

## STANDING AT COMMUNION

Orthodox Christians generally call Communion the *Eucharist*, which means “the Thanksgiving.” It is the center of our worship of the Lord, and the Eucharist is celebrated each Sunday. Historically Christians have stood during Communion. Although many Orthodox Churches have pews, much of the Liturgy is still celebrated from a standing position by priests and laity alike. Out of honor to the risen Christ, we prefer to rise in His Presence.

## THE PEACE

In early New Testament times Christians began exchanging what the Bible refers to as “a holy kiss” in their worship. This was done just before Communion as an affirmation between the people that they were at peace with God and also were truly reconciled to each other.

“The Peace,” as it came to be called, has continued in Orthodox worship and in many other Churches to the present. Ways it is done vary. Some use a kiss, some a handshake, some a friendly embrace. You are welcome to participate if you wish.

## Our Invitation to You . . .

Come worship with us. Set aside a Sunday soon to visit. Your presence will be an encouragement to us, and we believe your participation will be spiritually enriching to you.

## Come Worship With Us

Do you know there are some 225 million Orthodox Christians worldwide? It’s the second largest body in all of Christendom, next to the Roman Church. How remarkable that in spite of its size, relatively few Americans are aware of the Orthodox Church.

The truth is, you need to know about the Orthodox Church—and we in the Orthodox Church need to know you. Our Church has deep and lasting roots in Christian antiquity and is steeped in a rich biblical tradition. It has been the context of Christian living for millions and millions of Christians for almost twenty centuries.

Yet you cannot understand the Orthodox Church merely by reading about it or by hearing its worship services described. Orthodox Christianity must be seen and experienced firsthand to be understood. And when you visit us, besides the learning experience, the mutual understanding and encouragement that comes between Christians will make it even more worthwhile.

To help acquaint you with our worship, let us look at a few characteristics of Orthodox worship which may be different from your past experience. Knowing about these practices in advance will help make your experience of worship with us far more meaningful.

## LITURGY

### PICTURES OR ICONS

The first thing you'll notice as you enter the Church is the icons or pictures—pictures of Christ, the Virgin Mary with her Child, angels, Saint John the Baptist, Christ's twelve Apostles, and other holy and heroic Christians of the past.



Since the times of the New Testament, Christians have believed that when worshipping God, we who are earthbound enter by the spirit into "heavenly places." In Christian worship, we can step out of the pandemonium of time into the peace of eternity. Therefore everything in our worship has heaven as its point of reference.

The icons are a dramatic and constant reminder that there is infinitely more to reality than what we see day by day on this earth. They help impart the presence of heaven to us in our worship. We don't worship the icons, of course: worship is for God alone. But we do honor them.

By precise definition, the term *liturgy* means "work of the people." Participation is the key word here. The whole congregation is active in worship, even the children. And we call the whole process of our worship "the Liturgy." The Liturgy makes possible full participation on the part of all the people.

Our Liturgy has a two-fold goal. First, the goal is to re-enact or live through Jesus Christ's birth, His life and ministry on earth, His death and resurrection, His ascension into heaven, and our anticipation of His second coming. Second, in the Liturgy we participate by grace in His present life. We thereby come to know Christ in us, the hope of glory. What happened almost 2000 years ago becomes vital and alive and contemporary to us in the Liturgy.

### INCENSE

A human being is not merely soul or spirit. Being human involves the unity of soul and body. Thus worship calls not only for the action of the mind, the emotions, and the will, but also of the body with all five senses. So, as the Scriptures describe, in worship there are things to see, hear, touch, taste, and smell. Incense is used to underscore God's holiness, as it was in biblical times, and it activates our sense of smell. In the Communion even taste is drawn into action. Worship calls for whole-person involvement in unity, so there is provision for every aspect of our human makeup.



### THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

The most prominent symbol of Christianity from its beginning has always been the Cross. The Cross draws us to remember God's supreme expression of love for us: the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Of that reality we can hardly be reminded too often!

Christians have always displayed the Cross in their Churches, around their necks, and in their homes. And in worship we make the sign of the Cross. We make the sign of the Cross when the Holy Trinity is mentioned, for example when a prayer is offered "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen."

How has this traditionally been done?



We hold our thumb and first two fingers of our right hand together. This speaks of the three Persons in the Holy Trinity. Then, the last two fingers are held against the heel of the hand. These speak of the two natures of Jesus Christ: His full divinity and full humanity. With our hand held in that manner we touch it in succession to our forehead, middle chest, right shoulder, and finally to our left shoulder. We thus apply the Cross to our mind, our heart, and our strength.

If for any reason you're not comfortable using the sign of the Cross, simply refrain.