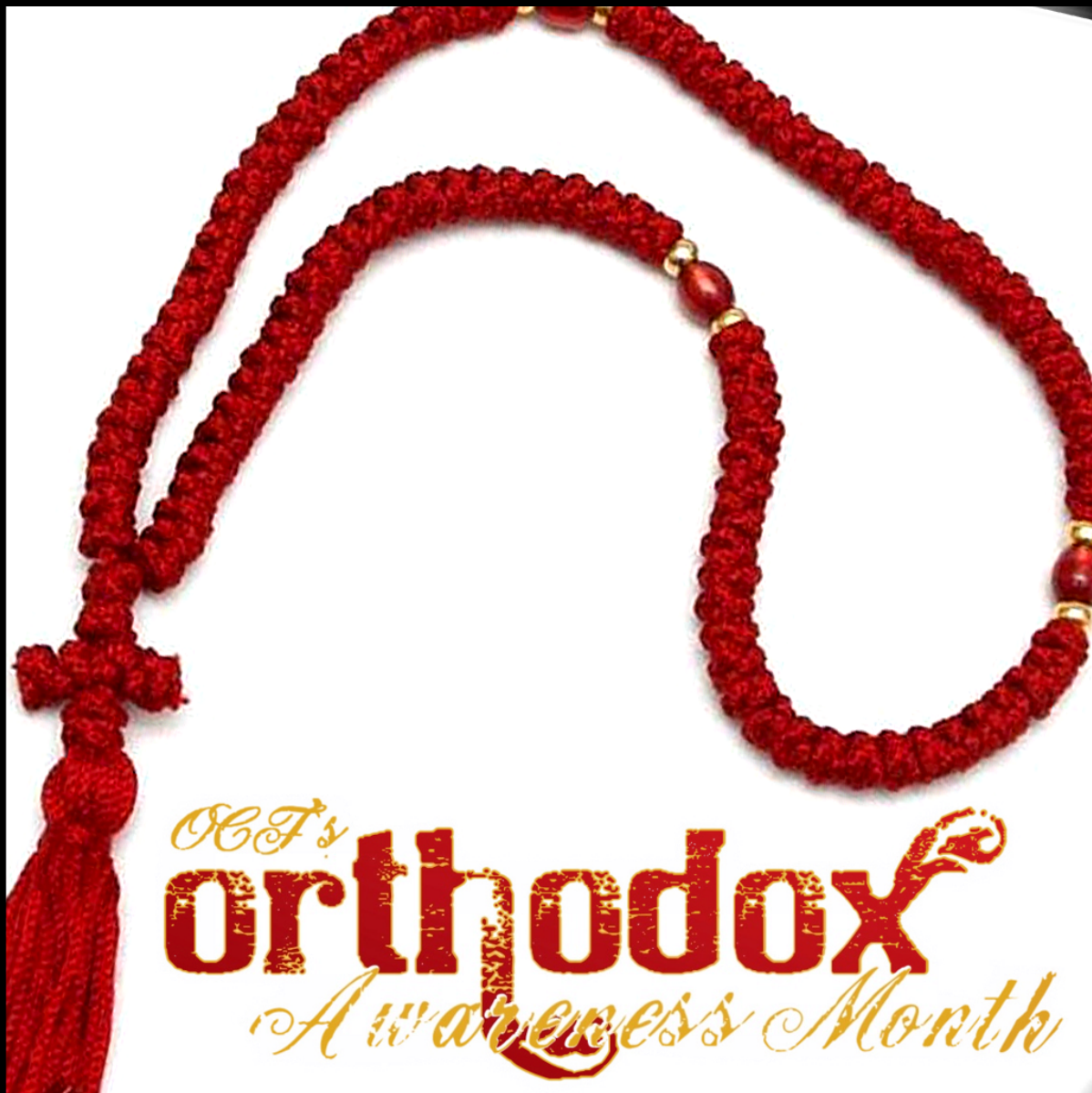


Presenting Orthodoxy

A Time to Grow, A Time to Teach



Helpful Resources

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ORTHO-FACTS

- There are some 250 million Orthodox Christians in the world.
- Most Christians in Greece, Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia, Russia, and the Ukraine are Orthodox.
- Three million Americans are Orthodox Christians.
- The heaviest concentrations of Orthodox in America are in Alaska, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, and Ohio.
- Organized Orthodox Church life first came to America in 1794 with missionaries from old Russia who came to Alaska.
- Centuries of vigorous Orthodox missionary activity across 12 time zones in northern Europe and Asia was halted by the Communists after the Soviet Revolution in 1917.
- Orthodox missions are active in Central Africa, Japan, Korea, and many other parts of the world.
- The 4 original Patriarchates still exist to this day – Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople, and Jerusalem.
- Orthodox Priests are called Father and can be married before being ordained.



Frequently Asked Questions

The following questions and answers can be found at (<http://www.stpaulsirvine.org/html/FAQs.html>)

ARE YOU JEWISH?

No. We're most definitely Christians.

OH, THEN, YOU'RE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIANS?

No. We're neither Protestant nor Roman Catholic.

OH, YOU MEAN LIKE "EASTERN ORTHODOX"?

Yes, except that we as Americans are very much in and of "the West." Ironically it is from the West that "The Eastern Orthodox Church" came to these shores some two hundred years ago through Alaska and California. Since that time Orthodox Christianity has been flourishing in the Americas.

IS THAT LIKE "GREEK ORTHODOX" AND "RUSSIAN ORTHODOX"?

Yes, but...The Orthodox Church is One Church. Currently, however, Church organization in North America is comprised of different "jurisdictions," or governing bodies of varying national origin within the One Church.

The doctrine and worship of each jurisdiction and parish is the same, though in some, languages other than English continue to be used in the services.

I THOUGHT THERE ARE JUST TWO KINDS OF CHRISTIANS, PROTESTANT AND CATHOLIC. HOW CAN YOU CLAIM YOU ARE NEITHER?

From the Orthodox point of view, Roman Catholicism is a medieval modification of the original Orthodoxy of the Church in Western Europe, and Protestantism is a later attempt to return to the original Faith. To our way of thinking, the Reformation did not go far enough.

We respectfully differ with Roman Catholicism on the questions of papal authority, the nature of the church, and a number of other consequent issues. Historically, the Orthodox Church is both "pre-Protestant" and "pre-Roman Catholic" in the sense that many modern Roman Catholic teachings were developed much later in Christian history.

The word catholic is a Greek word meaning "having to do with wholeness." We do consider ourselves "Catholic" in that sense of the word, that is, as proclaiming and practicing "the Whole Faith." In fact, the full title of our Church is "The Orthodox Catholic Church."

We find that Protestants readily relate to Orthodoxy's emphasis on personal faith and the Scriptures. Roman Catholics easily identify with Orthodoxy's rich liturgical worship and sacramental life. Roman Catholic visitors often comment, "In lots of ways your Liturgy reminds me of our old High Mass."

Many of the "polarities" between Protestants and the Roman Communion (i.e., "Word versus Sacrament" or "Faith versus Works") have never arisen in the Orthodox Church. We believe Orthodox theology offers the "western" denominations a way in which apparently opposite differences can be reconciled.

WHY DO YOU CALL YOURSELVES "ORTHODOX"?

The word orthodox was coined by the ancient Christian Fathers of the Church, the name traditionally given to the Christian writers in the first centuries of Christian history. Orthodox is a combination of two Greek words, orthos and doxa.

Orthos means "straight" or "correct." (It is also found in the word "orthopedics," which in the original Greek means "the correct education of children.") Doxa means at one and the same time "glory," "worship" and "doctrine." So the word orthodox signifies both "proper worship" and "correct doctrine."

The Orthodox Church today is identical to the undivided Church in ancient times. The Protestant Reformer Martin Luther once remarked that he believed the pure Faith of primitive Christianity is to be found in the Orthodox Church.

THEN YOU MUST BE A VERY CONSERVATIVE CHURCH.

In current American usage, the words "conservative" and "liberal" indicate a variety of often-conflicting viewpoints. Usually we don't really fit either category very well.

On seven major occasions during the first millennium of Christianity the leaders of the worldwide Church, from Britain to Ethiopia, from Spain and Italy to Arabia, met to settle crucial issues of Faith. The Orthodox Church is highly "conservative" in the sense that we have not added to or subtracted from any of the teachings of those seven Ecumenical Councils. But that very "conservatism" often makes us "liberal" in certain questions of civil liberties, social justice and peace. We are very conservative, or rather traditional, in our liturgical worship.

WHICH DO YOU BELIEVE IN, THE BIBLE OR TRADITION?

A good short answer to this question is "Yes!" The question implies precisely a kind of polarity (i.e., "Bible versus Tradition") which is not found in the Orthodox Christian worldview.

"Tradition" or in Greek *paradosis*, is used very often in the New Testament both as a verb and a noun. (See I Corinthians 11:23, where literally translating the original Greek, Paul says "for I received of the Lord that which I also have traditioned to you . . ." See also I Corinthians 11:2, and II Thessalonians 2:15 and 3:6.)

Tradition means "that which is handed over." The New Testament carefully distinguishes between "traditions of men" and The Tradition, which is the Faith handed over to us by Christ in the Holy Spirit. That same Faith was believed and practiced several decades before the New Testament Scriptures were set down in writing and given canonical (i.e., official) status. We experience the Tradition as timeless and ever timely, ancient and ever new.

We distinguish between The Tradition ("with a capital T") which is the Faith/Practice of the Undivided Church, and traditions ("with a little t") which are local or national customs. Due to changing circumstances, sometimes cherished traditions must be altered or respectfully laid aside for the sake of The Tradition.

The New Testament Scriptures are the primary written witness to the Tradition. Orthodox Christians therefore believe the Bible, as the inspired written Word of God, is the heart of the Tradition. In the New Testament, all basic Orthodox doctrine and sacramental practice is either specifically set forth, or alluded to as already a practice of the Church in the first century A.D.

The Tradition is witnessed to also by the decisions of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, the Nicene Creed, the writings of the Fathers of the Church, by the liturgical worship and iconography of the Church, and in the lives of the Saints.

DO YOU MEAN YOU ORTHODOX BELIEVE YOUR ELABORATE WORSHIP IS BASED ON THE BIBLE? I'D LIKE TO KNOW WHERE.

The Christian Church learned to worship in the Jewish Temple and in the Synagogues. Again and again the New Testament tells us that Jesus, Paul and the others worshipped regularly in Jewish houses of worship. (See for instance Luke 4:16; Acts 3:1; Acts 17:1-2.) We know from archaeology, and from modern Jewish practice, that Synagogue worship was and is highly liturgical, i.e., communal, organized, ceremonial, and done decently and in order (I Corinthians 14:40).

The French Protestant biblical scholar Oscar Cullman demonstrates very convincingly in his little book *Early Christian Worship* that when John describes heavenly worship in the book of Revelation, he is following the Hebrew custom of portraying Heaven's worship in terms of earthly liturgy. The writers of the Bible thought of earthly worship as a "shadow" or "type" of Heaven's liturgy. (See Isaiah 6, Hebrews 8:4-6.) In other words, a biblical passage such as the fourth and fifth chapters of the Book of Revelation gives us an accurate picture of a very early Christian worship service. That service very much resembles modern Orthodox worship.

Orthodox worship is also very Scriptural in the sense that it is a kaleidoscopic mosaic of Scriptural quotations, paraphrases, references, and allusions. It is, quite literally, "to pray the Bible!"

Apart from the fact that we worship in English, and use modern harmonies with our ancient melodies, our services are basically identical to those of the early Christian Church. For that reason our worship sometimes seems a bit "strange" to Protestant and Roman Catholic visitors. We often hear, "Your services are just beautiful, and the music is outstanding, but they feel somewhat different."

IT SOUNDS AS IF YOU ARE RIGIDLY BOUND BY YOUR TRADITION. YOU MEAN IT CAN'T CHANGE?

The Tradition as a set of basic principles outlining our worldview is a constant. Its very consistent, however, sometimes will even demand change. As a simple instance of this, by Tradition our worship is to be celebrated in a language understood by the worshipping congregation. This means the Tradition not infrequently requires a change in liturgical language. As another instance, the Tradition also requires constant change in ourselves as, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we grow spiritually and respond ever more fully to the call of God in Jesus Christ.

DO YOU HAVE THE VIRGIN MARY, SAINTS, PRAY FOR THE DEAD, AND HAVE CONFESSION "LIKE THE CATHOLICS?"

There are points of contact between Orthodox and Roman Catholic belief on these issues, and modern Roman Catholic practice. There are also significant differences. To discuss them in depth is beyond the scope of this short summary. The following is a brief statement of the Orthodox point of view.

We honor the Virgin Mary as "higher than the Cherubim and more glorious than the Seraphim" because she is the woman who gave birth to Jesus, Who is the Word of God, Who is God, (in Greek, Theotokos). We call her blessed and think of her as the greatest of missionaries, for her unique mission was to deliver the Word of God to the world. (See Luke 1:43, 48; John 1:1, 14; Galatians 4:4.)

We likewise honor the other great men and women in the life and history of the Church - patriarchs, prophets, apostles, preachers, evangelists, martyrs, confessors and ascetics - who committed their lives so completely to the Lord, as models of what it means to be fully and deeply Christian. These men and women are called "saints"; a word deriving from the ancient Latin word meaning "holy." For example, we believe that men like the apostle Paul - in their devotion to Christ - led holy lives and that we are indeed to be imitators of him, as he was of Christ.

We also believe that in the risen Christ, prayer transcends the barrier between life and death and that those who have gone before us pray for us, as we remember them in our prayers. In Christ, we are one family. (See Hebrews 12:1; II Timothy 1:16-18.)

As indicated in John 20:21-23, and James 5:14-16, we practice sacramental confession and absolution of sins. The presbyter (priest) is the sacramental agent of Christ. The priest sacramentally conveys Christ's forgiveness, not his own.

DOES YOUR CHURCH PRACTICE "OPEN COMMUNION?"

In the strictest sense the Communion of the Orthodox Church is open to all repentant believers. That means we are glad to receive new members in the Orthodox Church. The Orthodox concept of "Communion" is totally holistic, and radically different from that of most other Christian groups. We do not separate the idea of "Holy Communion" from "Being in Communion," "Full Communion," "Inter-Communion" and total "Communion in the Faith."

In the Orthodox Church therefore, to receive Holy Communion, or any other Sacrament (Mystery), is taken to be a declaration of total commitment to the Orthodox Faith. While we warmly welcome visitors to our services, it is understood that only those communicant members of the Orthodox Church who are prepared by Confession and fasting will approach the Holy Mysteries.

WHY DO YOU HAVE ALL THOSE PICTURES IN YOUR CHURCH?

Icons are not pictures in the sense of naturalistic representations. They are rather stylized and symbolic expressions of divinized humanity. (See II Peter 1:4; I John 3:2.) Icons for the Orthodox are sacramental signs of God's Cloud of Witnesses (Hebrews 12:1). We do not worship icons. Rather, we experience icons as Windows into Heaven. Like the Bible, icons are earthly points of contact with transcendent Reality. In the original Greek of the New Testament Christ is called several times the icon (image) of God the

Father. (See II Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3.) Man himself was originally created to be the icon of God (Genesis 1:27).

DO ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS PRAY TO ICONS?

Christians pray in the presence of Icons (just as Israelites prayed in the presence of Icons in the Temple), but we do not pray to the image.

ISN'T ALL YOUR OLD-FASHIONED DOCTRINE AND WORSHIP A BIT IRRELEVANT TO MODERN AMERICAN LIFE?

We believe that God quite literally does exist. He is not a figment of pious fiction or wishful thinking. God and His will is therefore our "top priority." We believe that the Word of God quite literally became Incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth. We believe the Lord Jesus literally rose from the dead in a real though transfigured and glorified physical body. We believe that life apart from God is hollow and meaningless.

We notice that people today talk often of "meaningfulness," "the meaning of life," "meaningful relationships," "the common good," "the good of humanity," "hope for the future of mankind" and so on. Also, various cults continue to attract many followers in all parts of our land. This indicates to us that people today are hungry for the answers we believe God has revealed through His Word, Who is Jesus Christ.

We believe ultimate human values are revealed to us by God, and serve as constant guides in the use of our steadily expanding scientific knowledge. We seek to evaluate technological advances in the light of those basic values.

It is our experience that our venerable Liturgy and the ancient Christian doctrines about God and the meaning of human life are just as relevant today as yesterday. These define our basic values. We know the whole ancient Christian Faith as that which makes more sense than anything else in this world of constant change, confusion, and conflict.

God is the Source of all Meaning; we believe that "mankind's noble ideals" such as truth, beauty, freedom and love, are not "merely ideals," but real characteristics of a real Lord.

In and through Christ Jesus, God reveals Himself in human terms and in human terminology as One who is at the same time Trinity of Persons. The word "person" as used in classical Christian theology is not the singular form of "people"; God is not "Three people." Person here means something similar to "I," or "Subject," as in the subject of a sentence. The One God is revealed as having three personal "Centers of Being." God is therefore neither alone nor lonely, for the One Lord is also perfect Communion of Persons. God as Trinity is the model and source of human inter-personal communion and fellowship.

Man was created capable of communion (mystical union) with God. Human matrimony is a favorite biblical image of this communion-relationship. Our capacity for divine communion was soon damaged by human error, stubbornness, and evil (i.e., sin). Because of God's infinite love, our potential for communion with God has been restored, renewed, and transfigured by Christ Jesus. Christ

communicates His very life to us through His Word and Sacraments. In Christ and the Holy Spirit we can and do experience varying degrees of a mystical union with God now in this life, and on a regular basis.

We believe that the purpose of human life is for us to become partakers of the divine nature through the grace of the Holy Spirit, in prayer, sacrament, study of the Word, fasting, self-discipline, and active love for others. All other human projects and purposes, however noble, and important, remain secondary to that, which gives ultimate meaning to human existence.

MORE RESOURCES

For more information to possible questions visit the following sites:

<http://oca.org/questions>

<http://goarch.org/ourfaith/introduction>

<http://oca.org/OCorthfaith.asp?SID=2>

<http://www.antiochian.org/discover>