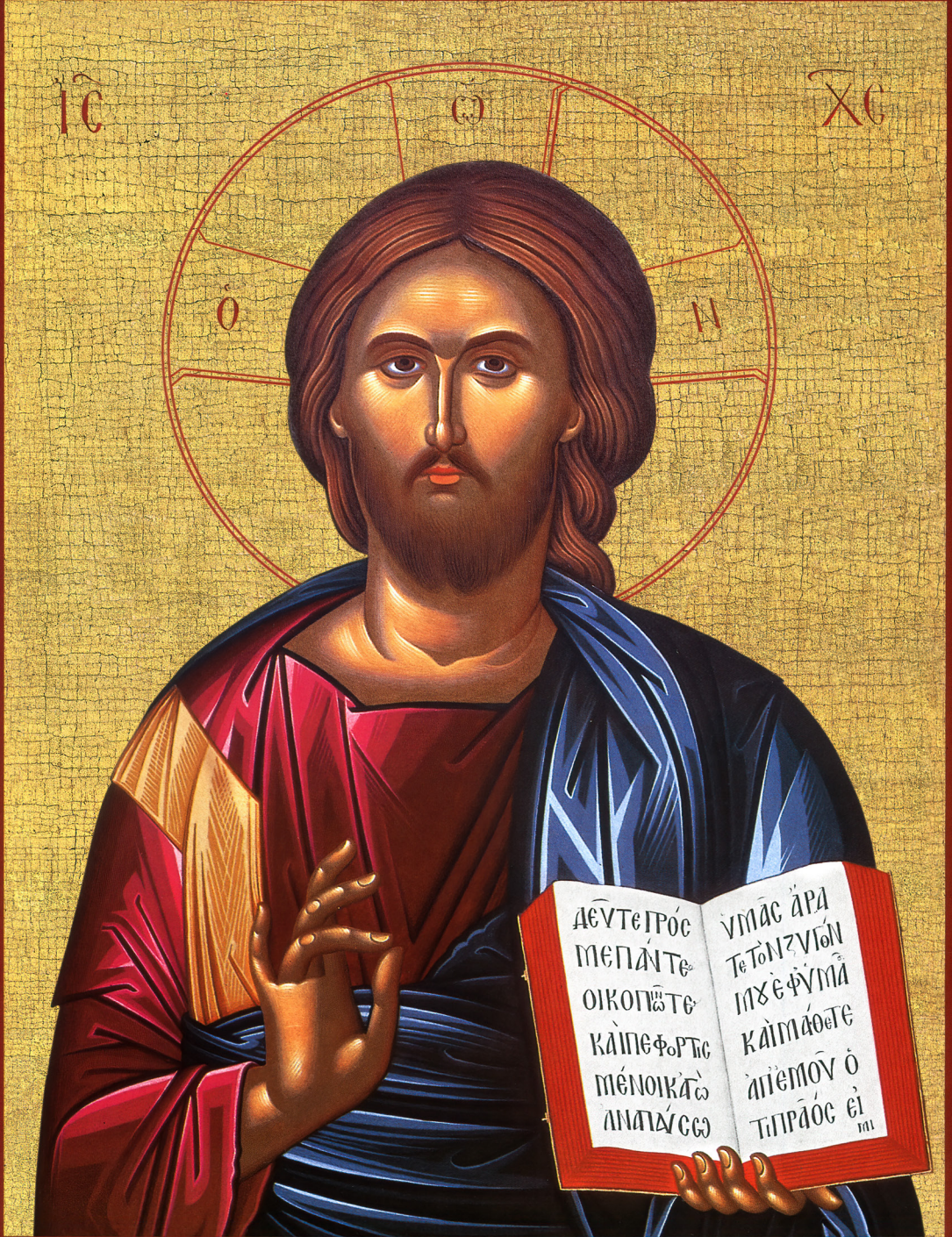


# THE APOSTOLIC TRADITION

A Comprehensive Guide to Discovering Orthodox Christianity





The Apostolic Tradition:  
A Comprehensive Guide To Discovering Orthodox Christianity

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## Chapter 1:

### The Patristic Path: What Is The Orthodox Church?

#### An Ancient Pathway

God's love (Αγάπη) for man and the pathway to salvation was contemplated long before Christ descended from heaven and took on human flesh. The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah cried out: "Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls." The words of the prophet, and many others throughout the Old Testament, capture the heart of Orthodoxy: an invitation to walk in the light of our fathers; An invitation to a path that leads to fulfillment and a path intended for us by God Himself.

This same path is followed by the Saints and Martyrs, Apostles and Prophets. Orthodoxy is not merely another Christian religion or a philosophy—it is the fullness of life in Christ, "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3). To walk into an Orthodox Church (Εκκλησία) is to enter into an unbroken tradition existing from the time of Christ and the Apostles. It is to hold the sacred gift purchased for us all at the ultimate price. To find it is like "a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who when he had found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Matthew 13:45). It is to enter the lifelong journey of transformation in Christ.

#### The Original Christian Faith

The Orthodox Church traces its roots to the very day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came down to the apostles and the Christian church was born. The Orthodox faith is the continuation of that first Christian community, safeguarding its teachings, methods of worship, and way of life without alteration or innovation.

After receiving a vision before battle in the early 4th century, Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity and eventually ensured the original dogma of the apostles was encapsulated in the Nicene Creed, which is still recited in every liturgy. The Orthodox church has been resolute in preserving its tradition and has continued to reject modern philosophies or "people-focused" changes seen in the many following Christian denominations. Orthodoxy has always remained steadfast in its practice of holding up the original teachings and practices of the original Church. This continuity is not a matter of pride but of faithfulness to the command of Christ, who promised that the



gates of Hades would not prevail against His Church (Matthew 16:18).

### Unbroken Continuity

From the apostolic times to the present day, the Orthodox church has preserved an unbroken chain of bishops, beginning with the “laying on of hands” by the apostles themselves. This apostolic succession is more than a mere historical claim; it is a sacred reality that ensures the Church remains connected to Christ. Through this continuous lineage, the teachings, the sacraments (Μυστήριον), and the worship of the Church have been preserved in their fullness.

The longstanding continuation of Orthodox practice is also witnessed in its liturgical life. Orthodox liturgical services celebrated in parishes today follow the same liturgy that was celebrated by the first Christians with very little change. To be part of an Orthodox service is to exist in the presence of the heavenly host described by Apostle John in the Book of Revelation, where angels and saints unceasingly glorify God. It is to add one’s voice to the great cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 12:1), offering praise that transcends our perception of time and space.

### The Fullness of Truth Revealed

We often describe Orthodox tradition as the “fullness of the faith” This is not meant as a full understanding of doctrine but an all-encompassing way of life. Orthodoxy is not meant to be an abstract intellectual exercise; it is the lived experience of God. Saint Gregory Nazianzus notes, “Theology is not for everyone... It is for those who have been tested and are accustomed to contemplation.” True Orthodox theological understanding flows from prayer, worship, and ascetic struggles which lead to union with God.

Spiritual fullness is also reflected in the Church’s unwavering adherence to the uncorrupted truth. In an age where truth is often seen as relative to the age, Orthodoxy proclaims the one truth of Christ, who is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). The dogmas of the Church, which were articulated over various ecumenical councils, are not mere human constructions but divine revelations, safeguarding the mystery of faith.

The Orthodox approach to truth is also holistic in nature. It attempts to embrace the whole person—mind, body, and soul—and sanctifies every aspect of the Christian’s life. The iconography, hymns and architecture of the churches, as well as the incense used in the services all contribute to an experience of the divine, drawing the faithful into the reality of God’s Kingdom.

### Today’s Church is our Modern Ark

The Orthodox Church sees itself, in one sense, as the Ark of Salvation, carrying the faithful through the proverbial storms of life to the safety of God’s heavenly Kingdom. We read that Noah’s ark preserved life during the flood, the Church, in effect, carries us and offers life in Christ amidst the chaos of the world. This “Ark” exists for the salvation of the world, extending the love and mercy of Christ to every person prepared to receive it.

## The Mystery of Worship

One of the most distinctive aspects of the Orthodox faith is our worship, which is deeply rooted in the belief that the Church is a reflection of heaven on earth. The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom or of St. Basil is not merely a human gathering; it is an encounter with the living God. Every detail of the service—from the chanting of carefully selected psalms to the procession of the holy gifts—points us toward the divine mystery.

## A Spiritual Transformation

For one to embrace Orthodoxy is to take the first step on a journey of personal transformation, a journey that requires humility, repentance, and love. The goal is nothing less than Theosis (Θεώσις) or “deification”, becoming partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). This is not a destination only reserved for a select few but the calling of every Christian.

As you begin your journey on this divine path, you will soon discover that Orthodoxy is not simply a set of beliefs or practices but a guide for your entire life. It is a new life centered on Christ, sustained by the sacraments, and further supported by the fellowship of those we meet inside the Church. It is the path that leads to the Kingdom of Heaven, where every tear will be wiped away, and all things will be made new (Revelation 21:4–5).





## Chapter 2:

### Understanding the Holy Trinity

#### The Mystery of God

“No one has seen God at any time” (John 1:18), but by grace He shows Himself to his Faithful. The Orthodox religion is all about the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is a mystery not intended to confuse the Christian, but to bring us into communion with the true nature of God. The Cappadocian Father Saint Gregory Nazianzus has us recall that, “When I contemplate unity, I am illumined by the Trinity. When I contemplate the Trinity, I am illumined by the unity.” To know the Holy Trinity is to believe something as it was originally taught and to enter into a personal relationship with God, “For God is Love” (1 John 4:8).

#### The God of the Bible: The Triune God

The Holy Trinity emerges like a slow rising sun in biblical scripture. The Old Testament might gently hint at the mystery, but the truth of the Trinitarian revelation is realised in the New Testament through Jesus Christ. From very early we have God the Father in the beginning of Genesis; the Spirit who is able to move throughout the waters giving them possibility; and the Word (Logos) that calls creation into existence. This is oneness of the Godhead at work.

This Old Testament description hints at the Trinity’s fullness: Father as Source, Son as Word, and Spirit as Giver of Life. Then one would also notice the words in Genesis — “Let US make man in Our image, according to OUR likeness” (Genesis 1:26) Again these are statements displaying the operation of divine unity. This is also visible in the recorded prophecies of the prophets, like Isaiah, when he said “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts” (Isaiah 6:3). All of this shows the nature of God as triune.

#### Discovering the Trinity in the New Testament

The Trinity becomes more comprehensible in the New Testament (the second covenant). The Father speaks from heaven at Jesus’ baptism by John the baptist: “When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:16–17). We call this event the-



ophany. It was done so in order to reveal the Trinity's three different parts working together in complete harmony.

In his worldly ministry, Christ also shows us the relation of Father, Son and Holy Spirit when he announces “I and My Father are One.” (John 10:30), he also reveals the return of the Holy Spirit, “However, when He, the Spirit of Truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come” (John 16:13). We find this threefold declaration in the Great Commission, too, when Christ calls the apostles to baptise “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). We are without question made by a thrice-holy God, existent as one.

### The Trinity: One Spirit in Three Persons

Informed by the Spirit and Scripture, the early Fathers have explained the mystery of the Holy Trinity as a single entity with three members; a mystery understood as hypostases (ὑποστάσεις). The unity and their role within the Godhead are defined and explained by this context.

We affirm this when we say elements of the Nicene Creed in our prayers: “One God, the Father Almighty”, and in “one Lord, Jesus Christ” who is “of one essence with the Father.” And the Holy Spirit is also “the Lord and Giver of Life” who “proceeds from the Father” and is “worshipped and glorified with the Father and the Son”.

### Understanding Trinitarian Distinction

We already read that there are three persons in the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These three “persons” are not elements or “functions” but uniquely distinct “persons of the Trinity.” We perceive the Father as the wellspring of the divine - The source; And the Son (Jesus) is ever born of the Father; The Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father. The differences between each of the three is also how they achieve eternal communion with each other. This is not a divide, so much as a mystery and an act of divine love. Each one coexists eternally and fully with the others.

### The Church Fathers speak of the Trinity

Many great church fathers and saints illuminate this enigma called the Holy Trinity. (Ἁγία Τριάς) They give us a language and meaning that guides our belief, without diminishing the sublime nature of God.

### Saint Athanasius: On The Trinity

The Orthodox interpretation of the trinity is considered consubstantial, which Saint Athanasius – a long-time proponent – did not overlook. Defending the church against Arianism, a new heresy that claimed Christ's divinity was incomplete, he wrote that only a fully divine Redeemer (Christ) could bind the world to God. “God was made man”, he wrote, “so that man may be God.”

### Saint Gregory of Nyssa: The Mystery of Divine Oneness

The Holy Trinity, according to Saint Gregory of Nyssa is likened to a spring, a stream and a river: One being - flowing three distinct ways. “The unity of the Trinity

does not contradict the important distinctions among each person, nor does each distinction compromise the unity of the whole.”

### Saint Basil the Great: Concerning The Holy Spirit

In his epistle on the Holy Spirit, Saint Basil the Great confirmed the deity and individual personality of the Spirit, and declared that the Spirit was not just a divine agent, but a co-equal and co-eternal member of the Trinity. The Holy Trinity, he said, is in “harmonious concord,” with each person in perfection and in eternal love.

### The Trinity in Orthodox Life

It’s not just theological study that is supposed to inform the mystery of the Trinity; it is involved in every aspect of Orthodox faith and life. Orthodox prayer and worship invoke the love of the Trinity at every opportunity. Almost every prayer and hymn begins with a prayer to the Holy Trinity: “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” The Divine Liturgy, the pinnacle of Orthodox worship, is trinitarian in nature, giving honour to the Father by the Son and the Holy Spirit throughout the service.

We pray “Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and unto the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages” in the Doxology for the majority of services, which instructs Orthodox people to regard the triune God as their central focus.

### The Trinity in the Sacraments

Even the seven sacraments of the Church are Trinitarian. In baptism, the believer dunks in the baptismal water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. When one takes the Eucharist - Communion (*Koinwvia*), he is joined to Christ by the descendent Holy Spirit and offers thanks before God the Father. The whole of the sacraments deal with a personal encounter with the trinity of God.

### Holding Trinity at the Heart of Christian Life

The mystery of the Trinity should remain in the forefront of daily Christian experience for all Orthodox faithful. The Unity of the Trinity, as Saint John Chrysostom put it: “The unity of the Trinity should teach us to live in peace with one another.”

### The Trinity and Theosis

Ultimately, Theosis (union with God) is the aim of every Christian, both lay and Saint. Theosis is only possible because God is threefold. Jesus alone unites us to God the Father by the Holy Spirit. “Through the Spirit we come to the Son, and through the Son to the Father.” says Saint Gregory Nazianzus.

Achieving theosis does not mean the loss of our individual nature but represents fulfillment of our communion with the Holy Trinity. As Saint Maximus the Confessor put it: “God became man so that man might enter into the mystery of divine love.”



## Chapter 3:

### The Incarnate Word: Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Saviour

#### The Word Became Flesh

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The words of the Evangelist John tell us what the essence of the Christian belief is: that the immortal Son of God incarnated in human form for the redemption of the world. The Incarnation is the greatest example of God’s love: divinity and humanity united in Jesus Christ.

Orthodox Christianity regards the Incarnation as the very basis of God’s plan for our redemption. No salvation, no victory over sin (ἁμαρτία) and death, no achieving eternal life would be possible without the Word becoming human. The Church, as informed by Scripture and the Fathers, recognises Christ to be God and man who are mystically joined as one, whose two personae are in no way confused, transformed or transubstantiated.

#### God’s Word: Living and Precious

To understand the Incarnation we must first ask: Who is Christ as the eternal Word of God? The Gospel of John begins by declaring Christ to be divine: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1).

The Word - Logos (Λόγος) is not created but the eternal Son of the Father, who is eternal and co-existent with him. The Logos is “the Wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:24) “the Logos is the One through whom all things were made” (John 1:3), the divine agent of creation, and the One who holds all things together (Colossians 1:17).

The Fathers emphasize that the Logos existed before all generations, he was always part of the divine nature. Saint Athanasius, on the Incarnation says: “The Word of God did not come into being when He was born in the flesh. Rather, He was with the Father from eternity, begotten before all time.” The Incarnation is not therefore the birth of the Logos, but His humble offer to save humanity.



## The Necessity of the Incarnation

Why did God become man? The response of the Church to this question is that He took on the form of a man so that humanity may be restored to God. The Incarnation should be seen in the light of human demise. The first act of disobedience by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden brought sin and death to the world, ultimately impairing God's relationship with them. Man, made in the image and likeness of God, became a slave to sin and death. It is said of Saint Gregory Nazianzus that "What is not assumed is not healed." Only by taking our human shape could Christ restore our fallen nature.

## The Divine Plan for Salvation

From the moment of man's fall God proclaimed a rescuer. The Old Testament is abounding in visions of the coming Messiah: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." (Genesis 3:15), "He was wounded for our transgressions" (Isaiah 53:5), "To Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom" (Daniel 7:14). These are the promises of the Incarnation: God's infinite love and his desire to return us to him.

Saint Athanasius writes that the Incarnation had been required because men, who were made after God's image, had been corrupted and died. The Word was made flesh to "restore what was lost and renew the image of God within us." Christ became human "That through these you may be partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4).

## The Enigma of Christ's Two Identities

Church proclamations that Jesus Christ was God and man is a mystery known as Dyophysitism (Δυοφυσιτισμός). It was the same doctrine declared at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, which called Christ "one and the same Son, perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, truly God and truly man."

## Fully God

Christ, as the immortal Word, is a fellow-contributor in the divine nature of the Father. He is infinitely powerful, infinitely omniscient and uncreated. Through His earthly ministry, Christ proved to be God by His miracles, by His dominion over the elements, and by His ability to cleanse us from our sins. When Thomas declared, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28), he avows Christ's divinity.

## Fully Man

Christ was also fully human "yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). He "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52), he was hungry, thirsty, experienced pain, and he suffered and died on the cross. Saint Gregory Nazianzus tells us: "He became what we are so that He might make us what He is." In taking on our humanity, Christ sanctified our earthly experience and taught us how to conduct ourselves in perfect submission to the Father.

## Without Confusion or Division

Both of Christ's natures existed in one man (hypostasis) there was no separation

or dissociation. This mystery proves His divinity as well as his humanity. “The Word, uniting to Himself a body animated by a rational soul, became man in an inexpressible and incomprehensible manner.” - Saint Cyril of Alexandria.

### The Salvific Work of Christ

The Incarnation was not the end of itself but the beginning of Christ's redemption for humankind, His Passion, Death and Resurrection - Every part of Christ's life represented His lifegiving mission to save mankind.

### Christ the New Adam

Saint Paul refers to Christ as the “Last Adam” (1 Corinthians 15:45), as opposed to the first Adam whose disobedience brought him to the grave. By perfect love, Christ redeemed man from the original sin. By baptism, Christ cleansed the waters; by crucifixion, He redeemed sin; by miracles, He restored creation.

### The Cross: The Ultimate Display of Love

Christ's salvific action reaches its apotheosis with His willingness to accept death on the cross. “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.” (John 15:13). Christ paid for the sins of the world on the cross by giving himself as the ultimate sacrifice. “It is finished”, He cried (John 19:30), the end of His mission to save humankind.

In Orthodox thought, the cross isn't an avenging act of God's anger but rather the very act of love. “The cross is the door to mysteries. Through this door, the intellect makes entrance into the knowledge of heavenly mysteries” Saint Isaac the Syrian writes.

### The Resurrection: Victory Over Death

The only victory over sin and death is Christ's Resurrection. When He arose from the dead, He crushed the power of Hades and opened the doorway to the after-life. “Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death,” rings our Paschal song.

The Resurrection of Christ's victory, enabled the resurrection of man. “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” Saint Paul writes in (1 Corinthians 15:20).

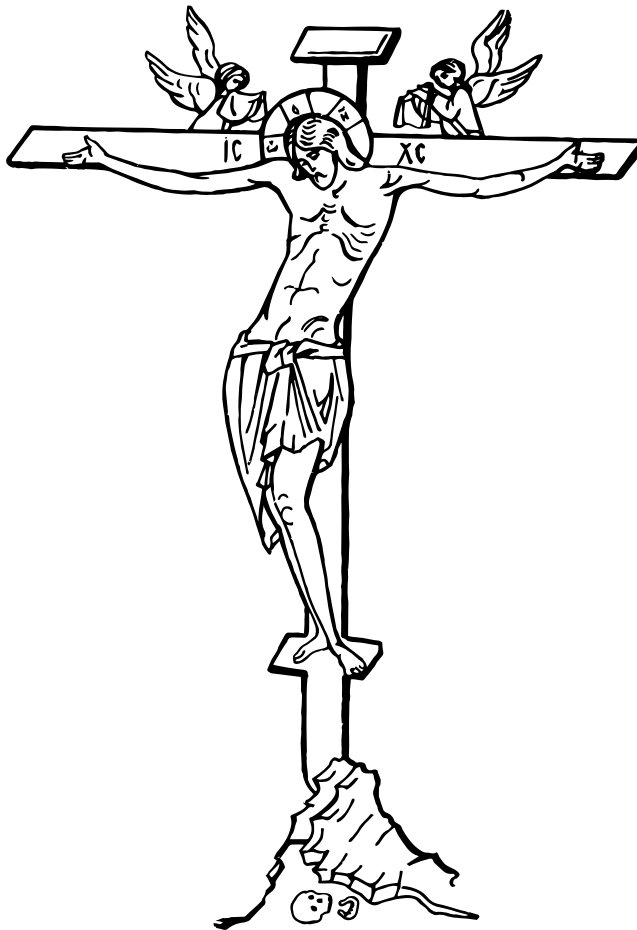
### Union with Christ: Theosis

The Incarnation of Christ made theosis or (spiritual communion with God) possible. Theosis is a state where we become enveloped in God's through the same mystery made God man. This state, however, requires the sacraments, prayer and ascetic struggle. We have seen the Saint Athanasius say “God became man so that man might become god.” We are not Gods in fact, but rather soaked with God's grace and joined in His divine activity.

### Incarnation in Worship and Life

The Mystery of the Incarnation pervades Orthodox worship. Our encounter with

the living Christ is achieved in the Divine Liturgy where Christ offers His Body and Blood for our salvation. The Nativity Feast acclaims the “Word made flesh”; the Feast of Theophany acclaims “His appearance in the world.”







## Chapter 4

### The Church: The Body of Christ

The Church is not just a routine gathering of people who share similar beliefs; it is the Body of Christ, the very place where Christ continues his mission to save the world. And “You are the body of Christ, and members individually”, Saint Paul states (1 Corinthians 12:27). This fact clearly conveys that Church is at the same time divine and human. It is a space representing divinity, but existing in the world. For Orthodox Christians, salvation is found in the Church. It is in congregation where the Church is bonded to Christ, sustained by the sacraments and led by the Holy Spirit. “One Lord, One faith, One baptism.” (Ephesians 4:5), It is a reflection of the Holy Trinity.

#### The Church as the Body of Christ

The Church as the “Body of Christ” metaphor is a scriptural. As Saint Paul put it in his letters, the Church is a living entity whose leader is Christ and its members are the people: “He is the head of the body, the Church” (Colossians 1:18).

“We, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another” (Romans 12:5). “For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:12).

These are passages that stress not only the Church’s solidarity but also the fact that its members are all different, with different gifts and different functions. The Church is not a static object but a living, breathing organism, animated by the Holy Spirit.

#### Christ as the Head

Christ as head of the Church, is its source of life and its communion with the Trinity. The Church is Christ’s and as its head he leads the body by means of the Holy Spirit. This “headship” of God ensures the true Church remains truthful and virtuous. “Just as the body is joined to the head, says Saint John Chrysostom, “and cannot live apart from it, so we, so we cannot live apart from Christ.” It is in this union that the Church functions as a saving agent bringing Christ’s love into the world.

#### The Church as God’s Ark of Salvation

The Orthodox Church says that salvation is not a private matter but a collective enterprise. The Church represents the saving Ark of faith, and the believers are a part of Christ and each other. “Outside the Church there is no salvation,” Saint Cyprian of

Carthage once said, not as an exclusion but as an affirmation of the Church's special position as the means of grace designated by God.

In the sacraments, especially baptism and the Eucharist, the elect enter Christ's life. Baptism is one's birth into the Church, where "One is born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:5). It is through the Eucharist that the life of the Church comes to its source directly, whereby the Church members become one with Christ and one another in communion.

### A Hospital for Sinners

We hear the Church is a hospital for the sick and not a museum for the Saints. It exists to heal the spiritual wounds brought by sin and turn its adherents to God. Saint John Chrysostom writes, "The Church is a place of healing, where Christ's mercy is poured out on those who seek it." Confession, prayer and the help of spiritual fathers put the sick back in health, and prepares the pious for the Kingdom of God.

### The Visible Church

The visible Church is the assembly of faithful huddled around the clergy with Christ as its leader. It is the primary goal of the Church, through its rituals and doctrine, to reach out to Christ.

### The Invisible Church

The Church also has non-visible characteristics. It represents the communion of all who are in Christ, alive and dead. We experience the Church on earth, but there is a continuation of the Church in heaven, where the Saints and Angels forever sing the praises of God. That same union is found in the Divine Liturgy when the joining of heaven and earth are celebrated. Saint Nicholas Cabasilas writes, "The Church is not confined to a single place or time; it is the communion of all who are in Christ, transcending the limits of this world."

### One Faith, One Baptism

The unity of the Church as the one true religion is found in our Nicene Creed. This solidarity is also demonstrated in the sacrament of baptism which brings believers into the "One Body of Christ." St Ignatius of Antioch insists on this unity: "Where the bishop is, there let the congregation gather, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church." The word Catholic has traditionally used to mean "universal" in the context of Orthodox worship.

### Overcoming Division

The Church has fought heresy and division throughout history, however under the auspices of the Holy Spirit it has always kept its Apostolic tradition. This coherence is attested to by the ecumenical councils, when bishops from every part of the Christian world came together to express and defend the truth.

Orthodoxy tells us that unity must be found in the fullness of faith and not in concession and subordination. work of the Church is to tell the truth in love and for all to join in Christ's communion.

## The Spirit as the Church's Soul

The Church lives by the Holy Spirit who leads and motivates it in everything. On the day of Pentecost, the Spirit poured out on the apostles, who were given the authority to proclaim the Gospel and initiate the Church. This Spirit still lives in the Church and sanctifies those within it and keeps it true. Reflecting on the Spirit's function, Saint Basil the Great said: "The Holy Spirit is the bond of unity, the source of sanctification, and the giver of life. Without Him, the Church would not exist."

## The Church as Christ's Bride

We often speak of the Church as the Bride of Christ, which reflects the covenantal and personal relationship of Christ with His followers. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for her." (Ephesians 5:25). Such an analogy calls to mind the sacrifice of the one who gave himself for the Church in order to sanctify and glorify her. It also encourages the Church to be true to Christ, her Husband, and to show the world that same love.

## The Wedding Feast of the Lamb

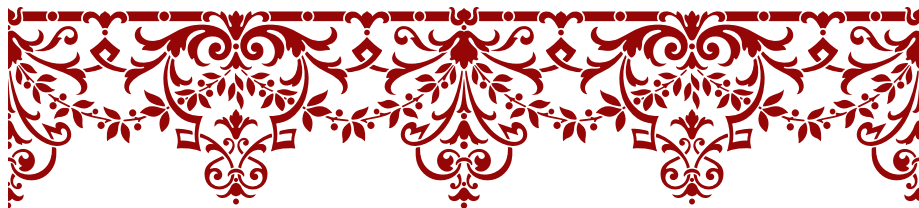
The final destiny of the Church is communion with Christ in the Kingdom of Heaven, the "the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:9). This prophetic eschatology compels the Church to live upright as we wait for the second Kingdom, when everything will be recreated.

## Life in the church

Being a part of an Orthodox Church is being part of the "life" of the Church. This includes attending the Divine Liturgy on a regular basis, receiving the sacraments, praying and almsgiving. The Church is not intended to be merely a social gathering but a society where all citizens have a part to play. Each parish invites all members to live holy lives in the shadow of Christ, speaking and acting accordingly. The Church is the Body of Christ — a pillar of light in a troubled world where we will find and offer hope and healing to all who come.







## Chapter 5

### Holy Tradition: The Life-Breath of the Church

#### The Fresh Water of Faith

Holy Tradition is indeed the soul of Orthodox Christianity: it is not a collection of ancient rites or regimented procedures; it is the Church's life-breath, the living, moving expression of the faith inherited from past generations. "Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle." Saint Paul urges in (2 Thessalonians 2:15). Tradition is not fixed or passive, but alive and always present. It links the Church to Christ and the Apostles. This is the Spirit of God speaking through ages "He will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13).

#### What Is Holy Tradition?

Holy Tradition, at its purest, is the presence of Christ in the Church. It is the righteous distribution of the Gospel, not only in writing but in the life of the Church. It is, in the words of Saint Basil the Great, "The teachings and practices handed down from the Apostles, some written, others received in the mystery of silence." Tradition is the guarantee that our Orthodox religion is always the same, and never changes - even as the world moves forward. It is the sacred continuity that connects the present with the past and offers vision for the future, and it is what keeps the Church alive and Orthodox in its teaching.

#### Scripture & Tradition Together

Scripture and Tradition are not separate but two complimentary streams of God's revelation that flow together in Orthodox theology. The Bible is also a product of tradition: it is a preserved interpretation of life in the Church. "The apostles did not hand everything down in writing; many things were delivered in unwritten form. Both the written and the unwritten are worthy of the same reverence" Saint John Chrysostom tells us. The Church does not receive its authority from Scripture alone (*sola scriptura*) but in the fullness of Tradition. Tradition is where Scripture is correctly received and understood.

#### The Sources of Holy Tradition

It's the Holy Scriptures, God's inspired Word, at the core of Holy Tradition. It was

always understood by the Church that the Bible is the ultimate source of faith and practice, but only in the sense that it is read through tradition.

The Holy Spirit had relegated the Scriptures to the canonisation by the Church in the first centuries of Christianity. This, too, was Tradition, in that the Church found which texts acted as true exemplifiers of the Apostolic word. The Scriptures still remain the source of Orthodox worship, doctrine and spirituality, when read and studied in accordance with traditional practice.

### The Creeds and Councils

The ecumenical creeds, in particular the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, are foundational in Holy Tradition. They offer insight into the interpretation of the faith and defend against heresy. These declarations maintained the unity of the Church. The Holy Spirit-led councils enlarged and expanded the doctrines of the Church. At the Council of Nicaea in 325 up to the Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787, the bishops outlined the faith in the face of adversity and scandal, preserving it for the future generations of the faithful.

### The Liturgy

The liturgy is the best example of Holy Tradition. The Church experiences the living Christ through the Divine Liturgy. This service has not changed much since the beginning of Christianity. Hymns, prayers and rituals in the liturgy express the Church faith, which educates and instructs the faithful in the truths of the Gospel. As Saint Nicholas Cabasilas has written: “The Liturgy is the most perfect work of Holy Tradition, for in it the mysteries of Christ are revealed and made present.”

### The Confessions of the Fathers

The works of the early Church Fathers including Saints Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom – are heirlooms of Holy Tradition. These saintly men, guided by the Spirit, exegetically taught the Scriptures and stood up for the faith against heresy afflicting the Church. The Fathers do not claim authority, however, it has been long regarded that their inspired insights act as an encyclopaedia of the faith that we can learn from, for future generations.

### The Lives of the Saints

Holy Tradition is complete when interpreted through the acts and writings of the Saints. The way they lived – humble, loving and patient – illustrates the life of the Gospel. From the early Church Martyrs to the desert ascetics, our elders incarnate the renewing work of Christ. Saint John of Kronstadt said: “The life of the saints is a continuation of the Gospel.” Their narrative encourages others to do the same.

### Icons and Sacred Art

Symbols, hymns and sacred art are also part of Holy Tradition. Icons are “windows to heaven” helping us visualise acts of faith and calling us to contemplation. They remind us of many important events in the history of the church.

## Guarding the Faith

One of the main functions of Holy Tradition is to protect the faith from heresy and alteration. The Church has always been challenged throughout the ages, from new doctrinal ideas in the first century to contemporary secularism. Tradition gives the Church the coherence and discernment it needs to stand by the truth. Saint Vincent of Lérins spoke about this in his phrase: We are to preserve “that which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all.”

## A Guide for Spiritual Life

Tradition is not only doctrinal but also practical, guiding the spiritual life of believers. The prayers, fasting practices, and sacraments handed down by Tradition shape the lives of the faithful, helping them grow in holiness. Saint Seraphim of Sarov emphasized the importance of adhering to Tradition in prayer and worship, saying, “The traditions of the Church are like a ladder ascending to heaven; by following them, we draw closer to God.”

## Unity Across Time and Space

Holy Tradition unites the Church across time and space. Through Tradition, the Church remains one with the Apostles, the Martyrs, and the Saints of every generation. It connects the local parish to the universal Church, transcending cultural and historical differences. In the Divine Liturgy, the faithful participate in the same worship offered by the early Christians, singing the same hymns and receiving the same Body and Blood of Christ. This unity is a foretaste of the heavenly Kingdom, where all the faithful will be gathered as one.

## Tradition vs. Traditionalism

It is important to distinguish between Holy Tradition and traditionalism. Tradition is alive, dynamic, and guided by the Holy Spirit, while traditionalism is a rigid adherence to customs for their own sake. Orthodoxy is faithful to Tradition while remaining open to addressing the needs of the modern world. As Saint Philaret of Moscow said, “The Church must hold fast to the ancient Tradition, yet also speak to the present age.”

## A Living Witness

In a world marked by rapid change and moral confusion, Holy Tradition offers stability and truth. It provides a living witness to the unchanging Gospel, calling all people to the eternal life found in Christ. The Church does not seek to conform to the world but to transform it, offering the life-giving message of the Kingdom. Holy Tradition is the means by which this message is preserved and proclaimed, ensuring its authenticity and power.



## Chapter 6

### The Word in Orthodoxy: Meeting the Word of God

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1). The words that begin the Gospel of John convey a very important message: God’s Word is not a set of books but the living Son of God, Jesus Christ. In Orthodox Christianity, the Bible is regarded as the inspired Word of God.

The Orthodox study of Scripture draws heavily on the Church’s focus on prayer, and adherence to Holy Tradition. Scripture alone is not the entire picture; it is an expression of the life of the Church in the way it practices its liturgical and sacramental life. As Saint John Chrysostom states, “To know the Scriptures is to know Christ.”

#### Is It Important To Feel Inspired?

Orthodox Christianity believes the Bible is inspired by God and is therefore considered theopneustos “God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16). This inspiration does not undermine the fact that the texts are written by human authors but instead functions through them, harnessing the specific personalities and circumstances of the authors to transmit God’s truth. Saint Gregory Nazianzus likens this divine-human synthesis to the Incarnation: just as Christ is fully God and fully Man, so the Scriptures are both Divine and Human. They are not dictated by God in a mechanical way but are the fruit of a divine cooperation that ensures their truth and authority.

#### The Canon of Scripture

Orthodoxy embraces a wider canon of Scripture than do most Western Christian faiths. Alongside the 39 Hebrew Bible books, the Orthodox Old Testament contains the Deuterocanonical texts (Wisdom, Tobit, and 1-2 Maccabees), which are seen as inspired and beneficial to the reader. The New Testament (27 books) is considered universal. Ultimately, it was the Holy Spirit in the early centuries who discerned Scripture’s canon. Even this canonisation bears witness to the unbreakability of Scripture and Tradition.

#### The Word Within the Word

Scriptural interpretation is an important part of Holy Tradition. In the Orthodox sense, it is neither detached nor independent from it. Tradition gives us the language in which the Scriptures are read and lived. As Saint Irenaeus of Lyons says, “The

Scriptures can only be interpreted rightly within the living tradition of the Church.”

The Holy Spirit-inspired Church has saved the Word of God, protected it from perversion, and given us the framework with which it can be understood. This means that the Bible is read not as a personal book but as a Holy book, intended for study in the context of faith.

### The Mission of the Fathers

The Fathers of the Church, including Saints Basil the Great, John Chrysostom and Gregory of Nyssa, have made an important contribution to interpreting Scripture. They provide significant insights into what biblical texts mean, and offer a way of taking the Bible at its word in accordance with the religion. As Saint Athanasius once said, “The Holy Scriptures are our salvation.” He emphasized reading them with the Church’s mind and refusing to entertain private and error-prone interpretations of them.

### Scripture in the Liturgy

Scripture itself is a deeply entrenched part of Orthodox worship. Even the Divine Liturgy is rich in biblical allegory, from the Psalms that are recited during the chants to the Gospel and Epistle readings offered up at the service. The liturgical presentation we, as Orthodox, participate in makes Scripture a living word. When the Gospel is read, it’s not just an historical record but the word of Christ addressing the believer. The priest or deacon says, “Wisdom! Let us attend!” the faithful then receive the Word in reverence and openness.

### The Lectionary: A Scriptural Cycle

For the Orthodox Church, a lectionary is an annual program of reading that helps the faithful read the Scriptures every day of the year. This includes passages from the Gospels, Epistles and Old Testament, but also Psalms and other Bible songs. Lent embodies the Church’s conception of Scripture as living text, interpreted according to the liturgical year and according to the feast days and seasons.

### Personal Reading and Study

Although scriptural reading can occur in a communal setting, reading and study on one’s own is also recommended. We are encouraged to study the Bible each day because “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105). St. Seraphim of Sarov says: “Read the Gospel and the other books of the Bible every day. It will nourish your soul and keep you close to God.” Private reading should be undertaken with humility and it helps to ask questions to a spiritual father to clarify misunderstood passages.

### Christ-Centered Reading

Orthodox Christians believe that the Bible points to Christ as the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 5:17). The Old Testament is interpreted from the perspective of the New, with Christ as the operative figure. The Exodus, for instance, was a foreshadowing of Christ’s redemption, and the Psalms are predicative of His Passion and Resurrection. Such a Christ-centered reading ensures that the Scriptures are always read in light of the Gospel.

## The Four Senses of Scripture

Orthodox tradition frequently relies on the fourfold sense of Scripture.

- Literal: The plain meaning of the text.
- Allegorical: The deeper spiritual meaning, often pointing to Christ.
- Moral: The application of the text to the believer's life.
- Anagogical: The text's ultimate reference to the Kingdom of God.

As Saint Athanasius puts it: “The Psalms are a mirror of the soul, reflecting all its movements and guiding it to God.” The repeated enactment of the Psalms in personal and liturgical prayer helps those who pray to absorb the Word of God and take it into their own hands.

## Witnessing to the Word

To truly live the Word of the Gospel also involves living it out in the world. The Orthodox Christian is encouraged to live out the message of Christ, and to become a Gospel for others to encounter. This witness is not only through words, but action.

## The Word of God is a Prelude to the Kingdom

For the Orthodox Church, the Word of God is not historical fiction, but an anticipation of God's Kingdom. We declare the eternal truth of God's love and salvation, guiding believers to His presence. Saint John of Kronstadt referred to the Bible as “a door to heaven,” by which the believer comes to Christ and is transformed by His presence. This experience is not the ultimate goal but preparation for the final encounter with God in the coming age.







## Chapter 7

### The Holy Mysteries: Sacraments of Life

#### Understanding Christ Through the Mysteries

The Orthodox Christian faith is one in which the sacraments – or more precisely, the Holy Mysteries – are not rituals or signs but direct experiences with God. They are the channels through which God’s grace flows, shaping the believer and reconciling him to Christ. Saint John Chrysostom summarises the Mysteries as “the medicine of immortality, delivering spiritual nourishment, salvation, and everlasting life.”

The word “Mystery” captures the inexpressibility of these sacred practices, beyond human understanding. Although their external expressions are the visible elements – water, oil, bread and wine – their inner substance is the invisible, transformative work of the Holy Spirit. In this chapter, we shall look at what the Holy Mysteries mean — with an emphasis on Baptism, Chrismation, and the Eucharist, but also briefly touch upon the other sacraments.

#### What Are the Holy Mysteries?

Holy Mysteries are the means by which Christ’s saving work becomes tangible and active in the life of the believer. They are both divine gifts and human activities that demand the faithful’s presence. Saint Nicholas Cabasilas, for instance, notes: “The Mysteries are not merely signs of grace but means through which grace is communicated to us.” They are the very life of the Church. They purify all time and place, all lives, all worlds, and lead the disciple to a union with God.

#### The Holy Spirit and His Tasks

The Holy Mysteries are made possible through the power of the Holy Spirit, who mysteriously changes the physical elements and sanctifies those who receive it. On Pentecost, the Spirit came upon the apostles and brought the Church into sacramental existence. This same Spirit continues through the Mysteries, purifying and restoring the faithful and bringing them to Christ.

#### The Sacrament of New Birth

The first and primary Mystery of Christianity is Baptism, the process by which a man or woman “be born of water and of the Spirit” (John 3:5). By Baptism, the

believer dies to sin and is resurrected into Christ and his Body, the Church. Saint Paul is referring to Baptism as being involved in Christ's death and resurrection: "Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 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." (Romans 6:3-4).

### The Rite of Baptism

Baptism in the Orthodox tradition is done through three immersions into water – to represent Christ's death, burial and resurrection. When we use water, it represents purification, regeneration and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The newly baptised are anointed with holy oil (the Oil of Gladness) as an act of obedience to God. They are then veiled in a white garment (purity), and blessed with a candle (Christ's light).

### Baptism as Conversion to the Church

Baptism is more than a personal gesture but an invitation into the faith community. The baptised person becomes a Church member, joining all other Christians in the Body of Christ. This communal quality emphasises that salvation is a shared experience, carried out in the life of the Church.

### The Gift of the Holy Spirit

The Mystery of Chrismation (or Sacrament of Confirmation) comes directly after Baptism. With the anointing of Holy Chrism, the new Christian is sanctified with the gift of the Holy Spirit and is able to live as a witness to Christ. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem refers to Chrismation as the believer's own Pentecost: "The Holy Spirit comes upon you and transforms your soul, sealing it with the grace of God."

### The Anointing with Holy Chrism

Holy Chrism, a preparation of oil and spices, is sanctified by the bishop in the course of Holy Week. It evokes the presence of the Holy Spirit. During chrismation the priest anoints the baptized person's forehead, eyes, ears, chest, hands and feet while he chants "The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit." This anointing consecrates the whole individual, making him fit for a life of righteousness and service. Similarly, it establishes the believer as a "temple of the Holy Spirit." (1 Corinthians 6:19).

### The Mystery of Christ's Body and Blood

Holy Communion (the Eucharist) is the central mystery of Christianity. During the Eucharist, bread and wine are turned into the Body and Blood of Christ so that the redeemed may directly commune with Jesus Christ. Christ established this Mystery at the Last Supper, saying "Take, eat; this is My body" Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to his followers, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.' (Matthew 26:26-28). We experience the fulfillment of these words at every Divine Liturgy, where the faithful receive holy communion.

### The Divine Liturgy

The Eucharist (communion) is administered at the Divine Liturgy, the most sacred

rite in the Orthodox Church. Prayers, hymns and scripture readings accompany the liturgy, which ends with the presentation of the Holy Gifts. The priest entreats the Holy Spirit to “make this bread the precious Body of Christ, and that which is in this cup the precious Blood of Christ, changing them by the Holy Spirit.” This is known as the “epiclesis” which is the heart of the Eucharistic Mystery.

### Communion and Unity

During Eucharistic sacrament, the Faithful become one with Christ and one another. As Saint Paul writes: “For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.” (1 Corinthians 10:17). This union crosses time and space, uniting the Church here on earth with the Saints and Angels in heaven.

### Confession (Repentance)

Confession is the sacrament of healing and reconciliation. Through repentance (Μετάνοια) and the absolution prayer offered for the forgiveness of sin, the faithful regain communion with God and the Church. According to Saint John Climacus, confession is “a second baptism” that purifies the soul and restores the believer’s relationship with God.

### Marriage

Marriage is the Mystery by which a man and a woman come together in Christ, and “become one flesh” (Ephesians 5:31–32). This sacrament is what makes their union holy and reflects Christ’s love for His Church.

### Holy Orders

Holy Orders is the Mystery by which the Church undertakes to ordain Deacons, Priests and Bishops to serve the faithful. It is a sacrament for the service of the church and its flock.

### Anointing of the Sick

The Anointing of the sick or unwell is the mystery of healing offered to those who are sick in body or spirit. By being blessed with holy oil and praying to God for healing, the elect are empowered by the Holy Spirit to heal their body and soul.

### Mysteries as a Guide to life

The Holy Mysteries are not considered events that are merely “experienced”, but a continuous feature of the spiritual life of the believer. They sanctify every part of one’s daily life, from conception to death, and afford the means for ongoing spiritual renewal. As Saint Seraphim of Sarov explains, “The goal of the Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit.” The Mysteries are the most direct way to attain this providing the faithful with a taste of the Kingdom of God.



## Chapter 8

### Prayer & Worship: The Heartbeat of the Christian Life

#### A Christian-Inspired Life

Prayer and worship are the heart of Christian life. They are the ways in which the human heart rises to God to commune with our Creator and Saviour. Orthodox Christians are called not just to recite prayer and worship individually or once in a while; rather, they are encouraged to make the practice of invoking God's mercy a central theme in their life. In the words of Saint John Climacus, "Prayer is the ascent of the mind to God," and worship is the rising of the mind to God in the life of the Church.

The heart of Orthodoxy is the Divine Liturgy, the Eucharistic celebration in which heaven and earth congregate and the faithful become one with Christ. Within the shadow of this pivotal act lie the daily prayers, worship and spiritual exercises that nourish and strengthen the individual's intimacy with God. This chapter describes the importance of prayer, the ethereal beauty of Orthodox prayer, and the transformative power of the Divine Liturgy.

#### Prayer: An Encounter with God

Prayer is the vehicle of the Christian spirit, the channel through which the worshipper speaks to God. It is an intimate act, rooted in affection, confidence and humility. The Lord Himself exhorts us to, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17), encouraging us to commit ourselves to prayer daily. From an Orthodox theological perspective, prayer should include thanksgiving, confession and supplication. It brings each Christian close to God, changing one's heart and shaping it in accordance with His purpose. "Prayer is the key to the treasures of heaven" Saint Isaac the Syrian teaches. "By it, the soul is raised to the heights of divine love."

#### The Jesus Prayer: An Invitation to Inner Silence

One of the most important prayers in Orthodoxy is the simple yet powerful Jesus Prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, save me, a sinner." This short and profound prayer is an effective way to gain inner stillness - hesychia (ἡσυχία) and continual union with God. When prayed in thoughtfulness and humility, the Jesus Prayer cleanses the heart, directs the mind, and exposes the soul to the power of the Holy Spirit. It is often practiced with a prayer rope "Komboskini", with which the faithful

keep the prayer focused and in step with spiritual direction.

### The Beauty of Orthodox Worship

Orthodox worship embodies a sense of beauty, honor and mystery. It isn't just a human ceremony but a God-inspired activity in which believers often include the veneration of Angels and Saints. The Liturgy of the Orthodox Church is filled with evocative symbolism, inviting the senses and the heart into God's Kingdom. Icons, incense, candles and chanting all convey a sense of God's glory and majesty. Saint Germanus of Constantinople describes prayer as "heaven on earth," a foreshadowing of the everlasting liturgy in the Heavenly Kingdom.

### The Structure of Orthodox Worship

Orthodox worship is built around a liturgical rhythm that sanctifies the passing of time and the continuous praising of God throughout the day, week and year.

- The Daily Cycle: This will include services such as Vespers, Matins, and the Hours, which provide a routine of prayer for the faithful.
- The Weekly Cycle: Each day of the week is dedicated to specific themes, such as the Resurrection (Sunday), the Angels (Monday), and the Theotokos (Saturday).
- The Liturgical Year: The Church calendar revolves around the great feasts, including Pascha (Easter), the Nativity of Christ, and the Transfiguration. All feasts celebrate the saving acts of God and invite the faithful to fully realize their spiritual reality.

### The Eucharist at the Core of Christianity

The most important element of Orthodox worship is the Divine Liturgy, where Christians partake in the Mystery of Christ's Body and Blood. In the sacrament of the Eucharist, the Church is fully Christ's Body, merged with Christ and with each other in a sacred union. The Liturgy is not only a celebration of Christ's death but an act of salvation. According to Saint John Chrysostom, "When you see the priest offering the bread and wine, do not think it is he who does this. It is Christ Himself who is present and acting."

### The Order of the Divine Liturgy

- The Liturgy of the Word: Prayers, hymns, and passages from the Bible are recited leading up to a reading of the Gospel. It prepares the people for the Word of God and for the Mystery of the Eucharist.
- The Liturgy of the Faithful: This opens with the Great Entrance, where bread and wine are offered up to the altar. The culminating event is the sanctification of the gifts, by which the Holy Spirit makes them the Body and Blood of Christ.

This Liturgy ends with a celebration of Holy Communion for the faithful in close communion with Christ and with one another.

### Participation in the Liturgy

Orthodox prayer is not meant to be a public spectacle but a shared practice for all the faithful. The prayers, chants and actions of the Liturgy engage the whole individ-

ual: body, mind and heart. Such personal engagement is consistent with Orthodox conceptions of worship as the service of the sacraments (leitourgia), rendered to God in is done thankfulness and devotion.

### The Transformative Power of Worship

Orthodox worship is not just a celebration, it's a sacrament. When people come to faith in prayer and the sacraments, the grace of the Holy Spirit touches their hearts and minds. Worship bridges the divide between man and God, the Saint Maximus the Confessor explains, by moving the believer from the temporal to the eternal reality. Any act of worship carries us one step closer to theosis (communion with God).

### Prayer Beyond the Church Walls

The Divine Liturgy and other services might be the crowning glory of Orthodox worship, but an effective prayer life goes far beyond the church. Orthodox faithful often enhance their personal life of prayer by establishing a “little church” or “icon corner” at home. Their routine may include morning and evening prayers, Bible readings, and the Jesus Prayer. These habits keep the seeker grounded in their religious experience with their heart centered on God.

### Worship as Lifestyle: a Way of Life

Orthodox Christians worship not just during certain hours or at certain locations but as a way of life. Every single detail of your life, work, family and relationships, can be brought before God as an act of worship. As Saint Paul encourages, “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). This holistic process enhances mundane tasks and makes every day a sacred moment of communion with God.







## Chapter 9

### Understanding the Beauty of God

Beauty has an innate appeal to the human heart, because beauty is divine. Orthodox Christianity is a religion in which beauty is not just an external accessory but a visual expression of God's presence. "Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." (Psalm 29:2), speaks of the deep relationship between beauty, holiness, and worship.

Perhaps the most impressive manifestations of this divine splendour are the Holy icons. Such images are much more than religious artwork; they are portals into heaven that entice believers into the mystery of God's Kingdom. Icons bring the invisible God into view, the Incarnation's truth and the transformed reality of creation.

#### The Theology of Icons

The mystery of the Incarnation underscores much of the theological underpinning of icons. Throughout the Old Testament, God prohibited image-making because he is neither visible nor understood (Exodus 20:4–5). "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14). Christ rendered the invisible God visible so making it possible for us to portray Him in sacred artwork.

The great promoter of iconography Saint John of Damascus writes: "In former times, God, who has neither a body nor a form, could not be represented by an image. But now that He has made Himself visible in the flesh, I make an image of the God whom I see." So icons signify the Incarnation and the salvation of the world through Christ.

#### Depicting the Transfigured World

Icons are not just symbols of history or persons, but of the transformed nature of creation through the lens of belief. This is why icons lack naturalistic or even realistic designs and instead employ symbolic shapes, hues and stances to express spiritual realities. The gold background of icons, for instance, reflects the light of the Kingdom of heaven, and the contemplative expressions of the saints speak of their communion with God. Images point not to the broken world, but to the rescued and adored creation that demonstrates a glimpse of the future.

## The Veneration of Icons

The worship of icons is not idolatry, but rather a celebration of love and respect for the individuals they depict. As Saint Basil the Great says: “The honor paid to the image passes to the prototype.” When the faithful kiss an icon or kneel before it, they’re not worshipping the wood and the painting, but venerating Christ, the Theotokos, or the saints depicted within the icon. The Seventh Ecumenical Council (787 AD) endorsed icon-prayer on the grounds that it stemmed from the Church’s belief in the Incarnation and the communion of Saints. This council re-established icons’ proper status as objects of Orthodox devotion following the iconoclasm in which they had been violently opposed.

## Early Christian Art

Iconography in the Christian sense began in the earliest centuries of the Church. Christians adorned Rome’s catacombs with images of Christ as the Good Shepherd, Biblical scenes and the fish and the anchor. Such early images were simple, but profound, declarations of faith, conveying hope and salvation.

## The Triumph of Iconography

By the fourth century, with the introduction of Christianity under Emperor Constantine, icons had spread like wildfire. Frescoes, mosaics and panel icons covered the walls of churches, signifying the Church’s increased belief in the visual preaching of the Gospel. The theological basis of icons became elucidated further in the Christological controversy of the early Church. This defence of icons ended with the Seventh Ecumenical Council, which recognised their significance for Orthodox liturgical practice and theology.

## Icons as Windows to Heaven

We consider Icons to be “windows to heaven,” because they let the worshipper envision how the Kingdom of God exists. They are not mere ornaments but are a key component of the Church’s worship and prayer life. When looking at an icon, the believer is immersed into a spiritual encounter with the figure or event in question. Icons, therefore bring the mind and the heart closer to God, separating the soul from the things of the world. As Saint John of Kronstadt wrote: “Icons are a means of communion with the heavenly world; through them, we enter into the presence of Christ and His saints.”

## Icons in the Divine Liturgy

Icons are also a focal point of the Divine Liturgy. The iconostasis, the icon wall that separates the sanctuary from the nave, depicts the union of heaven and earth. Christ icons, the Theotokos, and Saints remind Christians that they’re surrounded by a “great cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1), who are united with them in their immortal worship of God. Icons embellish the procession, prayers and hymns (Δοξολογία) of the Liturgy, making worship one coherent, integrated whole.

### Icons in Personal Prayer

Icons lie at the centre of private individual prayer, too. Orthodox Christians often have a prayer room at home decorated with statues of Christ, the Theotokos and their patron Saints. Such icons act as prayer focus points, allowing the worshipper to develop a sense of God's presence and to appeal to the intercessory prayers of the saints.

### Visualising unseen elements of the Church

The icons speak of the reality of the communion of saints, the love that connects the Church on Earth with the Church in heaven. They reassure the faithful that the Saints are not ethereal figures of time long gone, but living members of the Body of Christ who pray for and bear witness for those still in need of salvation. Theotokos icons, in particular, are highly valued in Orthodox devotion. The Panagia (Παναγία) as we call her is shown as the Mother of God, the ladder upon which the Word came to earth. Her symbols, like the Hodegetria (She Who Shows the Way), beckon her followers to Christ and compel them to follow her model of love, humility and obedience.

### Christ Icons: The Icon of the Father

The greatest icon of all is Christ himself, “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15). Icons representing Christ, like the “Pantocrator” (Ruler of All), express his divinity and his humanity. They invite the pious to look at His face and feel His love and grace.

### Transforming the Heart

Icons are not mere objects of worship, but agents of spiritual change. They address the heart in unutterable tones, generating an urgent longing for God and the divine Kingdom. As Saint Theophan the Recluse tells us, “When you gaze upon an icon with faith, it draws your soul into prayer and fills your heart with divine light.” Icons purify the mind, elevate the soul, and enlighten the believer's relationship with God.

### A Foretaste of the Kingdom

Icons give us a preview of the eschatological reality, the transformed world in which everything has been renewed in Christ. They teach followers that this is not the home they will stay in and that their destiny is to live forever in the eternal beauty of God's presence.

### Icons and Evangelism

Icons can effectively preach the Gospel in a world that is easily distracted by images. The majesty and depth of these visual representations entice people into the mystery of Christ, so they might experience the truth with their own eyes. The Orthodox Church's missionary activities were traditionally accompanied by the proliferation of icons, whose message is beyond language and culture. From the mosaics of Byzantium to the painted icons of Russia, such holy images have served as an effective means of communication for evangelism.



## Chapter 10

### The Saints: Models of Holiness

The saints are the great lights of the Church that shine in the name of Christ and guide those who follow them to the Kingdom of God. They are the “great cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1) who have completed the trial of humanity and faith and now sit in the presence of God. In Orthodox Christianity, the saints are more than just historical figures or moral paradigms: they are active members of the Body of Christ, teachers and intercessors for the faithful.

The saints demonstrate grace’s mysterious efficacy, and show us that holiness is not something only the privileged possess but a quality that belongs to all Christians. They encourage us to go the righteous way, and their examples demonstrate that the Gospel can be fulfilled anywhere, anytime, and everywhere.

#### Martyrs: The Ultimate Witnesses

The word “martyr” derives from the Greek for “witness” and the martyrs are the Church’s most profound witnesses to the faith. In dying for Christ, they served as witnesses to the truth of the Gospel and showed that life triumphed over death. Whether the martyrs were ancient Christians persecuted by Roman emperors or modern martyrs who stood against oppression and atheism, their blood became spiritual food to the Church. Saint Ignatius of Antioch, the willing martyr, and Saint George, who was kept strong when tortured, encourage us to remain faithful to Christ even in the midst of hardship.

#### Confessors: Witnesses Without Death

The martyrdom of saints did not necessarily involve everyone who was persecuted. Some, the confessors, had borne witness to Christ through imprisonment, exile or persecution without shedding their blood. Saints such as Saint Maximus the Confessor, who upheld the truth of Christ’s two natures, remind us that standing up for the faith requires an ability to resist deception and fallacy. While the martyrs and confessors are celebrated for their steadfast perseverance, among the saints there are many men and women who reflected Christ’s light in their normal daily lives of piety. Our ancestors, including Saint Phanourios, the humble shepherd, show us that holy things can be done in all walks of life.

## The Saints as Intercessors

Orthodox Christianity asserts that the Saints, many exiled from this world, are in Christ and connected to the Church on Earth. “For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord,” says Saint Paul (Romans 8:38–39). The saints, who have become joined to Christ, continue to love and care for the ones who still walk the pilgrim path.

## The Role of Intercession

The Saints are not just distant subjects but will forever be participants in the life of the Church. They pray to God on behalf of the faithful, carrying their petitions like sweet incense. Our Mother, the Theotokos is the highest representation of an intercessor, constantly pleading for the salvation of all mankind. “The saints are our helpers and advocates before the throne of God,” writes Saint John of Kronstadt. “They share in our struggles and rejoice in our victories, for they are bound to us by the bonds of divine love.”

## Requesting The Prayers of the Saints

Orthodox Christians often turn to the saints, and invoke them in prayer for comfort and suffering. This practice is not an act of worship, but a reflection on the saints’ proximity to God and their love for His people. People gravitate towards patron saints, whose lives parallel their own, or saints of particular miracles or benedictions. Saint Nicholas, for instance, is often invoked as a guardian of pilgrims, and Saint Nektarios is renowned for healing the sick.

## Saints as Symbols of Devotion

The saints are holy not for their own sake but because they let Christ change their lives. They modeled themselves in Christ with humility, love and obedience, becoming living expressions of his worldly presence. “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ,” Saint Paul urges Christians to do (1 Corinthians 11:1). The saints offer concrete models of how this imitative practice can be exercised – in the desert alone, in the household, or even in the midst of persecution.

## The Desert Fathers and Mothers

The early Church’s ascetics, or Desert Fathers and Mothers, sought sainthood through prayer, fasting and solitude. Saints such as Anthony the Great and Mary of Egypt offer a glimpse into how repentance is transformative, and how ascetic practice can bring spiritual renewal. Their practices and writings are still used today by Christians as an aid to resisting the passions and striving for virtue. “The one who knows himself knows God,” Saint Anthony wrote of self-examination and humility.

## The Saints in Everyday Life

Saints were not all necessarily monks or martyrs: many were found in the world, sanctifying their daily existence with piety and charity. Saints such as the Bishop Saint Nektarios of Aegina, who patiently tolerated insults, or the pagan saint Saint Xenia of Saint Petersburg, who served Christ as a “Fool for Christ”, illustrate that there

are ways to be holy in every situation. Such Saints help believers to understand that the call to holiness applies to everyone and that God's grace is adequate for every circumstance.

### New Martyrs and Confessors

The 20th and 21st centuries witnessed the rise of new martyrs and confessors who represented Christ in the face of severe persecution. Both Russian martyrs and martyrs of today in the Middle East and Africa represent potent witnesses to our sacred church.

### Modern Saints

Saints are still honoured by the Church in our own time, so that sainthood is not relegated to the deep past. Saints such as Saint Porphyrios, Saint Paisios and Saint Maria of Paris existed in our own time but always lived in the shadow of Christ. These saints addressed today's problems and compassionately guided their followers through modern life. Their example makes it clear that the call to holiness still holds true.

### Feast Days and Commemorations

Orthodox Christians observe feast days and festivals devoted to celebrating the Saints' lives and pray to them often. These celebrations remind the Christian of their relationship to the Saints and their shared pathway to the Kingdom of God. The feasts feature icons and special hymns and prayers detailing their acts and virtues. Saint Seraphim of Sarov's hymns, for instance, sing of his gladness and affection towards creation, while those of Saint George sing of his boldness and trust.

### Icons of the Saints

Icons of the Saints provide visual reminders of their presence and example. They portray the saints in their risen form, bathed in the glory of Christ's Resurrection. Such icons invite the faithful to imitate the Saints' virtues and pray to them.







## Chapter 11

### Theosis: Experiencing the Nature of God

#### The Highest Calling of Mankind

“God became man, that man might be god.” Saint Athanasius the Great’s eloquent words speak to the essence of Orthodox Christianity’s theology of salvation: theosis or “deification”. Far from being a departure from sin or a release from death, Orthodox salvation is seen as the ultimate union with God, a “partaking in the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

Theosis is not a philosophical term or promise, but the transformative experience of Christ. It is the accomplishment of humankind’s original calling, an exercise of grace, cooperation and love, through which the baptised individual becomes more and more close to the living Trinity.

#### The Biblical Foundation of Theosis

Theosis is a doctrine steeped in Scripture. From God’s creation of humankind in his own image and likeness to the assurance of eternal life in Christ, the Bible documents the divine path for human involvement in God’s life.

#### Created in the Image and likeness of God

Theosis is an unfolding process that begins with the creation of man: “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness’” (Genesis 1:26). The Holy Fathers say there’s a difference between being created by God and evolving in his image.

- Image: This term refers to the natural attributes of reason, will and intimacy with God that are intrinsic to the human species.
- Likeness: The state of being godlike, becoming holy and joining oneself to God through grace.
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“The divine image in man, says Saint Gregory of Nyssa, is the potential for godlikeness, which is realized through a life of virtue and communion with God.”

## Partakers of the Divine Nature

Saint Peter's letter describes the process of theosis thus: "By which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). To share the divine is not to become God in nature (God's nature is impermeable and transcendent), but to commune with his energy, with the life and grace He so generously gives to us.

## Union with Christ

Christ is the interface between humans and God. With His Incarnation, He reconciles the divine and human natures in His Person, allowing mankind to regain fellowship with God. Saint Paul emphasises this union: "it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). In baptism, the Eucharist, and the life of faith, believers are one with Christ, share in his death and resurrection, and ascend with Him to the Father.

## The Patristic Understanding of Theosis

Theosis is at the heart of what the Church Fathers taught, and they described its purpose and significance with theological clarity. Saint Athanasius' quote "God became man so that man might become god" identifies the Incarnation as the source of theosis. By becoming human, Christ made it possible to be in communion with God. Christ's redemption not only consisted of making right what had been broken in the fall but also lifted up humanity to an even greater status, together with God, in a mystical union.

## Saint Maximus the Confessor: The Divine Vision

Saint Maximus the Confessor believed that theosis represented the consummation of God's will for creation saying: "A sure warrant for looking forward with hope to deification (theosis) is provided by the Incarnation of God, who shows us the way by which, in our union with Him, we are made like Him." The goal of human life is to become god by grace, ascending to the divine likeness and bringing all creation into unity with our Creator.

## Saint Symeon the New Theologian: The Transformative Light

Saint Symeon the New Theologian emphasises the experiential aspect of theosis. Symeon sees theosis not as a theological idea, but as a reality, realized through the imposition of the Holy Spirit and the experience of the uncreated light. He writes: "God becomes man's Father not only by creating him but by making him a partaker of His divine glory, filling him with the light of His presence."

## Theosis and the working of the Church

Theosis is not an inward quest but a journey through the life of the Church. This is how the sacraments, prayer, asceticism and love bring the believer to a deeper union with God. The Holy Mysteries lie at the heart of theosis because they are the primary vehicles by which divine grace is given to the devoted. Prayer is the pulsing force of theosis, the way in which the Christian raises up and allows God into his own life.

### Asceticism: The Struggle for Holiness

Fasting, giving and self-sacrifice are key aspects of theosis. They enable the believer to renounce the passions, separate himself from all worldliness, and be transformed into virtue. The Jesus Prayer (“Lord Jesus Christ (Κύριε ἑλέησον), Son of God, have mercy on me sinner”) is one of the most effective means of training inner stillness (hesychia) and continuous communion with God. As Saint Gregory Palamas says, prayer cleanses the heart and lets the Christian see the eternal, immanent light of God. Saint John Climacus, in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, refers to asceticism as an upward movement where each ascending step brings the soul closer to God. He emphasises that asceticism requires humility and faith in God’s mercy.

### Obstacles and Challenges to Theosis

Theosis is not an easy journey. Sin, pride and spiritual complacency can impede the Christian’s growth.

#### Sin and the Passions

Sin interrupts communion with God and corrupts the soul, rendering it impervious to God’s illumination. The passions, the desires and attachments in our disordered nature, must be tamed through confession and spiritual discipline. Saint Isaac the Syrian states, “The struggle against the passions is the pathway to union with God, for in overcoming them, the soul is purified and made receptive to His grace.”

#### Spiritual Pride

Perhaps the most threatening aspect of the quest for theosis is spiritual pride; the idea that one’s own work is sufficient for holiness. Theosis demands humility and a daily recognition of one’s dependence on God.

### The Eschatological Fulfillment of Theosis

Theosis begins in this world, but reaches its climax in the age to come. Upon the resurrection, the righteous will fully become one with God, reconstituted in His image and seated in his glory. “When Christ who is our life appears,” writes Saint Paul, “Then you also will appear with Him in glory.” (Colossians 3:4). This is the ultimate theosis in which the believer’s relationship with God becomes complete.





## Chapter 12

### The Cross and the Resurrection

#### Experiencing Life Through Death

A paradox at the core of Orthodox Christianity is that one lives through death. The Cross and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ constitute the pivotal moments of salvation history, the axis around which the life of the Church and all believers revolve. Saint Paul exclaims, “For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” (1 Corinthians 2:2), and also states, “And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!” (1 Corinthians 15:17). The Cross and the Resurrection, however, are indivisible and demonstrate the completeness of God’s love and his ultimate victory over sin, death and the devil.

#### The Cross: The Tree of Life

The Cross itself is prophesied throughout the Old Testament, embedded into salvation history as the means by which God would save His people. In the Garden of Eden, man fell through sin connected with a forbidden tree. Christ reverses this disobedience through the Cross, the “tree of life,” by giving people who are devoted to Him eternal life (Genesis 3:22, Revelation 2:7).

When the Israelites were sick as result of snakes in the wilderness, God instructed Moses to set a bronze serpent on a pole, and all those who gazed upon it were healed. Christ Himself links it to His crucifixion: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:14–15). The Cross was not an afterthought but the culmination of God’s work to draw the world to Himself.

#### The Passion of Christ

The Passion of Christ reveals how deeply God loves us. In His pain and humiliation, Christ freely paid the price for sin, suffering rejection, ridicule, scourging and crucifixion. In the Suffering Servant reading, the prophet Isaiah prophesied this: “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions,” (Isaiah 53:4–5). Christ’s Passion is more than just an historical incident, but a mystery in which God himself dies in love for His people.

### The Cross as Victory

To the world, the Cross looks like a mark of defeat. Yet for the Church it is a triumph over sin, death and the devil. Christ's suffering on the Cross was not a passive act of denial, but a loving act of victory. "Through the Cross," says Saint John Chrysostom, "death was abolished, sins forgiven, hell despoiled, demons expelled, and the gates of paradise opened." The Cross is both the cross upon which the Lamb of God is sacrificed and the cross upon which he overrules the forces of darkness.

### The Cross in the Christian's Life.

Not only is the Cross the way in which Christ triumphed, but it is the model of Christian living. Christ exhorts His disciples to accept their cross each day and follow Him. "Then He said to them all, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.'" (Luke 9:23). It is about dying to sin, denying self-gratification, and living in sacrificial love. As Saint Cyril of Jerusalem instructs us: "Let us not be ashamed of the Cross of Christ. The Cross is the glory of the heavens, the salvation of the earth, and the joy of the faithful."

### The Centrality of the Resurrection

The Resurrection of Christ is the foundational doctrine of Christianity. Without the Resurrection, the Cross would be incomplete, and Christianity would be a religion of hopelessness. "And if Christ is not risen" writes Saint Paul, "then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty." (1 Corinthians 15:14). The resurrection proves that Christ is God's Son and that He triumphed over sin and death. It is a preview of the soul's resurrection, promising and ensuring eternal life.

### Passages on significance of the Resurrection

In the Resurrection, Christ overcomes death and turns it from a lifelong separation to a path to life. Death no longer holds the final word. "Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." (1 Corinthians 15:20). His resurrection sets in motion the regeneration of all creation, to be enacted completely at His second coming. "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 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. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection." (Romans 6:3–5).

Both the empty tomb and Christ's resurrection, as witnessed, offer concrete proof of the truth of the Resurrection. He showed himself to Mary Magdalene, to the disciples, and to more than five hundred witnesses, giving them peace, joy and the promise of His victory. (John 20:19–20, 1 Corinthians 15:6).

## The Cross and the Resurrection in the Christian Life of the Church

The Cross and Resurrection are central to Orthodox religious life, both in Holy Week and Pascha (Easter).

- Holy Week: The Church recreates the events of Christ's Passion, from his victory over death in Jerusalem to His Crucifixion and burial. Every service puts the faithful inside the shadow of His self-denying love.
- Pascha: There is no joy like the celebration of the Resurrection, for the worshipers proclaim, "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life." Pascha is not just a celebration, but part of the triumph of the Resurrection.

## The Sacraments and the Mystery of the Cross.

The mysteries of the Cross and Resurrection are deeply entwined with the Church's sacraments:

- Baptism: The believer dies with Christ and rises with him to a new birth (Romans 6:3–4).
- Eucharist: During the celebration of the Eucharist, the resurrected Christ receives the life of the Resurrection from the faithful.
- Confession: Through confession, the sinner feels the purifying grace of Christ's death and the resurrection.

The Cross and Resurrection are not just events to be remembered, but Christian life to be experienced. It is up to the believer to die with Christ, to kill the former self with its passions and desires, and to walk in the newness of life with Him. "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God." (Colossians 3:1). The Cross represents repentance and self-sacrifice; the Resurrection promises restoration.

## Suffering and Victory

The Cross encourages the believer to have faith in suffering because it is the way to salvation. "The cross is the door to mysteries," says Saint Isaac the Syrian. "Through the cross, joy enters the world." The Resurrection promises the believer that every trial and suffering would be redeemed in triumph. It is the promise of the resurrection that guides the pilgrim in their travails.

The Cross and Resurrection are the redemption not just of individuals, but of the entire world. In His death and resurrection, Christ's actions "reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross." (Colossians 1:20). The Church Fathers often speak of the Cross as the centre of the universe – heaven and earth – and the Resurrection as the day of the new creation. In Christ, the world is redeemed, and humanity is invited to participate in the rebirth of all things.





## Chapter 13

### The Spiritual Struggle: Surviving the Passions

For the Orthodox Christian, salvation is neither an act of law nor some abstract ideal, but a spiritual enactment, through which the spirit is cleansed, the heart brightened, and the Christian united to God. Central to this is the battle of the spirit, the war not against flesh and blood but against passions and the powers of sin that enslave the soul. As Saint Paul instructs believers to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12), he recognizes that the road to holiness is hard-fought, stern, and requires invoking the grace of God.

#### What are the passions?

The passions, in Orthodox theology, are unhealthy desires and attachments, born out of the human fall. It's not that human desires are necessarily bad, but unproductive passions distort them, and the soul is driven away from God and captive to sin. The Fathers tend to speak of the passions as a disease of the soul. “The passions are the misuse of what is in itself good. They arise when the soul seeks satisfaction in created things rather than in the Creator,” according to Saint Maximus the Confessor. Pride, anger, lust, envy, gluttony, greed, and sloth are examples of the passions. These are not actions on the surface but inner attitudes that darken the heart and hinder the soul's ascent to God.

#### The Cause of the Passions

These passions date back to the Fall, when humanity lost its communion with God. In this state of alienation, the soul became slave to the flesh, seeking meaning in created objects rather than in the Creator. According to Saint John Cassian, “The root of all the passions is the loss of divine love. When the heart turns away from God, it becomes captive to its own desires.”

#### Purification of the Soul

The primary objective of the Orthodox struggle is the purification of the soul. It is the rooting out of the passions and bringing the soul back into a proper spiritual communion, orientated to God and saturated in his grace. The purification of the soul involves not denying or curtailing human desires but turning them towards their proper end.

As Saint Gregory of Nyssa teaches, “The aim of the Christian life is to free the soul from the tyranny of the passions, that it may rise to the beauty of divine love.”

## Growth in Virtue

The spiritual battle is not only over sin, but virtue. Goodness is the fruit of the redeemed spirit in the form of love, humility, patience and self-control. As Saint Isaac the Syrian states: “Do not merely flee from evil but pursue what is good, for the soul is perfected not by what it avoids but by what it loves.” The ultimate aim of the spiritual struggle is communion with God, Theosis. It is not by the work of man but by the power of the Holy Spirit who converts the believer’s heart into a dwelling place for the divine.

## What Is Asceticism?

Asceticism derives from the Greek for askesis (meaning “exercise” or “training”) and describes the spiritual exercises Christians engage in to defeat the passions and develop virtue. In the way that an athlete prepares his body for competition, the believer prepares his soul for the glory of God. Saint Paul contrasts the Christian life with a sport, declaring that: “Every athlete exercises self-control in all things.” (1 Corinthians 9:25). Asceticism is not an end in itself but a means to tame the will and open the heart to the mercy of God.

## The Tools of Asceticism

- Fasting: Fasting is a bodily discipline which frees the soul from material possessions. When a believer is barred from food or pleasures, he becomes self-controlled and increases his trust in God.
- Christ also fasted in the wilderness to prepare the way for his disciples (Matthew 4:2).
- Fasting is not just a physical discipline but a spiritual one. According to Saint Basil the Great, “True fasting is not only abstinence from food but from evil thoughts, words, and deeds.”
- Prayer: Prayer fuels the spiritual warfare by connecting the soul to God and drawing Him into all life.
- The Jesus Prayer, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner” is an excellent prayer for resisting the passions and developing quietness (hesychia).
- Regular attendance at the Church’s liturgical prayers redoubles the prayerful resolve of the believer and connects them to the Body of Christ.
- Vigilance: Vigilance, or watchfulness (nepsis), means to keep your heart free from sinful thoughts and desires.
- “Watchfulness,” Saint Hesychios the Priest writes, “is a continual fixing and halting of thought at the entrance to the heart.”
- Giving: Giving and alms break the chains of greed and selfishness and shift the soul toward God and neighbor.

### Repentance as Transformation

Repentance (μετάνοια) is not just anguish over sin but a contrite heart and mind turning toward God. It's the source of the spiritual struggle, and the means by which the soul is constantly renewed. "A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." (Psalm 51:17) Saint John Chrysostom refers to repentance as "the medicine that restores the soul to health." In repentance, the Christian acknowledges sin, asks God for forgiveness, and vows to walk in newness of life.

### Confession: A Sacrament of Healing

The Mystery of Confession forms part of repentant life. Confession involves the sinner confessing his sin to God, who then acquits him through the priest who witnesses and intercedes for him. Confession can be a challenging and vulnerable experience, however it is an important step to acquire God's grace. "When we confess our sins with a contrite heart," Saint Symeon the New Theologian says, "God Himself receives us, forgives us, and restores us to His embrace."

### The Community of Faith

The spiritual struggle is not waged by itself but within the Church, the Body of Christ, with its prayers, sacraments and communion. Saints act as models and intercessors, illustrating that the road to holiness is possible, and giving hope to those in despair.

### Freedom in Christ

The spiritual struggle gives us freedom, not the appearance of freedom in doing whatever we please, but the actual freedom of living according to God's will. Saint Paul writes: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage." (Galatians 5:1). This liberty comes from conquering the desires and dwelling in the Spirit.

### The Joy of Holiness

Spiritual combat is not a burden, but an invitation. The more we purify our soul, the more it receives the joy and tranquility that comes with being in communion with God. Saint Seraphim of Sarov reflected this light and would frequently say to other people, "Christ is risen, my joy!" His life reflects the revolutionary force of spiritual struggle and the happiness that flows from a heart united to God.

Let us enter this struggle boldly and courageously, in the hope that Christ can heal our hearts and lead us into His everlasting Kingdom. For as Saint Paul put it, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).



## Chapter 14

### Observing the Liturgical Year

Time is God's gift to us, a way for human beings to experience His grace and live out their salvation. For Orthodox Christians, time is sanctified and marked by the cycle of the liturgical year. The liturgical year is a sacred calendar that centers Church and believer life around the salvific work of Christ, the feasts of the Theotokos and Saints, and the cycles of fasting and feasting that bring us nearer to God. Experiencing the fullness of the liturgical year is not just about keeping calendars and rituals: it's about edifying time, and bringing the mysteries of the faith to the real world.

#### The Origins of the Liturgical Year

The Orthodox liturgical year starts on 1 September, a Byzantine date linked to the agricultural seasons of the ancient world. This birth fits with the Church's conception of creation as a gift from God and the perpetual renewal of life in Christ.

The year revolves around the big feasts that mark the events of Christ's life, the Theotokos, and the Saints. These celebrations are not just historical recollections but realities in which the faithful revel, witnessing the grace and joy of the events they celebrate.

#### The Liturgical Calendar

The liturgical year revolves around three overlapping cycles:

- The Paschal Cycle: This is the center of the liturgical year, with Pascha (Easter) being the Feast of Feasts. It is a calendar that determines the dates of feasts, including the preparation of Great Lent and the half-year period after Pascha leading up to Pentecost.
- The Twelve Great Feasts: These include permanent and movable feasts reciting the events that constitute the life of Christ and the Theotokos.
- The Weekly and Daily Cycles: Each day and week has liturgical importance, with Sundays celebrating the Resurrection and days commemorating saints, angels or dates in the history of the church.
- Pascha, the feast of Christ's Resurrection, marks the highest point of the liturgical year. It is the celebration that sanctifies all the other celebrations and declares the triumph of life over death.

The Paschal festival begins with the midnight service of the Resurrection, where worshippers meet in the dark, holding candles to represent Christ's luminous presence. When the hymn rings out, "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death," the Church is cheerful and triumphant.

The forty days of Great Lent, leading up to Pascha, are a preparatory period of fasting, prayer and penance leading up to Holy Week, when the Church retraces the steps of Christ's Passion. The Twelve Great Feasts are essential celebrations that guide the believer through the mysteries of salvation. They are divided into "feasts of the Lord" and "feasts of the Theotokos."

### Feasts of the Lord:

- The Nativity of Christ (December 25): Celebrates the Incarnation of the Word as he was born and lived among us.
- Theophany (January 6): commemorates the baptism of Christ in the Jordan and the revelation of the Holy Trinity.
- The Transfiguration (August 6): Marks the appearance of Christ's holy glory to His followers at Mount Tabor.
- The Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday): Revels in Christ's triumphal entrance into Jerusalem on the eve of His Passion.
- Ascension (Four Days After Pascha): Celebrates Christ's ascension into heaven and the sending of the Holy Spirit.
- Pentecost (Fifty Days after Pascha): Celebrates the return of the Holy Spirit and the institution of the Church.

### Feasts of the Theotokos:

- Nativity of the Theotokos (8 September): This day celebrates the nativity of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God.
- Presentation of the Theotokos (November 21): Reflects Mary's childhood commitment to God.
- The Annunciation (25 March): Commemorates the Archangel Gabriel declaring to Mary that she was pregnant with the Son of God.
- The Dormition of the Theotokos (August 15): Marks the peaceful falling asleep in the lord of the Virgin Mary and her passage to heaven.

### Other Important Feasts

- The Exaltation of the Holy Cross (14 September): Commemorates the discovery of the Cross by Saint Helena and celebrates the victory of the Cross.
- The Feast of All Saints (Sunday after Pentecost): Celebrates all the saints, old and new, who were the product of the Holy Spirit's ministry in the Church.

### Fasting as Spiritual Preparation

Fasting forms part of the liturgical calendar, as a discipline of body and soul, humility and preparing for feasts. The Church lists the following times of fasting:

- Great Lent: The most rigorous fast of forty days leading up to Pascha.

- Nativity Fast (15 Nov–24 Dec): Awakens the faithful for the birth of Christ.
- The Apostles' Fast (Major Dates): A celebration of the apostles and their work.
- Dormition Fast (August 1–14): Prelude to the Dormition of the Theotokos.

These, in addition to Wednesdays and Fridays, are weekday fast days, remembering Christ's betrayal and death.

### How to Live the Liturgical Year in Everyday Life

The liturgical calendar extends from the church into the Christian household. Families can commemorate the feasts with prayers, iconography and feast dinners, establishing a “home church” that replicates the activities of the wider Church. Families can inform their children about the meaning of each feast by putting together hymns, readings and other practices that enhance and make the occasions memorable.

### Individual and Community Participation

Experiencing the liturgical year involves a participation in the practices and seasons of the Church. Attending the Divine Liturgy, observing fasts and experiencing the sacraments are the means through which the faithful join in the cleansing of time. Saint John Chrysostom instructs us to “let the rhythm of the Church guide your heart, for in her feasts and fasts, the mysteries of Christ are revealed.”

### Participating in the Mysteries

The feasts and fasts of the liturgical year are not just commemorations but engagements in the mysteries of redemption. “The liturgical year is the unfolding of Christ's life in the life of the Church, drawing us into the mystery of His love,” wrote Saint Maximus the Confessor. The liturgical year purifies the soul, cultivating patience, gratitude, humility and love. Fasting promotes self-control, joy, thanksgiving, and saintly commemoration inspires bravery and fidelity.





## Chapter 15

### Orthodox Family Life

Orthodox Christianity understands the family as a holy place, a “little church” where the Gospel is lived out each day. “The household is a little church,” Saint John Chrysostom teaches, “a place of spiritual growth and sanctification.” In this reflection, the family is not as a social construct but as being blessed for a God-given purpose, a community united in love, hope and purity.

For mothers and fathers of families, marriage is a sacrament that reflects Christ’s relationship with His Church (Ephesians 5:32). With the matrimonial sacrament and childrearing in faith, the family is the flesh and blood embodiment of God’s Kingdom.

#### The Theology of Marriage

One of the Holy Mysteries of the Orthodox Church is marriage, a sacrament that binds a man and woman together in Christ. This union is not a contract or an intimate agreement but a sacred covenant granted by God for the joint purification of couples and the establishment of a family. Paul likens the husband-wife relationship to the Church relationship with Christ: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.” (Ephesians 5:25). Such self-sacrificial love forms the basis of Christian marriage, requiring humility, patience and forgiveness on the part of both spouses.

#### The Wedding Service

Orthodox wedding ceremonies are symbolic and focus on the sacredness and permanence of marriage.

- The Crowning: Wreaths crown the couple in recognition of their unity, their mutual duty and sacrifice of self-sacrificial love.
- The Shared Cup: Both drink from the same cup, symbolizing that they lived together and that Christ is with them.
- The Dance of Isaiah: The couple are marched out joyfully around the Gospel, representing their walk together in life and faith and putting Christ at the center of their marriage.



These rituals remind the couple that their marriage is a participation in Church life, and a witness to God's love in the world.

### Building a Christ-Centered Home

The home is meant to be the family's church, where belief is cultivated and Christ is at the center. It all begins with prayer, the Christian life's most important quality. Orthodox families are urged to pray together every day, according to the prayers of the Church's liturgical tradition, including morning and evening prayers, the Lord's Prayer, and the Jesus Prayer. A space for prayer filled with icons that will make it easy to recognize God's presence and the family's devotion to Him. Saint John Chrysostom explains: "If we teach our children to pray and to place God first in their lives, we lay a strong foundation for their spiritual growth."

### Embracing the Liturgical Life at Home.

Family life should follow the cycle of the Church's year, its feasts, fasts and seasons. Parents can observe feast days with ritual prayers, meals and rituals, so that children grasp the importance of these occasions. Family spiritual well-being relies on participation in the Church's sacraments, in particular Eucharist and Confession. Regular participation in the Divine Liturgy enlivens the family's relationship with Christ and the larger Church community.

### The Role of Parents

Parents are the primary spiritual mentors of their children, responsible for building up their faith and shepherding them to Christ. This is not a matter of formal schooling, this education happens in the home. "but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord," writes the Apostle Paul (Ephesians 6:4). This involves:

- Teaching children the parables and lessons of the Bible.
- Encouraging them to recite prayers and hymns.
- Promoting Christian attitudes of love, patience, and humility.
- The Importance of Example

Children acquire for themselves what they learn from their parents actions more than they do from their words. A family that is generous, forgiving and respectful teaches children the Gospel better than any classroom. "What is most important is not what you say to your children but what you live before them," Saint Porphyrios of Kavsokalyvia taught. Parents who practice their faith genuinely guide their children to follow Christ with faithfulness and happiness.

### Raising Children in the Life of the Church.

Kids should be encouraged from an early age to become involved in Church life. This includes:

- Going to Services: Taking the children to the Divine Liturgy and other services, even when they are too young to understand.
- Partaking in Sacraments: Giving children the opportunity to experience Holy Communion daily, as well as training them for the Mystery of Confession at a

later age.

- Getting Active in Church: Encourage involvement with youth ministries, Sunday school, and parish activities.

### Godparents as Spiritual Guides

Godparents help develop children in their faith by offering guidance and role models. They guide children beyond the baptismal ceremony, providing support and direction into the child's spiritual life. Parents must keep children and their godparents closely connected by allowing frequent contact and shared involvement in the life of the Church.

### Support from Extended Family

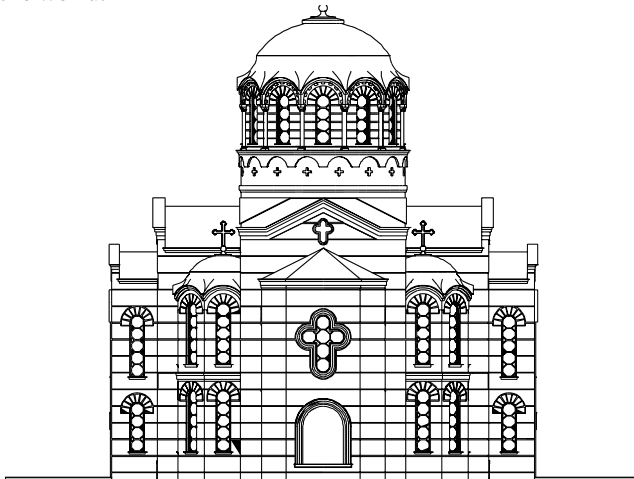
Aunts, uncles, and other family members can help parents raise their children in the religion. Their counsel, their experience and their prayers are helpful in the family's spiritual lives, and they are an important source of love and support.

### Family as the Light of Faith

In an increasingly broken and fractured world, an Orthodox Christian family can be an important witness to the love and grace of God. A family that practices its religion with integrity and enthusiasm is a sign of hope, leading others to Christ. Saint Seraphim of Sarov once said, "Acquire the Spirit of Peace, and a thousand souls around you will be saved." This also applies to families; a peaceful and Christ-centered home illuminates those who see it.

### Hospitality and Service

Orthodox families are instructed to love others beyond the home, to be welcoming and service-oriented. The inviting of the needy into the home, distributing food and supporting others are expressions of the love of Christ and of the mission of the Church in the world.





## Chapter 16

### Orthodoxy in the Age of Contemporary Living

Orthodox Christianity is both eternal and contemporary, grounded in the timeless truths of the Gospel. This is both an opportunity and a challenge for Orthodox Christians today. How can we follow Christ faithfully in a world that sometimes runs counter to the Gospel? How, when confronted with the realities of the modern world, can we witness the unfailing truth of the faith? Saint Paul's message to the Romans has just as much authority today as it did in the first century: "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2).

#### The Challenges of Secularism

Secularism, the drive to banish God and spirituality from public life, is one of the hallmarks of the contemporary world. This approach to the world puts materialism, individualism and relativism at the forefront, sometimes against Orthodox Christian values. Secularism urges Orthodox Christians to view the faith as a personal issue rather than a mode of living.

#### The Temptations of Modern Technology

Although technology has given us some amazing innovations, it also introduced new hurdles to for us to consider. The ubiquity of social media, entertainment and online temptations can sabotage spiritual development and foster shallowness, loneliness and addiction. Orthodox Christians are encouraged to use technology in a practical, spiritual and relational way that is not damaging to one's spirituality. It takes judgement, discipline and intentionality to define limits on screen time and media use.

#### The Opportunity for Witness

Even in these circumstances, the modern world offers opportunities for Orthodox Christians to proclaim the Gospel. Technology can help the Church speak to a new world giving people the ability hear the Church from every corner of the globe, and a greater desire for spirituality in a broken world provides fertile soil for the Gospel of Christ.

## Grounding in Prayer and Worship

The key to virtuous living in the contemporary world lies in an ongoing and consistent relationship with God through prayer and worship. Orthodox spiritual practices (daily prayer, Divine Liturgy, fasting, sacraments) nourish and guard against the traps and vices of contemporary culture. Saint Theophan the Recluse writes of inner silence: “Without prayer, there is no spiritual life. It is the breath of the soul.” Prayer every day and regular sacramental service allow Orthodox Christians to stay rooted in their religion, even in the hustle and bustle of contemporary life.

## Rooted in Holy Tradition

Holy Tradition is the lived experience of the Church, encompassing the Scriptures, the Fathers, the liturgy and the testimony of the Saints. In a culture where novelty and change are paramount, Tradition offers consistency, continuity and a lens through which to see truth. Orthodox Christians are encouraged to become fully immersed in Church life, by reading the Bible and the lives of the Saints, and by relying on the guidance of spiritual fathers and mothers. By staying grounded in Tradition, they can live in the modern world without losing touch with the holy realities of the faith.

## Finding the Balance Between Rejection and Acceptance.

Orthodox Christians are not encouraged to withdraw from the world but to alter it by their presence and witness. This involves a careful balance between rejecting the elements of culture that are antithetical to the faith and participating in those that are redeeming and sanctified. “Be in the world, not of the world,” says Saint John Chrysostom, essentially being socially engaged in a way that exemplifies the Kingdom of God.

## Cultural Discernment

To be a part of contemporary culture is to exercise judgment, to assess new concepts, practices and fashions according to Orthodox principles. Such discernment is shaped through prayer, study and engagement in the life of the Church.

- Art and Media: Orthodox Christians may see and make art, music, and literature that is beautiful, truthful, and wholesome, without offering up anything that encourages vice or hopelessness.
- Science and Technology: The Church recognizes that science and technology are a gift of God when applied properly and wisely. Orthodox Christians are asked to treat these domains in a manner that respects human life and the integrity of creation.

## Bearing Witness in the Workplace

The workplace is primary setting for practicing a life in Christ. Orthodox Christians must work with integrity, zeal and deference, as Christ’s loving servants. Saint Basil the Great urged Christians to treat their labour as serving God: “Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men” (Colossians 3:23). By living out the Christian tenets in their conduct to coworkers and customers, Orthodox Christians can show how transformative their faith is.

## Advocating for Justice and Compassion

Orthodox Christians have a responsibility to be voices of justice and mercy in a world filled with inequality and suffering. That means defending the dignity of every human being, protecting the poor and the oppressed, and preserving the sacredness of life. Social justice teachings in the Church are built on the example of Christ, who came to “preach the Gospel to the poor” and to “set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18). By living these ideals, Orthodox Christians can serve to heal and change society.

## Moral Relativism

Moral relativism, the idea that truth and morality are arbitrary and adjustable, is an enormous problem in contemporary society. Orthodox Christianity believes that truth is absolute and stems from Jesus Christ, who said “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Orthodox Christians should uphold and proclaim the moral message of the Church with clarity and tenderness, thereby standing as a counter-culture witness to the world.

## Spiritual Apathy

The speed and turbulence of the world can make us spiritually indifferent, despondent toward God and the work of the Spirit. This can be overcome with conscious efforts to put prayer, worship, and Scripture above all else. Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov cautions against complacency: “Spiritual indifference is the death of the soul.” Daily engagement with the life of the Church and a commitment to a spiritual father or mother can restore the spark of devotion.

## Support and Encouragement

The Church community provides essential tools for living righteously in the world. By sharing prayer, fellowship and encouragement, Orthodox Christians grow in faith. As Saint Paul teaches, “Therefore comfort each other and edify one another” (1 Thessalonians 5:11). Parish life provides the space for spiritual development, discipleship, and service. The Church is also the primary way to teach and help believers mature into the faith, helping them adapt to contemporary culture without losing touch with Orthodoxy. Sunday schools, Bible studies and adult learning programs help people grow in their faith and equip them to meet the challenges of the modern world.

## Hope for the Future

Orthodox Christianity reflects a gospel of hope in an increasingly dark and divided world. The Church proclaimed the inerrant love of God and the promise of His Kingdom, which transcended the sinfulness of the age. Orthodox Christians demonstrate, through living a spiritual life in the contemporary world, that this hope is possible, and that we can lead a life of holiness, serenity and joy in the midst of the tribulations of modern life.



## Chapter 17

### Death, Judgement, and Eternal Life

According to the Orthodox Christian religion, life is a journey to God, culminating in the mystery of death and the completion of creation in the Kingdom of Heaven. These “last things” – death, judgment, and life after death – are not metaphysical abstractions but realities that shape the Christian’s everyday existence and hope. Orthodox eschatology – the science of the last days – draws its central theology from the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the hope of the gospel, the triumph of God’s love over sin and death, and the joy of being forever in union with Him.

#### The Nature of Death

Death is the universal human condition we will all face, the separation of spirit and body. Orthodox doctrine asserts that death came as a result of sin (Romans 5:12). It’s a fact of life, but not the end of the world. For the Christian, death should be considered part of their spiritual path. Saint Paul labels death “the last enemy” (1 Corinthians 15:26), but Christ’s victory over death turns it into the key to heaven.

#### The Christian View of Death

Orthodox Christianity views death soberly and optimistically. It considers the reality and tragedy of death, but proclaims the Resurrection and the possibility of eternal life. “Let no one fear death,” writes Saint John Chrysostom, “for the death of the Savior has set us free. He has destroyed it by enduring it.” In Christ, death is no longer a depressing finality, but a path into a new and everlasting life.

#### The Funeral Service

The Orthodox funeral ceremony captures this dualistic vision. It grieves over the loss of a loved one and affirms the promise of the Resurrection. The songs and prayers assure the faithful that the dead are under the care of God, and death has been defeated by Christ.

#### Death and Judgment

The Orthodox faith teaches that the soul is given a specific verdict at the end of life. It is not the final judgment but an intimate experience with Christ, where the soul realizes its connection to God. Saint Macarius the Great explains it as a period in

which the soul has an early taste of happiness or grief, depending on its willingness to be open to the mercy of God during its mortal lifetime.

### The Intermediate State

The soul resides somewhere in between death and the last resurrection. The Church says that the souls of the saints live in an atmosphere of peace and relaxation, while the souls of the people who renounced God's love experience a state of alienation and remorse. This intermediate state is not static, but fluid, enhanced through the prayers of the Church and God's grace. The Church calls on the faithful to pray for the deceased, to celebrate liturgies and show charity in their name.

### The Return of Christ

Orthodox Christianity believes that Christ will return in glory to judge the living and the dead (Matthew 25:31–46). This Second Coming isn't a time of dread for believers but a fulfillment of God's command to re-establish everything in Christ. In the Creed, it says, "He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, whose Kingdom shall have no end." Such is the Church's eschatological vision, that of the victory of God's justice and grace.

### The Universal Judgment

On the day of judgment, all humanity will appear before Christ as Judge and Saviour. This judgement will reveal what is true of every individual's life, their choices and their relationship with God. "The judgment will reveal not only what we have done but who we have become," writes Saint Symeon the New Theologian, "whether we have lived in the light of Christ's love or turned away from it." There is personal and global judgment – not only of individuals, but of the whole creation which will be reborn and perfected in the Kingdom of God.

### The Promise of Resurrection

The Resurrection of the dead is one of the central principles of Orthodox Christianity, rooted in the Resurrection of Christ. "And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins," Saint Paul says (1 Corinthians 15:17). Christ's Resurrection is the first act of the universal resurrection, which promises that everything will be raised. Orthodoxy holds that the Resurrection is not only a spiritual event but a physical one. Christ "will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself." (Philippians 3:21)

### The Resurrected Body

The risen body will be both body and soul, an exalted composition suitable for life in the Kingdom of God. St Gregory of Nyssa refers to it as "a body freed from corruption, radiant with the light of the divine presence." This change is a manifestation of God's redemptive intervention, not just for the soul, but for the whole human body, mind and spirit.

### Eternal Life in the Kingdom of God

The end-point of God's plan is the construction of a new heaven and new earth, where God will reside with his people for all eternity (Revelation 21:1–4). All things



shall be remade in this new creation, and the righteous will receive oneness with God. Saint Irenaeus calls this “life in the fullness of God’s love, where humanity and creation are united in perfect harmony.”

### The Beatific Vision

Eternal life in the Kingdom is not just a continuation of the present but a part of the future. God’s glory will be exhibited to the elect directly, in the “beatific vision” as it is proclaimed in the Bible (1 Corinthians 13:12). This vision represents humanity’s highest achievement, the communion with God for which we were all made. As Saint Gregory Palamas puts it: “To see God is to share in His life, to be filled with His uncreated light, and to rejoice eternally in His love.”

### The Joy of the Saints

The Kingdom of God is also the kingdom of the Saints, the great cloud of witnesses who have completed their lives in faith and now sit in God’s presence. This communion will bring perfect love, happiness and tranquility for the people of God, who, with Christ and one another, will forever worship the Holy Trinity.





## Chapter 18

### Becoming a Catechumen: What to Expect

The catechumenate is one of the most intense and transformative phases of an individual's conversion into Orthodox Christianity. It is preparation, learning and spiritual development in which the discerning seeker acquires further knowledge of the faith and adopts a Christian life. Basing itself on the early Church, the catechumen experiences the fullness and joy of living in Christ.

To be a catechumen is to embark on a spiritual journey, a journey to baptism or chrismation and communion with the Orthodox Church. It is not only an education, but an evolution of the heart, mind and soul.

#### The Origins of the Catechumenate

The word “catechumen” is from the Greek “katecheo”, which literally means “teach by word of mouth”. In the early Church, the catechumenate was a time of compulsory teaching and training for those wishing to become Christians. It would often last for several years and conclude with baptism at the Paschal Vigil. The catechumenate was a preparation period for the candidate and the Church. Sponsors or godparents mentored the catechumens, the prayers of the faithful taught to them, and the Catechumens were slowly absorbed into the life of the Church.

#### The Catechumenate Today.

The catechumenate in the modern Orthodox Church is practiced in a similar way. It is an invitation and path to baptism (for the unbaptised) or chrismation (for the baptised who have been converted from another Christian tradition).

#### The First Steps

The road to becoming a catechumen usually starts with a curiosity about Orthodoxy. This initial stage may involve:

- Going to Church and witnessing the Church Liturgy.
- Calling a priest or spiritual father for help.
- Getting to know basic texts and resources about the Orthodox faith.

By asking questions and exploring the faith the potential catechumen may experience an increased desire to commit, eventually resulting in the decision to become a catechumenate.

### The Path of the Catechumenate

The transition from inquirer to catechumen is preceded by a liturgical act - the rite of the catechumenate. This ceremony is typically enacted at the close of the Divine Liturgy and comprises:

- Sin Renunciation: The catechumen turns against the devil and his works, thereby turning away from sin and darkness.
- Confession of Faith: The catechumen confesses their desire to be united to Christ and His Church.
- Blessing and Prayers: The priest asks for protection and enlightenment for the catechumen as they enter the formal process.

By entering the catechumenate the candidate enters into communion with the Church, where he or she receives its prayers and instruction as they are preparing for the sacraments.

### Learning the Faith

An important part of the catechumenate is learning the doctrine of the Orthodox Church. This includes:

- The Creed: How to interpret the basic teachings of the faith, such as those in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.
- Biblical reading: Comprehending the Bible, particularly the Gospels and understanding its interpretation in Orthodox traditions.
- Holy Tradition: An investigation of the writings of the Church Fathers, the sacraments, and the Church's liturgy.

Catechumens are usually taught through classes, conversations with a priest, or reading. What's at stake is not pure academic learning but actual knowledge of the religion that pervades the heart and the soul.

### Participating in Worship

Catechumens are encouraged to attend as many services as they can, experiencing the spirit of Orthodox worship. Though they do not yet receive Holy Communion, they participate in the prayers, hymns and services, absorbing the life of the Church first-hand. Saint John Chrysostom calls for this engagement: "The Church is the school of the soul. In her worship, the heart learns what words alone cannot teach."

### Developing a Life of Prayer

The catechumenate is also a period in which to build a personal prayer life. Catechumens are encouraged to:

- Pray, either with the prayers of the Church or on their own.
- Create a prayer corner in their home, and place icons within it.
- Learn the Jesus Prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, save me, a sinner.”

Prayer develops the catechumen’s relationship with God and is the source of humility, repentance and faith in His will.

### Embracing Repentance

Reconciliation lies at the heart of the catechumen’s transition. It’s a turn away from sin and a redirection of the heart toward God. This doesn’t just mean confession but a daily attempt to live the way Christ taught us. As Saint Isaac the Syrian says, “Repentance is the renewal of baptism, the cleansing of the soul from the passions, and the doorway to divine grace.”

### The Sponsor’s Responsibility

Sponsors, or godparents, are an important element in the catechumenate. They’re not just stewards of the catechumen’s experience, but participants in their spiritual training. Sponsors:

- Assist and encourage others to study the religion.
- Pray for the catechumen so they will prosper in their learning.
- Model Christian behavior.

The sponsor’s contact with the catechumen often goes on beyond baptism or chrismation, where they develop a commitment to Christ for the rest of their lives.

### Support from the Church Community

The catechumen isn’t alone in their journey. The entire Church family participates in their preparation, prayers, support and fellowship. The Church commemorates Catechumens in its liturgical prayers, recalling their importance to the Body of Christ. This family-like accompaniment reflects the Orthodox notion of salvation as a communal, love-based experience.

### Facing Obstacles

The catechumenate is an exciting period of spiritual development, but it can also present many difficulties, including:

- Struggles with doubt or confusion.
- Adapting to new rituals and disciplines.
- Getting rejected or misunderstood by friends or family.

Such struggles are spiritual exercises, instructing catechumens to lean on God’s mercy and the grace of the Church.

### Finding Encouragement

Catechumens are encouraged to continue their work, relying on God’s care and direction. The words of saints, Church prayers and the example of others bring

reassurance and courage. Saint Theophan the Confessor's counsel is this: "Do not be discouraged by struggles. They are the path to victory. Trust in God, and He will guide your steps."

### Baptism and Chrismation

The catechumenate is concluded with baptism and chrismation, the two sacraments in which the candidate enters into complete union with Christ and the Church.

- Baptism: The person who has come to faith is submerged three times in water as a way of dying to sin and rising again to life in Christ.
- Chrismation: The newly baptized is anointed with holy chrism and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Such sacraments are generally administered during the Paschal season as an expression of the victory of the Resurrection.

### First Communion

After baptism and chrismation, the baptised take their first Holy Communion, Partaking in the Body and Blood of Christ. It is their full initiation into the life of the Church and their continuing faith.

### Life After the Catechumenate

Baptism or chrismation marks not the conclusion of the journey but the opening to a relationship with Christ. The new Christian must continue to learn, to grow in their faith, to engage in the sacraments and to live out the Gospel every day.

### Becoming a Witness

This mystical shift during the catechumenate moves the newly baptised to open their faith to the world. As witnesses to the love and truth of Christ, they will serve as witnesses to the joy of life in his Church.





## Chapter 19

### Your New Life in Christ

To be baptised or chrismated into the Orthodox Church marks not the end of a path - but the start of a new life in Christ. It is a new life of continual renewal in which the believer grows in faith, with God, and is embraced into the life of the Church. Being an Orthodox Christian means bringing the faith into everything one does, placing Christ at the centre of all one's thoughts, behaviours and interactions.

#### The Importance of Daily Prayer

Prayer is the center of Orthodox Christian life, an expression of our communion with God, and a source of empowerment and direction. Saint John Chrysostom refers to prayer as “the light of the soul, illuminating the path to God.” Daily prayer helps set a lifestyle based focused on God. New Orthodox Christians are encouraged to devote specific times to prayer so the process becomes as automatic as breathing.

#### Creating a Prayer Rule

A prayer rule is a list of prayers and rituals designed to meet a person's spiritual needs and circumstances. A spiritual father or parish priest can assist in formulating a proper prayer rule. Common elements include:

- Morning and Evening Prayers: These include prayers of thanksgiving, penance, and intercession.
- The Jesus Prayer: Often recited with mindfulness, this little prayer “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have mercy on me, a sinner” promotes humility and awareness of God.
- Bible Reading: Reading the Bible, especially the Gospels, helps one feed the soul and understand the faith better.

#### Living the Sacramental Life of the Church.

The Holy Eucharist is the essence of Orthodox Christianity. The Eucharist also promotes spiritual development and enlarges the Christian's relationship with the Church.

## Preparation for Holy Communion includes:

- Prayer and fasting.
- Regular confession of sins.
- Humility and respect.
- Confession: A Sacrament of Healing

Confession, which can be used as a form of repentance and spiritual cleansing, is an essential part of Orthodox life. In this sacrament, the faithful confess, are forgiven and given counsel about how to avoid sin. Confessing on a regular basis can bring self-awareness, humility and an increased trust in God's grace. As Saint John Climacus writes, "Confession is the door to forgiveness and the beginning of reconciliation with God."

Being a member of a parish community is an essential component of the Orthodox Christian life. The parish is not only a place of worship, but a family of faith, where individuals support and care for each other. The ways you can participate in the parish are:

- Church Services: Regular attendance at Divine Liturgy and other worship services builds a sense of belonging and solidarity.
- Volunteering: Participating in parish activities (chorus, janitorial, or charity) builds community connections and supports Christ's mission.
- Connections: New friendships with fellow parishioners bring spiritual support and responsibility.
- Fasting: The Road to Purity and Discipline.

Fasting forms part of Orthodox life and teaches discipline, focusing the mind's gaze toward God. The Church observes fasting periods, such as Great Lent, and also weekday fasts on Wednesdays and Fridays. Fasting is not only about cutting off certain foods, but about humility, repentance and love. "True fasting is not just abstaining from food but from sin," Saint Basil the Great tells us.

## Reading the Lives of the Saints.

The saints are Holy figures, and they demonstrate the faith and strength required to pursue Christ. Reading their lives teaches and motivates Orthodox Christians to work towards spiritual maturity. As Saint John of Kronstadt wrote: "The saints are our companions and guides on the path to the Kingdom of God." Reading about their lives broadens the scope of one's understanding of the religion, and provides examples of practical Christian behaviour.

## Seeking Spiritual Guidance

A spiritual father or confessor can offer you invaluable assistance when dealing with spiritual considerations. Having regular discussions with a priest or mentor who can be trusted can answer doubts, solve issues, and support continued growth in the faith.



## Overcoming Doubts and Struggles

The road to true faith is not without its challenges. New Orthodox Christians may feel unsure, doubtful or inadequate. These are experiences of transformation, demonstrating dependence on God and the strength of prayer. Saint Isaac the Syrian exhorts, “Do not despair when trials come, for they are the way to the Kingdom.” The prayer, the Bible, and the encouragement of the Church help us to weather these temptations.

## Balancing Faith and Daily Life

Making faith a part of our lives is a process that demands planning and discipline. Work, family, and social obligations can be taxing at times, but being an Orthodox Christian means immersing Christ into everything.

## Living as a Witness

Orthodox Christians have the mission of standing as witnesses to Christ in the world. This act of being a witness begins with our conduct and with our love, care, and honesty.

## Inviting Others to the Church

Promoting the faith also involves inviting others into Orthodoxy. This could include inviting friends to a service, lending books or materials, or simply answering questions about the religion. Evangelism is not a campaign, it's sharing Christ's peace and truth in humility and love.



## Bibliography

### Scriptural References

Genesis 1:26 — “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.’”

2 Peter 1:4 — “...that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature.”

Galatians 2:20 — “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.”

Matthew 16:18 — “...on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

John 10:30 — “I and My Father are one.”

Matthew 28:19 — “...baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

John 14:6 — “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”

Matthew 13:45 — “...like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls.”

1 Corinthians 12:27 — “You are the body of Christ, and members individually.”

Ephesians 5:25 — “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for her.”

1 Thessalonians 5:17 — “Pray without ceasing.”

### Writings of the Church Fathers

Saint Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation*.

“God became man so that man might become god.”

“The Word was made flesh to restore what was lost and renew the image of God within us.”

Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*.

“The unity of the Trinity does not contradict the distinctions among each person.”

“The divine image in man...is realized through a life of virtue and communion with God.”

Saint Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*.

“The Holy Spirit is the bond of unity, the source of sanctification, and the giver of life.”

“True fasting is not only abstinence from food but from evil thoughts, words, and deeds.”

Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*.

“Prayer is the light of the soul, illuminating the path to God.”

“Just as the body is joined to the head and cannot live apart from it, so we live only in union with Christ.”

Saint Gregory Nazianzus, *Orations*.

“When I contemplate unity, I am illumined by the Trinity. When I contemplate the Trinity, I am illumined by the unity.”

“Through the Spirit we come to the Son, and through the Son to the Father.”

### Liturgical and Other Texts

Paschal Troparion: “Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life.”

The Nicene Creed: “I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth...and in one Lord Jesus Christ...of one essence with the Father.”





