

Ss KOSMOS AND DAMIANOS ORTHODOX CHURCH

February 15th 2015

The beauty of the outside of the church alone is enough to make one enter into Ss. Kosmos and Damianos Orthodox Church. The architecture emulates the original Byzantine style of domed roofs above a lofty, high sanctuary and nave.

Upon entering, the strong fragrance of incense fills your senses and helps create a sense of divinespace. Immediately ones eyes fall upon the beautiful, masterful icons adorning the walls from the entry area leading into the inner nave itself. Each icon is representative of a saint or a prophet from the Hebrew Scriptures. As a member of the church shares, these icons are not painted, but rather, they are *written*. Mainly "written" in Greece, each brush stroke, each inch of the icon is alive with layers upon layers of meaning. These icons are thought of as being "windows into heaven."

The *orthos*, or pre-liturgy service, commences with songs of praise by both the priest and the choir. The atmosphere inside the sanctuary is uplifting and inspiring. The faithful repeatedly make signs of the cross. A man fully prostrates towards the front of the sanctuary upon entering. It is clear that movements of voice and body are embedded in the worship and devotion.

Inside the Orthodox church a believer is in heaven. According to a church member, "Once you are in Christ, you are alive. There is no difference between heaven and earth." Glancing up at the high arched walls and domed roof, the icons abound. The Son is represented at the top and below are the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures. At the bottom of the dome the four evangelists of the New Testament surround the space. Icons of saints in the Orthodox Church from various backgrounds immediately enclose the congregation, acting as friends and fellow worshipers on this Sunday morning.

In preparation of the upcoming season of Lent, this day is considered Judgment Sunday.

As the liturgy begins the incense rises towards heaven, taking the prayers of the people with it.

The *iconostasis* with its icons and religious paintings separate the nave from the sanctuary. A "doorway" in the center reveals the priest. There are two parts to the liturgy. First, the priest comes into the nave with the Bible, representing the Torah being given to Moses. The second part is when the priest walks to the back of the nave with the chalice and then returns to the sanctuary, representative of the passion and resurrection of Jesus.

The liturgy culminates with the communion of bread and wine. Every moment of the service is filled with rich tradition and purpose.

It is for sure an experience that leave your head spinning, but in a good way! The overwhelming sense of awe of the Divine is humbling no matter to which faith one belongs.