



*We are honored to have you join us in our worship of the Blessed Trinity. It is our desire that this experience will deepen your understanding of and love for God. If you've never been to an Orthodox church before, we want to share some things with you that will help you better understand what is going on.*

### ■ America's Best-Kept Secret

Do you know there are some 225 million Orthodox Christians worldwide and over 1 million right here in the United States? It's the second largest body in all of Christendom. Despite its size, relatively few Americans are aware of the Orthodox Church. It's America's best-kept secret.

The truth is, you need to know about the Orthodox Church. 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.

Though you can learn a lot about Orthodox Christianity by hearing it described, you really need to see and experience it firsthand to understand it fully. And there is no better place to see and experience the heart of Orthodoxy than in her worship.

Let's look at a few characteristics of Orthodox worship that 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.

### ■ The Work of the People

The main Sunday morning worship service of an Orthodox Church is called the Divine Liturgy. The term "liturgy" means "work of the people." Participation is the keyword here. As you will see, the whole congregation is active in worship, even the children. Thus, the Liturgy is the common act of prayer, worship, teaching, and communion of all those who constitute the Church. In the Liturgy we participate, by grace, in the life of Christ. We thereby come to know Christ in us, the hope of glory. What happened almost 2000 years ago becomes alive and contemporary to us in the Liturgy.

### ■ The Physical Side of Being Spiritual

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 Orthodox worship, we can step out of time into the peace of eternity. Therefore, everything in our worship has heaven as its point of reference.

But this heavenly focus by no means turns worship into a mental religion. A human being is not merely soul or spirit. Being human involves the unity of soul and body. Accordingly, worship calls for the action not only of the mind, the emotions, and the will, but also of the body with all its senses. So, as the Scriptures describe,



in worship there are things to see, hear, touch, taste, and smell. Our whole being is to participate actively in worship.

### ■ Windows to Heaven

One of the first things you'll probably notice as you enter an Orthodox church is the icons or pictures—pictures of Christ, the Virgin Mary with her Child, angels, Saint John the Baptist, Christ's Apostles, and other holy and heroic Christians of the past.

An icon ("icon" is a biblical word that means "image") is a dramatic and constant reminder that there is infinitely more to reality than what we see day by day on this earth. Icons help impart the presence of heaven to us in our worship. Many churches display photos of their missionaries so that they may keep them in mind. The Orthodox Church displays those who faithfully finished the race, that we might keep them in mind. We don't worship the icons, of course: worship is for God alone. But we do honor them, believing that the honor given to the icon passes on to the person it images. One of the functions of icons is similar to that of the pictures of loved ones you probably have in your wallet—visual images that represent real people and significant events. But icons are far more than simple visual aids in our worship, and as such have long been called "windows to heaven."

## ■ What about Incense?

The pattern of heavenly worship described in both the Old Testament and the Book of Revelation is also reflected by the use of incense in Orthodox worship. Incense has always been used to honor the presence of the Divine. Thus the altar is censed because it represents the throne of God. The icons are censed because they depict God's Son and the saints through whom God worked. The people are censed because each of them is made in the image of God. Through the use of incense, even our sense of smell beckons us to worship.

## ■ The Sign of the Cross

From the beginning, the most prominent symbol of Christianity has 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 commonly display the cross in their churches, on their pulpits, around their necks, on their Bibles, and in their homes. But many are unaware that, from the Church's earliest days, Christians have freely and frequently made the sign of the cross on themselves. Using the sign of the cross gives us a personal, physical, and visible means to fulfill Saint Paul's scriptural admonition to "glory in the cross."

The sign of the cross is a handful of divine truth.

## ■ A People of Thanksgiving

A major focus of the Liturgy is our thanksgiving to God the Father for the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of God the Son. Orthodox worship is so steeped in the giving of thanks that it is often referred to as the "Eucharist" ("eucharist" is a biblical word that means "thanksgiving"). The Church has always believed that, in a mystery, God the Holy Spirit transforms our gifts of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of our Savior Jesus Christ. The grateful reception of these Holy Gifts

provides nourishment for the union Orthodox Christians have with the God who made and redeemed them. Non-Orthodox Christians are welcome to observe this holy sacrament, and to share in the "blessed bread" offered at the end of the Liturgy. Only baptized Orthodox Christians, however, may partake of the eucharistic elements.

## ■ A Final Word

We thank you again for being with us. We pray that your participation will be enriching to you. If we can answer any questions or be of service to you in some way, please let one of us know, or talk with our priest after the Liturgy.

*Perhaps you would like to know more about the Orthodox Church and what is involved in becoming a participant in her spiritual life and worship.*

**For information, please contact us at:**



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# Welcome!

