

## Introduction to Orthodox Worship – Importance of Holy Tradition

The teaching on the soul's salvation is mainly concerned with our inner man which we will get to in later talks. Things like prayer, focusing the mind and heart on God through prayer, discerning God's will for us in our lives and so on. But besides our inner man, we also have an outer man, whose actions are visible to all. The Church gives us a whole series of precepts in order that our outward behavior be profitable for us and edifying for others.

Apostle Paul, in many passages in his epistles, advises the faithful to imitate him and his co-laborers: I beg you therefore, be imitators of me. (I Cor. 4:16); Be my imitators, even as I imitate Christ. Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things, and hold firm to the traditions as I delivered them to you. (I Cor. 11:1-2); Brethren, be united in imitating me, and keep your eyes fixed on those who live this way, even as you have us as an example. (Phil. 3:17); What you learned, received, heard, and saw in me—practice these things (Phil. 4- 9), etc. The Apostle speaks of the need to follow him, but says little about how this is to be done; we are taught all this by the tradition of the Church. Those who followed the Apostles strictly preserved his tradition, for which he praised them: Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things, and hold firm to the traditions as I delivered them to you. (I Cor. 11:2). Later similar apostolic traditions were written down by their followers, the Holy Fathers.

Although there are in Scripture various directives for the proper conduct of a Christian and their relations with fellow believers, this subject is treated in greater detail by the Holy Fathers and later church writers, up to our own time. They write how one should behave in church and outside the church.

They emphasise Holy Tradition as the living continuity with the ancient Church. St John of Damascus says, "We do not change the everlasting boundaries which our fathers have set, but we keep the Tradition, just as we received it [On the Holy Icons, II, 12]."

Orthodox loyalty to Tradition [the things of the past] is not something mechanical or lifeless, however. Tradition is a personal encounter with Christ in the Holy Spirit,

Tradition is a living experience of the Holy Spirit in the present.

Our Lord tells us that when the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth (John 16:13) and this promise forms the basis of Orthodox respect for Holy Tradition.

So how well has this Tradition been preserved especially for us right here and now, 2000 years and a hemisphere removed from where it all began?

In the West, immigrants brought with them from their homelands an Orthodoxy which very quickly accommodated to the Christianity of the West, losing much of its essence

and under the influence of such phenomena as the ecumenical movement, secular influences and influences from other denominations. It came to think of itself not as the historical Church, the very Church of Christ, the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church as we confess and profess at every liturgy in the Creed, but as one of the many denominations and ecclesiastical bodies. As a result, Orthodoxy in the West is often an artificial version of traditional Orthodox Christianity.

So because of this and because we are a new Orthodoxy community with people coming from diverse backgrounds and traditions, we need to catechize and re-catechize on an ongoing basis. Not just for the sake of those coming to Orthodoxy later in life, but also for those who are culturally Orthodox and entered the faith as infants but have not really known or been familiarized with their own faith. We need to learn afresh as well as unlearn particular habits and customs which may have crept in through pious, innocent ignorance.

Today we will just have an overview of Orthodox customs and traditions as we experience them through the Divine Liturgy since we only come together once a week for now due to our limited resources and lack of permanent location for our Mission. So things like The Sign of the Cross, Venerating Icons, How to accept and receive blessing from priest...etc.

Later on in subsequent talks we can go into each aspect in greater detail.

Prepare for Liturgy from the night before.

Proper Attire. Don't track dirt inside.

Punctuality

Enter the church – Sacred Space. Not worldly

Quiet prayer. Sign of the Cross. Candles. Venerate Icons. Take your place.

Postures of worship.

When priest blesses or deacon censures. Bow.

Sit for Epistle. Instruction

Stand for Gospel. Living Word of God.

Stand for Anaphora/Elevation. Creed. Lord's Prayer. Communion

How to receive Communion

How to receive blessing from priest individually

Do not cross legs.

We stand, serve and worship before the altar of the Pantokrator the Lord Almighty and All-Powerful, we must always display, **manifest** and create an atmosphere where there is a **distinct sense** of being in the **presence of God**.

We must always be **mindful** that we are **constantly** in the **heavenly presence**.

Everything in a Divine Service **must** be **centred** in the **worship** of the **Pantokrator**. The clergy serving, the people reverently standing, and the choir singing orderly and piously.

The way Orthodox worship, and the Orthodox Church's Divine Services **must reflect the majesty of God** as revealed from the heavens.

At the small entrance, when we sing: **“Come let us worship and prostrate ourselves before Christ...”**

Mystically/Symbolically what does this mean? The bishop, the priest, in fact all who are participating in the procession of the small entrance are arriving and are being received in the name of the Lord. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. The bishop (priest) more so than everyone else is actually arriving in the name of the Lord. **He stands as a type of and in place of Christ – in the name of the Lord.**

But are we “blessed” as coming “in the name of the Lord?” Or have we checked out at that point, or any other time during the Services, by drifting into la-la land?

Therefore it is of **extreme importance**, and **this cannot be stressed and emphasised enough**, that we are **always keeping** our **focus** on the **divine presence**.

As Orthodox Christians we understand, in a mystical and spiritual way, that we unite ourselves with those in the heavens (the angels and the faithful who have gone on before us). **Together** we lift our hands with humility and solemnity, but also in praise and with beauty, order and grandeur, towards Him who sits on the heavenly throne. And we sing with those in the heavens, “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Sabaoth/of hosts. Heaven and earth are filled with your glory.”