

Adult Bible Class – Orthodox Q & A (Fall and Winter 2014/2015)

Q. At the top of the bulletin are all these Saints and Martyrs. Is there a set Sunday we pray for each? How do you know which ones? Does it change each year?

A. We commemorate different Saints and Martyrs each day of the year, usually according to the date the Saint, or Martyr, reposed in the body. For instance, today (Sept. 14) we commemorate St. John Chrysostom because this was the date of his bodily death. The Church remembers various Saints according to their significance – some universally, some more locally, some ethnically (or regionally). The Russian Church calendar will mention certain Saints which are not listed on the Greek Church calendar, or the Serbian Church calendar; however, Saints and Martyrs commemorated in one part of the Church are always recognized as Saints throughout the whole Church.

Q. If Enoch, Elijah, Moses all achieved such perfection before the death of Christ, what changed with His death? It seems that they reached Theosis. Explain the differences between then and now.

A. The death (and resurrection) of Christ is essential because that fact establishes the Truth of the Christian Faith, and both kinds of Saints – those who lived *before* the Incarnation of our Lord and those who live *after* – have the same Faith. The Old Testament Saints (e.g., Enoch, Elijah, and Moses) believed in the Christ to come. *Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad* (John 8:56). The appearance of both Moses and Elijah with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration confirms their faith in the God-man, Jesus Christ (cf. Matt. 17:3; see Heb. 11:39-40). The New Testament Saints (e.g., the Apostles, the Martyrs, and us) believe in the Christ who has come.

What has changed, therefore, is the fact that the promises of the coming Christ are now fulfilled in the Incarnation and His death and resurrection. *God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom He also made the worlds...* (Heb. 1:1-2). So if the Saints prior to Christ's death and resurrection were deified, what about now? St. Paul writes: *For if the ministry of condemnation had glory* (i.e., the old covenant, declared by Moses), *the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory* (i.e., the new covenant in the Spirit, fulfilled in Christ). *For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. For what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious* (2 Cor. 3:9-11). We who live after the coming of Christ in the flesh have no excuse in the pursuit of deification.

Q. What is the difference between Tones?

A. “Tones” refers to the standard *melodies* employed in Orthodox Church music. By convention, there are eight tones (Gk., *octoechos*, lit., “eight tones”), or sets of melodies, used in the Church in a cyclical pattern. For instance, today (Sept. 14, 2014) is designated “Tone 5,” meaning the melodies for the day’s services (and those of the week following) are all sung in Tone 5; the next week will be Tone 6, then Tone 7, then Tone 8, and then Tone 1 beginning the cycle again. This pattern resets and begins each year after Pascha. Various hymns for feasts and saints are written in specific tones not necessarily those of the tone of the week – e.g., the Troparian of the Cross is always Tone 1 (“O Lord, save Thy people...”), and the Kontakion of the Cross is always Tone 4 (“As Thou wast voluntarily crucified for our sake...”).

The tones, or melodies, used in Russian Orthodox music are different than those used in the Greek Orthodox tradition, but both types of melodies – the “Russian” or “Greek” (i.e., *Byzantine*) – are equally Orthodox. However, all Orthodox musical styles originally grew out of the Jewish synagogue and Temple chants, being the precursor to the Christian Church which both Christ Jesus and His Apostles attended and fulfilled (see Luke 2:41-42; 4:16; Acts 2:46; 3:1; 13:14).

By way of additional explanation, each set of Tones (1, 2, etc.) contains four sub-sets of melodies in that particular Tone: 1) for the hymns of the day, known as Troparia and Kontakia; 2) for the occasional verses (Gk., *stichera*) sung during Vespers and Matins services (i.e., “Lord, I Call,” the Praises, and Sessional Hymns); 3) for the Prokeimena, that is, Psalm verses usually preceding Scripture readings; and 4) for the Irmosi, or theme-verses, sung to begin each ode of a Canon.

Q. What is the proper dress code for attending Church services?

A. For Christians, the proper dress code is to be clothed with Christ. *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ* (Gal. 3:27). *But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts* (Rom. 13:14). Thus immediately following Baptism the Christian wears a white robe. “The servant of God, N., is clothed with the robe of righteousness” (from the Baptismal Service). In the early centuries of the Church, the newly-baptized wore their white robes for a week, everywhere they went. The vestments worn by the clergy of the Orthodox Church reflect this Christ-like reality, in particular, the white *sticharion* (i.e., robe) put on first underneath all the other vestments.

So the clothing worn by Christians – at all times, not just at “Church,” but especially at Church – should adhere to this code, or “rule,” of the righteousness of Christ, the *wedding garment* (Matt. 22:11-14). At Church, in the Divine Liturgy, we’re going to meet the King! St. Paul writes: *In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in*

modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works (1 Tim. 2:9-10). “Propriety and moderation” – these terms denote reverence and good judgment in respect to the *other* person, first before God and before those assembled for worship in the Church. In other words, the dress code of Christians seeks to draw attention away from the individual toward Christ by outwardly reflecting a simple, calm, and peaceful *hidden person of the heart* (1 Pet. 3:4).

Church is never the place for the ostentatious display of different cultural dress styles and fashions. People may wear different styles because they are in vogue, but these should not be worn to show off the person wearing them. The case of head-coverings (e.g., scarves, or hats) illustrates this rule. While the Apostle Paul discusses perfectly good reasons for wearing a head-covering, he also states, *But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God* (1 Cor. 11:2-16). The focus should be on Christ, not our customs.

This also means that the dress code at Church can never be simply a matter of “appearance,” and the issue of “dress code” cannot be the primary matter governing Church life because it leads to judging others. *My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, “You sit here in a good place,” and say to the poor man, “You stand there,” or, “Sit here at my footstool,” have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?* (Jam. 2:1-4).

One person may be “weak” in regard to dress code; that is, this person may stumble in their faith by allowing certain dress styles to bother them. Another person may be “strong” regarding a dress code; that is, this person doesn’t have any scruples regarding the dress of others, and they don’t affect his, or her, faith. Yet because the Church is, by definition, a community, its members always consider the other persons and not just themselves. *Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things, and, We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification* (Rom. 14:1; 15:1-2). *All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well-being* (1 Cor. 10:23-24).

“Dress code” is a matter of faith (reflecting Christ) and love (the good of our brothers and sisters in Christ). Both of these concerns dictate according to conscience what we wear to Church.

Q. Why do they (i.e., Fathers and writers of the Church) refer the Virgin Mary to the burning bush?

A. The “burning bush” is a reference to the vision seen by Moses on Mount Horeb. *Then the Angel of the Lord appeared to [Moses] in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he saw the bush burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. So Moses said, “I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not consumed”* (Ex. 3:2-3). It is also written that *God called to [Moses] from the bush* (Ex. 3:4), and He said, *“I AM the Existing One...The Existing One sent [Moses] to [the children of Israel]”* (Ex. 3:14).

In the Church the burning bush is likened to the Virgin Mary because just as the bush contained the fire but was not consumed – and God, the Angel of the Lord, was in the bush, so the Virgin Mary literally contained the Incarnate Son of God within her womb and was not consumed. The burning bush is what we call a *type*, or prophetic example, and the Theotokos is the fulfillment of that type. Other *types* of the Virgin Mary are: the Jar of Manna (Ex. 16:33), the Ark of the Covenant (Ex. 25:21-22), the Throne of the Lord (Isa. 6:1), and the Unopened Gate (Ez. 44:1-3), etc.

Concerning God in the bush, it is important to note that the Angel of the Lord is the Son of God. The Angel of the Lord is clearly identified as God (Ex. 3:2-4; see also Gen. 16:7-14). Furthermore, *For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government will be upon His shoulder. His name will be called the Angel of Great Counsel, for I shall bring peace upon the rulers, peace and health by Him* (Isa. 9:5). The Angel of the Lord is the Son of God who is the Christ who will be born of the Virgin. This is why in Orthodox icons of Jesus Christ, the Greek words *ho ōn* (ὁ ὢν; He Who Is, The Existing One) are in the halo around Christ’s head clearly identifying Him as God revealed to Moses in the burning bush (Ex. 3:14).

Q. Why isn’t cremation allowed in the Orthodox Church?

A. Because the body is an integral part of the human person and will be raised on the Last Day to be reunited with the soul, purposeful destruction of the body by cremation is not allowed in the Orthodox Church; if a person is cremated, a funeral in the Church is not permitted. We do not intentionally destroy the holy temple of God (1 Cor. 6:19). The holiness of the body persists after the separation of the soul from the body in bodily death as shown by the wonderworking relics of the saints (see 4 Kgm.[2 Kg.] 13:20-21). Accidental burning of the body (e.g., in a house fire) is not cremation and is not an impediment to serving funeral services for such a situation. Besides, cremation is a rather brutal process wherein the flesh is burned away but the bones partially remain and must be ground into powder by mechanical means (i.e., pounding with a hammer, or in a pulverizing machine).

The Orthodox practice regarding the body after death is to honor the body and prepare it for burial (see Gen. 50:13-14; John 29:39-40; Acts 9:37). The body is laid in state for mourning and during the funeral services, and it is blessed with holy water to conclude the funeral service following the Prayer of Absolution. None of this is possible if the body is cremated. Likewise at the cemetery (lit., "sleeping-place"), the person's body is laid to rest with the other faithful in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection. Grave blessings are done each year at the graves of the faithful because their bodies are there awaiting the coming of Christ in glory.

Q. What is the reason a woman receives a special blessing (i.e., is "churched") before she enters church for the first time after giving birth to a child? Do all Orthodox churches follow this practice?

A. The reason for the "churching" of the mother is indicated in the prayers in the service of *Prayers for the Woman on the Fortieth Day of Childbirth*: "O Lord God Almighty, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who by Thy word hast created all nature, both reason-endowed men and irrational animals, and hast brought all things from nothingness into being, we pray and entreat Thee: Thou hast saved this Thy servant, *N.*, by Thy will. Purify her, therefore, from every sin and from every defilement as she now draws near to Thy holy church; and let her be counted worthy to partake, uncondemned, of Thy Holy Mysteries"; also, "O Lord our God, Who didst come for the salvation of the human race, come also upon Thy servant, *N.*, and count her worthy, through the prayers of Thine honorable Priest, of entrance into the temple of Thy glory. Wash away her bodily and spiritual uncleanness, in the completion of the forty days. Make her worthy also of the communion of Thy precious Body and Blood." As prescribed, all Orthodox churches follow this practice to one degree or another.

So "churching" is the recognition of purification from sin affecting the mother in the process of conception and childbirth, and this purification results in worthy reception of Holy Communion. The *Prayers* assume the precise reason for the mother *coming to church* is to receive Holy Communion in repentance and faith, that is, to participate fully in the liturgical assembly. This is the same reason the mother brings her newborn child to Church, that is, to receive Holy Communion with her *after being baptized (and chrismated)*, the necessary Christian prerequisite for anyone to receive Holy Communion (see John 3:3-8; Acts 2:38-42).

Further explanation is required concerning two issues mentioned above: 1) the nature of the sin affecting the mother in the process of conception and childbirth; and 2) the numbers of days after childbirth (e.g., 40) when the mother is "churched."

One, while sex, conception, and childbirth are not sinful in and of themselves, in our fallen world these activities are inevitably intertwined with lust. *For behold, I was conceived in transgressions, and in sins my mother bore me* (Ps. 50[51]:7). God told the

woman (Eve): *I will greatly multiply your pain and your groaning, and in pain you shall bring forth children* (Gen. 3:16). What has grown old in sin and death must be made new, beginning with the very act of childbearing. Thus the Church acknowledges the need for grace and renewal beginning with the mother of the newborn. What is “natural” must be transformed in Christ to participate in the eternal kingdom of God.

Two, the customary “churching” of the mother on the fortieth day after childbirth is in conjunction with bringing the newborn to Church (i.e., for Baptism) in imitation of Christ’s being brought to the Temple 40 days after His birth according to the law of Moses (Luke 2:22-24; Lev. 12:1-8). *Must* a mother (and father) wait 40 days for her child to be baptized, and therefore absent herself 40 days from the Church? No, this has become conventional, but it is not an absolute law, and the practice is not intended to be legalistic. St. Cyprian (+258) writes concerning those who say a child should not be baptized until the eighth day after their birth – in imitation of the law of circumcision: “No one is to be hindered from obtaining grace by that law which was already ordained (i.e., circumcision on the eighth day; see Luke 2:21), and that spiritual circumcision (i.e., Baptism; see Col. 2:11-12) ought not to be hindered by carnal circumcision, but that absolutely every man is to be admitted to the grace of Christ...to be even more observed in respect of infants and newly-born persons” (*Letter 58.5, 6*).

Q. Why do (and can) bishops change rules on when (what days and hours) children can be baptized and couples can be married?

A. The Apostle Paul says that the Holy Spirit has appointed *overseers* (lit., *bishops*) to *shepherd the church of God* (Acts 20:28). Likewise the Apostle Peter writes, *Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers* (lit., *bishops*)...*nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock* (1 Pet. 5:2, 3). Once again the Apostle Paul: *Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account* (Heb. 13:17). “All of you are to follow the bishop as Jesus Christ follows the Father, and the presbytery (i.e., priests) as the apostles. Respect the deacons as the command of God. Apart from the bishop no one is to do anything pertaining to the church. A valid Eucharist (i.e., Divine Liturgy) is to be defined as one celebrated by the bishop or a representative of his. Wherever the bishop appears, the whole congregation is to be present, just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the whole (lit., *catholic*) Church” (St. Ignatius of Antioch [+107], *Smyrnaeans* 8).

So bishops do make rules, but they govern as shepherds, not dictators, imitating by the grace of the Holy Spirit and to the best of their abilities the Chief Shepherd and Bishop, Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:25; 5:4; Heb. 13:20). This means that the governing principle of bishops is the eternal well-being of Christians entrusted to their care, and whatever rules they enjoin are intended to direct the Church in the way of Christ – *for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness* (2 Tim. 3:16; Ps. 22[23]; Ez.

34; John 21:15-17). This also means that members of the Church should obey and respect their bishops because they have been given by God to lead and care for the Church.

Of course, we understand the way of Christ according to the Orthodox Tradition, that is, *the living experience of Christianity* embodied in the Faith and Practice of the Church, most notably the liturgical services, hymns and prayers, and the doctrinal and disciplinary canons from the various Councils of the Church by which this experience is historically applied. The bishops' application of Orthodox Faith and Practice changes from time to time depending on the circumstances and spiritual state of the people of the Church involved. For instance, at one time the Church-wide 40 day Fast of Great Lent did not exist but was enacted throughout the Church to re-train people in the necessary discipline of fasting which had been almost universally neglected.

Conscientious bishops do not "change the rules" arbitrarily or unilaterally without considering the impact of their decisions on the rest of the Church. Rules are sometimes modified to better direct the Church in Christ depending on the particular positive and negative factors affecting the ability of Christians to carry out the Faith and Practice of the Church at any given time. And, whether well-founded or not, sometimes a bishop will impose a rule, or change certain rules, as a simple exercise of authority expecting obedience.

[N. B. The background of the question concerning the bishop's rules governing the days and times of Baptisms and Marriages is the recent changes pertaining to this subject in the parishes of the Midwest Diocese. The previous bishop allowed Baptisms during the Sunday morning Divine Liturgy – Baptismal Liturgies – and the next bishop did not. The previous bishop would not allow Saturday evening weddings in the Church, and the next bishop did allow Saturday evening weddings. Both bishops had their reasons for their "rules," but confusion resulted from the changes because the previous practices had been the norm in the Diocese for decades.]

Q. In the Prayer before Communion (i.e., in the Divine Liturgy), why do we say, "Like a thief do I confess Thee"?

A. The full portion of the Prayer reads as follows: "Of Thy Mystical Supper, O Son of God, accept me today as a communicant; for I will not speak of Thy Mystery to Thine enemies, neither like Judas will I give Thee a kiss; but *like the thief will I confess Thee*: Remember me, O Lord, in Thy Kingdom" (italics mine).

The reference to the thief is from the Gospels which state that two thieves – "robbers" (Matt. 27:38; Mark 14:15:27)/"criminals" (Luke 23:32) – were crucified along with Jesus, one on either side of Christ. St. Luke writes: *Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed [Jesus], saying, "If you are the Christ, save Yourself and us." But the other,*

answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." (Luke 23:39-43)

So the Prayer before Communion refers to the "good thief" crucified alongside Christ, who repented of his sins, confessed Jesus as the Lord, and prayed to Christ for salvation. By saying, "Like the thief will I confess Thee," the believer prays to the same Christ with the same humility and faith of the "good thief." We thus approach Holy Communion in order to receive the Crucified and Risen Lord Jesus which is the Kingdom of God and Paradise (see Luke 22:28-30; Rev. 2:7).



[N. B. The three-barred Orthodox Cross includes the tilted third bar at the bottom of the Cross. The bar is tilted down on one side pointing to the thief who denied Christ to the end; the bar is tilted up on the other side pointing to the "good thief" who confessed Christ and received entrance to the Kingdom of heaven.]

Q. What is the purpose of censng? How did it start?

A. "Censing" refers to the use of incense in the Church. Incense is used in many services of the Church both to cense the entire space with the people gathered and to cense particular things at certain times during the services (e.g., the Gospel book, the loaves blessed at the Litia, "Lord, I Call," or "Memory Eternal").

The purpose of censng is indicated in two Scripture passages. The first is from Psalm 140[141]:2 sung during Vespers in the Orthodox Church: *Let my prayer be set forth before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.* As incense accompanied the evening sacrifice in Israel, a "sweet aroma to the Lord" (see Ex. 29:38-30:10; also joined to the lighting of the lamps in the evening), so now incense accompanies the offering of the Church's prayers which rise to God as a thanksgiving to the Lord (Mal. 1:11).

The second is from the Book of Revelation (5:8; 8:3): *Now when [the Lamb, Christ] had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints...Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.* The use of incense in the Church on earth

is a participation in the worship of God in heaven. The guiding principle of worship in the Orthodox Church is that our earthly worship is patterned on the worship of God in heaven (Ex. 25:9; Heb. 8:1-6). Our manner of worship comes from God and is fulfilled in Christ Jesus who Himself participated in the liturgy of the Temple and synagogue and delivered this to the Church through His apostles complete in the Divine Liturgy (see Luke 2:46; 4:16; 22:15-18; Acts 2:46; 3:1; 13:14; *et al.*).

So censuring has always been a part of the worship of God among the faithful. It was prescribed in the Old Covenant in the Law given through Moses. Incense characterizes the beauty of the marriage relationship between the Church, the Bride of God, and God (Song of Songs; Ps. 44[45]:9). Thus the Church has retained and perpetuated the practice of offering incense with its prayers as an image of the heavenly reality of our worship (see Heb. 12:22-24; *op. cit.* Rev.). The manner of censuring (e.g., types of censers and movements with the censer during services) has varied, but the use of incense remains.

Q. Why do we have to stand so long at Church?

A. The normal posture for prayer and receiving instruction in the Church is standing (3 Kgs.[1 Kg.] 8:12, 20ff.; Ps. 133[134]; Ps. 134[135]:1-3; Rev. 7:9-11; 15:2). Standing is the posture of attention, demonstrated notably in services called *Akathists* (lit., *not sitting*). So we normally stand for the duration of the services of the Church. The other posture for prayer is prostration in which a person bows down on their face in humility before God (2 Chr. 7:3; Rev. 4:10; 5:14).

Sitting during worship is purposely allowed, for instance, at the readings of groups of Psalms at Vespers and Matins called *Kathismata* (sing., *Kathisma*), literally meaning “sittings.” Obviously with pews or chairs in Church, people may sit if they need to. Yet even if people are sitting, it is customary always to stand for certain parts of the services as a reminder of the normal standing posture of prayer (e.g., for the Gospel reading, or the Anaphora Prayers).

In most Orthodox churches abroad – in Russia, Greece, etc. – there are no pews or chairs. People stand for worship. Pews in American Orthodox churches are an accommodation to non-Orthodox, American sensibilities. This does not call for a legalistic reaction concerning the propriety of pews in Orthodox churches. Not having pews doesn’t make one truly Orthodox, just as having pews doesn’t automatically make one less-than, or non-Orthodox. Even with pews and/or chairs, the normal posture for prayer is still standing.

Q. “The righteous will be in everlasting remembrance. He will not fear evil tidings.” What does this mean?

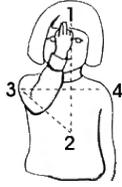
A. This is a Psalm verse (Ps. 111[112]:6-7) sung at memorial services in the Church. The other memorial song “Memory Eternal” is based on two words in the first half of this Psalm verse: “everlasting remembrance.”

The verse really contains two main thoughts. One, the righteous person will be remembered forever. A person is righteous by participating in the righteousness of God, through the fear of God, faith in God, and the gift of God in Christ. Eternal remembrance is possible only for the eternal God, and for God to “remember” someone or something eternally means that God causes them to enjoy His favor forevermore. “To remember” in the Scripture is not just a mental activity, but it is always joined with action resulting from the thought. *So God heard [the children of Israel’s] groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Then God looked upon the children of Israel and was made known to them (Ex. 2:24-25). Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people...to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant (Luke 1:68, 72).*

Two, the righteous person will not be afraid because of an evil report, as the passage continues: *His heart is prepared to hope in the Lord. His heart is established; he is not afraid as he surveys his enemies (Ps. 111[112]:7-8).* A person secure in the eternal righteousness of God does not panic or despair when confronted with the troubles of this world, even if those troubles are directed against, or blamed, on him (or her). This security is exemplified in the Person of Christ Himself, the Righteous One, *who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him (i.e., God the Father) who judges righteously (1 Pet. 2:23; cf. Ps. 118[119]).* Thus comforted in the eternal memory of God, the righteous person endures the evils of this world in faith, hope, and love.

Q. Do all Orthodox make the sign of the Cross in the same way?

A. Yes, all Orthodox make the sign of the Cross the same way, from forehead (1) to heart (2), and then from the right shoulder (3) to the left shoulder (4; see figure 1. below). Also, the right hand which makes the sign of the Cross is formed with the thumb, index, and middle finger touching (three fingers signifying the three Persons of the One Godhead), and the ring and pinky fingers folded into the palm (two fingers signifying the divine and human natures of the one Person of Jesus Christ; see figure 2. below).



1. Making the Sign of the Cross



2. Forming the hand for the sign of the Cross

The direction of “crossing oneself” from the right to left shoulders is a mirror image of the direction the Bishop, or Priest, makes the sign of the Cross when facing and blessing the people. Sometime in the last several centuries of Church history, the Roman Catholics reversed the original mirror image, and Roman Catholic laity began “crossing themselves” from left to right shoulders.

The fact that all Orthodox make the sign of the Cross the same way does not mean the Orthodox always made the sign of the Cross the way we do today. The original practice was simply to sign the Cross on one’s forehead with one’s thumb (in imitation of the “marking” in Ezekiel 9). As the Church progressed in history, the sign of the Cross became more demonstrative; it was not only a bodily reminder of Baptism and aid to focused prayer, but making the sign of the Cross over one’s body and with folded hand became a visible confession of one’s faith in the Holy Trinity, the God-man Jesus Christ, and the Crucifixion and Resurrection (see *The Sign of the Cross*, by Andreas Andreopoulos, for an excellent presentation of the historical practice of this topic).

Q. How is divorce (dealt with/treated) in the Orthodox Church?

A. Divorce is the legal dissolution of marriage. According to Orthodox Faith and Practice, Marriage is a *mystery* (i.e., *sacrament*) of the Church, *an eternal bond* which is an icon of the relationship between Christ and His people in the Kingdom of God (Eph. 5:21-33). Therefore, the Orthodox Church does not grant divorces as if a marriage once effected can somehow be undone or nullified (also because the Church is not a legal, civil institution). The Church acknowledges a divorce when it takes place, and with that acknowledgement the Church recognizes that a separation has taken place contrary to God’s design and that there is need for healing both between the ex-spouses and God and between all persons involved in the former marriage – ex-spouses, children, extended family, and members of the parish family. Historically after the tenth century, “when it received from the emperors the legal monopoly of registering and validating all marriages, the Church was obliged to ‘issue divorces’” (pg. 58 in *Marriage An Orthodox Perspective*, by Fr. John Meyendorff [St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1975]). But this kind of “Church divorce” is novel and illegitimate from a Christian perspective and definitely should not be considered normal, especially since the Church is not a department of the State (be that the Roman Empire [which no longer exists] or any other national government).

God says that He hates divorce (Mal. 2:13-17). Our Lord says, *“Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate...Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives (see Deut. 24:1-4), but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery”* (Matt. 19:3-9). The Apostle Paul writes: *If any brother (i.e., Christian) has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him...But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or sister (i.e., fellow believers) is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace* (1 Cor. 7:12-16). In addition to sexual infidelity and abandonment, physical abuse has also been cited in the Church as cause for separation.

If a divorce has occurred, as mentioned above, the situation is properly treated in a spirit of repentance and a desire for reconciliation with God and each person affected by the situation. Marriage is an icon of communion with God (hence originally sealed at Holy Communion during the Divine Liturgy, now indicated with the Common Cup of the Marriage Service always done in the Church). Divorce is the opposite – a rupture and estrangement from communion, which is why the newly-divorced Orthodox Christian typically is suspended from Holy Communion (for a time, depending on circumstances). The issue concerning divorce is greater than assigning blame or culpability to the ex-spouses – the offender and the offended – although clearly in many cases involving infidelity, abandonment, and/or abuse one spouse is more, or completely, at fault. The greater issue is that God intends the marriage of one man and one woman to be forever, but divorce terminates that arrangement. It is a tragedy to be confessed, forgiven, and patiently endured, overcoming lingering resentments, bitterness, and sadness with humility, the fortitude of faith, and commending oneself and each other to the direction of God.

A second or third marriage is granted in the Orthodox Church, particularly in the event of the death of one’s spouse(s), but a fourth marriage (or more) is not allowed. This also applies to situations of divorce; however, the blessing of one’s Bishop must be obtained for second or third marriages to occur after divorce simply because the Bishop is the Head Pastor of the Church because divorce affects the community of the Church, not just the individuals who were married; also, the Bishop determines the propriety of the marriage of a person already divorced, based once again on considerations of repentance and sincerity of desire for reconciliation with God and one another. For instance, the suitability of a person for a second marriage who married and divorced when very young before entering the Orthodox Church is vastly different than a life-long member of the Orthodox Church who is a known philanderer. The Orthodox Service for a Second Marriage differs from the standard order by the inclusion of two prayers of repentance and forgiveness for the couple just prior to the Crowning.

In the case of clergy, normally a divorced man is not allowed ordination (first as a Deacon, then a Priest, which are prerequisites to the Episcopacy), and a clergyman who is no longer married because of his wife's death, or divorce, is not allowed to remain clergy if he chooses to re-marry. This is in accordance with the Apostle's words: *The husband of one wife* (1 Tim. 3:2, 12; Tit. 1:6).

Q. Many Orthodox wear their wedding rings on the right ring finger. What is the explanation for this practice?

A. In the Church, the *right hand* is representative of action and authority, particularly because Jesus Christ is God the Father's "Right-hand Man." *The right hand of the Lord exalted me; the right hand of the Lord worked its power* (Ps. 117[118]:16). *If I walk in the midst of affliction, You shall make me live; You stretched out Your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and Your right hand saved me* (Ps. 137[138]:7). *Fear not, for I am with you. Do not go astray, for I am your God who strengthens you; and I will help and secure you with My righteous right hand* (Isa. 41:10). *If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God* (Col. 3:1; Ps. 109[110]:1).

Likewise in Scriptural and churchly language, the signet ring – the official stamp of approval and authenticity – was worn on the right hand (cf. Jer. 22:24; Hag. 2:23). Such a ring indicates that its wearer is chosen for a noble or, in the case of the Church and marriage, godly purpose. "By a ring power was given unto Joseph in Egypt; by a ring Daniel was glorified in the land of Babylon; by a ring the uprightness of Tamar was revealed; by a ring our heavenly Father showed compassion on His son. For He said: 'Put a ring upon his right hand, and kill the fatted calf, and let us eat and rejoice' (cf. Lk. 15:22-23) Thine own right hand, O Lord, armed Moses in the Red Sea; for by Thy true word the heavens were established and the earth firmly founded; and the right hand of Thy servants shall be blessed by Thy mighty word, and by Thine uplifted arm" (Prayer after Exchanging Rings in the Betrothal Service).

Thus the Orthodox practice is to wear wedding rings on the right hand ring-fingers. Wearing a wedding ring on the left hand ring-finger recalls the ancient Roman belief that this particular finger was directly connected to the heart via the "love vein" (*vena amoris*). This practice was made law in England under King Edward VI in the 16th century and has been perpetuated in Western European culture.

Q. Several words used in Orthodox services (e.g., *vouchsafe*) seem to be unique to those services. What are some of these words and what do they mean?

A. Certain words unique to Orthodox services occur in three categories: 1) theological terms, 2) words from foreign languages, and 3) words retained from older English usage. Following are some examples.

Theological Terms:

Birthgiver-of-God	the Virgin Mary, Mother of God (Gk., <i>Theotokos</i>)
Condescension	self-humbling of the Son of God in the Incarnation
Consubstantial	“of one essence” (Gk., <i>homoousios</i>)
Incarnation	“enfleshment” (God becoming flesh in the Person of Christ)
Only-begotten	eternal generation of the Son from the Father
Procession	eternal going-forth of the Spirit from the Father
Trinity	three-in-one (Lat., <i>trinitas</i>)

Words from Foreign Languages:

Alleluia	“praise the Lord” (Aramaic)
Amen	“truly” (Hebrew)
Cherubim	one of the ranks of angels (Hebrew)
Dormition	“falling-asleep (death of the body)” (Latin)
Hosanna	“save, Lord!” (Hebrew)
Nativity	“birth” (Latin)
Seraphim	another of the ranks of angels (Hebrew)
Theotokos	“Birthgiver-of-God” (Greek)

Words Retained from Older English Usage:

Art	“are” (e.g., in the Lord’s Prayer)
Compass	“surround, encompass”
Godhead	“divine nature”
Thee/thine/thou/ye	second person pronouns (“you/your”)
Vouchsafe	“grant a favor” (rel., <i>vouch for, voucher</i>)

The unique terminology of the Church is retained not only because it is unique but also because the presence of many terms implies their development and usage in the history of the Church. For instance, terms concerning God the Holy Trinity have specific meaning only as they were used over time to define the Orthodox way of speaking about God in contrast to heretical confessions of God.

Q. Do nuns marry? Are their dresses also called habits?

A. Nuns are female monastics, women monks, who do not marry because they are, by definition, celibate. Concerning marriage, there are two basic vocations: 1) to be married (applying to the majority of people), and 2) to be celibate (applying to avowed monastics). As profound as the married estate is in the Church, the celibate, or virginal, state has greater dignity because the one committed to this life is completely devoted to God (see 1 Cor. 7:8-9. 32-35; Matt. 19:10-12).

As women monastics, nuns typically wear clothing befitting their station in life. The dress of nuns is called a habit by which the body and head are covered indicating the monastic character of modesty, simplicity, and obedience to God.

Q. Our bishops pray with a hat on, and in 1 Corinthians 11:4 it says that *Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head*. Also, it says that *Every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head (11:5)*. Should women wear hats to church? Also, should women be preachers?

A. First, at the conclusion of the discussion in 1 Corinthians 11 concerning head-coverings, the Apostle writes: *But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God (11:16)*. So the issue of *mandatory or optional* head-coverings is a local custom; likewise, the type of head-covering is variable, whether a simple scarf, or a hat, or something else. In the case of bishops, sometimes they wear their monastic *klobuk* (a tall hat with a veil attached in the back), and sometimes they wear *miters* (a crown-like hat). During the course of Church services bishops do remove and replace their headwear in conformity to the above direction from 1 Corinthians (e.g., reading the Gospel, etc.), illustrating the spiritual principle of the headship of Christ.

Second, women can be “preachers” in the Orthodox Church in the sense that there are women prophets. Consider the verse above: *Every woman who prays or prophesies...* (1 Cor. 11:5). One of the original seven deacons, Philip, had four virgin daughters *who prophesied* (Acts 21:9). The elderly woman Anna was a prophetess who *spoke of [the Lord] to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem* (Lk. 2:36, 38). To prophesy means to speak, or declare, the word of God, frequently with future implications. A prime example is the Virgin Mary herself when she spoke of her place in God’s plan of salvation as the Mother of God (Lk. 1:46-55).

However, women are not “preachers” in the Orthodox Church in the sense that women can be pastors, priests, or bishops (i.e., ordained teachers and leaders). The primary reason that pastors are always men is that they are icons of the Chief Shepherd and High Priest, Jesus Christ, who is a man, the Son of Man (1 Pet. 5:2-4; Heb. 8:1-6). The Apostle Paul enjoins that women maintain silence in the Church regarding teaching and having authority – based on the law of creation, that Adam was formed first and then the woman from the man, and on the fact that Eve was deceived and fell into sin first (1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:11-15; cf. Gen. 2:21-22; 3:6, 16).

The Orthodox Church exclusively has men ministers because it maintains the order of creation and redemption as a manifestation of the Kingdom of God, not because it is sexist, chauvinistic, or patriarchal. Herein Christ Jesus is the Head and His Bride, the Church, is His body. Christ is the new Adam, and His mother, the Virgin Mary, is the new Eve. Each sex, or gender, has its right place in God’s design which is particularly

manifested in the Church liturgically (that is, gathered around Christ Jesus in assembly for instruction, worship, and communion). At one time the Church did have women deacons (see Rom. 16:1; Phoebe); however, deaconesses assisted Bishops and Priests in instances involving ministry to women, for instance, in the baptisms of women or visiting women in their homes. Orthodox deaconesses did not have liturgical duties in the services of the Church with the rest of the clergy (e.g., vested at the Altar).

Q. In the great Orthodox hymn *O Lord, Save Thy People* we sing, “grant victories to the Orthodox Christians over their adversaries.” As we Orthodox Christians contemplate this line today, who are our adversaries (e.g., Muslims, Mormons, Lutherans, gay rights advocates, internal demons, etc.), and what is the victory we want to achieve (e.g., their destruction, their conversion to Orthodoxy, etc.)? How does the Church understand/interpret this line of the hymn today?

A. To understand the hymn, here is the full text of it:

Original Greek:

Σωσον Κυριε τον λαον Σου
και ευλογησον την κληρονομιαν Σου
νικας [τοις βασιλευσι κατα βαρβαρων]* δωρουμενος
και το Σον φυλαττων
δια του Σταυρου Σου πολιτευμα
[* or, τοις ευσεβεσι κατ’ εναντιον]

Literal Translation of the Original Greek:

Save, O Lord, Your people
and bless Your inheritance,
granting victories [to the kings against barbarians]*
and guarding Your commonwealth
through Your Cross.
[* or, to the godly against opposition]

Customary Translation (English Version):

O Lord, save Thy people
And bless Thine inheritance.
Grant victories to the Orthodox Christians
Over their adversaries,
And by virtue of Thy Cross
Preserve Thy habitation.

“Granting victories to the kings against barbarians,” the oldest reading of this line, indicates the historical and – today, we would say – political meaning of the hymn. The Roman Emperor Constantine first declared Christianity no longer illegal (313 A.D.) and

then embraced Christianity for himself and his subsequent empire. Before Constantine entered the decisive battle against his rival Maximian at the Milvian Bridge, he had a vision of the Cross in which he heard: “By this sign conquer”; subsequently, Constantine had his troops adorn their standards with the sign of the Cross.

Christianity became the “official” religion of the empire under the Emperor Theodosius in 380 A.D. As a result, despite the fact that Christian schism and heresy raged within the empire beginning at the time of Constantine (d. 337), Christianity centering on the Cross was the emblem uniting the civil Roman domain (i.e., the *commonwealth*; Gk., *politevma*, “state, or arrangement according to law and culture”). By definition, peoples outside this domain, particularly those opposed to this *commonwealth*, were known as *barbarians*.

Through the centuries “barbarians” were understood as any aggressive ethno-political group hostile to the Roman Empire and its religion, Christianity: Germanic tribes, Parthians, Persians, Huns, Muslims, Turks, etc. As the barbarians were subdued and brought into the Empire, usually adopting Christianity as their own religion, these new “Christian nations” began applying the Hymn of the Cross to themselves. Russia, once a barbarian opponent of the Roman Empire, embraced Christianity making their adversaries – Tartars, Mongols, etc. – barbarian referents in the hymn. According to usage, the Troparion of the Cross became the “national anthem” of Orthodox commonwealths.

As witnessed in the variant wording above, “granting victories to kings against barbarians” has been generalized to read “granting victories to the godly against opposition.” This moves the meaning of the hymn away from a “worldly,” or “political,” sense to a meaning of a more spiritual kind. Christians are *kings and priests to our God* (Rev. 5:10), and the Church is, indeed, *a holy nation* (1 Pet. 2:9). Yet as Christ says, Christians are *in* the world, but not *of* the world (John 17:14-16). *My kingdom is not of this world*, Jesus said to the governor, Pontius Pilate. *If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here* (John 18:36).

For our citizenship (Gk., *politevma*; commonwealth) *is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ* (Phil. 3:20). *Put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all* (Col. 3:10-11).

The *godly*, or *pious Christians*, are believers living in communion with God in the Church, the Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit, conducting themselves according to the precepts of the Gospel. *Opposition* to this commonwealth is comprised of the forces of evil, namely, the devil and his wicked horde. *For we do not wrestle against*

flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (Eph. 6:12). Satan enlists willing human fleshly desires and the systems of the world in his fight against God and the Church (see Gal. 5:16-18; Eph. 2:1-3; Jam. 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17). So opposition to the godly takes a variety of forms: idolatry, immorality, persecution, schism (division based on scruples), heresy, false doctrine – this opposition comes from both inside and out.

The key to understanding the hymn, whether praying for “victories of kings against barbarians” or “victories of the godly against opposition,” is the Cross itself – “guarding Your commonwealth through Your Cross.” The ultimate victories are the saving results of the Cross of Christ – not military conquests, earthly wealth, or satisfaction of personal power. The victories of the Cross are preservation of faith in the forgiveness of sins and unbroken communion with God. *But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world* (Gal. 6:14).

For this reason, even though historically in the Roman (i.e., Byzantine) Empire and subsequent “Orthodox nations” Christianity and the Church were closely allied with the functioning of the State, the Cross was always understood primarily as a Christian, not a political, symbol. When in the seventh century the Persians attacked Jerusalem and took the True Cross away to their foreign land, the Emperor Heraklios personally led his armies to reclaim the Cross and return it to its place in the Holy Land. This campaign was intended not as a way to expand the empire, but as a means to restore the spiritual balance of the empire.

We are exhorted to pray *for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence* (1 Tim. 2:2). The Troparion of the Cross is simply a prayer to this effect, providing the key to godliness and reverence in the Cross itself, especially when the kings and all who are in authority are avowed Christians in communion with the Church, which is an icon on earth of our heavenly commonwealth.

Q. Why do/should we light candles?

A. *You shall also command the children of Israel to bring you pure oil of pressed olives for the light, to cause the lamp to burn continually in the tabernacle of testimony, outside the veil before the testimony. Aaron and his sons shall tend it from evening until morning before the Lord. It shall be an ordinance forever to their generations on behalf of the children of Israel* (Ex. 27:20-21). *There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together* (Acts 20:8).

Lamps and candles are lit (and carried) in the Church not just for the giving of physical light, but more importantly for the purpose of spiritual illumination, for instance, as follows:

- *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my paths* (Ps. 118[119]:105; processions, entrances, baptisms, weddings, etc.).
- *You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven* (Matt. 5:14-16; prayers at home).
- *Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom* (Matt. 25:1; when entering the Church).
- *And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light (lit., lamp) that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts* (2 Pet. 1:19; Gospel readings).
- *The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.* (Rev. 1:20; for all Church services).

Thus candles (and lamps) are lit in connection with the fact that the Church is the place of the light of Christ. *For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ* (2 Cor. 4:6).

Q. What does the Church teach about what happens to the soul right after death (of the body)? What are the tollhouses?

A. Our Lord teaches what happens to the soul after the death of the body. *So it was that the beggar (i.e., Lazarus) died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom (i.e., paradise). The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torment in Hades (i.e., hell), he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom* (Luke 16:22-23). Upon the death of the body, known in Scripture as "falling asleep" (cf. Luke 8:52; 1 Thes. 4:15), the soul is separated from the body and begins to experience its eternal end, either the bliss of heaven or the torment of hell. Furthermore, the soul separated from the body is still identifiable as a particular person (e.g., Lazarus). On the Last Day of judgment when Christ returns in glory, the bodies of all the departed will be raised and reunited with their souls, and the entire person will experience either eternal life or eternal condemnation depending on one's spiritual state in this life (John 5:28-29; 2 Cor. 5:9-10; Rev. 20:11-15).

Now we live in the time between the death of our bodies and Judgment Day. Can the soul, once the body has died, return to the body? Yes, we witness this with Jairus'

daughter and Lazarus who was four-days-dead, among others (see Luke 8:55; John 11:38-44); sometimes this occurs for the eventual repentance and salvation of the person involved. While the destiny of each soul is fixed at the time of bodily death (cf. Luke 16:26; Heb. 9:27), the Church continues to pray for the souls of the departed because this decision belongs ultimately to God, and we commend especially the faithful departed, with all people, to the mercy and love of God. Prayers for the departed assumes these persons are *alive in Christ*, not dead (and therefore, unfeeling), and that they still share in the life of the Church, as indeed they do (2 Tim. 1:18; Heb. 12:22-24; Rev. 6:9-11; 20:4).

“Tollhouses” is a term used to illustrate the effects of demons on the souls of the unrighteous departed; it is a term used to explain the mystery of death. The “tollhouse,” or “customs-house,” is an image familiar from the ancient world. “Like the tax collectors who sit along the narrow streets and snatch at the passers-by and extort from them, so also the demons watch carefully and grab hold of souls. And when they (i.e., souls) pass out of the body, if they are not completely purified, they are not permitted to go up into the mansions of Heaven there to meet their Master. For they are driven down by the demons of the air” (Ps. Macarius, *Homily 43.9*). As the soul of the unrighteous leaves the body and passes through the air (aerial region, in which the devil and his demons operate; see Eph. 2:2), it undergoes an accounting process wherein it is seized and accused by demons (cf. Luke 12:20 [WSol. 15:8]; Jude 9; Rev. 12:10). The devil is called “the ruler of this world” (John 14:30), and the devil and his demons dominate the world of the unjust particularly at the time of death.

“The souls of the righteous are not in fear, since they have the grace of God, and the demons have no power over them. The souls of the unrepentant are in anguish, being subject to the influence of the demons and to the action of the passions as well. There are demons, but the customs payment also means the action of the passions” (from *Life After Death*, by Metropolitan of Nafpaktos Hierotheos, trans. Esther Williams, [Levadia, Greece, 1995], pg. 66; this book is an excellent resource for the Church’s teaching on this entire subject). In the end, we reap what we sow: *For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life* (Gal. 6:8). The soul experiences this immediately upon its separation from the body in death.

Q. Are there any Gospel writings by any of the other Apostles, and if so, why aren’t they used or espoused?

A. There are writings from the ancient world of which it is claimed they were written by various Apostles: The Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of Philip, etc. One such writing, the Gospel of Judas, was recently in the news having been rediscovered and translated from a Coptic papyrus. This “Gospel” claimed that Judas was the only one of Jesus’ disciples to have known the truth of Christ and who was

commanded by Christ to betray his Master. St. Irenaeus of Lyon (ca. 180 A.D.) condemned this writing because of its deceptive falsehoods. Fiction author Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* is based on themes and materials contained in such "Gospels." One writing from the second century, the *Proto-Gospel of James*, is used extensively in the Church because it documents the birth and life of the Virgin Mary Theotokos; herein is found material not contradictory, but supplemental, to the Faith and experience of the Church, which in the second century could still be confirmed by living memory as historically accurate.

Even though bearing the names of Apostles, virtually all of these "Gospels" have never been accepted in the Church as authentic precisely because of their false theological content. They portray "another Jesus...a different spirit...[and] a different gospel" (2 Cor. 11:4; Gal. 1:6-9) than what the Apostles declared. *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world* (1 John 4:1). All the true Apostles of the Lord experienced and taught the same truths of the Faith, and their counterfeits can be quickly discovered (2 Cor. 11:12-15; 2 Pet. 3:14-18).

Q. Can a person enter heaven without being baptized? Can you call yourself a Christian before you are baptized? In Baptist circles you are baptized after you are old enough to show that you understand what it means to be a Christian. I know people who are very young and clearly being blessed by God (and are following His word) but are not yet baptized. What would the OCA (Orthodox Church in America) consider their standing to be?

A. The Church's answer to the first two questions has been "yes" under certain circumstances. For instance, in the case of aborted children, or infant children who have died or been killed before being able to be baptized, their lack of baptism does not mean they lack a living relationship with God in Christ, especially since their spiritual faculty had not yet been darkened by sins and passions and they had been under the influence of the Holy Spirit within the Church prior to their bodily deaths. Similarly, adults preparing for baptism (i.e., *catechumens*) who die suddenly, or who are martyred for confessing the name of Christ prior to their baptism, are considered true Christians because of their intentions, even if those intentions were not brought to fulfillment in actual baptism. Catechumen-martyrs are said to have received a "baptism of blood" even though not baptized in water.

St. Basil the Great writes, that according to the Lord's command: *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...* (Matt. 28:19), the first command is to make disciples. Therefore, we should show ourselves to be disciples, that is, Christians, first in order to receive baptism beneficially (see his work *Concerning Baptism*, chapters 1-2). For this reason Baptism is not indiscriminately administered to children of parents who give little evidence of their intentions to practice and raise their children in the Christian Faith. Parents bringing

their children for Baptism should bear witness to their own discipleship and the fact they want their children to be followers of Christ throughout their lives unto eternal life.

Christ clearly says, *Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God* (John 3:5). Likewise, *He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned* (Mark 16:16). When those convicted by Peter's words on the Day of Pentecost asked, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter answered, "Repent and **let every one of you be baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call**" (Acts 2:38-39; emphasis mine). Baptism is necessary according to Christ's command, not optional, and Baptism is given to and received by everyone who wants to be a Christian, including infants and small children (cf. Acts 16:15, 33). If someone believes in Christ and is ignorant of Baptism, they should be instructed *more accurately* in the way of God in order to receive Baptism (cf. Acts 8:36-38; 18:26; 19:1-7). If someone believes in Christ, yet knows of Baptism and rejects it, this is contrary to the will of God and will undermine whatever faith they possess (Jam. 4:17).

The key to receiving Baptism properly, as with becoming a Christian, is faith, not a certain amount of intellectual understanding. Anyone who has faith to be a Christian will believe they need to be baptized according to Christ's will, and that person will seek Baptism not because it depends on their level of faith, or understanding, but because of the promises delivered in and through Baptism. Faith simply trusts these promises. *Therefore we were buried with [Christ] through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life* (Rom. 6:4). *For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit* (1 Cor. 12:13). *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ* (Gal. 3:27). *There is also an antitype (i.e., fulfillment [of the Ark of Noah]) which now saves us – baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ* (1 Pet. 3:21).

According to Christ and the Apostles, infants and small children provide the standard for such faith. Jesus says, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes" (Matt. 11:25); then, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven...Whoever causes one of these little ones **who believe in Me** to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt. 18:2, 6; emphasis mine). In another place: *Then they also brought infants to Him...Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little*

child will by no means enter it” (Luke 18:15-17). St. Paul writes to Timothy: from childhood (lit., infancy [Gk., apo brephous]) you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:15).

The insistence on a “believer’s baptism” (based on an age of accountability and powers of reason) among certain Protestant groups (e.g., Baptists) goes back to the rationale of the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. Protestants objected to the mechanical understanding of the effectiveness of Baptism and the rest of the sacraments according to Roman Catholic practice. This mechanical understanding put forth the idea that Baptism and the sacraments were effective simply because they were performed the proper way in the sacramental system of the Church (Lat., *opus operatum*; lit., *the work having been worked*). This idea was intended to guarantee grace through the sacraments even if the minister performing the sacraments was an unbeliever, or if the person receiving the sacrament was an unbeliever; in other words, the sacraments are objective means of grace. Roman dogma also made Baptism necessary to remit the guilt of original sin inherited by each person at the moment of their conception in the womb, and in its sacramental system the Church possessed the power to do this.

Certain Protestants countered with the opposite viewpoint, that the effectiveness of Baptism and the sacraments depends entirely on the recipient’s ability to know what’s being done to them; in other words, the meaning of the sacraments is subjective. One such group, called the Anabaptists (lit., *re-baptizers*), insisted that everyone who had been baptized in infancy in the Roman Church had to be baptized again because their first Baptism was meaningless without personal knowledge of what was happening to them. According to this same reasoning, the Body and Blood of Christ would be present in the Lord’s Supper only if the person receiving Communion believed they were there, once again by demonstration of personal knowledge; in fact, among certain Protestant groups the chief benefit of the Lord’s Supper became the mental remembrance of Christ’s death and resurrection, not the reception of Christ’s very Body and Blood. By and large, Protestants of this mindset minimized, or dismissed, the importance of the sacraments retaining their performance as “ordinances” to be kept, not means of grace or forgiveness; also, Protestant diminution of the sacraments was a consequence of the understanding that the Roman Catholic system was corrupt and needed to be rejected.

Both extremes are foreign to Orthodox Faith and practice. On the one hand, we have no sacramental system that works automatically according to rite, or independently of faith. Our guarantee is the Holy Spirit who resides in the Church and keeps us in communion with Jesus Christ (cf. John 16:5-15; 2 Cor. 1:20-22), which is precisely the essence of Holy Baptism making us members of the Body of Christ. On the other hand, we never isolate the individual believer according to one’s personal ability to rationally comprehend spiritual realities. This is why in the Orthodox Church all the baptized also receive Holy Communion, whether infants, children, adults, or the senile. *My faith is our*

faith (see Jude 3), and unless a person consciously rejects the Faith (by immorality and/or apostasy), every believer is striving forward in Christ to the best of their ability.

Q. The issue of gay marriage is set to go before the US Supreme Court as it is being challenged by Ohio and several other states. What potential ramifications and/or sanctions could this have on the Church, and what might the Church's responses or actions be?

A. According to the Orthodox Christian Tradition, "gay, or same-sex, marriage" is an oxymoron. There is no such thing. Marriage, by definition, is the union of one man and one woman who strive together in salvation, love, and – God willing – the bringing forth of children (Matt. 19:4-6; 1 Cor. 7:1-16). Marriage is an icon of the eternal relationship between Christ (the husband) and His Church (the bride) [Eph. 5:22-33].

A government's legalization of "gay marriage" does not change the Church's theological truth of marriage. However, the legalization of "gay marriage" may affect the way in which any marriages performed in Church are recognized as legal in the eyes of the legal authority, that is, the State.

Right now in America, Bishops and Priests register with the State to sign marriage licenses validating the weddings they officiate. These licenses must be returned to the proper authority within a certain amount of time following the date of the ceremony, and thus the newly-wed couple is officially married in the eyes of the state. The legal status of marriage is important because of property rights, custody of children, and inheritance issues – all impacting the good ordering of society. There is no conflict here between the goals of the State and the goals of the Church, and the Church is glad to bless and fulfill these necessary aspects of married life in the kingdom of God. This is why it has been normal in our culture sympathetic to Christianity for weddings to take place in Church, or at least by a Christian minister, because both the worldly and other-worldly aspects of marriage were seen as mutually important.

Under the concept of non-discrimination, legalization of "gay marriage" means that the State may require any marrying institution (including the Church) to recognize "gay marriage" in order to have legal status in performing marriages of any kind. Under such conditions, if the Church refused to acknowledge "gay marriage," then the State could refuse to grant the Church, or its ministers, legal authority to marry at all. The State would not pretend to dictate what the Church does, or does not, believe. It would just prohibit the Church from being legally valid pertaining to the performance of weddings unless the Church complied with the State's policy. In such a situation, the State could foreseeably impose punitive action against the Church, or its ministers (i.e., the Bishops, or Priests), for performing marriages while in violation of the law. It would be very difficult, if not impossible, for the State to force the Church to perform "gay weddings" contrary to the Church's doctrine, as the Church is still protected from such coercion by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

So how could the Church respond, if its ability to affect legally recognized marriage is revoked? First, the Church cannot renounce its own principles concerning Christian marriage, but the Church must continue to teach and practice the truth of Marriage as given by God. Second, the Church would still marry people according to its practice (e.g., Service of Crowning, etc.), but couples in the Church would have to obtain a “legal marriage” through an agent of the State, for instance, before a Judge or Justice of the Peace (never another “church” or “minister” in compliance with the law sanctioning “gay marriage,” as that is self-contradictory for Christians). Orthodox Christians would have to be more attentive to the fact that actual Marriage has been, and will always be, a Mystery (Sacrament) of the Kingdom of God, not a legal contract. In a very real way, such a situation would put the modern Church in the same position it experienced in the first three centuries of its existence, when the Church and its ministers were not acknowledged by the Roman authority.

Q. Why does the OCA (Orthodox Church in America) not have a Patriarch?

A. The Orthodox Church in America (OCA) does not have a Patriarch because it is not a patriarchate, merely an autocephalous Orthodox jurisdiction. Being autocephalous (lit., *self-headed*), the OCA chooses its own bishops and does not answer directly to a foreign hierarch. The chief bishop among equals (i.e., the Primate) in the OCA is called a Metropolitan. The OCA is one of several jurisdictions in America; all the other Orthodox jurisdictions in America answer to a foreign hierarch (e.g., Patriarch of Moscow, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople [Istanbul], etc.).

A patriarchate is a larger jurisdiction typically defined by geographically ethnic or national boundaries – the word *patriarch* literally means “the ruler of the family” (that is, an ethnic conglomerate or nation). Five ancient patriarchates existed in the Orthodox Christian Church: Rome, Constantinople, Jerusalem, Antioch (Syria), and Alexandria (Egypt). Eventually as more nations became defined according to Orthodoxy, the number of patriarchates grew: Bulgaria, Romania, Russia, etc.

If America were to have a Patriarch one day, he would be the Patriarch of all of America, and his patriarchate would be centered in some city like Washington D.C., the capital of the country. This would only happen if the many jurisdictions existing in America were unified into one American jurisdiction.

Q. How does the Orthodox Church view the Rosary?

A. The Rosary, a Roman Catholic devotional aid, is a string of beads with Cross attached used together with a series of prescribed prayers and meditations. As a person moves from Cross to beads the prayers and meditations are said in order until one completes the course of the Rosary. The prayers notably include the so-called *Apostles’ Creed*, *Hail Mary*, *Glory to the Father...*, and the *Lord’s Prayer*. The current meditations prescribed

in the Roman Church are arranged in four groups of five dwelling on the life of Christ and the Virgin Mary.

As a devotional aid, the Rosary serves a very similar function as the Orthodox prayer rope (Rus., *chotki*, Gk., *komboschini*), although movement along the knots/beads of a prayer rope is usually accompanied by the saying of the Jesus Prayer at each knot: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me [a sinner]." Both the Rosary and prayer rope serve to focus attention on the prayer or meditation.

Aside from differences in the prayers used for both the Rosary and prayer rope, for instance, the Orthodox Church does not use the *Apostles' Creed*, and the Roman Catholic *Hail Mary* includes a concluding petition not found among the Orthodox, some doctrinal content foreign to Orthodoxy is included in the Rosary, notably the statement of the Virgin Mary's exemption from "original sin," hence her Assumption into heaven without falling-asleep (the Orthodox feast of the *Dormition* of the Theotokos).

Q. Why wait to cut the Communion bread until after it is consecrated (i.e., becomes the Body of Christ)? Why not cut the bread prior to consecration?

A. The main reason for cutting, or dividing, the Communion bread after the consecration is to maintain the integrity of the one Body of Christ from which all the faithful will partake. *For we, though many, are one bread and one body, for we all partake of that one bread* (1 Cor. 10:17). Thus the manner of preparing Holy Communion provides a visual reminder of the theology of the Eucharist – there is one Christ from which all eat. This is why the Orthodox Church uses one loaf – called "the Lamb" – for Holy Communion and not many individual wafers (the same is true of the one cup, or chalice, and not many individual cups).

Another reason for cutting up the Communion bread after the consecration is to keep the one loaf of bread become the Body of Christ separate from the other breads used for various commemorations prior to the Divine Liturgy, the pieces of which are likewise placed on the *diskos* (i.e., plate) with the Lamb. The Lamb remains intact, undivided, and unmingled with the other pieces of bread on the *diskos*.

The cutting, or dividing, of the consecrated Body of Christ into small pieces before adding to the chalice is a Slavic custom not commonly followed in other Orthodox jurisdictions, e.g., the Greek or Antiochian Archdioceses. In those parishes, the Priest breaks the Lamb into four large pieces and simply adds two of them whole into the chalice. Smaller pieces are then given to the faithful as the Priest divides them with the spoon in the chalice.

Q. On page 65 of the *Divine Liturgy* books we have these words: “Remembering this saving commandment and all those things which have come to pass for us: the Cross, the Tomb, the Resurrection on the third day, the Ascension into heaven, the Sitting at the right hand, and the second and glorious Coming.” Why is the second Coming referred to as already to have come to pass for us?

A. The answer to this question hinges on the understanding of two concepts: what it means “to remember” and what it means “to have come to pass for us.” Clearly as a historical event, the second Coming of Christ is still in the future; historically, the second Coming hasn’t happened yet. Consequently, understood as the memory of a past event, the second Coming can’t yet be remembered.

Liturgically (hence, Biblically) speaking our “remembering” and “things which have come to pass for us” are not restricted by concepts of time such as past, present, and future. Biblically the verb “to remember” is closely connected with the concept of the covenant between God and His people. This covenant is a relationship based on past actions of God, His present care and blessing, *and* future promises, all indicative of life in communion with the eternal God who transcends time in changeless fashion. *Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you (past), whose faith follow (present), considering the outcome of their conduct (future). Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:7-8).*

The following illustrates this meaning. *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy...Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbaths, to observe them throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant (Ex. 20:8; 31:16). [Moses prayed,] “Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Your servants, to whom You swore by Yourself and said to them, ‘I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of heaven for multitude, and all this land I spoke about to give their seed, they shall inherit unto ages’” (Ex. 32:13). [Zacharias said,] “Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed His people...to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham: to grant that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life” (Luke 1:68, 72-75).*

To *remember*, specifically in regard to God’s covenant, is to bring to mind, or act upon, all that God promises for His people. Regarding the second Coming of Christ, for us to remember it means that we act upon it because it is a sure promise of God; therefore, it forms our reality even in the present. This is precisely the point of Jesus’ teaching of His second Coming, for instance, in the passage of the sheep and goats: *“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him...” (Matt. 25:31-46).* Who are the sheep who will inherit the kingdom at that time? – those who showed mercy to Christ in the least of His brethren.

Likewise at the Lord's Supper, which is the new covenant in His blood, Christ said, *"Do this in remembrance of Me"* (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:23-25). In our participation at the Lord's Supper – during the Divine Liturgy – we are formed by all of Christ's work for us from start to finish, from His conception and birth to His Coming again in glory. *[Jesus said to His disciples just after the Lord's Supper before His crucifixion, speaking of His ascension and return in glory,] "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know"* (John 14:3-4).

In God's eternal counsel and by the saving dispensation of Christ in the flesh, all these aspects of life in communion with Christ have come to pass for us. They form our living relationship with God in Christ. *Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God...* (2 Pet. 3:11-12). *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new* (2 Cor. 5:17).

Q. What is the status of a suicide victim (Christian) in the eyes of the Orthodox Church in America (OCA).

A. The following is written in the OCA "Guidelines for Clergy": "1. The act of suicide is a profound tragedy affecting a parish. It necessitates prayers for forgiveness for the sake of the departed and exhorts the members of the parish community to repentance and sorrow. 2. The Orthodox Church normally denies a Church burial to a person who has committed suicide. However, factors bearing on the particular case may become known to the priest, who must share this information with the diocesan hierarch (i.e., bishop); the hierarch will consider the factors and make the decision concerning Funeral Services."

Denial of a Church burial means that suicide, as far as anyone can normally determine in this life, is a final act of unrepentance and denial of the Faith. Suicide is an act of self-murder from which the person does not have opportunity to recover in this life, which is what makes suicide such a profound tragedy. For this reason, the phrase "suicide victim" is not proper in that suicide is not a thing victimizing a person from the outside; in the act of suicide, the person becomes a victim of oneself. The Church therefore prays for the forgiveness of a suicide commending the person to the mercy of God who knows all things and is the final Judge.

Factors may well exist changing the status of a suicide from a brazen act of self-murder, for instance, a history of struggle with mental illness, despair brought on by prolonged abuse at the hands of others, or an interval of time between fatal action and death in which the person expresses repentance. These factors are considered for denying or performing Funeral services and burial. Yet even if Church burial is denied (within the

Church cemetery), this is done as a reminder to all of the profound tragedy of suicide and its incompatibility with the Christian Faith, not as a final judgment on the part of the Church who still commends the person to the mercy of God in its prayers for eternal salvation in the Kingdom of heaven.