

I'M ORTHODOX: WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

30 Questions and Answers
A Concise and Practical
Guidebook



INDEX OF QUESTIONS

- 1.** I'm Orthodox, What Does That Mean?
- 2.** Who Is The Holy Trinity: Father, Son And Holy Spirit?
- 3.** Who Is Jesus Christ?
- 4.** Who Is The Holy Spirit?
- 5.** Who Is The Virgin Mary?
- 6.** Why Do Orthodox Celebrate So Many Saints?
- 7.** What Exactly Is The Church And Why Should I Go?
- 8.** What Are The Major Feasts Throughout The Year?
- 9.** What Is The Issue With The Church Calendar I Hear About From Time To Time?
- 10.** What Is The Divine Liturgy?
- 11.** What Are The Different Church Services We Celebrate?
- 12.** What Is The Purpose Of "Kolyva" And The Significance Of Memorial Services For The Departed?
- 13.** Why Are Icons So Important To Orthodox?
- 14.** Why Should I Read The Bible?
- 15.** What Are The Ten Commandments?
- 16.** What Are The Beatitudes?
- 17.** Orthodox Have A Lot Of Traditions, Where Do They All Come From?
- 18.** Why And How Do Orthodox Perform The Sign Of The Cross?
- 19.** Should I Pray Every Day?
- 20.** What Is The Lord's Prayer And Why Is It So Special?

- 21.** What Are The Sacraments And Why Are They Important?
- 22.** What Is The Significance Of Baptism?
- 23.** What Are The Prescribed Fasting Periods Throughout The Year?
- 24.** Do I Have To Fast Before Receiving Holy Communion?
- 25.** Does The Orthodox Church Permit Marital Divorce?
- 26.** What Is Repentance And Confession?
- 27.** What Exactly Is Sin?
- 28.** I Swear Sometimes, Is That Bad?
- 29.** What Happens When We Die, Is There Life After Death?
- 30.** What Is Deification (*Theosis*), What Is Salvation?

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING





"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" (Matthew 5:14-16).

Beloved in the Lord,

God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is the true and uncreated Light. He is the "creator of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible," as we recite in the Creed.

In order for us as Orthodox Christians to follow the words of Christ recorded by Matthew the Evangelist, we must be properly educated about the Truth of God and His Church, which is the Kingdom of Heaven realized on earth.

For this reason, together with the many other spiritual offerings of our Holy Metropolis, this small *Question and Answer*-formatted guidebook was developed to help inform the faithful – and those interested in learning about Orthodoxy – about our Christian faith, which alone leads man to salvation in Christ.

Read this guidebook; contemplate the information provided in it; apply the lessons on a daily basis; become an active Orthodox Christian who prays, fasts, is a cheerful giver, merciful, goes to confession and church services, and lives a sacramental life.

By learning more about what a tremendous blessing it is to be an Orthodox Christian, we can *give light ... and shine before men* in today's society and glorify the Triune God. We hope that this guidebook – together with our *Orthodox Catechism: Basic Teachings of the Orthodox Faith* book – enhances your relationship with the saints of our Church, the Most Holy Theotokos and, above all, Christ, the only Redeemer and Savior of the world.

With fatherly love and blessings,

f. Metropolitan Sotirios

METROPOLITAN ARCHBISHOP SOTIRIOS





1 I'm Orthodox, What Does That Mean?

It means that through your baptism you became a member of the Orthodox Church, the *One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church*, which is the Body of Christ.

It means that you confess and bear witness to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the centre of Christianity; in fact, He is the centrepiece of all history (*The Alpha and the Omega*). For since God became man, and since we are united with Him in baptism, we experience His Incarnation in our lives.

More, the definitive text of the Orthodox Faith is the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (the Symbol of Faith), the outcome of the First and Second Ecumenical Councils in the fourth century.

The Creed

I believe in one God, Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages.

Light from Light, true God of true God, begotten not created, of one essence with the Father; through Whom all things were made.

For us and for our salvation He came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man.

He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried.

On the third day, He rose according to the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead; and His kingdom will have no end.

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified; who spoke through the Prophets.

In One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

I acknowledge one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

I expect the resurrection of the dead.

And the life of the age to come. Amen.

Who Is The Holy Trinity: Father, Son And Holy Spirit?

The Holy Trinity is revealed both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, the Trinity is revealed in subtle ways; in the New Testament, the Trinity is revealed fully and plainly, beginning at the Baptism of our Lord (*Theophany*, celebrated January 6).

One essence in three persons. God is one and God is three – the Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit are ‘one in essence’ (*homoousios*), yet each is distinguished from the other two by personal characteristics. ‘The divine is indivisible in its divisions’ (Gregory of Nazianzus), for the persons are ‘united yet not confused, distinct yet not divided’ (John of Damascus).

The distinctive characteristic of the first person of the Trinity is Fatherhood: He is unbegotten, having His source and origin solely in Himself and not in any other person. The distinctive characteristic of the second person is Sonship: although equal to the Father and coeternal with Him, He is not unbegotten or sourceless, but has His source and origin in the Father, from whom He is begotten ‘before all ages,’ as the Creed says. The distinctive characteristic of the third person is Procession: like the Son, He has His source and origin in the Father; but His relationship to the Father is different from that of the Son, since He is not begotten but from all eternity He *proceeds* from the Father.

God is absolutely transcendent: 'No single thing of all that is created has or ever will have even the slightest communion with the supreme nature or nearness to it' (St. Gregory Palamas). God, although absolutely transcendent, is not cut off from the world He has made. God is above and outside His creation, yet He also exists within it.

God is personal, He is an Incarnate God. God has come down to humankind, not only through His energies, but in His own person. The Second Person of the Trinity (Jesus Christ), 'true God of true God,' was made human: 'The word became flesh and dwelt among us' (John 1:14). A closer union than this between God and His creation there could not be. God Himself became Man (*Theanthropos*).

3 Who Is Jesus Christ?

Orthodox Christians believe that the Son, that is to say, Jesus Christ, is God. We repeat the words of the Creed, "I believe ... and in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages. Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not created, of one in essence with the Father, from Whom all things were made."

Orthodox Christians believe quite correctly. Their belief is supported by Holy Scripture. John the Evangelist tells us, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." In this way he calls the Son and the Word of God, God. He further in-

forms us that the Son and Word of God existed from the Beginning, that is, before Creation, before Time. He always existed, together with the Father. He was and is inseparable from God the Father. And He is Perfectly God. St. Paul complements this by saying, "Great is the mystery of godliness—God appeared in the flesh." How? By the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Son, Jesus Christ. Elsewhere, St. Paul calls Christ Lord and God, Great God, Blessed God. But first St. Thomas, after Christ's Resurrection, had called Christ, "My Lord and my God."

In other places in Holy Scripture, the same Divine attributes are ascribed to Christ that are also ascribed to the Father. He is called The One Who Existed Before All Time, the All-Mighty, the All-Knowing, Equal to the Father, Creator of the World. From what we have said, from the Creed and Holy Scriptures, it becomes very clear that the Son is Perfect God as is the Father. Christ Himself teaches "That all should honour the Son just as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent Him" (John 5:23). In other words, he who denies the divinity of the Son, denies the divinity of the Father and, therefore, is an unbeliever.

4 Who Is The Holy Spirit?

"In the beginning God made heaven and earth. The earth was invisible and unfinished; and darkness was over the deep. The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the water" (Genesis 1:1-2).

The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, and is “the Lord, the Giver of life” (Creed). Since He is Lord, He is coequal with the Father, and is His Coworker in making heaven and earth.

“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). The Father is worshiped in spirit – that is, in the Holy Spirit – and in truth – that is in Christ Himself and according to Christ’s revelation. God is Spirit: God cannot be confined to a particular location. Those who receive the Holy Spirit and believe in Jesus Christ can worship God the Father with purity of heart.

“But when the Comforter comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me” (John 15:26). While the Son is begotten of the Father alone, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone; the beginning, the Fountainhead, of both Persons is the Father.

Prayer to the Holy Spirit:

Heavenly King, Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, who dwell in all places and fill all things, treasury of good things and giver of life, come and abide in us and cleanse us of every impurity, and save our souls, O Good One.

5 Who Is The Virgin Mary?

“For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed” (Lk 1:48).



For more than two thousand years the Church has preserved the memory of the Virgin Mary (who is often referred to as *Panagia* in Greek, which translates into “All-holy”) as the prototype of all Christians – the model of what we are to become in Christ. The Virgin Mary was unconditionally obedient to God – as the Virgin Mary bore Christ in her womb physically, all Christians now have the privilege of bearing God within them spiritually. By God’s grace and mercy we are purified and empowered to become like Him.

The honour we give to the Panagia also signifies our view of who Jesus Christ is. From early times the Church has called her Mother of God (*Theotokos*, or “God-bearer”), a title which implies that her Son is both fully man and fully God (*Theanthropos*). As His Mother, she was the source of Jesus’ human nature; yet the One she bore in her womb was also the eternal God. Therefore, because of her character and especially because of her role in God’s plan of salvation, Christians appropriately honour the Virgin Mary as the first among the saints.

In obedience to God’s clear intention, therefore, the Orthodox Church honours the Panagia in icons, hymns, and special feast days. We entreat her to intercede with her Son on our behalf. We also ask her, as the first believer and the Mother of the Church, for guidance and protection. We venerate her – but we do not worship her, for worship belongs to God alone.

In many church services we sing the following hymn, which expresses the Virgin Mary's unique place in creation:

It is truly right to bless you, Theotokos, ever blessed, most pure, and mother of our God. Higher in honour than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more glorious than the Serapheim, who without corruption gave birth to God the Logos. Most truly Theotokos, you do we magnify.

Did you know? In Orthodox icons of the Panagia there are usually three stars – two on her shoulders and one on her forehead – representing her Ever-Virginity, *before, during and after* the Nativity of Christ.

Why Do Orthodox Celebrate So Many Saints?

Saints are an integral part of the Orthodox Church: St. Clement of Rome writes, "Cleave to the saints, for they who cleave to them shall be made holy," while St. Ephraim the Syrian adds, "Blessed is he who plants in his soul good plants, that is, the virtues and the lives of saints."

The context for understanding how and why we pray to the saints in the Orthodox Church is the Church itself. The Church is made up of all the believers who accept as their own faith of the Church about the Triune God, salvation, and the sacramental life; who acknowledge the spiritual role of saints in the Church, and the teaching of the Church about the saints.



For us Orthodox, it is good to remember that the original word in Greek used to speak about saintly persons is the same word exactly which is used to describe God's "holiness" and whatever is sacred. The Greek word is *aghios*. So, in our minds we must keep ever highlighted the extremely close connection between the holiness of God and the saintliness of human beings.

This holiness is a call to all of us to grow toward the fulfilment of a new relationship with God. It is important that each of us understands the holiness of our Christian calling and the sanctity of our existence as believers and therefore, as "saints in the making."

Some Christians, throughout the history of the Church, have, in fact, spent their lives so completely in "making holiness perfect" that they have impacted dramatically on the rest of the Church's membership. It is these wonderful people, these examples of what faithfulness to God can do for the life of human beings, whom we refer to in the special sense of "the saints of the Church" whom we honour in icons and hymns. It is these very special persons who stand as an example for the rest of us, an encouragement, a proof that the Christian life can be lived to its fullness in this life. And it is these very special members of the Church of Christ, whom we call upon to pray for us, to intercede on our behalf.

Did you know? The *Synaxarion* is a volume of books which contain the "Lives of the Saints" of the Orthodox Church to inform and nourish the faithful.

7 What Exactly Is The Church And Why Should I Go?

"A person cannot have God as his Father if he does not have the Church as his Mother." –St. Cyprian the Hieromartyr, Bishop of Carthage

"Where the bishop is present, there the people shall gather." –St. Ignatius the Hieromartyr and God-bearer, Bishop of Antioch

The Church is the Kingdom of Heaven realized on earth; it is here to bring the whole world back to God.

The Church is where the faithful receive God's grace through the holy sacraments. This one Church, the *One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church*, established by Christ and inspired by the Holy Spirit is the vehicle for knowing and experiencing the truth of God.

The Orthodox Church contains, expresses, promulgates and lives, in its existence as Church, the very Faith given by Christ and the Holy Spirit to the Church. The Bible records St. Paul writing to his disciple Timothy the following important message:

I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these instructions to you so that, if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion (1 Tim 3:14-16).

While the Scriptures are the inspired truth of God in human words, the Church is the pillar and ground of that truth. More, the “truth” about which this passage speaks is about Christ Himself; that is, it is doctrinal, dealing with some of the most fundamental beliefs of the Church. It is in this sense that the Orthodox Church understands itself to be identical with that very same Church of two thousand years ago. “Orthodox” means “correct believing,” so the claim of the Orthodox Church is that it maintains, teaches, and seeks to live in accordance with that correct belief.

What Are The Major Feasts Throughout The Year?

Acts 18:21 (“I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing.”) shows there was already an emerging liturgical calendar among the Apostles, revealing their deep desire to gather in remembrance of the great Christian feasts.

The ecclesiastical calendar begins on September 1st (Beginning of the Indiction). Pre-eminent among all festivals is **Pascha, the Feast of Feasts**, which stands in a class by itself. Next in importance come the Twelve Great Feasts, usually reckoned as follows:

- The Nativity of the Mother of God (September 8)
- The Elevation (or Raising Up) of the Honoured and Life-giving Cross (September 14)
- The Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple (November 21)



- The Nativity of Christ (Christmas) (December 25)
- The Baptism of Christ in the Jordan (Theophany or Epiphany) (January 6)
- The Meeting of Our Lord (The Presentation of Christ in the Temple) (February 2)
- The Annunciation of the Mother of God (Evangelismos) (March 25)
- The Entry of Our Lord into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday) (one week before Pascha)
- The Ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ (40 days after Pascha)
- Pentecost (Trinity Sunday) (50 days after Pascha)
- The Transfiguration of Christ (August 6)
- The Falling Asleep of the Mother of God (The Dormition) (August 15)

Thus three of the Twelve Great Feasts depend on the date of Pascha and are 'movable'; the rest are 'fixed'. Seven are feasts of the Lord, and five are feasts of the Mother of God.

There are also a large number of other feasts, of varying importance. Among the more prominent are:

- The Circumcision of Christ (January 1)
- The Three Great Hierarchs (January 30)
- The Nativity of St. John the Baptist (June 24)
- Saints Peter and Paul (June 29)
- The Beheading of St. John the Baptist (August 29)
- The Protecting Veil of the Mother of God (October 1)

- St. Nicholas the Wonderworker (December 6)
- All Saints (First Sunday after Pentecost)

Source: The Orthodox Church, Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia, Penguin Books (1997)

What Is The Issue With The Church Calendar I Hear About From Time To Time?

Up to the end of the First World War, all Orthodox still used the Old Style or Julian Calendar, which is at present thirteen days behind the New or Gregorian Calendar, followed in the west. In 1923, an Inter-Orthodox Synod was held in Constantinople, attended by some (but not all) of the Orthodox Churches; this gathering decided to introduce a revision of the Julian Calendar, corresponding for all practical purposes to the New or Gregorian Calendar. The change was introduced in Constantinople and Greece in March 1924, but it proved controversial and was not adopted everywhere. At present the Revised Julian Calendar is followed by most autocephalous churches. This results in a difficult and confusing situation which one hopes will shortly be brought to an end. At present the Greeks (outside the Holy Mountain of Athos and Jerusalem) keep Christmas at the same time as the west, on December 25, while the Russians keep it thirteen days later, on January 7; the Greeks keep Epiphany on January 6, the Russians on January 19; and so on. But practically the whole Orthodox Church observes Pascha at the same time, taking no account of the Revised

Julian Calendar. This means that in practice Orthodox Easter sometimes coincides with the western date, and is sometimes one or more weeks later.

The reform in the calendar aroused lively opposition, particularly in Greece, where groups of 'Old Calendarists' or *Palaioimerologitai* broke with the Orthodox Church, the *One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church*, which is the Body of Christ. The 'calendar question' is not primarily about dates but obedience to the Church and communion in Christ.

The Orthodox Church is the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. It is administratively comprised of fourteen Sister churches, who are autocephalous or self-governing, but who share the same faith and sacramental life. The fourteen Autocephalous Churches are: Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem (the four Ancient Patriarchates); and, Russia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, Cyprus, Greece, Poland, Albania and the Czech Lands and Slovakia.

10 What Is The Divine Liturgy?

"Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him" (John 6:53-56).



The Divine Liturgy is the way the Orthodox Church conducts the Mystery or Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. There are several forms of the Divine Liturgy in the Orthodox Church, but the most common is the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.

The sacramental life is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. The most inclusive and overarching of the sacraments is the Holy Eucharist. The sacrament had its beginning with the Last Supper which Christ shared with His disciples before His betrayal and crucifixion (refer to the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians 11:23-32).

Together with baptism, the Eucharist covers the whole dimension of our Christian existence. Its unique place in the life of Orthodox Christians is seen in the fact that it is the central and primary act of worship for the Church; it is conducted each Sunday and on other days for and by the whole body of Christians in each parish.

We live liturgically when the Divine Liturgy is the focal point of what God does for us, as well as our reaction – as the people of God – to those acts of salvation, redemption, and sanctification. In the Divine Liturgy, we meet the real presence of Christ in the elements of the sacrament and in the forgiving, elevating, and fulfilling presence of Christ in our lives. We do this both as individuals and as members of the Church, which is the Body of Christ.

In this sacrament we especially see the significance of what it means to be a member of the Church; what it means to grow in the image and likeness of God; what it means to love God and our fellow man; and what it means to receive the continuing presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. As participants in Holy Communion, we receive the Divine Presence in our lives in the most realistic of ways and we affirm our union and desire to be one in thought and will and action with God.

11 What Are The Different Church Services We Celebrate?

The Daily Cycle of Services

In ancient times, Christians began each portion of the day by common prayer. This resulted in eight services: *Vespers, Compline, Midnight Office* and *Matins* for the night; the services of the First, Third, Sixth, and Ninth Hours for the day. Besides these, in fulfillment of Christ's command to break bread in memory of Him, Christians celebrate every day the Divine Liturgy, or, if not the Liturgy, the Typica, otherwise called the "Pro-Liturgy Service." Thus was formed a daily cycle of nine services.

The Weekly Cycle of Services

Every day of the week is consecrated to certain special memories, as follows: *Sunday*, to that of Christ's rising from the dead; *Monday*, to honouring the holy Angels; *Tuesday*, to the memory of the Prophets and, among them, of the greatest prophet, St. John the Forerunner; *Wednesday* is consecrated to the Cross of Christ, as being the day of Judas' treason, and to the Mother

of God; *Thursday*, to the memory of the Apostles and all sainted bishops, and, in their number, of St. Nicholas, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia; *Friday*, to the Cross, as being the day of the Crucifixion; *Saturday*, to the Saints, especially to the Mother of God, and to the memory of all those who have died in the hope of resurrection and eternal life. The remembrance of these events and persons is recalled by certain prayers and hymns, different for each day of the week, which enter into the fixed daily cycle of services.

The Yearly Cycle

Every day of every month, every day of the year is consecrated to the memory of certain events or to that of different Saints. In honour of each given event or person, special hymns, prayers and rites have been established, which are added to the hymns and prayers for the day of the week. In the yearly cycle, the greatest changes in the service occur on great feast-days and during the fasts. According to the subjects of the services, the feast days are divided into *Feasts of Our Lord*, in honour of God Himself, – of the *Mother of God*, – and *Saints' Feasts*, in honour of the holy angels and of holy men and women.

12 What Is The Purpose Of “Kolyva” And The Significance Of Memorial Services For The Departed?

“They turned to supplication and prayed that the sin they had committed might be completely blotted out” (2 Maccabees 12:42). This Old Testament passage is a clear statement that the righteous Jews prayed for the

departed so that the sin they had committed might be blotted out. It is hope in the resurrection of the departed that forms the basis for prayers for them.

"Kolyva" is the name given to the mixture of boiled wheat, sugar and other ingredients (such as raisins, almonds, pomegranates and spices) which are presented at memorial service. Following the memorial services, the Kolyva is distributed to parishioners, usually in small cups or plastic bags. Wheat early became a symbol of the resurrection which we expect, based on Christ's word, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit," (John 12:24). Thus, the wheat becomes a symbol of what we confess to be our faith in the Creed: "I expect the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come." The sugar is added as a prayer that the deceased's resurrection will be a sweet and pleasant one. Thus, the Kolyva are a symbol of our faith and prayer for the beloved deceased person.

Why do we pray for the dead? It is true that the dead are judged by how they lived. Generally, the Church teaches our future in eternity is based on our faith, life, deeds, virtues, love, compassion and goodness (or their absence) in this life, before our death. Yet, since we are never fully sure of the place of each soul before God, and because God Himself is merciful and loving, we pray for any help which might come to the soul of the deceased. The Church teaches that our prayers help the deceased in some way, although we do not know how or how much.



13 Why Are Icons So Important To Orthodox?

Today has been manifested as a day of festivity, as a day full of happiness. The bright light of very true dogmas shines like lightning. And Christ's Church is glowing, for she is once again adorned by the replacement and installation now of holy icons and depictions, and the light that they radiate. And a oneness of mind among the believers has God bestowed. (Hymn from the Sunday of Orthodoxy)

The icon points us to Christ and His saints. We honour Him and them through the use of icons.

The Christian Tradition from the beginning rejected the worship of images as idolatry. It has never changed this position. However, also from the very beginning, as early as the catacomb period, Christians drew representations of holy persons and events. The Christians also showed respect for the persons and events thus represented. It was natural to bring this practice into the Church. The greeting or expression of respect was a formal kiss; the important point is that it was not "worship."

The Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787 made the point clearly. The honour given to the icon is transferred to the person or event depicted in the icon; it is not worship, which only belongs to God. Like the mercy seat of the tabernacle, the icon is a place where we meet God and holy persons and events. We celebrate the icons on the first Sunday of Great Lent (the Sunday of Orthodoxy).

14 Why Should I Read The Bible?

"All Scripture is inspired by God" (2Ti 3:16).

For the Christian of true worship, the Bible is the greatest source of truth, virtue, and ethics. It is invaluable as a source of teaching doctrine and holiness. We call it the "Book of Life," for in its pages we find the closest expression we have of the Inexpressible. From generation to generation, the books that make up the canon of Scripture have communicated to us the lessons God has taught and still is teaching His people. It is open to all, and should be read by all: men and women, clergy and laity, children and adults, believers and unbelievers.

The Bible Reveals Salvation: the one who reads the Bible and repents of his own sinfulness, recognizing no good in his life without God, opens the door to a new life. He is transformed by encountering the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son and Word of God. He is the One whom the prophets proclaim would save us from sin and the sting of death which we brought upon ourselves. When we read with a repentant heart, the words we read in the Bible are not lifeless rules and interesting stories, but insights into a world beyond expression. These words are doors through which to walk, so we may come to know God. The Bible challenges us to emerge from our own personal self-centered and illusory world, and to enter rather into the Kingdom of God. Then every word of the Bible is a window to heaven, to Paradise, and to Perfection.

Scripture is inspired by God and so we approach it in a spirit of obedience. The Bible must be read with serious and humble prayer, a genuine desire for God's mercy, along with sound instruction from the Church and the very presence of the Holy Spirit within us. Our Lord Jesus Christ left Himself within this Holy Book, that He might be found by those who genuinely seek Him. Take up and read and may you find Him!

15 What Are The Ten Commandments?

"For the true fulfilment of the commandments demands that we do neither too little nor too much but simply pursue a course acceptable to God and in accordance with His will." –St. Gregory of Sinai

The Ten Commandments are found in the Old Testament, Exodus 20:1-17:

Now the Lord spoke all these words, saying: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. **You** shall have no other gods before Me.

"You shall not make for yourself an idol or a likeness of anything in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, recompensing the sins of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me; but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.

“Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: neither you, nor your son, your daughter, your male servant, your female servant, your cattle, nor your stranger who sojourns with you. For in six days the Lord made heaven and the earth, the sea, and everything in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath Day and hallowed it.

“Honor your father and mother that it may be well with you, and your days may be long upon the good land the Lord your God is giving you.

“You shall not murder.

“You shall not commit adultery.

“You shall not steal.

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife or his house, and neither shall you covet his field, nor his male servant, his female servant, his ox, his donkey, any of his cattle, or whatever belongs to your neighbour.”

16 What Are The Beatitudes?

The Beatitudes, the blessings of true discipleship, are from the Lord's Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:1-12, below), as well as His Sermon on the Plain (Lk 6:17-26).

In the Sermon on the Mount, we see God Incarnate speaking with authority to the multitudes face to face; Christ introduces the kind of life those who seek the Kingdom of God must lead. His homily could properly be called, "The Righteousness of the Kingdom." It can be divided into several sections: The Beatitudes; The New Covenant; Spiritual disciplines, such as giving alms, prayer, and fasting; and, Exhortations to righteousness.

Matthew 5:1-12

"And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn,
For they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,
For they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
For they shall be filled.



Blessed are the merciful,
For they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,
For they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,
For they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for
righteousness' sake,

For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you,
and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.
Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your re-
ward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets
who were before you."

17 Orthodox Have A Lot Of Traditions, Where Do They All Come From?

We preserve the Doctrine of the Lord uncorrupted, and firmly adhere to the Faith He delivered to us, and keep it free from blemish and diminution, as a Royal Treasure, and a monument of great price, neither adding any thing, nor taking any thing from it. (Eastern Patriarchs, Letter of 1718).

"And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen" (John 21:25). This verse not only emphasizes the holiness of what was written, but also points to the ongoing oral tradition within the Church.

This idea of living continuity is summed up for the Orthodox in the one word **Tradition**. 'We do not change the everlasting boundaries which our fathers have set,' wrote St. John of Damascus, '*but we keep the Tradition, just as we received it.*'

Orthodox are always talking about Tradition. What do they mean by the word? A tradition is commonly understood to signify an opinion, belief or custom handed down from ancestors to posterity. Christian Tradition, in that case, is the faith and practice which Jesus Christ imparted to the Apostles, and which since the Apostles' time has been handed down from generation to generation in the Church. But to an Orthodox Christian, Tradition means something more concrete and specific than this. It means the books of the Bible; it means the Creed; it means the decrees of the Ecumenical Councils and the writings of the Fathers; it means the Canons, the Service Books, the Holy Icons – in fact, the whole system of doctrine, Church government, worship, spirituality and art which Orthodoxy has articulated over the ages. Orthodox Christians of today see themselves as heirs and guardians to a rich inheritance received from the past, and they believe that it is their duty to transmit this inheritance unimpaired to the future.

Writing to the Thessalonians, St. Paul says, "Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle" (2Th 2:15). The tradition of the apostles (Holy Tradition) is to be preserved by the Church, for God is its source. Holy Tradition is that which Jesus Christ taught to the

apostles, and which they in turn taught the Church under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in their instructions as they visited the churches and their writings. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit we adhere to Holy Tradition as it is present in the apostles' writings and as it is resident in the Church to which the truth is promised (Jn 16:13).

18 Why And How Do Orthodox Perform The Sign Of The Cross?

"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" (Galatians 6:14).

The power of the Cross is mysterious -- no matter how unexplainable, it is true and indisputable.

Throughout the history of the Church, Christians have preached the Cross, displayed the Cross in their homes and altars, venerated the Cross in the liturgy, and signed themselves with the Cross in worship of the Holy Trinity and during times of fear or temptation.

In general the right hand is used; the thumb, index and middle fingers are brought to a point – representing the Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The ring and baby fingers are together folded down, towards the palm – they represent the two natures of the God-man Jesus Christ: Divine and Human.

The four points are made, in the following order, to properly make the sign of the Cross: forehead; navel;

right shoulder; and, left shoulder. The sign of the Cross can be made at any time, in any place, for any reason, but should always be made with reverence and respect. The Cross is to be venerated, for wherever the sign may be, Christ also is there.

In addition to the Third Sunday of Great Lent (Veneration of the Cross), the Feast of the Elevation of the Life-Giving Cross is commemorated each year on September 14th (Strict Fast). The Epistle Reading for the Feast is from St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 1:18-24: BRETHREN, the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart." Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

19 Should I Pray Every Day?

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1Th 5:16-18).

In St. Paul’s writings, words such as *rejoice, always, without ceasing* or “constantly”, and *give thanks* refer primarily to prayer. The Fathers of the Church teach that unceasing prayer is a proper goal, for spiritual growth comes through such discipline. Prayer is communion with God through words of praise, thanksgiving, repentance, supplication, and intercession. Prayer is “raising up the heart and mind to God” (St. John of Damascus). More, prayer is the breath of the soul. Without breathing and oxygen, nothing can live. The soul without prayer is in a state of spiritual death.

Prayer is conversation and dialogue with God Himself. This happens in any place including whenever you stand or kneel before your home prayer corner, where your icons and vigil light are set up, or in the House of the Lord, the Church, in the company of God Himself. Like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before the fall, you will feel the caress of God whenever you pray. You will rejoice in His smile, and share in His happiness and glory. This is true prayer. Can there be anything better, more exalted, more honourable, and more pleasing than this? This is why St. Paul advises us to “pray without ceasing.” Make it a daily spiritual exercise and you will see how much you will benefit and be spiritually enriched.

Did you know? You can download a free Greek and English Prayer Book from the website of our Metropolis.

20 What Is The Lord's Prayer And Why Is It So Special?

The Lord's Prayer is as follows:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. *For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.*

This prayer was given by Christ, Who is the True God, and is invaluable to us. It is found in the Gospels of Matthew (6:9-13) and Luke (11:2-4) and in many ways summarizes the entire Bible, doctrines of our Faith, and Christian way of life.

According to St. Maximus the Confessor (celebrated January 21), "This prayer contains a petition for all things that the Word of God caused with the emptying of Himself during the Incarnation and it instructs us to seek just those things that only God the Father, through the natural intercession of the Son,

truly grants in the Holy Spirit. These gifts are seven: 1. Theology, 2. Adoption through the Grace of God, 3. Equality with the angels, 4. Partaking in the eternal life, 5. Restoration of the nature that impassively turns to itself, 6. Abolition of the law of sin, and 7. Abolition of the tyranny of the devil who reigned over us with deception" (Interpretation of the Lord's Prayer, Philokalia).

21 What Are The Sacraments And Why Are They Important?

There are seven sacraments (Mysteries) in the Orthodox Church: Baptism; Chrismation; Holy Communion; Confession; Ordination; Matrimony; and, Holy Unction.

Note: Baptism; Chrismation; Holy Communion; and, Confession are obligatory, while Ordination; Matrimony; and, Holy Unction are optional.

The sacraments, that is, living a sacramental life within the Church, are very important and indispensable for the Christian believer.

The visual performance of a Holy Mystery imparts the invisible saving power, called God's grace, upon the recipient – a truly wonderful gift! God's grace are God's gifts, which are necessary for our regeneration, sanctification, and salvation.

What Is The Significance Of Baptism?

"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, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen." (Matthew 28:19-20).

In short, baptism is our death, burial, and resurrection in union with Jesus Christ. It is a rite of passage, given by Christ to the Church as an entrance into the Kingdom of God and eternal life.

The Apostle Paul describes the promise of God in this "mystery," as most Orthodox call it, when he writes, "Therefore we were buried with Him 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). To baptize literally means "to immerse, to put into." Historically, the Orthodox Church has baptized by triple immersion, "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19).

St. John the Baptist, the last prophet of the old covenant, baptized in water for repentance (Mk 1:4; Acts 19:4). Jesus received John's baptism, thereby transforming the water and baptism itself. In the New Covenant, baptism is the means by which we enter the Kingdom of God (Jn 3:5), are joined to Christ (Rom 6:3), and are granted the remission of our sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).



The Church has understood baptism as:

1. *A first and second dying.* Our first dying with Christ in baptism was our death with Him on the Cross. The second death of baptism is continual – dying to sin daily as we walk in newness of life.
2. *The resurrection of righteousness.* This is our life in Christ, our new birth and entrance into God's Kingdom, our "newness of life" (Rom 6:4). It is our being joined to Christ in His glorified humanity and indwelt by God Himself.
3. *An intimate and continual communion with God.* We are raised to new life for a purpose: union and communion with God. In this sense, baptism is the beginning of eternal life.

What Are The Prescribed Fasting Periods Throughout The Year?

With a few exceptions, we fast on Wednesdays and Fridays.

The first and major fast is that before *Pascha* which begins on Clean Monday and concludes on Lazarus Saturday. This is a 40-day period and helps prepare us for the Holy Week and Resurrection (fasting continues to the end of the Holy Week). During the Paschal fasting period, meat, dairy and fish are not consumed, while oil is on certain days. There are two exceptions to the eating of fish: on the Annunciation (March 25) and on Palm Sunday.

The *Christmas Fast* begins on November 15th and ends on the eve of the Nativity of Our Lord, December 24. During this period, meat and dairy are not allowed while fish is on certain days (not on Wednesdays and Fridays) until the feast of Saint Dionysios of Zakynthos on December 17th.

There is also the *Apostles' Fast* beginning on the Monday after the Sunday of All Saints and concluding on June 28th with the feast of Saints Peter and Paul. The beginning date fluctuates, however, depending on the date of Pascha. We eat fish throughout this fast except on Wednesdays and Fridays.

Finally, we fast between August 1-14 in honour of the Theotokos and in anticipation of her Dormition (*Dekapentavgoustos*). We do not consume meat, dairy or fish with the exception of the Transfiguration of Our Lord (August 6) when fish is permitted.

Regardless of the day of the week, there is a strict fast on September 14 (the Elevation of the Life-Giving Cross); January 5 (Eve of the Epiphany of Our Lord); and, August 29 (Beheading of Saint John the Baptist). Note, we can consume oil if the above days are on Saturdays or Sundays.

The following are fast free periods:

- The first week of the *Triodion* (between the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee and the Sunday of Prodigal Son);

- The week immediately following Pascha (Bright-week);
- The week immediately following Pentecost; and,
- The ten days following Christmas (Dec. 26 – Jan. 4).

24 Do I Have To Fast Before Receiving Holy Communion?

Fasting is a divine commandment (Gen 2:16-17). According to Basil the Great, fasting is as old as humanity itself; it was prescribed in paradise. It is a great spiritual endeavor and the foremost expression of the Orthodox ascetic ideal. As a spiritual endeavor, the true fast is inseparable from unceasing prayer and genuine repentance. Repentance without fasting is fruitless, as fasting without merciful deeds is dead, especially nowadays when the unequal and unjust distribution of goods deprives entire nations of their daily bread.

Like a nurturing mother, the Orthodox Church has defined what is beneficial for people's salvation and established the holy periods of fasting as God-given protection in the believers' new life in Christ against every snare of the enemy.

Fasting for three or more days prior to Holy Communion is left to the discretion of the piety of the faithful, according to the words of Saint Nicodemus the Hagiorite: "... *fasting before partaking of Communion is not decreed by the divine Canons. Nevertheless, those who are able to fast even a whole week before it,*

are doing the right thing." However, the totality of the Church's faithful must observe the holy fasts and the abstinence from food from midnight for frequent participation in Holy Communion, which is the most profound expression of the essence of the Church. The faithful should become accustomed to fasting as an expression of repentance, as the fulfillment of a spiritual pledge, to achieve a particular spiritual end in times of temptation, in conjunction with supplications to God, for adults approaching the sacrament of baptism, prior to ordination, in cases where penance is imposed, as well as during pilgrimages and other similar instances.

25 Does The Orthodox Church Permit Marital Divorce?

The Church is deeply saddened by the breakdown of any marriage, particularly when it involves its own members who were joined together in Holy Matrimony through an Orthodox sacrament. Jesus Christ supplied us with the basic Christian attitude to the question of divorce. "It was also said [in the Old Testament] 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity [adultery, literally] makes her an adultress; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery" (Matthew 5:31). The basis of this teaching is found in Christ's very high appreciation for marriage. Thus the Church is opposed to divorce in principle and sees it as a failure and an evil.

When a marriage breaks down to the point where the relationship between the spouses has deteriorated so that they are no longer spiritually, morally, personally, and bodily bound to each other as one flesh, the Church sees the couple as dead to each other and the marriage in substance as not existing. But it is always a sad and sorrowful thing for the Church to acknowledge the end of a marriage. It is an occasion for repentance and the seeking of forgiveness from God on the part of those involved, as well.

For the sake of Christian mercy and compassion and because of her understanding of our human frailty, the Church does grant divorces, and in many cases the right to remarry. In general, though, the Church seeks to avoid divorces and works hard through her teachings, preaching, counseling, prayers, and pastoral concern to reconcile those spouses who are having difficulties in their marriage.

26 What Is Repentance And Confession?

"From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (Matthew 4:17).

According to Saint John of Damascus, repentance is a return from the unnatural to the natural state and from the devil to God through *asceticism* and toil; moreover, it is a voluntary return from transgressions toward the opposite virtues. The signs of repentance are remorse and a change of mind, while characteristics

of repentance include contrition of the heart, tears, the rejection of sin, and the love for virtue. Repentance must, of necessity, be sincere. It is sincere when accompanied by contrition of the heart, by the disposition to compensate Divine Righteousness, and to confess one's sins.

True repentance is a change of mind for one's actions, an alteration of one's ethical life, a change toward the better, complete rejection of one's previous life and sin, steadfast willingness to exercise virtue, complete unification one's own will with the Divine Will (i.e., the Divine Law). Therefore, repentance is an ethical rebirth of man and the starting point of a new, virtuous life.

Confession has always followed repentance. Confession is a voluntary and sincere declaration of sins committed, without shame and reservation, but with self-reproach and contrition to the person who has been appointed by the Church (that is, the clergy) to forgive sins.

Confession must be voluntary and sincere in order for it to be true and effective. A rushed and insincere confession is fruitless, since it is not a revelation of the heart, an expression of deep remorse, and an indication of yearning for treatment. Confession must be performed without embarrassment and reservation, but with boldness and self-reproach, because boldness is an expression of the abandonment of sin and a disposition to expose sin; bashfulness confirms that there exists a lack of courage.

Finally, confession is necessary for the following reasons: i) because it is a commandment of God; ii) because it brings back and restores the peace between God and man; and, iii) because it benefits man both morally and spiritually.

Did you know? Christ's first word, like that of St. John the Baptist, is "Repent." The kingdom of heaven is present wherever Christ is.

27 What Exactly Is Sin?

The primary meaning of the Greek word for sin (*hamartia*) is 'failure' or, more specifically, 'failure to hit the mark' and so a 'missing of the mark,' a 'going astray' or, ultimately, 'failure to achieve the purpose for which one is created.'

The law of sin is the power of the sinful passions in our mortal humanity. Passions – desires for such things as food, sex, praise, possessions – are natural; their sinful overindulgence is not. Carnal (physical) passions are especially strong. They aid the unnatural domination of the body over the soul. Sometimes carnal passions overpower the will. Only God's grace can bring victory for righteousness.

Writing to the Romans, St. Paul says:

"For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed?"

For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (7:20-23).

Baptism frees us from being slaves of sin if we continue in obedience to God. While one is enslaved to sin, one does not know enough even to be ashamed of it; but having received the Gospel, one realizes how shameful the life of sin is and can clearly see its end: death. Slavery to God, on the other hand, initiated by baptism, is actually freedom. Only this freedom can bear the fruit of holiness and everlasting life – for it is only through the grace and love of God that life everlasting is given to us.

The law of the Spirit, also called "the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2) is the power and life of the Holy Spirit active in those who by faith in Christ live out their baptism and chrismation to the fullest possible degree. This way of life orients one's innermost being toward God and restores the power of the spirit over the flesh, the soul over the body – far away from sin.

28 I Swear Sometimes, Is That Bad?

"Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29).

"But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth" (Colossians 3:8).

Swearing is a wrong and inappropriate behaviour for a Christian, since, among other things, it is an expression of anger and often abusive of others, language unfitting for persons growing in Christ.

The Third Commandment prohibits us from the "vain" use of God's name: *You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.* It is the purposeless and idle use of the Holy name of God which makes it such a disrespectful thing. Another aspect of this improper use of God's name is to use it in an oath, by which we seek to verify the truth of our words by invoking God's name or the names of saints or holy things. This is also rejected by Christ (see Matthew 5:34-36; 23:16-21).

Remember and keep in mind that swearing is neither fitting nor appropriate language for persons who seek to serve God.

What Happens When We Die, Is There Life After Death?

With death comes the separation of the soul from the body. The body returns to the earth from which it was taken. It decomposes but it is not lost. The time will come when it will be resurrected, spiritualized and made incorruptible, at the time of the just judgement.

And then it will be united with the soul to be judged along with the soul. In the meantime, the soul which was separated, through death, from the body, lives in a middle state. It undergoes the particular judgement. "It is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes the judgement" (Hebrews 9:27). This means that immediately after death the soul is judged individually. It remains after this particular judgement until the final judgement, at the Second Coming of Christ, having a foretaste of paradise or of hell.

At the final judgement, which will take place at the Second Coming of Christ and after the Common Resurrection, all people will be presented before Him to be judged. The evangelist Matthew tells us the following: "Before Him will be gathered all nations" (Matthew 25:32). At the final judgement, the souls will not be the only ones to be presented. We will be presented wholly, with our body and soul—with all our personhood. Body and soul will be judged. St. Paul tells us: "For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

At the final judgement everyone will be judged according to their faith and their works. Christ will then separate the just from the unjust, or sinners. "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34), and to the sinners He will say: "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). Then "they [sinners] will go away into eternal punishment, but

the righteous into eternal life" (Matthew 25:46). This will be the final judgement. After the final judgement, there will either be eternal life or eternal punishment. There will be no changes after the final judgement. The just will be grounded in their righteousness and will always be righteous, and will live eternally. The unrepentant sinners will be stabilized in their sin. They will not be able to change. They too will live. They will not vanish, as some fools say. The above verse makes that vividly clear.

30 What Is Deification (*Theosis*), What Is Salvation?

"God became human that we might be made god."

–St. Athanasios, Patriarch of Alexandria

Deification is the ancient theological word used to describe the process by which a Christian becomes more like God. St. Peter speaks of this process when he writes, "As His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness ... you may be partakers to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled (cf. 1:3, 4).

When the Church calls us to pursue godliness, to be more like God, this does not mean that human beings become divine. We do not become like God in His nature. That would not only be heresy, it would be impossible. For we are human, always have been human, and always will be human. We cannot take on the nature of God.



Deification means we are to become more like God through His grace or divine energies. In creation, humans were made in the image and likeness of God (Gn 1:26) according to human nature. In other words, humanity by nature is an icon or image of deity: the divine image is in all humanity. Through sin, however, this image and likeness of God was marred, and we fell.

When the Son of God assumed our humanity in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary, the process of our being renewed in God's image and likeness was begun. Thus, those who are joined to Christ, through faith, in Holy Baptism begin a process of re-creation, being renewed in God's image and likeness. We become, as St. Peter writes, "partakers of the divine nature" (1:4).

When we are joined to Christ, our humanity is interpenetrated with the energies of God through Christ's glorified flesh. Nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ, we partake of the grace of God – His strength, His righteousness, His love – and are enabled to serve Him and glorify Him. Thus we, being human, are being deified.

The End And Glory To God For All Things!



REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

In addition to Metropolitan Sotirios' *Orthodox Catechism: Basic Teachings of the Orthodox Faith* (Fourth Edition – July 2015), we gratefully acknowledge the following publications, particularly *The Orthodox Study Bible* (2008 – St. Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology), a most edifying work.

- A Manual of the Orthodox Church's Divine Services, Archpriest D. Sokolof, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville (2001)
- Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church: Official Documents
- Living the Liturgy, Stanley S. Harakas, Light and Life Publishing Company (1974)
- Orthodox Christian Beliefs: Real Answers to Real Questions from Real People, Stanley S. Harakas, Light and Life Publishing Company (1988)
- Orthodox Church: 455 Questions and Answers, Stanley S. Harakas, Light and Life Publishing Company (1974)
- Saint Nektarios, Repentance and Confession, Saint Nektarios Monastery Publications (2002)

- The Faith of the Saints: A Catechism by Saint Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic, Pendragon Publishing, Inc. (2005)
- The Lord's Prayer, Holy Monastery of St. Gregorios, Mt. Athos (2001)
- The Orthodox Church, Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia, Penguin Books (1997)





GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF TORONTO (CANADA)

86 Overlea Blvd. (1 Patriarch Bartholomew Way)
Toronto, Ontario M4H 1C6 Canada
Tel: (416) 429-5757 • Fax: (416) 429-4588
E-mail: metropolis@gometropolis.org

Website: www.gometropolis.org

YouTube: GOMetropolisToronto

Twitter: @GO_Metropolis

Facebook: Greek Orthodox Metropolis
of Toronto-Canada