

**Father David Cownie  
and  
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**A GUIDE TO  
ORTHODOX LIFE**

**Some Beliefs, Customs, and  
Traditions of the Church**

Second Edition



**CENTER FOR TRADITIONALIST  
ORTHODOX STUDIES**

Etna, California

1996

The publication of this book was made possible by the generosity of Mr. Alexander Kolimantzeros Colman and Dr. Dionysios Adamis, to whom the Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies and the authors are particularly indebted.

library of congress catalog card number  
92-73469

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isbn 0-911165-22-3

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## Acknowledgements

We would like to express our gratitude to His Eminence, the Most Reverend Cyprian, President of the Synod of Bishops of the True (Old Calendar) Orthodox Church of Greece and a man of true Christian principle and conscience, who helped to call us from darkness into the light of True Orthodoxy and who blessed us to write this book. We would also like sincerely to thank His Grace, the Right Reverend Chrysostomos, Titular Bishop of Christianoupolis and assistant to Metropolitan Cyprian, and the Fathers of the Holy Monastery of Saints Cyprian and Justina in Fili, Greece, who gave us, during our various visits to their sacred haven, instruction in our Faith and evidence that Angels do indeed dwell in the flesh. Finally, we are, as always, indebted to His Eminence, the Most Reverend Dr. Chrysostomos, Exarch of our Church in America, His Grace, the Right Reverend Dr. Auxentios, Titular Bishop of Photiki and assistant to His Eminence, and our confessor, Archimandrite Dr. Akakios, Abbot of the Saint Gregory Palamas Monastery, for their spiritual support and guidance. They are for us mirrors here in America of the same Orthodoxy which we found in Fili.

## Table of Contents

Introduction . . . . .	I
Orthodox Daily Life . . . . .	3
<i>The Sign of the Cross</i>	
<i>Icons</i>	
<i>Prayer</i>	
<i>Fasting</i>	
<i>Money</i>	
<i>Creating an Orthodox Atmosphere in the Home</i>	
Orthodox Church Life . . . . .	54
<i>Church Etiquette</i>	
<i>The Mystery of Confession</i>	
<i>Holy Communion</i>	
<i>Clergy Etiquette</i>	
<i>Monastery and Convent Etiquette</i>	
The Orthodox Cycle of Life . . . . .	101
<i>Orthodox Baptism</i>	
<i>Marriage and Family Life</i>	
<i>An Orthodox Approach to Death</i>	



## INTRODUCTION

The Orthodox Church, especially now with the freedom of Eastern Europe, is gaining ever greater attention in the Christian West. The Western world is suddenly discovering that the second largest Christian Church, numbering 350 million or more souls, lays claim to antiquity—indeed to a history that reaches back to the time of the Apostles—and to a rich spiritual tradition that reaches far beyond the limits of Western theological thought. As they rediscover the Church of the Tsars and of the nineteenth-century Eastern monarchies, the Christians of the Occident are also discovering a Christianity older than the Church of Rome, a Church which discussed and resolved many of the issues of the Reformation long before Western Christianity was separated from its Eastern roots. They are finding that the old political and theological prejudices that served to relegate that separation to the short memory of history are falling away. With the light of new knowledge from the East, we in the West are coming to understand that it was Rome that broke away from the ancient Patriarchates of the East in 1054, not the Eastern Orthodox Church which cut itself off from the Latin Church. We are coming to see the truncated vision of Christianity which has marked our intellectual history for more than five centuries. And as this happens, more and more Western Christians are embracing the Orthodox Church as the criterion of Christianity, as the source and mother of their own beliefs.

Conversion to the Orthodox Church is not easy. In the West, especially, immigrants brought with them from their homelands an Orthodoxy which very quickly accommodated to the Christianity of the West, losing much of its essence and, under the influence of the ecumenical movement, coming to think of itself, not as the historical Church, the very Church of Christ, but as one of many other ecclesiastical bodies. As a result, Orthodoxy in the West is often an artificial version of traditional Orthodox Christianity, covering its inauthenticity with an ec-

## 2 *Introduction*

clesiology derived from Western notions of the Church and rooted in its ideas of “officialdom” and “relevancy.” This even has led at times to a spirit of antagonism towards True Orthodoxy—that Orthodoxy of resistance to the worldly spirit and to political “officialdom” that has always produced pillars of Christian virtue—that impedes a deeper understanding of our Faith. In such an atmosphere, we feel it necessary, as converts ourselves, to offer to those coming to the Orthodox Faith a vision of the practical Orthodox life as it is lived, not in the artificial Orthodoxy of the West, but by the pious traditionalist Orthodox of Greece, the Levant, and Eastern Europe. In this way, we hope to help new converts drink from the sweet waters of a genuine Orthodoxy, that we might establish in the West, too, wells of that life-giving, refreshing drink.

To this end, we have tried in the various sections of this short book to summarize some of the traditional beliefs and customs of the Orthodox Church as they relate to the daily life of the believer and to the Church’s worship. We have brought these elements into focus in our discussion of the whole cycle of Christian life, from Baptism to marriage to the culmination of human life, death. We hope that our few, necessarily limited commentaries will help Orthodox converts and non-Orthodox Westerners to gain a more genuine glimpse into that ancient way that leads to human transformation and union with Christ: Orthodoxy.

*The Authors*

## CHAPTER 1

### Orthodox Daily Life

#### *A. The Sign of the Cross*

The sign of the Cross has been the most powerful weapon against great temptations from demons, from the early ascetics down to the present day.<sup>1</sup>

The Sign of the Cross is a fundamental element of Orthodox life. It should be second nature to anyone who claims to be an Orthodox Christian. The Sign of the Cross is used in virtually every situation in life. Before we eat, before we sleep, or when we awaken in the morning, we should automatically make the Sign of the Cross. The great spiritual advantage of making a habit of this is that, when we are confronted with a dangerous or compromising situation, we will make the Sign of the Cross without hesitation. This might save our life or even our soul, depending on the circumstance. Saint Barsanuphios the Great has written:

[T]he Lord Jesus Christ, an angel or another person can be portrayed by demons, not only in sleep but when a person is awake—for satan can transform himself into an angel of light. But the Cross of the Lord, upon whose power, as the Church chants, the devil does not even dare to gaze—for he trembles and is convulsed being unable to behold its power—this he cannot represent.<sup>2</sup>

Because the Sign of the Cross has such a powerful effect on demonic powers, people often experience a sense of self-consciousness when attempting to make it. Our weak flesh also rebels against outward manifestations of faith. But this can be

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<sup>1</sup> [St.] Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic, *The Prologue from Ochrid: Lives of the Saints and Homilies for Every Day in the Year*, trans. Mother Maria (Birmingham, England: Lazarica Press, 1986), Vol. 3, pp. 230–231.

<sup>2</sup> Father Clement Sederholm, *Elder Leonid of Optina* (Platina, ca: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1990), p. 195.

#### 4 Daily Life

overcome quite easily, if we only strive to train ourselves and come to understand the tremendous power of the Cross, in which, Saint Paul tells us, we should glory.<sup>3</sup>

To make the Sign of the Cross, we place the thumb and the first and second fingers of our right hand together, representing the Three Persons or *Hypostases* of the Holy Trinity. Next, we fold the fourth and fifth fingers against our palm, representing the two Natures of Christ, Who came down from Heaven to the earth, in order to save mankind. Holding our right hand in this way, we touch the tips of the three fingers to our forehead, our abdomen, the right shoulder, and the left shoulder. We then put our hand down to the side of our body.

Properly executed—and one should be careful to make it slowly and with care—the Sign of the Cross has tremendous spiritual power. This is because we are not only affirming our faith in Christ’s Sacrifice on the Cross at Golgotha, but confirming our belief in the Holy Trinity and the Human and Divine Natures of Christ, that is, the basic dogmas of the Orthodox Faith.

The Sign of the Cross was such an integral part of Christian life in the Early Church, that few direct references can be found in the literature of the Early Church. It was an oral, living tradition which every Christian took for granted, much like Holy Baptism. Thus Saint Basil the Great says the following of this custom in his treatise “On The Holy Spirit”:

For were we to attempt to reject such customs as have no written authority, on the ground that the importance that they possess is small, we should unintentionally injure the Gospel at its very vitals; or, rather, should make our public definition a mere phrase and nothing more. For instance, to take the first and most general example, who is there who has taught us in writing to sign with the cross those who have trusted in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ?<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Galatians 6:14.

<sup>4</sup> St. Basil the Great, “On the Spirit,” in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd ser., ed. Philip Schaff and

Here, Saint Basil refers to the Sign of the Cross as “the first and most general example” of an oral tradition. There are many references in the Lives of the Saints from Apostolic times down to the present day which testify to the power and security an Orthodox Christian can experience through the pious act of making the Sign of the Cross over himself. Saints and Martyrs of all ages have been delivered from fire, wild beasts, demonic attack, carnal temptations, and poison by fidelity to this ancient tradition:

The mysterious power of the Cross, however inexplicable, is true and indisputable. ...‘If ...[Saint John Chrysostomos] says, ‘we are striving to drive out demons, we use the Cross, and it is also of aid in healing sickness.’ St Benedict made the sign of the Cross over a glass containing poison and the glass shattered as if struck by a stone. St Julian made the sign of the Cross over a cup of poison brought to him, and drank the poison, suffering no bodily harm from it. The holy martyr Vasilissa of Nicomedia protected herself with the sign of the Cross and stood in the midst of the flames, remaining completely untouched. The holy martyrs Audon and Senis crossed themselves when ravening wild animals were let loose upon them, and the beasts became docile and meek as lambs. The sign of the Cross has been the most powerful weapon against great temptations from demons, from the early ascetics down to the present day. The most ferocious of the devil’s devisings are dispersed into nothing, like smoke, when a man signs himself with the Cross. Thus it was the good will of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself that the erstwhile sign of wickedness and shame, the Cross, should, after His crucifixion on the wood of the Cross, be the vehicle of all-conquering power and might.<sup>5</sup>

The Sign of the Cross should, as we have said, become an automatic response to every act we perform and every trial we experience. This is especially true when unclean or carnal thoughts suddenly come into our minds. Such thoughts are perhaps not sinful in and of themselves, but they can lead us to sin.

Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, mi: Wm. B. Erdmans, 1978), p. 41.

<sup>5</sup> *The Prologue*, Vol. 3, pp. 230–231.

Therefore, it is essential that we immediately dispel them by making the Sign of the Cross in faith. We should also hasten to add that a pious retreat to the power of the Cross assumes that one is making a sincere effort to lead a Christian life or that he is in the midst of sincere repentance. The Sign of the Cross is not a talisman against those things that we do not want to put up with. It contains spiritual power, which always draws on the power of human intent. It is not something magical. If we neglect to say prayers or keep the fasts, or if we feel no true compunction for our carelessness, we should not be surprised if the Sign of the Cross does not magically heal, for example, a loved one in the hospital intensive care unit. By the Providence of God, such an unusual thing might happen. But within the domain of our own efforts, true spiritual results are always the result of a sincere devotion to God and submission to His Will, whatever the circumstances.

### *B. Icons*

In former times God, who is without form or body, could never be depicted. But now when God is seen in the flesh conversing with men, I make an image [Icon] of the God whom I see. I do not worship matter; I worship the Creator of matter who became matter for my sake, who willed to take His abode in matter; who worked out my salvation through matter. Never will I cease honoring the matter which wrought my salvation! I honor it, but not as God.<sup>6</sup>

Icons play a pivotal rôle in Orthodox living. As windows into the next world, they serve to teach us and to remind us of the importance of spiritual life. Without Icons, our Churches would very quickly become theaters full of spectators, rather than places where earth and Heaven meet, where the Angels and Saints join us in worshipping the Creator, God, the Holy Trinity. Without Icons to remind us of our Savior and the Blood which He voluntarily shed for us, or of His Holy Mother, the

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<sup>6</sup> St. John Damascene, *On the Divine Images*, trans. David Anderson (Crestwood, ny: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), p. 23.

most exalted of created beings, sanctified by her ineffable contact with God within her womb, or of the Saints, whom we emulate in our path towards union with Christ, our daily lives would lose contact with the spiritual goal before us. We might quickly tire or even lose interest in running the long race and in fighting the good fight that Saint Paul describes for us.<sup>7</sup>

Orthodox Icons are painted according to very specific patterns and regulations, which must be followed strictly by the iconographer. Many iconographers are monastics, though a lay person may also paint an Icon under strict spiritual supervision. The patterns and rules for the execution of an Icon reflect the tradition of how specific Saints are to be depicted. The prototypes of various Icons derive from artistic ideals and Christological principles that were established by the Œcumenical Synods and fully developed in Byzantine times. Once one becomes aware of these conventions, recognizing the Icons of particular Saints becomes quite simple. This recognition is valuable, for it makes it possible for us to enter an Orthodox Church of any ethnic tradition and instantly recognize many of the Saints depicted, even when the lettering is in a language we cannot read.

As for the reverence we should hold for Icons:

The icon contains and professes the same truth as the Gospels and therefore, like the Gospels, is based on exact concrete data, and in no way on invention, for otherwise it could not explain the Gospels nor [*sic*] correspond to them.

Thus the icon is placed on a level with the Holy Scriptures and with the Cross, as one of the forms of revelation and knowledge of God, in which Divine and human will and action become blended.<sup>8</sup>

We should approach an Icon with the same reverence and awe that we reserve for the Holy Cross and Holy Scripture. We venerate an Icon in order to communicate the reverence, respect,

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<sup>7</sup> 1 Timothy 6:12; Hebrews 12:1.

<sup>8</sup> Leonid Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons* (Crestwood, ny: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982), p. 30.

and love which we hold for the subject of the Icon. Even as people visiting their loved ones in prison, separated by a glass window, might actually kiss the window to show their love and concern, so we, as pilgrims in this fallen world, reverently kiss the images of our Savior or His Mother or His Saints. Icons depict these holy persons in the heavenly realm, our own desired haven.

Because Icons are holy, there are particular ways they should be handled and displayed. Let us look at some of these.

*Icons in the Home.* The Orthodox Christian home is like a family Church. For this reason, we choose an eastern wall or corner of a prominent room to set up our “Icon Corner.” The Icon Corner is our “family Altar,” as it were. This is where we pray together as a family and where we share many of our joys and sorrows with the Lord. We should always include in the Icon Corner an Icon of Christ, the *Theotokos*, and any Saints whom we wish to venerate or pray to regularly. In the Icon Corner, we should have a small table or shelf to hold a bottle of Holy Water, Blessed Oil, palms from the Sunday of the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday), and other items used for worship. Married couples will often keep the candles which they held at their wedding here, as well. In front of the Icons, safely out of the reach of small children or pets, we should keep an oil lamp perpetually burning. Although some people use votive candles in their lamp, it is proper to burn olive oil. It is the fuel used in most monasteries and represents a very ancient tradition. Churches also traditionally use olive oil in their lamps. In the home, “Pious Orthodox faithful take oil frequently from the lamp and bless themselves, making the sign of the Cross on their foreheads.”<sup>9</sup>

There are two other major reasons—aside from fidelity to Church Tradition—for using olive oil, and both are related to the idea of sacrifice. The added cost of using olive oil over electricity, or even votive candles, renders the lighting of the lamp

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<sup>9</sup> Reverend Michael B. Henning, *Marriage and the Christian Home* (Seattle: St. Nectarios Press, 1987), pp. 23–24.

before an Icon a more genuine sacrifice and a more meaningful offering to God. Also, oil lamps require daily attention and periodic cleaning. This forces us to render some small service to God each day, even if that service involves something as simple as maintaining a lamp. Such pious, constant diligence will not go unrewarded. Church history is replete with accounts of families and monasteries which faithfully maintained their lamps, even when food literally ran out, and which God consequently delivered from their need. The care of oil lamps is described below:<sup>10</sup>

1. *The Glass.* A votive glass or any small glass with a wide mouth may be used for the lamp. (It is advisable, however, to use a glass large enough that it will hold enough oil to last at least ten or twelve hours.) Once used for this purpose the glass should not be reused for any other purpose. Traditionally, glasses used for oil lamps are red or blue, giving off a pleasant glow.

2. *The Oil.* The use of olive oil for the lamps is, as we have said, an ancient tradition, dating back as far as our Father Moses. The olive oil will burn better if the container in which it is stored is left open and allowed to age. Be sure to protect open oil from insects and other possible sources of contamination with cheesecloth or another form of screen. Before pouring the oil into the glass, it is a good idea first to add a small amount of water and a pinch of salt. The oil will float on the water, and, in the event that the lamp is left unattended for too long, will extinguish the flame, thus preventing the glass from cracking; the salt will inhibit the growth of microorganisms.

3. *The Wick.* To make a wick, use cotton string about a foot in length. Do not use coated or waxed string. Six-ply cotton string will be thick enough. If the wick is soaked in vinegar, it will burn more brightly and more cleanly. The wick should be allowed to dry thoroughly before being used.

4. *The Flame.* The Fathers of the Holy Mountain (Mount Athos) have taught us to use a very low flame, which they call “passionless.” The flame should burn steadily and not flicker,

<sup>10</sup> These tips have been adapted from Henning, *Marriage*.

since it is otherwise distracting during prayer. A lamp will burn six to twelve hours, depending mainly on the oil, but also on the size of the flame, the weather, *etc.* Before relighting a lamp, remove the excess carbon from the wick and twist the string slightly, in order to shape the wick into a point. Candle wax may be used to make a firm point, for ease in threading the wick. It should be trimmed off before lighting.

5. *Cleaning.* Napkins or tissue used to wipe off the carbon and oil from the fingers should be burned in a special place (in the home censer, for example) and not thrown in the trash. Be careful not to drip or spill the oil when lighting the lamp. (Saint Theodore of Studion imposes a “penance” of thirty prostrations on an Ecclesiarch who spills oil from the Icon lamps.) The glass in the lamp should be washed periodically and the oil replaced. The water in which the glass is washed, as well as the old oil from the lamp, should not be poured down the drain. It is best, rather, to pour them under plants or trees or in an area that is not walked on.

We should show the same care and reverence that we display towards the oil which we burn in front of an Icon for the Icon itself. Of late, there has been a trend towards using Icons in rather mundane ways. They have been used as labels on bottles of wine, as seals on envelopes and postage stamps, and even on wrapping paper. In all of these cases, the Icons are treated as mere decorations, without any respect or veneration. After having served their decorative function, they are placed in the trash. Since everything which we do as Orthodox Christians should be logical and consistent, it makes no sense to prostrate ourselves and kiss one Icon in the Church and then throw another in the garbage. All Icons are equally deserving of our respect. Thus we should be careful to avoid any mundane or blasphemous uses of Holy Icons.

*Icons Used When Traveling.* Whenever we travel, we should take a small diptych or triptych Icon with us. These are small Icons, usually of the Savior and the *Theotokos*, which are hinged

together and folded up to protect the Icons when packed in a suitcase or purse. Whenever we stop for the night or to take a rest in our travels, we should take out the Icons, determine the direction of east, and set them up with their backs to the east. We should then recite our prayers in front of them. Praying before Icons is, of course, an important part of Orthodox piety. So is the habit of facing east during such prayers. This ancient custom is mentioned by Saint Basil the Great:

Thus we all look to the East at our prayers, but few of us know that we are seeking our own old country, Paradise, which God planted in Eden in the East.<sup>11</sup>

The custom of carrying Icons on a journey for use in prayer is an old one. Recently, the remains of a Russian warship, the *Slava Rossii*, which went down off the south coast of France in 1780, were discovered. Over eighty small metal Icons, apparently used by those traveling on the ship for their daily devotions, were recovered from the wreckage. Significantly, one authority writes of this find:

Why were such metal icons so numerous aboard the *Slava Rossii*? Ever since the early Christian period, icons had functioned as *pal-ladia*—that is, as protectors. The sailors of Catherine the Great's fleet were probably no more pious than other members of Russian society, and in carrying such icons were probably expressing their native devoutness and the seaman's natural desire to be kept safe from harm.<sup>12</sup>

It would serve all of us well to follow the example of these Russian sailors and to seek the protection of our Lord or the *Theotokos* by taking with us Icons of our own during travel and vacations.

### *C. Prayer*

Pray without ceasing.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> St. Basil the Great, "On the Spirit," p. 41.

<sup>12</sup> Diane le Berrurier, "Icons From the Deep," *Archaeology*, Vol. 41, No. 6 (1988), p. 27.

Saint Paul offered this advice in his First Epistle to the new believers in Thessalonica. He did so precisely because he understood how very essential prayer is to the life in Christ. Most sincere believers understand this concept in their minds, but few know how to bring it to fruition. To do so is not nearly as difficult or lofty a task as one might think. All that is required is determination.

The mechanics of establishing a personal and family prayer life are very similar to those of establishing a routine of fasting. In fact, the two literally go hand in hand. To establish a prayer life without keeping the fasts opens one to spiritual delusion, particularly if any significant time is spent in quiet prayer. Likewise, fasting without prayer leads one to pride and vainglory, which puff up the individual in his own eyes. Unless prayer is undertaken in conjunction with fasting, and unless we pray when we fast, our efforts will be in vain. Remember what our Lord said of a powerful demon: "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting."<sup>14</sup> All Christians are constantly engaged in spiritual warfare, whether they know it or not, and this war cannot be waged effectively without a regular cycle of prayer and fasting that goes on seven days a week.

*Family Prayer in the Home.* Traditionally, it is the husband who is responsible for establishing the family prayer life. If he takes the lead and consults with his wife in an atmosphere of mutual respect and Christian love, she will usually respond very positively in helping him to maintain a Christian household. If the husband truly loves his wife, "as Christ loves the Church,"<sup>15</sup> she will sense this love and support him in his efforts to guide the family down an Orthodox path. But if the husband assumes the rôle of a dictator or judge, handing down decisions from a position of superiority, such pride and arrogance will engender animosity and anger. And this is not the

<sup>13</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:17.

<sup>14</sup> St. Matthew 17:21.

<sup>15</sup> Ephesians 5:25.

kind of atmosphere which will encourage sincere family prayer. We must always remember that “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance.”<sup>16</sup> If the prayer life we initiate does not at some point begin to bear such fruit, we should realize that something is wrong.

Orthodox prayer is by nature repetitive and cyclical. This means that specific times should be established for prayer and a specific order of prayer be decided upon. The Church has established a set of Morning and Evening Prayers. These can be found in any Orthodox prayer book. Each member of the family should have his own copy to read along.

“Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray and cry aloud: and He shall hear my voice.”<sup>17</sup> The Orthodox prayer cycle actually moves from evening to evening, as the Psalmist prescribes. In the evening, there should be more time available, and so a little more can possibly be done than in the morning. A daily prayer life would best benefit from saying an Evening Prayer Service, reading the daily Scriptural readings, and reading from the Lives of the Saints for that day. To maintain the liturgical cycle that is followed by the Church, we should have a Church calendar which has Scriptural readings listed for each day of the week. The calendar will also inform us of the particular Saints commemorated on a particular day. Calendars are available from various sources.

In the morning, again, we should set a specific time before family members leave for work or school and stick to that time. It is wise to begin with a short set of prayers and then add to the list as the family adjusts to the new schedule. The most difficult obstacle to be overcome is the illusion of time. When our family first began to establish a prayer life at home, we were convinced that there was absolutely no time for it. Though at the time we were only saying a short set of opening prayers, we were all sure that we would all be late getting to our respective destinations.

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<sup>16</sup> Galatians 5:22-23.

<sup>17</sup> Psalm 54 [55]:17.

Then one day we decided to time how long these prayers were taking. We were finished in less than two minutes! Time, then, is relative to the importance we place on what we are doing. When we seriously consider the importance of getting to our Ultimate Destination, the amount of time we spend at prayer will seem almost insignificant.

Prayers should be said standing, facing the Icon Corner, with the lamp lit. Men should stand to the right, women to the left. Women and girls should have their heads covered during prayer, and all should be modestly dressed. The Orthodox Christian home is supposed to be a “family Church.” We should also approach our prayers with awe and reverence, having first settled any quarrels or differences amongst ourselves. We should cross ourselves, making bows and prostrations, just as we would in Church. Keep in mind that many distractions will occur just as the prayers begin. The phone will ring, salesmen and neighbors will come to the door, dogs will bark, *etc.* Anything that can be disruptive always seems to come along at prayer time. At such times, persevere! Do not be discouraged or dismayed. “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”<sup>18</sup> These distractions will become less frequent with the passage of time.

After prayers, the whole family should sit quietly while someone reads from the Lives of the Saints. If the daily Scriptural readings are read, all should stand while the husband reads the Gospel. After an initial period of awkwardness, these readings will begin to spark conversation between children and adults. This is, therefore, an excellent way for children to learn about their Faith. A child learns far more about any subject when he is allowed to frame his own questions. If the child asks a question you cannot answer immediately, do some research and find out the answer. Ask your Priest. If he does not know the answer, he probably knows where the answer can be found. These periods of interaction can form the basis of a very healthy communication between parent and child. For one thing, if the

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<sup>18</sup> St. James 4:7.

adults are leading the prayers and readings, the child will understand that God is very important to the parents and that He is deserving of our time and effort. And this attitude can only be communicated in the home.

Often there is some resistance to the idea of starting a prayer life from one person or another in the family. Children may resist and drag their feet. Nonetheless, they should be compelled to participate, just as they are compelled to attend school. If, for some reason, the husband and wife cannot agree on a scheduled prayer life, then the spouse desiring a prayer life should quietly go about the business of establishing his or her own. This must be done in a spirit of absolute humility and subservience to God. When prayers are framed in humility and reverence, they will be pleasing to God. They will also slowly change the life of the person who is praying and impress the person who is not. This impression will gradually lead that person to pray as well. Ultimately, there will spring forth in these two individuals a desire for communal or familial prayer. But this will only happen when sincere evidence of the fruit of the Spirit is manifested. What husband or wife could not help but be attracted to anything that caused his spouse to become a more patient, joyful, loving individual? On the other hand, if prayer is accompanied by snide comments, angry or superior looks, or stony silence, who on earth would wish to emulate that?

*Prayer When Traveling.* When traveling, either alone or as a family, we should always take along a prayer book, prayer rope, and an Icon. Most hotels in the United States have a Bible in each room. This can be used for daily Scriptural readings and also for profitable reading if you have a few spare hours.

*Prayer at Meals.* We should always give thanks to God for the fact that we even have food to eat. Before each meal, we should all stand quietly behind our seats as the blessing is said by the senior person present, unless he or she defers it to someone else. The husband or, in his absence, the wife is normally responsible for saying the blessing. It should be said properly and reverently. This is indispensable for the children. They learn

good manners by waiting quietly to be seated, and they learn to understand that food is not a right, but a true blessing and gift of God.

It is not the same thing to eat your meal with a blessing and to eat it without one. Every meal is eaten at God's table which He Himself has laid for us, and we must thank God, our Host, and ask His blessing. Food which is blessed is both sweeter and more satisfying, but unblessed food is both bitter and unsatisfying—and unhealthy. The Emperor Theodosius the Younger was once walking in the outskirts of Constantinople and, seeing the little house of a monk, called in on him. The elder asked the Emperor if he would like something to eat. The Emperor accepted, and the elder brought him bread, oil, salt and water. The Emperor ate and drank, and then asked the monk: 'Do you know who I am?' 'God knows who you are,' answered the monk. 'I am the Emperor Theodosius.' The monk silently prostrated before him. The Emperor then said to him: 'I am an Emperor and the son of an Emperor, but believe me, I have never before in my life eaten such sweet-tasting food as here today with you.' 'And do you know the reason?' asked the elder, and went on: 'It is because we monks always prepare our food with prayer and a blessing, and therefore even bad food will turn into sweet for us. They certainly take a lot of trouble over the preparation of your food, but they do not ask a blessing from God, and so the most delicious food is tasteless.'<sup>19</sup>

*The Jesus Prayer.* The Jesus Prayer is at the heart of all monastic endeavor. But this Prayer is not reserved solely for monastics and should be used by all pious Orthodox Christians. The Jesus Prayer is the simple prayer of the publican: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Much has been written of it and of its use, often on a very lofty level. We will not discuss these lofty dimensions of the Jesus Prayer, but, rather, strongly recommend that anybody living in twentieth-century Western society generally avoid such goals as "prayer of the heart" and seek a more practical benefit from this "prayer of prayers." A superficial view of Christian life, such as that which

<sup>19</sup> *The Prologue*, Vol. 2, pp. 295-296.

seeks instant enlightenment through this or that formula, can lead one down the thorny path of delusion and spiritual death.

Having put forth a warning about its misuse, we must stress that there are very positive uses for the Jesus Prayer for any person at any moment. If circumstances occur which keep you from saying your regular Morning or Evening Prayers, then you can recite the Jesus Prayer on a prayer rope. A prayer rope is a cord of intricate knots made from yarn in the form of numerous Crosses, usually braided by monastics, which can be obtained from an Orthodox supply company. Though they resemble the Western rosary, prayer ropes should not be confused with this Latin devotional device and are not used in the same way as the rosary. To say a prayer rope, according to the simplest method, you merely recite the Jesus Prayer once for each knot on the rope, until you have used all of the knots on the rope. As the Jesus Prayer is recited, one settles into a regular rhythm. This rhythm will vary with each individual. To say a prayer rope takes a minimal amount of time and allows us a way to worship God even when our time is constrained.

The Jesus Prayer can be used at any time of the day. When we find ourselves in an idle moment, we can recite it quietly to ourselves or even in our head. If we are faced with a temptation of any kind, we should recite the Jesus Prayer quietly, until the temptation recedes. When we have a close call driving in traffic, we should recite the Prayer in thanksgiving. When we awaken from a bad dream, we should cross ourselves and recite the Jesus Prayer, until we slip back into sleep. This Prayer should be our constant companion and solace. Our ultimate goal should be to have this Prayer on our lips instantly, in any situation.

There was once a terrible collision of two jumbo jets on the runway in Tenerife, one of the Canary Islands, in the mid-'70s. About twenty-five people survived out of almost six hundred. One of these survivors described the hellish scene of a plane full of hundreds of people who were burning to death, and his most vivid memory was that of hearing almost all of these people cursing God in their agony. What would come to our minds if

we were thrust into such a situation? Are those the sentiments that we would like to present to the Eternal Judge? A constant practice of the Jesus Prayer can teach us to glorify and thank God in all circumstances—even in times of tremendous agony and pain. And it can prepare us to go before the Eternal Judge, not condemned by our curses, but justified by our praises. It is, in effect, a training tool for prayer.

Prayer is also an attitude, as much as it is words. If the Jesus Prayer leads us to true prayer, it leads us to something which is profoundly bound up with the very goal and purpose of human existence. Metropolitan Cyprian gives a wonderful description of what this ultimate goal in our prayer life should be. He depicts for us the fruit of the Jesus Prayer:

The Faithful commonly offer this convenient excuse when we give them the brotherly counsel that they should cultivate ceaseless prayer: ‘How is it possible to pray unceasingly amidst the world and its distractions?’

Indeed, could it be that the injunction of St. Paul to ‘pray without ceasing,’ an instruction certainly not addressed only to monks and ascetics, but to newly-enlightened Christians living in idolatrous surroundings, is unattainable? Most assuredly not. Let us, then, delve into this vital matter.

A basic error on the part of the Faithful, with regard to prayer, is that they think of prayer as being restricted to words alone. Our prayer, in fact, is an expression of our spiritual disposition, and it becomes constant and more ardent when accompanied by good works. The entire life of a renewed Christian is a prayer. His existence *is an offering of glorification to our Lord and God. It is a material manifestation of yet another Apostolic command: ‘Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.’*<sup>20</sup>

Thus it is that St. Basil the Great tells us to pray whenever we sit at a table. When you eat bread, thank Him Who gave it to you. When you drink wine, remember Him Who provided you with this gift, that your heart might be gladdened. Is your hunger satis-

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<sup>20</sup> i Corinthians 10:31.

fied? Do not forget the Benefactor. When you dress, thank Him Who gave you clothes, increasing your love for God, Who bestows upon us garments for both winter and summer. Is the day finished? Thank our Lord, Who gave us the sun, that we might do the works of the day, and Who gave us fire to serve the needs of the night. And again in the evening, raise up your eyes to the Heavens and the beauty of the stars, glorifying the Master Fashioner, Who made all with wisdom.

In this manner, without our perceiving it, our hearts are drawn close to God: we live in an atmosphere of Grace, we breathe God, we pray unceasingly. And certainly it is to this that prayer aspires—not only, then, to the formal repetition of designated prayers at an appointed hour. Prayer and glorification on the road, at work, at meetings, on outings, everywhere and always: this is unceasing prayer.

The beginning of ceaseless prayer is, without doubt, difficult. But we have divine allies. These are the Holy Angels. As the Holy Fathers say, ‘the Holy Angels urge us on to prayer, accompanying us and delighting in their prayers for us.’ Let us not be negligent, contriving ‘excuses for sins,’ but let us press ourselves, that we might become *living Christians*, people of prayer, and dwelling places of the Holy Spirit.<sup>21</sup>

#### *D. Fasting*

Then came to Him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but Thy disciples fast not? And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.<sup>22</sup>

Most people have heard of this passage from Scripture, but they generally do not have the slightest idea how to interpret it practically. The Orthodox Church is the only Christian Tradition which has preserved and maintains a specific and rigorous

<sup>21</sup> Metropolitan Cyprian, “Words on Prayer,” *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. 1, Nos. 4 & 5 (1984), p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> St. Matthew 9:14–15.

schedule for implementing the very healthy and spiritually profitable discipline of fasting. Before going into the details of how to fast in the Orthodox Church, we should consider first the reasons why we fast. For once we understand why we fast, we often find fasting much easier to implement.

First of all, we do *not* fast in order to punish ourselves. This very negative approach is actually an attitude which was held by Roman Catholics when they still practiced fasting. There is a delicate but significant distinction between a contrition that is founded on self-examination and a generic guilt that has little relationship to reality and which can often psychologically cripple a person. The former is essential to the formation of an Orthodox concept of sin and repentance. The latter is an aberration that is exemplified by Western notions of original sin and the corresponding juridical model of salvation that seeks to appease an “angry” and “offended” God. Let us emphasize that we Orthodox fast principally in order to recall and to emulate Adam and Eve in their original state before the Fall. At that time, according to Scripture, they consumed no animal products of any kind and certainly did not kill animals for meat. The Orthodox fast thus restricts the kind of food which we eat more than the actual quantity, in an attempt to return to the food eaten in the Garden of Eden. While there are certain days during Great Lent and Great Week when we do not eat any food at all, the usual pattern of fasting involves abstinence from animal products, fish, wine, and olive oil. Thus, it is quite possible to keep the Orthodox fast without feeling at all punished or deprived.

This emulation of our first parents, Adam and Eve, also accomplishes a second goal of fasting, bodily health. The Fathers of the Church have long maintained that the consumption of meat excites the passions and is unhealthy. Medical science has also come to question the safety of animal foods and to praise the vegetarian diet:

With regard to the avoidance of foods of animal origin, as dictated by the Church on certain days and during various periods, we

have seen here too, that today's medical science supports the correctness of these ordinances. It does so in two ways. First, by its proof that cholesterol leads to arteriosclerosis, hypertension, and various kinds of cardiac disorders, and by its discovery that cholesterol is found in all foods of animal origin (meat, fish, eggs, dairy products), which the Orthodox Church prohibits Christians from eating on fast days and during lenten periods. Second, by its proof that fats lead to the diseases just mentioned and to others.<sup>23</sup>

By limiting our intake of animal products, we also allow our bodies the opportunity to throw off toxins which have accumulated in our systems.

The third reason for fasting is perhaps, at least for us in the West, one of the most important ones: self-control. Every day we are inundated with thousands of messages, either visual or audible or both, which beckon, cajole, or beguile us to indulge ourselves in one form of excess or another. Statistical research has shown that we listen to these messages and act upon them. The average twentieth-century American enjoys a standard of living which was once reserved to high-placed aristocracy. In the heat of August, even a hundred servants with hand-held fans could not do for Louis xiv what a simple room air conditioner does for a retired widow in a small apartment in our time. What would Julius Cæsar have given for a chariot capable of traveling over sixty miles per hour, which could cover hundreds of miles in a single day? The luxury and comfort we enjoy tends to smother spiritual life even as the thorns choked out the seed in our Lord's parable.<sup>24</sup> Thus, to train ourselves in denial and self-control, to learn the art of gracefully declining a simple piece of cheese on an inappropriate day, is one of the more valuable lessons the Church can offer us.

The generally accepted rules of fasting in the Orthodox Church are as follows:

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<sup>23</sup> Constantine Cavarinos, *Fasting and Science* (Etna, ca: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1988), pp. 19-20.

<sup>24</sup> St. Matthew 13:7.

1. Unless otherwise noted, on a fast day we do not eat animal products of any kind. This includes any part of any mammal (beef, lamb, pork, *etc.*), bird (chicken, turkey, duck, *etc.*), or fish (tuna, cod, sardine, *etc.*). This also includes any by-products of these animals (milk, cheese, or eggs). Olive oil is also restricted on fast days. This is for a very special reason. It hearkens back to the time when a dove brought an olive sprig back to the Ark to signify God's mercy on the world after the Flood.<sup>25</sup> So, during a fast we set aside olive oil in anticipation of God's sign of mercy. (We might note the similarity between the Greek words for "olive oil"—*elaion*—and "mercy"—*eleos*)

2. Alcoholic beverages are allowed as follows:

a. Hard liquor of any kind (that is, a drink stronger than wine) may be consumed only when meat or dairy products are permitted.

b. Wine is allowed on specific fast days when the Saint of the day is commemorated with a sung Doxology or a *Polyeleos* is appointed. These days are always specified in the Church Calendar. Olive oil is also allowed on these days. These days are commonly referred to as "wine and oil days."

c. Beer is usually consumed any time and is not considered an alcoholic beverage.

3. There are also fast days when fish is allowed, in addition to wine and oil. These days are also specified in the Church Calendar. They generally denote Feast Days, such as the Transfiguration or the Annunciation, which fall during fasting periods. Fish is sometimes eaten on the Patronal Feast of a parish or monastery when it falls on a fast day, but this custom is in violation of strict fasting rules.

4. Shellfish (shrimp, clam, lobster, *etc.*), reptiles (alligator, turtle, rattlesnake, *etc.*), and amphibians (*e.g.*, frog legs) are all allowed on any fast day.

5. Non-dairy substitutes and mock meats which are vegetarian in content are often used during fasts. These do not normally violate the spirit of the fast, since avoiding animal prod-

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<sup>25</sup> Genesis 8:11.

ucts is very much a matter of avoiding the hormones and fats which are unhealthy and excite the passions. Moreover, when we are put in the position of having to locate substitutes, this very action instills the discipline which fasting is meant to bring to our lives. If, however, we fast by constantly replacing meat and dairy products with unhealthy or rich-tasting, rather than natural, substitutes, we violate the meaning and purpose of the fast. One must exercise honest control in this area.

6. Many Orthodox substitute vegetable oils for olive oil on a fast day. Strictly speaking, this practice is acceptable. However, the use of these oils, too, should be restricted as much as possible, since they are unhealthy and are often used to enhance the natural flavor of food—things inconsistent with the spirit of fasting. A strict fast, where no oil is permitted, is called “xerophagy” and is observed in stricter monasteries on fasting days and during the various lenten periods. When followed for short periods of time, this is also a good practice for lay people.

7. Orthodox monastics do not eat meat or poultry at *any* time, including non-fast periods. They may, however, eat fish, dairy products, and eggs on non-fast days.

8. Married couples should also abstain from sexual relations on fast days. This also includes non-fast days during which they are preparing for Holy Communion. This is referred to as “fasting from the flesh” and can help strengthen a marriage when practiced with mutual consent of the husband and wife.

These are the times when we fast in the Orthodox Church:

1. Every Wednesday and Friday during the year, except during certain fast-free weeks. (These exceptions are the weeks following Nativity [Christmas], the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee, Pascha, and Pentecost.) The Wednesday fast recalls the betrayal of Christ by Judas Iscariot and the Friday fast commemorates His Crucifixion. In monasteries, incidentally, Mondays are also generally observed as fast days, in honor of the Holy Angels.

2. The Orthodox Church has four fasting periods in the liturgical year. These are:

*a. Great Lent.* The fasting rules for Great Lent are outlined in most Orthodox calendars and cookbooks.

*b. Apostles' Fast.* This fasting period starts the Monday after the Sunday of All Saints. It is generally less severe, allowing fish on weekends and on several Feast Days during the Fast. Tuesdays and Thursdays are wine and oil days. The Apostles' Fast ends on June 29, the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul. If this day falls on a Wednesday or Friday, fish, wine, and oil are permitted.

*c. Dormition Fast.* Held in honor of the Dormition (Falling Asleep) of the *Theotokos*, this is the shortest fasting period, lasting only two weeks. It begins on August 1 and ends on August 15. Fish is only allowed on the Feast of the Transfiguration (August 6). Weekends in this Fast are wine and oil days. If the Dormition falls on a Wednesday or Friday, that day becomes a fish, wine, and oil day.

*d. Nativity Fast.* This fast begins forty days before the Feast of the Nativity (Christmas) on November 15. It is a more relaxed Fast until December 20. Until that date, we are allowed fish on weekends. After that date, wine and oil are appointed for the weekends. Tuesdays and Thursdays are wine and oil days throughout this Fast.

These fasting periods were established many centuries ago in order to allow Orthodox Christians properly to prepare themselves for the various Feasts in the Church's liturgical cycle. This cycle is Divinely inspired, as is all of Holy Tradition. If we are to participate fully as Orthodox Christians in the Festal Calendar, we must orient ourselves to God's schedule, rather than our own. This means that social and familial events which center around the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, or Western Christmas must be rearranged or adjusted according to the lenten periods in which they fall. We must also be careful to schedule weddings outside of any fasting period. It makes no sense for a couple to marry during a time when the marriage cannot be consummated with the blessing of the Church.

No Bishop or Priest, we should add here, has the authority

to grant “dispensations” from any fast day, except for reasons of health on a case-by-case basis. This practice among Orthodox in the West is a violation of Holy Tradition and introduces a spirit of legalism into the Church that compromises the Orthodox way of life and places it under submission to Western ideas and practices.

Fasting is one of the primary ways that we train ourselves to be in the world, but not of it, and constitutes one of the more challenging tasks facing an Orthodox Christian in America and the West. We are surrounded by people who accept those messages which extol the “virtues” and pleasures of self-indulgence. Few of our contemporary countrymen are going to support us in our Orthodox Faith, even though all will watch our struggles with interest, waiting to see if we are truly serious about what we claim to believe. This is especially true of our heterodox families and friends. Therefore, there is no greater witness for Orthodoxy in America than that humble soul who quietly goes about the business of keeping the fast.

With regard to the everyday problems of fasting, let us emphasize the fact that recent trends towards health and fitness have been a boon for Orthodox fasting in America. Foods which were once full of lard or other animal fats are now prepared with vegetable oils or shortening. The emphasis on consumer awareness has resulted in excellent labeling standards on all food, making it possible to know exactly what is in the food we are buying. Many excellent meat substitutes, such as tofu and “soya bean meat” products, as well as vegetarian dishes, are commercially available in most supermarkets. All of this, unheard of thirty years ago, makes fasting easier for Orthodox Christians in the West.

The first step in fasting, then, is to familiarize yourself with the resources that are available to you in your area. Excellent vegetarian cookbooks are available in any bookstore. Locate one or two and study them. Determine the basic ingredients that you will need to make a vegetarian meal and go about the business of finding them in your supermarket. Once you have tried a

few recipes, you will discover that about ninety percent of the flavor in any recipe comes from spices, onions, and garlic. Meat is more a matter of texture than anything else. There are ways to mimic this texture. They can be as simple as throwing artificial bacon bits into soups or salads. Tofu mimics hamburger very well, with none of the fat. There are also many excellent milk substitutes on the market, which can even be poured over cereal, though you should choose one made with soya or light oils and low in sugar. There are many other things available; it is simply a matter of taking the time to find out what they are.

A few guidelines will serve to make fasting easier:

*When Shopping.* Read labels! Some people feel that by reading labels closely they might develop a pharisaical attitude. But that is simply not true. We are only being pharisees when we read the labels on *other* people's food (and this does happen). It is a perfectly reasonable thing to want to know exactly what we are eating, whether we are fasting or not. Do not assume that something has no dairy products or meat. Read the label. Some cookies are still made with lard. Again, read the labels. Gelatin (including Jell-O) is made from animal by-products. It should be avoided. Croutons often have cheese mixed in them. One should be wary of such products. There are several mock crab and lobster products on the market which are actually made from fish and eggs; these, too, present a problem on a regular fast day. One must be careful to watch for them. The best rule of thumb is, in the end, never to assume anything.

*At Home.* The key to keeping a good fast, particularly during the longer fasting periods, is to develop a good repertoire of dishes. Great Lent can be a truly difficult experience if we eat lentils every day. Lentils are fine, but what about vegetarian tacos, vegetable curry, a nice pasta salad, shrimp casserole, or five-bean soup? The list can go on forever. The point is that there is potentially a great variety in the foods which we can eat during a fast. Also, home-baked bread always makes a meal seem like a feast, and is far more nutritious than the bread avail-

able in a market. There are bread-making machines on the market that make it possible for even the busiest household to enjoy this simple pleasure.

Fasting in a family situation requires commitment, particularly on the part of the husband and wife. The children, especially small children, will follow whatever agenda the parents establish. If the parents approach a fast day with a negative attitude, the children will learn that fast days are something to be dreaded. If the parents look forward to a fast, so will the children. The best attitude to develop is one of humble acceptance: "If today is a Wednesday, we will simply not discuss ice cream or pizza. We will leave that for the time when we can have these things." Such words of encouragement teach children to accept fast days without any negative feelings. And at a time when people feed their children health-destroying junk foods, parents who teach their children to fast are more responsible parents.

*Fasting with Relatives or Friends.* If you happen to have guests to dinner or if relatives stay with you during a fast, simply feed them what your family would eat. They should be aware of the fact that you are Orthodox Christians and should be as gracious about accepting your hospitality during a fast as they would be at any other time. We are under no obligation to feed people anything that we would not eat ourselves. This creates an artificial situation which inevitably causes more problems than it solves. Converts often find that their families pass through a phase of challenging them about their fasting. This is a spiritual trial which will pass. If we assume a very humble attitude and treat our fasting in a matter-of-fact way, without any fanfare, eventually people will accept it as something that is important to us. On the other hand, if we assume an attitude of superiority or become judgmental and condemnatory of those who do not fast, then people will learn to avoid us and come to believe that Orthodox Christians are very haughty and unpleasant people.

If a traditionalist (Old Calendarist) Orthodox Christian invites a modernist Orthodox (most of whom fast "in spirit," but not in fact) to dinner at a time which coincides with a New Cal-

endar Fast, then fasting food should be quietly served, whether the modernist is accustomed to this or not. We should always encourage our Orthodox brothers to observe the fast. It goes without saying that modernist Orthodox should be served only fasting fare if they visit traditionalists during one of the Old Calendar Fasts.

*Fasting in a Restaurant.* We may at times find ourselves in situations, particularly at work, where a group of people will ask us to eat lunch with them during a fast. This is not an impossible situation. Most restaurants now have some form of salad bar, and all restaurants have a side salad on the menu. Many have cooked vegetables as well. When ordering a salad, it is wise to ask if the salad has any cheese or eggs. If so, simply ask the waitress or waiter to have a salad without cheese or eggs. This is perfectly acceptable, since many people are allergic to these things. Cooked beans or spinach sometimes come with bacon. It is wise to ask about this, too, before ordering. Some restaurants have dishes made with shrimp or scallops. As long they have no cream sauce, this is an excellent food during fasts. No one will be in the least offended if you follow the Church's fasting rules in this way. There is, then, no excuse for setting aside fasting in the face of the proverbial "business lunch" or any other circumstance where you may be dining out.

When dining out with the family, Oriental restaurants are usually a good choice. Most Oriental restaurants have seafood dishes with shrimp or scallops. They also usually have a stir-fried vegetable plate. Fried rice is a problem, since it is usually made with egg. But many restaurants will leave the egg out on request. Some shrimp dishes also have meat. For instance, shrimp with lobster sauce always seems to come with pork in the sauce. These dishes should obviously be avoided. Mexican restaurants are usually not a good choice. Most of them cook the beans and rice that are the staples of this food in lard or meat drippings and many foods are smothered in cheese. Seafood restaurants, on the other hand, are an excellent choice. In addition

to various types of fish, these restaurants usually have several items on the menu which can be eaten on any fast day.

No matter which restaurant you choose, here are some basic guidelines to follow;

1. When in doubt, *ask*. There are many people who are on various diets or who have food allergies. Most restaurants are happy to accommodate such customers. Thus, do not hesitate to ask for substitutes. Dieters can ask to have food broiled in margarine instead of butter. You can do the same. Also ask for margarine to put on your bread and ask for a non-dairy creamer for your coffee.

2. If the food ordered has something unexpected, such as meat, or if a salad is smothered in cheese, politely explain that you can not eat the dish in question and ask for a substitute. Under no circumstances should you knowingly eat anything which would break the fast.

3. In a social drinking situation, we should choose beer, soft drinks, or juices (unless it is a wine day). These things are also healthier than hard spirits, anyway.

4. Concentrate on the main item being ordered and do not get bogged down with details. If the avocado sandwich has a very little bit of mayonnaise, do not make a scene by scraping it off. Such a display does more spiritual harm than good. There is a difference between eating a small amount of condiment on a sandwich and deciding to consume a salad covered with bleu cheese dressing. For one thing, there usually is a choice of dressings for a salad, but very few restaurants have a vegetarian substitute for mayonnaise on a sandwich. In any event, we should always follow the dictates of our conscience, but not make silly displays of our fasting.

5. Always say a quiet blessing before beginning to eat, whether the people around you are religious or not. You can always cross yourself, which shows your Christian commitment, and say a prayer silently, if need be. If anyone is offended by the Cross, you probably should not be sitting at the table with him.

One challenge often posed to an Orthodox Christian during

a fast is the experience of answering people's questions about our fasting customs. This is especially true on the job. Inevitably, people will notice that there are times when you appear to avoid meat. Most Americans find this very strange and are naturally curious. Some are downright rude in their curiosity. When confronted about your choice of meal, merely reply that there are certain times when you do not eat meat. If someone pursues the topic, point out that this is a discipline you have accepted as healthy and beneficial, much like jogging or losing weight. You might also explain your fasting customs as a spiritual exercise in self-denial. Be careful always to make such statements from an attitude of humility. We should never allow ourselves to sound prideful or superior. A humble reply coupled with a quiet blessing before eating is a very strong witness for Orthodoxy. If people do choose to ridicule or mock you for this, accept this humbly as a trial from God. Such acceptance builds spiritual strength. If certain people "get on your nerves" repeatedly, simply avoid eating out with them.

*Fasting While Traveling.* Some people choose to cite (or misquote) ancient Canons which relax the fast for a person who is traveling, and thus excuse themselves from fasting while on a journey. But is this really necessary? These Canons were written at a time when travel was a very dangerous and risky adventure, and they do not, at any rate, allow for a total abandonment of fasting. These situations simply do not exist in modern America or Europe. There are restaurants everywhere and, as we have said, they all serve food which can be eaten even during the strictest fasting period. Air travel also presents no problems. All airlines that serve meals will provide vegetarian or seafood meals upon request, though you must be diligent about ordering special meals before boarding the plane. Do not feel that this is any trouble for the airline. It is very common, especially with international carriers. Truly devout Jews, Moslems, and Hindus all require special meals. Besides religious considerations, many people require special meals for reasons of health. The airlines are all competing for your business and are more than happy to

accommodate the needs of their passengers. Here are some basic rules to follow regarding air travel:

1. It is wise to request special meals at the time you arrange your flight. This means that you should consult the Church Calendar and verify whether any of the days when you will be traveling are fast days, and whether you are allowed oil or wine or fish. Request either a vegetarian meal, which will be all vegetables, or a shellfish meal, such as shrimp, crab, or scallops. Be sure to verify that any crab served is real crab and not mock crab made from fish.

2. Check back with the airline the day before your departure to make sure that your special meals are listed with your reservation; if not, order them again.

3. At check-in, before boarding the plane, verify that the special meals appear on your reservation. The airline should have a few vegetarian meals set aside, even if they did not appear on the reservation. These efforts in checking and double-checking are perhaps a bit frustrating, but we can tell you from experience that this is the only way to be sure that you are not presented with a choice of chicken or lasagne on a Wednesday flight.

If traveling by train or bus, the options are more limited. However, we have found that bringing our own food along, particularly on a shorter trip, is a viable alternative. A little planning ahead can make the trip so much more enjoyable.

*Fasting at School.* Once a routine of fasting is established at home, children are far better prepared to pursue fasting seriously at school. Young children in the first four years of elementary school are usually very zealous about following fasting rules at school. Children that age thrive on structure, and once they have a routine set, they follow that routine to the letter. Usually, the school itself will not have any appropriate fasting foods available for lunch, so the meal must be brought from home. But this is not a bad thing, since school lunches are notorious for their unhealthy ingredients and poor preparation.

When parties are scheduled at school on a fast day, check with the teacher and make her aware of the child's situation. Offer to bring something to the party that the child can eat. Be sure to have enough for the other children to share. This accentuates the positive for the child, rather than allowing him to feel left out. At the same time, it allows the child to feel different in a positive sense and to develop a healthy notion of what it means to be one of those "peculiar people"<sup>26</sup> of Christ's Church.

In America today, it is not be unusual for a child to attend school with Moslems, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Each of these faiths has particular dietary and social restrictions. If we, as Orthodox Christians, out of a false concern that our children not appear different from the other children, excuse them from fasting at the school Christmas party, we will have no witness before the Moslem child who maintains a strict Ramadan fast, or the Buddhist child who remains vegetarian at all times. Our children will quickly perceive this as hypocrisy on our part and we will be unable to teach them anything further about living our Faith.

Any sincere Orthodox Christian is going to appear different to those around him. This was true in Saint Paul's time, when he spoke of the peculiarity of Christians, and it holds true today. Children can handle these differences as long as they have firm support from their parents. But if the parents falter in their resolve or are indifferent to fasting, the children will definitely follow suit. This is one of the grave responsibilities of parenthood. Children always learn from their parents. The question is this: Will they learn that which is pious, noble, and healthy, or that which is destructive to the soul and body? The answer is entirely up to the parents.

*When Invited to Visit Friends During a Fast.* We should generally avoid social engagements during a fast; however, when this is impossible, there are some helpful guidelines that we can follow:

1. If the occasion involves dinner, we should ask what is be-

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<sup>26</sup> Titus 2:14.

ing served. If we explain our situation to the hostess, she will most likely arrange something for us. If she is unable or unwilling to do so, then it is probably best to put off the invitation until a more appropriate time. This can be done politely in such a way as to cause no offense.

2. At a buffet-style dinner, it may be possible to bring a covered dish. If so, arrange this with the hostess. You can then provide your own fasting food for the dinner.

*Fasting During American and Non-Orthodox Holidays.* The American holiday season poses particular challenges for Orthodox Christians. Thanksgiving sometimes falls during the Nativity Fast (according to the Church, or Julian, Calendar which traditionalist Orthodox Christians follow). Western Christmas (December 25 New Style, or December 12 on the Church Calendar) always falls during the Nativity Fast, which means that we are in a period of preparation for the Birth of Christ, while the society around us is beginning its round of “Xmas” parties. While family closeness and a spirit of generosity are admirable qualities in and of themselves, commercial interests in America have moved in to take advantage of the “Christmas spirit” by introducing relatively new “traditions” of expensive gift-giving and lavish entertaining. These not only compromise the Nativity Fast for Orthodox Christians, but violate even the meaning of the Western celebration of Christmas. In order to deal sensitively with our family and friends, while still maintaining an attitude of prayerful preparation for the Nativity of Christ, we should plan our activities during this season carefully.

*Thanksgiving.* There are two basic situations which we face at Thanksgiving. Either we are expected to have family and friends over, or we are expected to visit family and friends. If we are serving the meal, the best thing to do is to arrange to have the usual turkey dinner on the previous Sunday, before the Nativity Fast. If we invite those with whom we would normally share this day to the Sunday dinner, then there will be less contention about Thursday. Sincere people who truly care about us

will be glad to adjust. Those who stubbornly insist on our participation in the Thursday holiday do not really have our feelings at heart. In such situations, it is best to avoid confrontation altogether. Many family situations are less than healthy. This sort of contention is a clear sign of problems which go much deeper than a turkey dinner. It is thus much better for all concerned to work at overcoming those difficulties, rather than simply playing out a charade each year on the last Thursday of November. This might require a few years to sort out. But with patience, humility, and a loving attitude, the situation will eventually improve.

If we are invited to dinner on Thanksgiving, we should be very frank about the fact that this is a fast day for Orthodox and that we would be happy to arrange to visit after dinner. Sitting at table and not eating the meal would probably cause more tension and problems than it would solve. Arranging to bring a fasting dessert or some drinks after dinner is a far better alternative. If we bring something, we should be very low-key about the content and emphasize that it is to be shared by all. This sort of quiet witness will speak volumes to people over the years.

*Western Christmas.* This day has taken on a dimension over the past fifty years which, unfortunately, causes people to dread its approach and breathe a sigh of relief at its departure. Police statistics show that suicides and family abuse increase dramatically during this time. How sad it is that the Birth of Christ is so often forgotten in the midst of what has become an emotional Saturnalia, with the family elevated to a status above God and emotions transformed into a substitute for spiritual feelings. The depression associated with this holiday is the result of parties without pleasure, frivolity without joy, and a subconscious yearning for the spiritual meaning of Christmas. We should not dwell on these negatives, but as Orthodox Christians we must understand that Tradition holds out a much better way for us. And in this understanding we should separate ourselves from the cash register holiday that has become Western Christmas.

The parties and social whirl which surround this season

need not cause undo concern. We should avoid attending many parties, as this is inconsistent with our own preparation for Nativity. But attending several engagements with non-Orthodox family or friends causes no problem. We should, however, assiduously avoid lavish affairs which involve large numbers of people we do not know, since these parties too often degenerate into occasions for drunkenness and immorality. When declining such invitations, we should maintain a quiet, humble spirit and merely say that we have other plans.

On Western Christmas day we should visit those heterodox family members and friends whom we would normally visit and exchange gifts with those whom we normally exchange gifts. We should keep gifts simple, preferably made by ourselves, and we should be very loving and gracious. Once again, we can always bring a fasting dessert to share, if a meal is involved. We can console ourselves, if we feel left out of the holiday festivities, by realizing that this day is for most people the climax of a season of endless parties and shopping. We can call to mind the fact that we will be breaking the Fast in two weeks, followed by a fast-free period of spiritual celebration, while our non-Orthodox family and friends will be in the middle of the post-holiday blues.

*New Year's Day.* New Year celebrations are something that we should restrict to family and a few friends. For one thing, traditionalist Orthodox Christians follow the Julian Calendar, as we have said. For us, the New Year coincides with a Church Feast Day—the Circumcision of Christ (and the Feast of Saint Basil the Great)—and is thus celebrated in a sober way. As well, the Orthodox Church Year, around which we arrange our worship, begins on September 1, not January 1. We should avoid the large gatherings which mark the celebration of the secular New Year on the New Calendar, as these are usually occasions for drunkenness and immorality. Our Fast ends a week later, after the Nativity Feast, and we will then have an opportunity to celebrate in an upright, joyful way. If we properly prepare and

wholeheartedly rejoice in our Faith, our celebrations of Christ's Birth will gradually become occasions of joy for our family and friends as well. We will come to avoid, rather than dread, the secular holidays of the Western Christmas season.

### *E. Money*

For the love of money is the root of all evil.<sup>27</sup>

Nothing is closer to the heart of the modern materialist than his money. Money determines our status in society, our level of self-worth, and our entire identity as persons. In Western societies and in those countries which have embraced Western materialism, such as Japan and the Pacific Rim, the acquisition and spending of money are perceived as the single most important activities in a person's life. For the average person, from the ages of twenty-five to sixty-five more time and effort are poured into this activity than any other. This sad state of affairs is very evident among Orthodox Christians as well, especially in the West. Most people emigrate to North America for the purpose of acquiring money, and many succeed in their desire. But what is the proper Orthodox Christian attitude towards money? What are the proper uses of money? When does one cross the line from good stewardship to avarice? What was the difference between the rich man who left poor Lazarus to die at his gate and the Righteous Joseph of Arimethea? Both men possessed great wealth. These are important questions that Orthodox Christians in the materialistic world must address, for it is impossible for us to progress spiritually until we have placed our acquisition and use of money in proper perspective.

First of all, we must always keep in mind that money in and of itself is neutral. Money is merely a tool, a means to an end. As noted above, it is the *love* of money that constitutes a problem, not money itself. The Greek word *philargyria*, or "love of silver," is the term used by Saint Paul. This term is related to the word *philargyros*, the Greek adjective for "covetous," which was used in the Gospel of Saint Luke to describe the Pharisees who re-

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<sup>27</sup> i Timothy 6:10.

jected our Lord's admonition that man cannot serve both God and mammon.<sup>28</sup> This same word is used by Saint Paul to describe the attitude of men in the last days: "For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous [*philargyros*], boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy."<sup>29</sup> As we can see by the various sinful attitudes included in this list, covetousness is very dangerous to the soul. But what do we mean by "covetous"?

As soon as Adam fell, God made it clear that man was to work for his bread in this fallen world. Therefore, honest, hard work is a virtue which has been extolled by all of the Fathers of the Church. The Desert Fathers supported themselves with handicrafts, weaving baskets and mats. Saint Leo of Optina, in nineteenth-century Russia, was constantly weaving belts as he counseled his spiritual children. Even today, all of us must perform some sort of work in order to acquire necessary food, clothing, shelter, and transportation. Those who seek to receive these things without working for them become slothful parasites who gradually lose all self-respect and motivation. In the words of King Solomon, "A slothful man hideth his hand in his bosom, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again."<sup>30</sup> Rather, one should, "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest."<sup>31</sup>

So it is plain that all Christians are expected to work and to support themselves and their families by this work. The real question is: "How much work and money are enough?"

In His parable of the talents, Christ showed us that different people are given varying degrees and amounts of talents or resources. The master in this parable gave one man five talents,

<sup>28</sup> St. Matthew 6:24; St. Luke 16:13.

<sup>29</sup> ii Timothy 3:2.

<sup>30</sup> Proverbs 19:24.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:6-8.

another two, and another only one.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, we should not be surprised if a few of us become very wealthy, some of us live comfortably, and many of us have very little in this life. In God's eyes, there is no particular honor for any of these people, rich or poor; rather, each has varying degrees of responsibility. The man who doubled his two talents was accorded the same honor by the master as the man who ended up with ten. Each doubled what he was given, and that was the basis for his reward. The same holds true in our lives today. If one is born into an upper middle-class American family, with the advantages of a comfortable life and superior education, God will expect much more from him than He ever would from a child born in the slums of Mexico City or Calcutta. God loves both equally, yet allows their situations in life to be completely different.

As Orthodox Christians, we understand that God created the heavens and the earth. That means that He created everything that money buys—even the gold and silver from which money is made or on which it is based. We must come to understand clearly that God owns everything and that we have ultimate possession of nothing. We are only given permission to act as stewards of His property, like the servants in the parable of the talents. So long as we maintain this attitude of stewardship or service, which relates directly to Christian humility, we are in a position to use those things which God has entrusted to us for His glory. On the other hand, if we allow ourselves to believe that those riches we possess are actually *ours*, then we will begin to cultivate in ourselves an attitude of pride and superiority, which is diametrically opposed to the Will of God. The Psalmist describes such poor souls in this way:

They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches;

None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him:

(For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth

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<sup>32</sup> St. Matthew 25:15.

for ever:)

That he should still live for ever, and not see corruption.

For he seeth that wise men die, likewise the fool and the brutish person perish, and leave their wealth to others.

Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands by their own names....

This their way is their folly; yet their posterity approve their sayings.

Like sheep are they laid in the grave; death shall feed on them; and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; and their beauty shall consume in the grave from their dwelling....

Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased;

For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him.<sup>33</sup>

Here we see portrayed the arrogance and utter folly of those who allow themselves to believe that what they possess is actually *their* property and not that of God. This attitude is what caused the rich young man to turn away from Christ when he was asked to give up his possessions and follow Him.<sup>34</sup> This was also what led our Lord to say: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."<sup>35</sup> The rich man is not loved any less by God than the poor man, but his riches themselves entangle him in a web of self-deceit which ultimately leads either to a rejection of God or to the creation of a god in a form acceptable to the rich (the so-called "social religion" of those who think that their wealth is a personal "blessing" from God). In either case, spiritual death is almost always the result.

As long as we remember that our earthly possessions are not really ours, but God's, all things will naturally fall into place for

<sup>33</sup> Psalm 48 [49]:6-11, 13-14, 16-17.

<sup>34</sup> St. Matthew 19:21-22; St. Mark 10:21-22; St. Luke 18:22-23.

<sup>35</sup> St. Matthew 19:24.

us. After all, it is always easy to be generous with someone else's money; and in this case, God means for it to be that way. But as soon as we begin to cling to money or those things that it buys, or come to believe that God blesses us through material things, we fall to the sin of avarice. We must recognize this in ourselves and within our families if we ever hope to embark upon any serious form of spiritual life; for the materialism of twentieth-century America has been a veritable black hole of avarice, from which many millions of people have never been able to extricate themselves. Never in history has six percent of the world's population consumed seventy-five percent of the world's resources; yet that is precisely what we Americans, as a nation, are doing. In such circumstances, we must set aside the idea that "everything" is ours and begin to recognize that all things belong to God. That to which we can rightfully lay claim is that which God gives us for our needs, not that which we want.

As Orthodox Christians in America, then, we have a particular responsibility to seek a simpler, more spiritual existence—and seek this life we must. We must reverse the pattern established by most Americans and seek to minimize our interaction with the materialistic world, in order to embark on the path of Orthodox maximalism. This concept has been forcefully put forward by Bishop Auxentios of Photiki:

If we have a profession, then this profession should always be understood as service to God. If it provides us with food and shelter, so that we have greater time for the Church, then it is God-pleasing.... And if our earthly work brings us fame, fortune, or prestige, then we must surrender these things to the Church also, using what has come to us to help others come to the Church.

...Every relationship in life, every responsibility in the world, and even life itself are secondary to our service to the Church. A layman is bound by this rule, since the Royal Priesthood of believers exists in its exaltation of the new life that God has given us, one which demands that we put aside the life of sin and of the world and give ourselves over wholly to the needs of the soul and God's Church.

...If one's job or one's earthly pursuits impede, rather than

accommodate and serve, the priorities of the spiritual life, it is the former pursuits which must be put aside, not the latter priorities. One should ideally hold employment which allows attendance at Church not only on weekends, but on major Holy Days. And certainly one should arrange to have vacation days from work correspond at least to the activities of Great Week and Pascha. Vacations from work should not be seen as occasions for leisure or travel pleasures, but as a time in which one's service to the Church can be increased or when pilgrimages to monasteries and holy places can be arranged. If one's employment precludes this, then he should seek another livelihood. And if this means a decrease in one's standard of living—well, better a life lived in poverty than an eternity spent in spiritual deprivation.<sup>36</sup>

All of the priorities set forth by Bishop Auxentios are directly affected by our attitude towards money: by how much we love money. In this Western materialistic society, our salaries, the size of our homes, the kind of cars we drive, and the kinds of entertainment we can pay for all have an impact on our self-image. How we spend and utilize money is often, therefore, an outward indicator of our inner spiritual condition. The blind pursuit of money and the various distractions from the spiritual life that it will buy ultimately indicate a sickness of soul that will lead us to a disastrous end, both in this world and in the next:

Abba Isidore said that the passion of greed is frightful and dares to do anything; it is never satisfied with what it might acquire and leads the soul of which it has possession to the greatest of all evils. Let us, then, from the very beginning drive it away with all our might; for if it prevails in our soul, it becomes incapable of being subjugated.<sup>37</sup>

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#### *F. Creating an Orthodox Atmosphere in the Home*

<sup>36</sup> Bishop Auxentios, "The Church First, All Else After," *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (1991), pp. 1–2.

<sup>37</sup> *The Evergetinos: A Complete Text*, Vol. 2 of the 1st Book, trans. Bishop [Archbishop] Chrysostomos, Bishop Auxentios, Constantine Kokenes, John V. Petropoulos, and the Rev. Gregory Telepneff (Etna, ca: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1991), p. 92.

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience Godliness; and to Godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fail.<sup>38</sup>

The atmosphere experienced at home sets the tone for our entire outlook on life. This is especially true for children. Every home has some kind of atmosphere or “feeling” which is instantly apparent to any stranger who walks into it. We can control and shape the feeling and mood of our surroundings. In fact, our ultimate goal as Orthodox Christians should be to strive to foster in our homes an atmosphere in which there prevail the virtues enumerated above by Saint Peter. This is not easy, particularly in these times. But neither is such a goal impossible to achieve. If we honestly seek the good in this world, through a sincere striving to seek God in our everyday lives, we will naturally seek to be selective in what we see and hear and what we bring into our homes.

Above all other worldly things that we encounter, television, videos, music, magazines, and books have the greatest influence on us. It is essentially through these entertainment media that we confront the society around us and that society influences us. And it is thus primarily through these things that the “world” enters into our home. Since we cannot prevent the influences of the world from entering into our homes, and since these influences are frequently designed for entertainment, we must be highly selective in choosing what is heard and seen in the home through television, videos, and music and what is read in books and magazines. If we are to form and maintain an Orthodox at-

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<sup>38</sup> ii Peter 1:5-10.

mosphere in the home, we must choose programs and reading material which have instructive value and which are not sources of mere distraction and witless pleasure. This also demands that we reflect on the nature of the entertainment media around us. Thus, we would like to make a few comments about television, videos, music, and books and magazines, so as to help readers to determine what helps and what hinders, among these things, in the establishment of a home atmosphere conducive to Orthodox living.

*Television.* It is a sad fact that many people simply surrender their entire home life to the whims of media executives. The general assumption in America seems to be that everybody must own a television and that everybody must watch that television a minimum of four to eight hours every day. No matter how violent, inane, or sexually provocative the content is, we are expected to find this material entertaining. This is a perfect example of how the world insinuates itself into the life of a Christian. Millions of people who claim the Name of Christ in this country passively conform themselves to the world's standards simply by regularly watching network TV fare. They become like the frog placed in a pot of cool water which is slowly heated until the frog is boiled to death. Because of the gradual change in temperature, the frog never becomes alarmed enough to jump out of the pot. So it is with people who have watched TV from childhood. They become so desensitized to violence and sexual immorality that they cease to have any reaction to material which would have been immediately banned from the movie house, not to mention the home, even several decades ago.

*TV and Children.* The real tragedy in all of this is the effect that regular television viewing has on children. Here we shall list just five of the many very serious effects that television has on children:

1. *Potentially questioning, curious, family-centered, book-and-art-loving five-year-olds become television zombies and lose the ability to question their environment.* Interaction with other hu-

man beings is an essential life skill. Television deprives children of the tools for acquiring that skill. Television first hypnotizes and then numbs the imaginative capabilities of the child. If a child listens to a story as it is read from a book by a loving family member, he has the opportunity to formulate his own vision of that story in his mind. He can ask questions as the story progresses and make comments about various characters and situations as they occur. If he sees that same story on the television, he must sit passively and allow the TV to dictate every element of the story to him. Ultimately, many children grow to prefer this passivity to thinking about a story. The young student, therefore, loses interest in books, which approach life with more complexity than that offered by TV and which require him to think. Creative writing, diaries, letter writing, and the ability to discuss any topic for more than a few minutes—all of these diminish as the electronic device takes over.

2. *By the age of ten, schoolchildren usually exhibit changes in speech patterns as a result of watching TV.* Television viewing causes children to become so passive that their verbal expressions are reduced to a minimum. Ask your child about his school day. If the response you get is muddled and incoherent, this is usually evidence that he has been watching too much television. This deficiency is in major part the result of absorbing rapid-fire television images, which never allow the child to formulate a response. By age eleven, having watched more than four thousand hours of television, the average American child has taken the majority of his English lessons from the TV screen, not from schoolteachers or books. There are few full paragraphs spoken on TV, almost no poetry, and no descriptive materials. Is it any wonder, then, that children cannot communicate intelligently and that the average eighteen-year-old American can hardly read or write?

3. *Television inhibits meaningful family communication.* A typical fourteen-year-old girl in this country talks with her mother—in terms of actually discussing a subject in an intelligible way and in a sensible context—for only about four minutes a

week. We have allowed television viewing, it seems, to take the place of normal dinner conversation and the exchanges between parents and children that are essential to child rearing. As television watching increases, family communication decreases. The TV comes to devour more and more hours in a young child's life, and almost nothing can compete with it for attention.

4. *Creative silence, which allows us to contemplate our relationship with God in a deeply personal way, is discouraged by dependence on the ever babbling television.* Children and adults who are from a home environment which has a constant background of TV noise become increasingly discomfited in the face of extended silence. They tend to develop the impression that silence is somehow wrong or unnatural. Prayer, then, can easily seem discomfiting and Church Services long and unbearable. Thus, the value of quiet contemplation is never learned. A desire for silence, prayer, and contemplation, the foundations of deep spiritual growth, can only be developed in a peaceful atmosphere—ideally in a home where time is invested in personal and familial prayer, without the blare of TV or music.

5. *The major issues of life are twisted and distorted by the media, which are primarily interested in creating spiritless consumers.* Love, war, death, prejudice, history, the future, and, most importantly, God and the fate of the human soul—all of these issues are either twisted, distorted, or ignored by TV “culture.” Children and adults do not view television in a comprehensive context, since TV never presents enough in-depth information for the viewer to *have* a context. News is presented in short “sound bites” which have been edited to portray a particular point of view. Documentaries concentrate on subjects which seek to titillate rather than inform and educate the audience. TV talk shows blatantly go about the business of portraying the abnormal—sex change operations, homosexuality, children who have murdered their parents, and every form of immorality imaginable—without providing the viewer with a context into which he can place these things. Children especially, then, come

to think of the abnormal as normal and as something to be accepted. Having no historical, cultural, or spiritual frame of reference, the good and the bad are jumbled together in a child's mind, with the good more than likely forgotten three days later. Such an empty creature, TV "experts" know, is quick to buy anything put before him. A spiritless, unthinking viewer, he becomes an indiscriminate consumer.

In view of its devastating effects on them, what sort of TV should we encourage our children to watch? The best thing, particularly for preschoolers, is no television at all. The sad fact, however, is that most parents, even in Orthodox homes, choose to use the television as a baby-sitter, rather than facing the responsibility of interacting with their own children. Children need to have stories read to them. They need time to play in ways which will exercise their imaginations and allow them to manipulate toys, which also develops hand-eye coordination. These things are best accomplished where there is no television. Older children need to see moral purity as a way of life. The excessive or gratuitous violence and sex portrayed on TV, with its glorification of materialistic attitudes, will not create such a vision. Thus, while it is perhaps not possible to remove the influence of television from their lives entirely, we must make clear rules for watching TV. Lewd programs must be forbidden in the home. The child should also be trained to leave a friend's house, if such programs are being viewed there, making it clear that he should quietly remove himself from the situation without a display of self-righteousness. Only if we are careful to limit TV viewing will we produce the kinds of sensitive, morally responsive children who have the character to avoid independently the very TV poison that destroys character.

*Adults and TV.* For adults, indiscriminate TV viewing poses dangers almost as serious as those posed for children. Repetitive exposure to immoral and violent situations and to secular, humanistic attitudes, which deny or ignore the spiritual side of man's nature, leads to a subtle shift in our attitudes and beliefs. The people who write and produce network television live in a

world which is far removed from that of a pious Orthodox Christian. Their worldview is generally devoid of any valid concept of spiritual life. Network television tends to express open disdain for moral purity in any form. For example, virginity is usually portrayed in a sarcastic and negative light. The American dream is portrayed as a quest for mediocrity in which the smart person is one who seeks to obtain the greatest return for the least effort. Situational ethics are the order of the day. These influences are far more insidious than we think, and they sometimes do more damage than the open violence and crude sex displayed on TV. The latter an adult can immediately identify as immoral and wrong; but subtle attacks on moral and spiritual values are not easy to see. They can, again, influence our attitudes and ideas without our even knowing it.

When we watch any TV program or any commercial, we must constantly evaluate what we are watching and compare its message or substance with the eternal standard of Orthodox Christian Truth: What would Saint John Chrysostomos have thought of this? How would Saint Peter have reacted to it? If we do this constantly, we can learn to discriminate a beneficial program from a questionable one. However, this requires that we remain vividly sensitive to what we watch. To do this, we must limit television viewing, make it secondary to the pursuit of silence and spiritual exercises (prayer, contemplation, spiritual reading, *etc.*), and constantly search for the source of the philosophies which underlie TV "culture." Otherwise, TV will take from us our ability to judge and to tell what is right from what is wrong. It is obvious that this will eventually negatively affect the Orthodox home itself.

*Videos and Movies.* What we have said of TV applies to videos and movies, since most videos and movies are now seen on TV in the home. With regard to movie theaters, as a general rule it is not good for children to go to them. In the first place, the parents have no control over what is presented in such places. Thus, children bring back into the home influences which the

parents know nothing about. Also, movie theaters often serve as inexpensive “baby-sitters” and lead parents to abandon their parental responsibilities. This, too, has a deleterious effect on the Orthodox home.

*Music.* Music is an extremely powerful medium of communication. Certain forms of music are even physically addictive. The powerful bass line of contemporary rock and rap has a sensual beat which, as a number of psychologists have determined from empirical studies, is capable of arousing passions. This bass line, coupled with lyrics which range from the merely suggestive to the openly pornographic, is pumped into the heads of many young people at a rate of four to six hours a day. Studies have shown, in fact, that most adolescents spend even more time listening to music than watching TV or videos. Therefore, it is important to carefully evaluate a young person’s music.

*Music and Adolescents.* Adolescence is a time of personal discovery. Most young people, at this stage of growth, are trying to figure out where they fit into the world. The need for belonging, along with a terrible fear of being rejected by their peers, leads young people to move in herds. This reflects itself in the world of music, where adolescents conform to the crowd by listening to the same music, which is usually promoted by local radio pop music programs. Most of this popular music involves lyrics which encourage the young to conform and to follow the crowd and which advocate an immoral and frivolous way of life. The constant stimulation that adolescents receive from such music renders it impossible for them to spend any serious time in quiet prayer or introspective contemplation, or even to value these things. Rather than embarking on a journey of personal discovery, they are most often completely absorbed in the cynical message of nihilism which comes pounding through the speakers and into their unformed minds.

Popular music obviously cuts children off from the rest of the family. Meaningful communication with children is impossible, if they are constantly listening to music, especially if they are wearing headsets that cut out the rest of the world. The best

solution to this problem is to prevent it from starting in the first place. Children should be exposed to classical and traditional music from their earliest years. If they develop an ear for good music, they will be naturally repulsed by the crude, primitive beat of pop music. Listening to radio stations that feature rap, rock, and other popular music should be banned in the home. All tapes and compact discs brought into the home should be examined and approved by the parents. Stereo headphones should not be allowed, but, rather, music should be as much as possible shared with others.

*Music and Adults.* It is quite easy for an adult to point to popular bands like Metallica or Megadeth and condemn those young people who choose to listen to such demonic and violent music. But they should remember that the airwaves are full of country music stations that play songs with lyrics extolling the “pleasures” of adultery, murder, drunkenness, and irresponsibility. Millions of adults listen to this music. Adults should also reflect on the moral content of lyrics from the music normally played on light rock and oldies stations, many of which are obscene, suggestive, and even anti-Christian. We adults cannot listen to lyrics laden with negative and immoral imagery and expect our children to heed us when we warn them against the inappropriate messages found in the music to which they listen. Only if the adults in a family also listen to good and wholesome music will the children form proper attitudes towards this form of entertainment.

*Magazines and Books.* We should evaluate the magazines and books we have in our homes, both for the sake of our children as well as our own. Look at each magazine that you buy carefully and analyze the editorial slant. So-called “soft porn” magazines like *Playboy* and *Penthouse* obviously have no place in a Christian home. Not only is the glorification of immoral pleasures in these kinds of magazines un-Christian, but the worldview portrayed in them focuses on materialistic self-gratification. Such a worldview destroys family life, since in a healthy family, each member is constantly called upon to subordinate his immediate desires

for the good of the entire family. Without such an attitude, spiritual life dies; for, to be sure, self-discovery in a spiritual sense is built on our concern for others. This is a basic principle of Christianity—a principle to which self-gratification is wholly antithetical.

Other magazines tend to concentrate on fashion, hobbies, cars, or sports. Most of these are not openly immoral or wrong. But the philosophy behind them must be examined. What one must consider in evaluating such publications is the matter of priorities. All of these magazines have articles and advertisements which focus on a materialistic approach to life. This is a very seductive thing. Many a mid-life crisis has been fueled by the desire for sports cars, stereos, clothes, and the “things of the world,” a desire subtly implanted by exposure to a worldly philosophy that places greater focus on this life than on the next. The hapless victim of such a philosophy comes to think that he can fill the spiritual void in the human soul—something which we feel acutely as we see old age and death approaching—, and he thus turns to the world and makes the stuff of fashion, sports, and hobby magazines the main priority in his life. As a consequence, he often loses not only his soul, but his family. Worldly priorities must be avoided, if we are to build a proper Orthodox attitude in our homes.

There are other magazines which should be scrutinized. Many women’s magazines, for example, tend to elevate romantic love as an end in itself. All immoral behavior becomes permissible, as long as it is done for “love.” This message is obviously a threat to the Christian home. Many women’s magazines also tend to denigrate the rôle of mothers and motherhood, elevating career and self-fulfillment to a place of primary importance. Once again, the emphasis here is on self, rather than the family, and the values presented are destructive to the home. The advertisers in these magazines also concentrate on weight loss, make-up, clothes, and hairstyling, urging the reader to seek things that lead to vanity. Very subtly, such advertisements turn a woman

away from a life of commitment to the home and children and instill in her a desire for worldly adornment. This is abundantly clear when we contrast the adornments of the “fashionable” woman presented in modern magazines with the adornments which Saint Peter assigns to the Christian woman:

Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.<sup>39</sup>

Sadly enough, many of the books which are sold in America and in Western Europe today are simply trash. Since fewer and fewer people read, booksellers have turned to themes that they think might attract a public which has turned to the witless entertainment of television and videos. Thus, much of the fiction written over the past twenty years is either blatantly immoral or at best morally ambivalent. Take, for example, the books of Stephen King, admittedly an excellent writer and clever storyteller—a rare thing in today’s world of books. Though his works are not immoral, his tales of psychic horror are almost demonic in content. Very few of Stephen King’s characters possess any deeply held beliefs that directly affect their lives. Instead, they are usually brutalized and murdered in bizarre ways, often with a hideously demonic element at play in the background. There is no reference to God and His ultimate power. Almost always, evil is presented as an ultimate or superior power and King’s characters are but helpless victims of something beyond their control. Such material—among the most popular in America—is spiritually dangerous for any Christian. It portrays a completely false image of the spirit world, often in very compelling terms, and destroys any image of the God-protected individual and family that underlies a Christian view of the home.

Pop psychology and “self-help” books deserve special attention. Next to books of fiction and immoral romance novels, they

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<sup>39</sup> i Peter 3:3-4.

are probably the best-selling volumes in America. These books should be generally avoided. Not only do many of them view human beings from a humanistic or amoral perspective, but the authors contradict one another. One self-proclaimed “expert” will pontificate about his or her theory of child rearing or male-female relationships, only to have all of those ideas refuted by a different “expert” several years later. Thus the reader is exposed to a moral relativism that is constantly changing, making values seem capricious and ultimately unstable. Since none of these “experts” has a rational frame of reference for what he theorizes, the reader never develops a logical view of human interaction, the human being, or life. And without some standard by which to measure human behavior and thinking, he is left without a philosophy of life. Books that thwart the development of a philosophy of life obviously have no place in an Orthodox home.

*Adult Responsibility.* The key to maintaining an Orthodox Christian atmosphere in the home lies entirely in the hands of the adults living in that home. If they are united in their desire to seek to manifest the fruits of the Spirit—“joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, against such there is no law”<sup>40</sup>—then it very quickly becomes quite easy to separate diversions which are positive and helpful from those which are destructive. It is really quite simple to evaluate the merits of the films, books, songs, or programs under consideration. Read reviews of films or programs before renting or watching them. Is the overall message positive or constructive in its intent? Is the story line so weak that the director has to resort to vulgar language, gratuitous violence, or illicit sexual images to hold the audience’s interest? Does the story line itself denigrate God or present demonic phenomena in a positive or ambiguous light? The same problems that render a film unsuitable also apply to books and music. Reviews for all of these can be found in newspapers and newsmagazines.

Our most important goal as Orthodox parents is the creation of an Orthodox atmosphere in the home. Ideally this

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<sup>40</sup> Galatians 5:22-23.

should begin early on. But in the case of many converts to the Faith, or of parents who have only of late seen the negative effects of the world on their children and homes, the ideal time has often passed. Children who have already reached adolescence and have been allowed to watch and listen to all kinds of entertainment garbage since early childhood present a difficult challenge. Nonetheless, we must correct them with uncompromising fidelity to Christian virtue, though always in a calm spirit and with patience. Objectionable and inappropriate entertainment materials should be immediately removed from the home. This is the responsibility and right of the parent, and this should be made absolutely clear to children. We should be guided in these things by the words of Saint Paul: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil."<sup>41</sup> If our children see us constantly testing and weighing the merits of each movie or program we watch, each book or magazine we read, and each piece of music we listen to, they will come to understand that an Orthodox Christian is responsible for what he chooses to do. And if this vigilance results in a corresponding increase of peace, joy, and temperance in the home as the more negative elements are eliminated, will come to emulate our example. They will put away old and bad habits and learn to live the same Orthodox life that is lived by children reared from a young age in the Faith. This is how an Orthodox Christian home, even among those who convert to the Faith when their children are older, can truly become a small plot of Heaven on earth.

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<sup>41</sup> i Thessalonians 5:21-22.

## CHAPTER 2

### Orthodox Church Life

#### *A. Church Etiquette*

The Church is the earthly heaven in which the heavenly God dwells and moves.<sup>42</sup>

An Orthodox Church is that part of God's creation which has been set apart and "reclaimed" for the Kingdom of God. Within its walls, the heavenly and earthly realms meet, outside time, in the acts of worship and Sacrifice offered there to God. Angels assist the Priest during the Divine Liturgy, and Saints and members of the Church Triumphant participate in the Services. The Blessed *Theotokos*, the Mother of God, is also present and, of course, our Lord Jesus Christ is invisibly present wherever two or three gather in His Name,<sup>43</sup> just as He is always present in the reserved Eucharist preserved on the Holy Table of most Orthodox Churches.

Given these very significant spiritual realities, we should always approach an Orthodox Church with the deepest attitude of reverence. Even when passing an Orthodox Church on foot or in a car, we always cross ourselves out of respect for the presence of God therein. It is, indeed, unthinkable that we should ever pass in front of an Orthodox Church without showing such reverence. Therefore, it is obvious that we must approach our meeting with the heavenly realm during Divine Services with careful and proper preparation.

When preparing for Church, we should always dress as we would for a visit to an important dignitary. After all, we are about to enter into the very presence of God. Therefore, casual apparel is not appropriate. For example, shorts should never be

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<sup>42</sup> St. Germanos of Constantinople, *Ecclesiastical History and Mystical Contemplation*.

<sup>43</sup> St. Matthew 18:20.

worn in an Orthodox Church by either sex, under any circumstances. Men should normally wear a suit and tie. Women should wear dresses or skirts and should always cover their heads. The style and color of clothes worn by Orthodox Christians should be subdued and modest, especially when attending Church. Men's shirts should be buttoned to the neck. Tight clothing, sleeveless tops, and garish T-shirts should be avoided, since they are wholly inappropriate for Christians. In fact, the rule of thumb for proper dress both in and out of the Church building is this: Avoid wearing anything which would draw attention to oneself. This includes jewelry, make-up, the ostentatious use of perfume (or cologne for men), and large or gaudy hats. When we enter a Church, we should always strive to develop an attitude like that of the humble publican. Thus, anything in our appearance which would conflict with an attitude of humble piety should be considered inappropriate.

When arriving at the Church for Services, we should seek to arrive a few minutes before the Service begins, in order to prepare ourselves and clear our minds. In some Churches, and especially in Old Believer communities, one removes his shoes before entering the Church. This is, of course, impractical in larger Churches, and thus, unfortunately, the custom—one still followed by Moslems and inherited from their Christian ancestors—has almost died out in Orthodox countries. But the symbolic meaning of removing our shoes, in an attempt to keep the dirt of the world from the Church, reminds us that, even more importantly, we must not carry the worldly dirt of our minds into the Divine Services. On entering the Church proper, having crossed ourselves when approaching the building, we normally reverence the central Icon in the Narthex with three prostrations. This is done by making the Sign of the Cross twice with a bow (bending and touching the ground with the right hand) or, if one wishes, a prostration (falling to the knees and bending the head almost to the ground). (With regard to prostrations, it should be remembered, here, that because Sunday is the Day of Resurrection, we do not make prostrations or kneel in Church

after Saturday Vespers. This proscription holds not only for Sundays, but also for the entire festal period from Pascha to Pentecost. In some monasteries, this rule is applied to the whole of Saturday as well.) We then kiss the Icon (preferably on the Saint's right hand, if the Saint is blessing or holding a Cross) and cross ourselves a third time, making a final bow or prostration. Because we should not smudge or otherwise deface an Icon, women should avoid wearing lipstick to Church—if not altogether. (We might point out that Saint John of Shanghai and San Francisco even issued an *ukase* concerning the inadmissibility of venerating Icons when wearing lipstick.<sup>44</sup>)

Orthodox Churches always have candles available at the back of the Church. One should normally light one of these before an Icon as he enters the Church. If you have a special need or wish to remember someone prayerfully, you can make this known to God by lighting a candle as a pious offering to God. Saint John of Kronstadt tells us:

The candles burning on the altar represent the non-created light of the Trinity, for the Lord dwells in an unapproachable light. They also represent the fire of Divinity which destroys our ungodliness and sins. The candles lit before the icons of the Saviour signify that He is the True Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world (John 1:9); at the same time, He is a Fire which engulfs and revives our souls and bodies.

The candles lit before the icons of the Theotokos are a symbol of the fact that she is the Mother of the Unapproachable Light, and also of her most pure and burning love for God and her love for mankind.

The candles lit before icons of saints reflect their ardent love for God for Whose sake they gave up everything that man prizes in life, including their very lives, as did the holy Apostles, martyrs, and others. These candles also mean that these saints are lamps burning for us and providing light for us by their own saintly living, their virtues and their ardent intercession for us before God

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<sup>44</sup> *Man of God: Saint John of Shanghai & San Francisco*, trans. and ed. Archpriest Peter Perekrestov (Redding, ca: Nikodemos Orthodox Publication Society, 1994), p. 241.

through their constant prayers day and night. The burning candles also stand for our ardent zeal and the sincere sacrifice we make out of reverence and gratitude to them for their solicitude on our behalf before God.<sup>45</sup>

After having revered the Icon in the center of the Church and having lit a candle, we then assume our places in the Church: men on the right, women on the left (as we face the Altar). (The habit of kissing the Icons on the *Templon*—the Altar screen in front of the Church, often improperly called the *iconostasion*—, which can be seen in the most traditional of Churches and monasteries, is not technically correct. These Icons should actually be revered by the Bishop or the serving clergy, not the Faithful or others in attendance at the Services.) A traditional Church will have no pews, but only several benches or “choir stalls” (*stasidia*, in Greek) around the periphery of the Church, for the infirm or aged. Therefore, the Faithful stand through most of the Services. It is impious, arrogant, and improper to sit before God during Divine Services. Pews and sitting during services are a Protestant innovation, the natural consequences of services that entail, not a meeting of the heavenly with the earthly, but the recitation of a sermon accompanied by hymns. The separation of worship from a sense of participation in the Mysteries of God and its reduction to viewing and listening to a performance by a preacher and choir is incompatible with an Orthodox understanding of worship. So is sitting during Services.

With regard to pews and standing during prayer, we should note that the modernist or reformed (New Calendarist) Orthodox Churches did not start using pews until late in this century, and then primarily in the West. The ancient worship of the Christian Church has always involved standing. Even Western cathedrals like Notre Dame in Paris and Il Duomo in Florence, never had pews. It was unthinkable to the Fathers of the Church that one should sit in the presence of the King of Glory. As well,

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in *Orthodox America*, June 1984, p. 11.

Orthodox worship is active. The Faithful are called upon to be participants in the Liturgy and not to be mere spectators. First, this requires attention, and that attention is most complete in the standing position. This ancient practice has been validated by a researcher at the University of Southern California, who has determined that “people literally think faster on their feet” and process information up to twenty percent faster when standing.<sup>46</sup> Second, proper participation in the Liturgy involves bowing, the making of the Sign of the Cross, and sometimes prostrations. These active forms of worship are lost in Churches which have pews.

As we stand attentively, our hands should be at our sides. It is improper and disrespectful for one to put his hands behind his back, which signals an arrogant stand of defiance, or in his pockets, which is a sign of casual relaxation—hardly something appropriate for worship. We worship God with our whole bodies, and thus even our posture should show reverence and humility. We must never lean against the walls of the Church, which are sacred and which are often covered with Icons, and we should not stand in an inattentive way. Since soldiers can stand at attention for long periods of time, since children can stand in line for several hours to see a movie, and since cheerleaders at sports events can assume a certain pose for extended lengths of time, anyone who says that proper posture and standing in Church are impossible is simply being irrational. While standing in worship, the Sign of the Cross should normally be made at the end of each petition chanted by the Deacon or Priest, accompanied by a slight bow. (In some monasteries, where silence is assiduously maintained, this practice does not hold, since movement can be distracting.)

We make the Sign of the Cross:

1. When the Name of God, Christ, or the Trinity is mentioned.
2. When the *Theotokos* or any Saint’s name is mentioned.

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<sup>46</sup> “News of Science,” *Reader’s Digest*, October 1989, p. 149.

3. When we say the *Trisagion* (“Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us”), “Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, both now and ever, and unto the ages of ages,” the Lord’s Prayer (“Our Father...”), and any other similar prayers.

4. At the end of each petition in a litany, as we noted above.

5. Whenever the Deacon or Priest says, “Let us beseech the Lord.”

6. Whenever the curtain to the Altar is opened or closed.

7. At any time that you wish to pray for or remember any person during the course of the Service (for instance, when the Deacon or Priest commemorates the Bishop or the sick or those traveling).

There are also circumstances when we do *not* normally make the Sign of the Cross. Two such instances are:

1. When a Priest or Bishop blesses with his hand. We should, properly, simply bow slightly in acknowledgment of this blessing. This is also true when one approaches a Priest or Bishop for a blessing. He should not cross himself, but receive the blessing of the clergyman in question.

2. During the reading of the Six Psalms during Matins (see below).

There are also times during the Services, as we have noted, when the Faithful make a bow (bowing slightly or touching the ground with the right hand) or a prostration (*metanoia* in Greek, or *poklon* in Russian), crossing ourselves, falling to the knees, and bending the head down to the ground. We bow:

1. When we venerate an Icon, especially on Saturday or Sunday, when we are not to make prostrations.

2. At the beginning of any Service and each time that the Reader says, “O come, let us worship....”

3. At several specific times during the Liturgy (see below).

4. When the Deacon, Priest, or Bishop censens in our direction.

5. When the Priest or Bishop makes an entrance into the Altar during Vespers or Liturgy.

6. Towards the Bishop, if present in the Church, when he is commemorated during the petitions.

We make prostrations:

1. As described above, when entering the Church and venerating the central Icon, as long as we are outside Paschaltide and it is not a Sunday. Some people only bow in this instance. This, too, is proper.

2. When anyone enters the Altar outside Paschaltide and on days other than Sunday, even if he is only going in to clean. After prostrating or bowing, a Bishop, Priest, or Deacon kisses the Holy Table. (No one else should, incidentally, ever touch the Holy Table under any circumstances.)

3. At certain points in the Divine Liturgy during the week, outside Paschaltide.

At the end of any Service, the Priest will come out, facing us, and commemorate a list of various Saints. We should cross ourselves at each name mentioned. This may seem artificial and repetitive at first, but if we work through our initial resistance, this corporate action of the believers with the Priest facing one another is really quite beautiful and very beneficial for the community. Of course, this is only possible if we strive to maintain an attitude of humble reverence. All of these acts of piety and attempts to participate in the Services are empty and vain if they are done with the slightest hint of pride or showiness. This is easily avoided when we focus all of our concentration on the Altar and the prayers, participating in the Service from a sense of awe and gratitude for God's infinite mercy. This attitude will not come easily or quickly. There will be days when we simply have other things on our mind. What we must remember is that nothing which seems important in our daily lives and which distracts us from worship will be of any consequence fifty or a hundred years from now. Our prayers, on the other hand, are heard eternally.

We properly begin the weekend cycle of Divine Services with attendance at Vespers (or the Vespers–Matins Vigil) on Saturday afternoon or evening (or on the afternoon or evening

before a Feast Day). In order to understand what Feast or Saint is being commemorated at the Liturgy, it is necessary to attend the Vespers Service and hear the hymnody which both praises and often describes the meaning of the Feast or the life of the Saint. Since, over the Church Year, all of the great doctrines of the Fathers about Christ and the Saints can be found in this hymnody, the Vespers and Matins Services are indispensable to a correct knowledge of our Faith. To miss the Vespers Service as a matter of convenience is to deny ourselves the opportunity of learning the basic tenets of our Faith. Moreover, the Vespers Service prayerfully prepares us for the coming of Christ into our midst during the Divine Liturgy. Our lives are often so hectic and crammed with activity during the week that it becomes necessary to slow down and contemplate our relationship to our Creator with Services of preparation for the Liturgy. "Be still, and know that I am God,"<sup>47</sup> the Lord tells us through the Prophet-King David. This is almost impossible to achieve if our only contact with the Church is on Sunday morning.

The second Service in the cycle of Orthodox worship is Matins, which is celebrated Sunday morning before the Divine Liturgy. In the Slavic Churches, Vespers and Matins are often combined into one Service called the "All-Night Vigil." If we are attending a Vigil, the end of Vespers is immediately followed by the Six Psalms. These Six Psalms constitute the most solemn set of prayers read in any Service, for they are believed to be the prayers that will be heard at the beginning of the Dread Judgment, when Christ appears at the end of the world. For this reason, we stand perfectly still, in absolute concentration, as we will when confronted by His Judgment at the end of time. If Matins is performed separately, then some opening prayers and Psalms and a short litany are read before beginning the Six Psalms. During these readings, as we noted above, we do not cross ourselves, but remain absolutely still.

While the Matins Gospel is being read, we look humbly to

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<sup>47</sup> Psalm 45 [46]:10.

the ground and listen attentively. Afterwards, the Priest will bring out the Holy Gospel (an ornate book containing the Gospel Readings for the Church Year) for us to venerate. We first venerate the Icon in the center of the Church, as we did when we entered. We then proceed to the Priest and make two bows, reverently kissing the Gospel and *not*, according to Greek custom, the hand of the Priest (who holds the Gospel in his hands, both hands being covered by the end of his *Phelonion*), and then make a third bow. We venerate the Gospel as we would an Icon of Christ. Saint John of Damascus made it quite clear that the written Word is a form of Icon:

The sixth kind of image [Icon] is made for the remembrance of past events, such as miracles or good deeds, in order that glory, honor, and eternal memory may be given to those who have struggled valiantly. They assist the increase of virtue, that evil men might be put to shame and overthrown, and they benefit generations to come, that by gazing upon such images we may be encouraged to flee evil and desire good. These images are of two kinds: either they are words written in books, in which case the written word is the image..., or else they are material images, such as the jar of manna or Aaron's staff...<sup>48</sup>

Since the Gospel contains the very words of Christ, it is also considered the most sacred of images.

After having attended Vespers and Matins, we attend the Divine Liturgy. We should fast from midnight the night before this Service, in order to be attentive during the celebration and in order to prepare ourselves for receiving Holy Communion or *Antidoron*, the blessed bread which is distributed at the end of the Liturgy. (If the Divine Liturgy is being held at midnight, then we would fast six to eight hours prior to the start of the Liturgy. This is a strict fast which excludes all food and liquids.) Even if we do not commune during the Liturgy, the *Antidoron* at the end affords us a kind of participation in the Eucharist. This is because it has been in the very presence of the Holy

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<sup>48</sup> St. John Damascene, *Images*, pp. 77–78.

Mysteries, remaining bread and not becoming the Body of Christ, but taking on the blessing of the Eucharist. For this blessing we, again, prepare ourselves by fasting.

If we are communing, then we should, as a minimum, have kept the Wednesday and Friday fast. We should also fast from meat on Saturday. But since Saturday is not a day of fasting (except for Great and Holy Saturday), we should eat olive oil and drink wine and, if our spiritual Father allows it, eggs and dairy products at midday. From midday on Saturday we should normally fast as on any Wednesday or Friday. Married couples should, of course, fast from the flesh before communing. During a regular fasting period, such as Great Lent, the preparation for Communion is already accomplished. For this reason, Priests usually counsel their people to commune more frequently during an appointed Fast. Before coming to Church, we should also say our Communion Prayers in the Icon Corner of our home. These prayers prepare us mentally and spiritually for partaking of the Divine Eucharist. We must also confess our sins to the Priest before communing, in order to make our preparation complete. Saint Paul was very clear about the grave necessity of this preparation:

Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep [die].<sup>49</sup>

Having made the necessary preparations, we should go to the Church for the Divine Liturgy a bit early. Thus we give ourselves time to venerate the Icons, light a candle, and present the names of those living or dead Orthodox Christians whom we wish to have commemorated by the Priest during the Service of Preparation. In the Slavic Churches, small loaves of *prosphoron* (bread) are available to accompany the list. In both Greek and

<sup>49</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:27-30.

Slavic Churches, the Faithful usually have a commemoration book which contains a listing of both the living and the dead Orthodox Christians whom they wish to have commemorated at the Service. Usually an Altar Server will carry these back to the Priest while he is doing the Service of Preparation. It should be noted that only Orthodox Christians are commemorated in the Liturgy, since it is the common worship of all those joined together in right belief. (The heterodox, for whom we can and must pray, should be remembered only in our private prayers and *never by name* in the public worship of the Church. This includes political leaders, too. The Divine Liturgy has prayers for all people, but those whom we mention by name are those who belong to the fullness of Orthodoxy, who share our Baptism and beliefs, and who are loyal to Orthodox teachings. Even an Orthodox Patriarch who is not of right belief—*i.e.*, who has fallen to wrong doctrine—cannot be mentioned by name in the Liturgy. Thus, the more zealous Fathers on Mount Athos will not even utter the name of the Patriarch of Constantinople, a modernist and ecumenist who has compromised the Faith, though the See of Constantinople has always been the protector of the Athonite communities.)

During the Service of Preparation, the Hours are usually read. These are short Services of Psalms and prayers which the early Christians read throughout the day as part of their efforts to pray unceasingly. This time is sometimes used for the hearing of confessions, especially if more than one Priest is present, though this practice is not a good one and detracts from the Services. After the Matins Service or the reading of the Hours, the Divine Liturgy begins. During the most solemn parts of this Service, we are called upon to participate in the following ways:

1. At the time of the Great Entrance, we should bow slightly as the Gifts are brought out from the Altar. We should never bow down so far, during liturgical entrances, that we do not see what is happening. Entrances and processions in the Church call our attention to something (the Gospel, the Offerings for the

Eucharist, an Icon, *etc.*) and we should not be looking at the floor when they take place. Otherwise, they lose their meaning. When the Priest passes we may gently touch or kiss the edge of his *Phelonion*. We should stand upright just before the Priest enters the Beautiful Gates.

2. When the Priest says, “Take, eat...,” we should make a bow and then stand upright. The modern practice of kneeling at this point is rooted in the incorrect idea that these words constitute the “consecration” of the Eucharistic Elements. The Orthodox Church has never held to that understanding.

3. When the Priest says, “Take, drink...,” we once again make a slight bow and then stand upright.

4. When the Priest says, “Thine Own of Thine Own...,” we bow (or make a prostration, on days when this is permitted) and remain bowed down (or prostrate) until the Priest says: “Especially for our most holy...” It is during this time that the Priest reads the prayers of “consecration” inside the Altar.

5. After the “Our Father...,” when the Priest exclaims, “Holy Things are for the Holy,” we bow (or make a prostration, on days when this is permitted) and then remain bowed down (or prostrate) until the choir finishes “One is Holy...”

6. When the Deacon or Priest presents the Chalice and chants, “With fear of God...,” we either bow or make a quick prostration (when allowed), and then stand upright again.

If we are to commune, we go to the central Icon in the Church and venerate it as we did when we entered the Church. We then move to form a line to the right of the *Ambon*. Our arms are crossed over our chest with the right arm over the left. As we go forward, we should humbly allow men to commune first, in order of rank within the Church and by age (eldest first). Then the women should commune by rank (usually the Priest’s wife, or Presbytera, first) and by age. Finally, the children should come forward, boys first, by age. We do this in keeping with Saint Paul’s admonition, “Let all things be done decently and in order.”<sup>50</sup> We must always approach the Mysteries with the

<sup>50</sup> i Corinthians 14:40.

greatest reverence. Thus, if someone should push ahead, allow him to do so. It serves no purpose for us to start an argument and to distract the other Faithful as they receive the Mysteries.

When we receive the Mysteries, we should still have our arms folded on our chests. Making sure that the communion cloth is held carefully under our chin, we should open our mouth well enough in advance for the Priest to place the Spoon in it easily. We should close our lips on the Spoon as the Priest communes us, and then allow him to draw the Spoon out, with our lips closed, thus wiping the Spoon clean. We should not attempt to kiss the Chalice—despite the fact that this is a common practice in the Slavic Churches—, but quietly withdraw from the cloth and move over to take some *Antidoron*, dipping a piece lightly in the wine provided. The most critical concern for us when we commune is to make certain that we do nothing that might accidentally tip or knock the Chalice from the Priest's hand. As we partake of the *Antidoron*, we should be very careful not to let any crumbs drop to the floor.

If we did not commune, but have fasted from midnight, then at the end of the Service we should come forward, after venerating the center Icon, and approach the Priest, cupping our hands, right hand over left. As the Priest places the *Antidoron* in our hands, we should kiss his hand. It is a pious custom to take some of the *Antidoron* home to consume during the week. A resealable plastic bag should be brought to Church to keep the *Antidoron* for the journey home. Those who have communed and who have taken the *Antidoron* that should be provided immediately after Holy Communion should not take *Antidoron* again at the end of the Divine Liturgy.

After the final blessing, the Communion Prayers of Thanksgiving are read quietly by the Reader. During this time we should all contemplate the Mysteries of God and His mercy, as the prayers exhort us to do. After these prayers are finished, we should venerate the Icons as we did when we came into the Church and quietly leave in the same order that we communed.

We should refrain from greeting friends and acquaintances until after we have left the porch of the Church. The Deacon or Priest is probably still consuming the Mysteries which remained and is cleaning the Chalice. Our Lord is still present in the Altar. An atmosphere of quiet reverence, therefore, should always be maintained in the direct vicinity of the Church.

Keep in mind that these guidelines for Church attendance are structured for the communities within our own jurisdiction. There will be some variation in practice in Slavic Churches, since our emphasis is on Greek practice. But these differences will be very minor. In modernist Churches, which have lost many of the traditions of the Orthodox Church, perhaps only some of these traditions are followed. In any case, if you find any deviation from them in your community, always manifest an attitude of humility towards what you see. We have not cited these traditions for the purpose of creating tension and hostility. Our purpose is to educate and instruct, not to condemn or judge. Concentrate on doing those things which you can do in a spirit of reverence and gentleness, and avoid criticizing others. Such a witness over a period of time could very well inspire those around you to seek a more traditional life as well.

*B. The Mystery of Confession*<sup>1</sup>

And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> We have used the proper word, here, to refer to the “sacraments” of the Orthodox Church. Though the word “sacraments” is used in English by almost all Orthodox writers, the Greek and Slavonic words for the Church’s vivifying ministrations are correctly rendered “Mysteries.” Not only is the word “sacraments” borrowed from the lexicon of the Western church, but it reflects theological ideas that do not accurately correspond to Orthodox thinking. Just as the Orthodox Church does not have “seven sacraments” (a formula used in Orthodox confessions that were meant to address Western theological concerns), but rather a vast array of Grace-bestowing Mysteries, so it does not technically have “sacraments” as the heterodox Christians understand and define them. She has Her Own unique traditions and Her Own unique vocabulary to describe those traditions.

The popular perceptions of the Mystery of Confession held by a vast majority of Orthodox lay people tend to fall into two basic attitudes. Either they totally ignore Confession as irrelevant, or else they live in dire fear of it. Both points of view keep people from experiencing the true cleansing power of this important Mystery. Confession provides us a means by which to return to the original state of purity which we had immediately after Baptism.

If we wipe away the socially learned responses to our bodies and to our passions, protecting ourselves against demonic temptation by frequent Confession and by moral living, we can return to the innocence of our youth. We can remain mature in body, yet remain unadulterated by the sin and pollution which the world so stupidly calls 'adult.'<sup>53</sup>

The modern world tries to pretend that sin is a myth and that personal accountability for one's actions before a just God is merely a quaint superstition. As Orthodox Christians, we are called to a different standard than that of the world. This has been true of Christians in all ages and is especially important in our times. We are called to be the "light of the world"<sup>54</sup> and the "salt of the earth."<sup>55</sup> This means that we must not only be vigilant in how we live, but we must be honest with ourselves and respond immediately to God's call to repentance when we fall short of the mark. When we approach God in a spirit of humility and repentance, Confession can bring us face-to-face with ourselves. We can learn more from our weaknesses than we ever will from our strengths, because acknowledgment of weakness is the shortest path to humility. As Abba Sarmatias said: "I prefer a sinful man, who recognizes his fault and humbles himself, to a self-complacent man of virtue."<sup>56</sup> The most absurd

<sup>52</sup> Acts 19:18.

<sup>53</sup> Bishop [Archbishop] Chrysostomos, *Repentance* (Etna, ca: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1986), p. 49.

<sup>54</sup> St. Matthew 5:14.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 13.

notion that many people cling to in these times is the idea that no matter how selfish, vain, egotistical, and immoral they may be, they really are quite “good.” This is a destructive delusion. Let us see how we might better examine our lives to see what the real truth about ourselves usually is.

*Proper Preparation for Confession.* One of the easiest ways to examine our conscience is to call to mind each of the Ten Commandments listed in the Book of Exodus<sup>57</sup> and again in the Book of Deuteronomy,<sup>58</sup> keeping in mind that our Lord emphasized and expanded the meaning of these in His Sermon on the Mount.<sup>59</sup>

- i. I am the Lord thy God. ...Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.
- ii. ...Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image. ...Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them....<sup>60</sup>

People think that these commandments have no relevance to the modern world. After all, most of our ancestors stopped bowing down to stone idols centuries ago. But what these commandments are really saying is that for a Christian, nothing in the world should stand between him and his relationship with God. This means that we should honestly look at our priorities in life. For most people, God and the Church fall in about fifth or sixth place in order of importance. Money, career, power and influence among people, personal prestige (or ego), and self-gratification are the most powerful motivating forces and priorities in this materialistic society. The goals of Christianity run contrary to these forces and goals. In fact, living an Orthodox Christian life is ultimately incompatible with our attainment of worldly status and possessions. If we worship the needs and goals of the

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<sup>56</sup> Archimandrite [Archbishop] Chrysostomos, *Humility* (Etna, ca: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1982), p. 61.

<sup>57</sup> Exodus 20:1-17.

<sup>58</sup> Deuteronomy 5:6-21.

<sup>59</sup> St. Matthew 5:1-7:29.

<sup>60</sup> Exodus 20:2-5; Deuteronomy 5:6-9.

self, we have placed false gods before the True God, whom we reach only through self-denial and other-worldliness.

iii. Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain....<sup>61</sup>

The sin of blasphemy is generally overlooked in these times. Blasphemy and foul language are so commonly heard on television and in movies that small children often use language in kindergarten which was once used only by sailors. Interestingly enough, although most people are less offended by blasphemy than by openly crude sexual language, blasphemy is a sin against God, and is therefore the more serious offense. The whims of fashion and the decline of civilization do not exempt Orthodox Christians from their responsibilities to God and their families. They must, therefore, guard against the sin of blasphemy, which the Church has always recognized as a grievous sin. Let us heed, in this respect, a story told by Saint Gregory the Dialogist:

In this city, there lives a certain man who is known to all; three years ago, this man had a son who, if I recall, would then have been about five years old, for whom he had such human love that he did not even try to discipline him.

For this reason, the boy, when someone prevented him from getting his way, used to blaspheme the magnificence of God—and let me emphasize that this is something dangerous.

When, three years ago, a deadly plague fell upon the region where he lived, this young boy succumbed to it and was near death. As eyewitnesses recounted, while the father took the child into his arms, the boy himself saw evil spirits coming for him. The boy began to tremble, to blink his eyes in fear, and to cry out in despair to his father: ‘Father, save me, protect me.’ Simultaneously, as he cried, he turned his face towards his father’s chest, as though wanting to be hidden.

When the father saw his son trembling, in agony he asked him what he had seen. The son answered: ‘Black creatures came to me and wanted to take me away with them.’ No sooner had he finished this phrase, than he immediately blasphemed the name of

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<sup>61</sup> Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 5:11.

the Divine Magnificence and, with this blasphemy, expired.

Thus, God, the All-Powerful, in order to show by what sin the boy was given over to these evil servants, allowed him to die with this sin which his father, while the boy was alive, did nothing to prevent. And this boy whom God allowed, by His mercy, to live as a blasphemer, by His righteous judgement was also permitted to blaspheme at his death, so that his careless father might know well his sin. For this father, being indifferent to the soul of his young son, reared for the Gehenna of fire not an insignificant sinner, but a great sinner.<sup>62</sup>

The use of blasphemous and foul language is obviously not a light matter. In particular, we must be sure that we never approach the Holy Mysteries with this sin on our souls.

iv. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.<sup>63</sup>

For Orthodox Christians, this means regular attendance at Vespers on Saturday evening and Matins and Divine Liturgy on Sunday. This also involves arranging our lives to attend Services on the Great Feasts of the Church. In addition, we should reserve Sundays for family and Church activities. We should not do chores or actively seek to work on this day. Of course, certain situations may occur infrequently which require us to work on Sunday, but we should order our lives as Orthodox Christians in such a way that this is the exception and not the rule. This is one area which will readily reveal to us our true priorities. What we do with our time outside of normal work schedules shows us the depth of our spiritual life.

v. Honour thy father and thy mother....<sup>64</sup>

This is an area which requires a balanced approach. Too much concern for the opinion and approval of parents can be just as damaging to our spiritual life as it would be for us to neglect them. This commandment does not require blind obedi-

<sup>62</sup> *Evergetinos*, Vol. 2, pp. 45-46.

<sup>63</sup> Exodus 20:8; Deuteronomy 5:12.

<sup>64</sup> Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16.

ence, for it is possible (and often sadly common in these times) for one or both parents to demand children to behave in ways contrary to the Law of God. Saint John Chrysostomos acknowledged this problem when he said:

‘What if my parents command me to do things that are wrong?’ you might ask. Well, even when a parent does wicked things himself, he usually doesn’t force his children to imitate him. However, St. Paul has left us a provision in this case, by saying, ‘Obey your parents in the Lord,’ that is, whenever they tell you to do what is pleasing to God. So if your father is an unbeliever, or a heretic, and demands that you follow him, you ought not to obey, because what he commands is not in the Lord.<sup>65</sup>

We are, then, primarily responsible to look after our parents as they grow older and to give them respect. Even in cases where our parents may have abused us in some way, we are still responsible for their welfare. Selfish neglect or disrespect for our parents is also a sin which should not be ignored if we plan to commune.

vi. Thou shalt not kill.<sup>66</sup>

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment....<sup>67</sup>

Here we see the difference between what God expects of people in the world and the standard He holds up for Christians. It is relatively simple to refrain from actually killing another person, but it requires years of personal struggle in prayer and fasting to acquire such meekness that we never become angry with our neighbor “without a cause.” The Holy Fathers have always considered anger to be one of the chief pas-

<sup>65</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *On Marriage and Family Life*, trans. Catherine P. Roth and David Anderson (Crestwood, ny: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1986), p. 66.

<sup>66</sup> Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17.

<sup>67</sup> St. Matthew 5:21–22.

sions afflicting mankind and standing in the way of salvation. We should always honestly look into our hearts to see if we harbor any bitterness or bad feelings towards any other person. Have we left any quarrel or confrontation unresolved? If so, we should follow the wise counsel of Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky) of Kiev:

The most effective medicine against anger and irritability, although it is also the most bitter at the first draught, is to ask forgiveness after a quarrel. It is bitter for human pride but, if it is bitter, hasten even more to make use of it, for it is bitter only for the proud, and if it seems so intolerable to you, then know that you have within you yet another serious disease, pride. Sit down and think over your own soul, and pray that the Lord help you to master yourself and to ask forgiveness and peace from the person you have offended, even if he is more to blame than you.<sup>68</sup>

We must never approach the Holy Mysteries if we harbor unresolved anger for any other person.

vii. Thou shalt not commit adultery.<sup>69</sup>

As Orthodox Christians, we are called to lives of complete chastity before marriage and complete fidelity within marriage. Even within the bond of marriage we are expected to abstain from marital relations on all fast days and prior to receiving Communion. We do not seek to emulate the world, but seek to “come out from among them, [and] be...separate,”<sup>70</sup> as Saint Paul said. Moral purity was one of the distinctive traits of the early Christians, one that set them apart from pagan society. Now the West has come full circle and has reverted to a completely pagan attitude towards sexual matters. This fact renders our struggles in this area all the more important, simply because we will appear so different to the rest of society, should we suc-

<sup>68</sup> Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky, *Confession* (Jordanville, ny: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1983), p. 51.

<sup>69</sup> Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18.

<sup>70</sup> ii Corinthians 6:17.

ceed. We can also give many of those around us hope for a better way of life, free from disease and emotional distress, if we attend to our moral lives. Those who preach promiscuity simply choose to ignore the explosion of sexually transmitted diseases and the fact that the human organism was never designed to accommodate a promiscuous way of life. We ultimately become ill, weaken, and often die as a result of sins of the flesh. Many women become barren, often at a tragically young age. In the life of sexual morality, these things are washed away.

The only way to maintain a pure life is to be very careful and discerning about influences in the home. We must control the images that enter our minds, whether they are gleaned from television programs, videos, movies, music, books, or magazines. This is the only way we can have any hope of meeting our Lord's command that we control our thoughts as well as our bodies.<sup>71</sup> There is no justification for having any form of pornography in the home at all. Let us heed the words of Metropolitan Anthony:

Let them also stop believing in worldly stories and novels, according to which illicit love for another person's wife, for example, or another person's husband or a close relative is represented as a kind of involuntary possession with which it is supposedly impossible to struggle. All this is a lie, and all these 'love-affairs' are the fruit of a corrupted or idle imagination which was unknown to our ancestors, who were not educated from novels, but from sacred books. It is necessary to fill one's soul with different, better things, to love Christ, the homeland, studies, school, and how much more, to love the Church, one's parents and one's companions in the work to which one's life is dedicated, and to choose as a companion for one's life a woman with whom one can form a marital union and bring up children.<sup>72</sup>

Even if we sincerely work to lead a life of moral purity, we must never consider ourselves above temptation. Most of us will carry the struggle against the flesh to the grave. We must be sure,

<sup>71</sup> St. Matthew 5:28.

<sup>72</sup> Metropolitan Anthony, *Confession*, p. 68.

therefore, that when we approach the Mysteries we have carefully examined our thoughts and temptations and that we have confessed even the smallest infractions. For, if the flesh is weak, this is because the flesh is also strong.

viii. Thou shalt not steal.<sup>73</sup>

In this area, people usually engage in a certain amount of self-justification. Most people manage to keep from robbing convenience stores or embezzling thousands of dollars from a major corporation. But the world offers us many other opportunities to take something that does not belong to us without asking permission from the owner. This often begins with taking small things, such as office supplies at work, or with not actively seeking to locate the owner of something we have found. We forget that this commandment applies to such things and that we are not free to justify ourselves for sins of this kind. The commandment also refers to the buying or selling of stolen goods or conspiring to cheat or defraud people out of their money. If we work in the area of sales, are we truly honest with our customers when we describe the product or service that we sell? If someone entrusts us with his possessions, even if they are small or insignificant, do we take diligent care for these items? All of these issues are covered by this commandment.

ix. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.<sup>74</sup>

Actually, this commandment is more concerned with slander and gossip than simply telling the truth. Slander destroys, through innuendo or outright lies, the reputation of an innocent person. It is usually employed by cowardly people who are either eaten up with envy or who believe that the only way they can prevail against some person whom they perceive as a threat is by destroying his reputation. This is a very serious sin which is, sadly enough, rampant in the Orthodox Church today. We par-

<sup>73</sup> Exodus 20:15; Deuteronomy 5:19.

<sup>74</sup> Exodus 20:16; Deuteronomy 5:20.

ticipate in slander when we choose to believe negative stories or incidents related to us about people whom we have never met and do not personally know. As Orthodox Christians, we have an obligation to believe the best about people until we have had clear personal evidence to the contrary. Slander, then, should be foreign to us.

Gossip is a lesser form of slander, but is just as destructive and sinful. We should thus be careful about what we repeat to other people regarding the behavior or character of others. If we pass on a story, we should remind ourselves that we might be passing on false information about that person. We thus become the source of a lie. This is a sin even if we have no malicious intent. Do you have a tendency to pass on information, just to appear to be “in the know”? Do you seek to inflate yourself at the expense of others? If so, you are guilty of gossip and are on the verge of slander. And if so, you should avoid Holy Communion until you have corrected this fault.

With regard to lying, which is also covered by this commandment, one must be very cautious. The essence of a sinful lie is the result that we are seeking from the lie. Are we lying for our own selfish interests? Even when there is no direct harm caused to another person, a selfish lie is still a sin, for it focuses on the ego, which in turn impedes communion with God. And this is harmful. It is also possible, however, to do great harm by going out of our way to tell someone the truth. Many people have been harmed by neighbors who chose to be “honest” in the name of truth, when the intent of their heart was quite malicious. This kind of “truth” is a lie and is a form of false witness. Telling the “truth,” then, is a complex thing. At times, the “truth” is a lie and, strangely enough, what appears to be deceitful can be in the very spirit of “truth,” if this “deceit” is undertaken for the sake of the greater good. Saint John Chrysostomos once gave some interesting examples of this:

A timely deception used with a right purpose is such an advantage that a lot of men have been called to account on many

occasions for failing to deceive.

If you consider famous generals from the beginning of history, you will find that most of their successes are triumphs of deceit, and that men like this can earn more praise than others who conquer by more straightforward methods. For the others are successful in their wars at a greater expense of money and men. ...When the plans of doctors are hindered by the whims of their patients and the obstinacy of the complaint itself, then it is necessary to put on the mask of deception. ...Great is the power of deceit; only it must not be applied with treacherous intention. Or rather, it is not right to call such action deceit, but good management and tact and skill enough to find many ways through an impasse. ...The straightforward man does great harm to those he will not deceive.<sup>75</sup>

As Orthodox Christians, we must seek to live in the spirit of truth, which demands that we do all things that are good for our neighbor, bearing a “true” witness before them.

x. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidervant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s.<sup>76</sup>

Envy is a passion which feeds off the other passions. It can lead people to irrational and reckless acts, including slander or even murder. Pontius Pilate knew, for example, that the chief priests who sought to crucify Christ, “had delivered Him for envy.”<sup>77</sup> These are the depths to which envious people can sink. When we allow ourselves to feel envious of our brother’s blessings, it means that we have completely forgotten our own. All that we are and all that we have belong to God. All of our scheming and ambition, our desire to have more than God has given us, simply get in the way of true spiritual progress. Ambition for material gain is, indeed, a very short-sighted attitude

<sup>75</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Six Books on the Priesthood*, trans. Graham Neville (Crestwood, ny: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), pp. 48–51.

<sup>76</sup> Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21.

<sup>77</sup> St. Mark 15:10.

which can ultimately lead us to envy of those who possess what we do not. Metropolitan Anthony says this about envy:

Envy is joined to the yet more repulsive feeling of gloating over the misfortunes of others, and is linked with some other sinful passion—vainglory, self-interest, or ambitiousness and so is directed against one's adversary in a way corresponding to this passion. In order to vanquish envy, not only must the actual envy be opposed, but also those fundamental self-loving passions of the soul from which it is born. ...If you do not love money, you will not envy your neighbor when he gets rich.<sup>78</sup>

We must remember that it was through the envy of the devil that sin entered the world. This is a very serious sin which cannot only destroy our own life, but the lives of those around us as well. The sin of envy can start as a small irritation of our spirit that can fester into a gaping wound. Do we find fault with others, particularly those who are promoted ahead of us or shown some special honor? As Saint Paul said, "Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another."<sup>79</sup> Otherwise, we will bring sure condemnation upon ourselves should we choose to partake of the Blessed Cup with envy in our hearts.

*The Order of Confession.* The Mystery of Confession entails a very simple procedure. We merely arrange a time with the Priest, usually on a regular schedule (every week, if possible), and meet with him. This can be in the Church or at home. The actual place is not important. What is important is that we have properly prepared for Confession by examining our conscience. If we are meeting in a more informal setting, we should say the prayers appointed in the service books for the order of Confession. This is not always done, if the Confession occurs during or immediately following a Service. A good Priest will prompt us if we seem hesitant. But it is far better for us to be prepared ahead of time and give him a concise and honest account of our sins.

<sup>78</sup> Metropolitan Anthony, *Confession*, p. 79.

<sup>79</sup> Galatians 5:26.

The Priest will ask questions and give advice on how to avoid various problems, as he deems appropriate. The Priest is there as a witness before God and is subject to suspension or deposition should he ever betray (misuse) what he has heard. After we are finished, we should bow to allow the Priest to hold his *Epitrichion* over our heads as he recites the following prayer (or one similar to it):

O Lord God...the salvation of thy servants, gracious, bountiful and long-suffering, who repentest thee concerning our evil deeds, and desirest not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live: Show thy mercy now upon Thy servant, N., and grant unto him (*her*) an image of repentance, forgiveness of sins, and deliverance, pardoning his (*her*) every transgression, whether voluntary or involuntary. Reconcile and unite him (*her*) unto thy holy Church, through Jesus Christ our Lord, with whom also are due unto thee dominion and majesty, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.<sup>80</sup>

There is a second prayer which has come into use in recent times which is wholly inappropriate for use by an Orthodox Priest. It entered into the Russian Church from the West and contains the Roman Catholic formula, recited by the Priest, "I absolve thee from all thy sins." The Orthodox Church does not deny that the Grace of the Holy Spirit, which resides in the Priesthood, is salvific and washes away sin. But for a Priest to consider this a personal prerogative and to proclaim forgiveness speak of an arrogance, indeed, an abuse of the Priesthood unknown in any Patristic witness and in the humble examples of the best clergy. About this abusive and wholly un-Orthodox formula, Metropolitan Anthony says the following, in his advice about Confession:

Unfailingly read over each of them the most important prayer 'Lord God, the salvation of Thy servants...', and stop thinking

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<sup>80</sup> *Service Book of the Holy Orthodox-Catholic Apostolic Church*, trans. Isabel Florence Hapgood, 6th ed. (Englewood, nj: Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese, 1983), pp. 289-290.

that the essential prayer of the Mystery—which is the only one read by virtually the majority of the Priests—is the following: ‘The Lord and God Jesus Christ [...forgive thee, my child...all thy transgressions. And I, his unworthy Priest, through the power given unto me by him, do forgive and absolve thee from all thy sins....<sup>81</sup>]’ This prayer was introduced into our order of confession quite recently, less than three hundred years ago; neither the Greeks nor the Edinoversti<sup>82</sup> have it, but it came to us from the Roman Catholics.<sup>83</sup>

*Finding a Confessor.* We should always first seek spiritual guidance from our local parish Priest. But occasionally situations arise when the Priest is too busy or is in some other way unable to give us serious spiritual guidance. He may also have not been given a blessing by his Bishop to hear Confessions. (According to proper and traditional Orthodox practice, a Priest is allowed to hear Confessions only after he has gained some experience in his clerical rank. Sadly enough, especially in America and in the Slavic Churches, this important custom is largely ignored in contemporary Orthodoxy.) In this case, we should seek, again with the parish Priest’s aid, the help of a spiritual guide, whether at another Church or at a monastery. We should seek to establish a stable relationship which will continue over a period of years. We should also confess regularly, and to the same person. Constantly changing confessors never allows us to find real solutions to our spiritual problems. Many situations require much time and effort to resolve. A spiritual relationship with a confessor is not an easy thing to establish, and much caution is advised:

First, one must distinguish between an elder and a spiritual Father.... There are few elders left on the face of the earth today, and those who claim to be elders or allow their followers to call them by that title—especially here in America, where Orthodoxy

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 290.

<sup>82</sup> Old Ritualists (Old Believers) who re-united with the Russian Orthodox Church, but were allowed to maintain their pre-Nikonian customs.

<sup>83</sup> Metropolitan Anthony, *Confession*, pp. 25–26.

is so immature—, do no service to the cause of Orthodoxy. ...It is a fact that the average layman often confuses the functions of the elder and the spiritual Father.

Secondly, obedience to a spiritual Father is not so much a question of commanding and obeying as of leading and following. ...The spiritual Father does not coerce, he does not give orders; rather, he takes the spiritual child by the hand and leads the way, gently but firmly....

One of the signs by which a layman can recognize his spiritual Father is this: a spiritual guide is not 'longing' to give anyone advice; on the contrary, he knows that of himself he is empty and incapable. ...Bishop Ignatios [Brianchaninov] says that 'the Fathers forbid us to give advice to our neighbor of our own accord, without our neighbor's asking us to do so. The voluntary giving of advice is a sign that we regard ourselves as possessed of spiritual knowledge and worth, which is a clear sign of pride and self-deception.' ...True spiritual guides give advice with fear of God and only because it was asked of them; knowing their own grievous inadequacies, they do not expect instant obedience, but leave it to the judgment of their spiritual child. In this way they protect both themselves and their spiritual children.<sup>84</sup>

The relationship described above is meant for those living a pious Orthodox life of prayer, fasting, and regular attendance at Divine Services. Until we have established these routines in our daily lives, there is little that a spiritual Father can do for us, aside from praying for our conversion to serious spiritual life.

### *C. Holy Communion*

Then Jesus said unto them [the Jews], Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. Whosoever eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live

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<sup>84</sup> Archimandrite [Archbishop] Chrysostomos *et al.*, *Obedience* (Brookline, ma: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1984), pp. 44-47.

by the Father: so he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.<sup>85</sup>

These words, so often profoundly misunderstood, reveal one of the great Mysteries of Christendom. In fact, what is accomplished on the Holy Table during the Divine Liturgy is referred to as a “Holy Mystery” precisely because what occurs is beyond our comprehension. The Orthodox Church has always believed and understood that Jesus Christ is actually present in the Bread and Wine which are offered on the Altar. These become the Body and Blood of Christ, the Body and Blood of the same Christ Who commanded us to “eat My flesh and drink My blood.” This is an awesome mystery which must never become routine or automatic, so that we lose sight of the fact that *God is present* in the Chalice in a form which fulfills our highest hope for spiritual transformation. These Mysteries, the Body and Blood of Christ, provide us with a way to remove the stain of the ancestral curse of Adam, which we all share. This Mystery is not a magic “pill” to help us make our way through the mundane trials of the week; nor is it something symbolic and secondary. These Mysteries bring us into a true and vivifying relationship with Jesus Christ. This relationship cleanses and purifies our souls for our inevitable face-to-face meeting with Christ after death.

Holy Communion is an occasion that demands of us a certain level of preparation. While it is true that we are all sinners and will always remain sinners in this life, that does not excuse us from our responsibilities to prepare ourselves, to the best of our ability, to be clean before the face of God. Suppose someone were to invite an auto mechanic to dinner in his home. Is it not likely that the hostess would expect her guest to wash his hands and change his greasy clothes before sitting at table? The auto mechanic might argue that it is in the nature of his job for him

<sup>85</sup> St. John 6:53–58.

to be greasy and dirty; but that would not spare him from the wrath of the hostess, were he to soil her furniture or linens—and rightly so. How much more, then, should we strive, out of love, to avoid the wrath of God by properly preparing to receive Holy Communion. How much more should we strive to be clean, both physically and spiritually, as we partake of the Great Banquet of the Holy Eucharist?

*Proper Preparation for Holy Communion.* We have already discussed fasting and Confession as they relate to preparation for Holy Communion. A few additional points, however, should be made:

1. Though we fast strictly for a number of hours before communing, it may happen that, while brushing our teeth in the morning, we accidentally swallow a small amount of water. This is not a violation of the fast and should not keep us from communing.

2. The evening before we commune should generally be spent quietly at home, preferably reading or discussing spiritually profitable material. We should also not be taking part in dances (which are, in any case, inappropriate for Orthodox Christians), parties, concerts, or other worldly forms of entertainment the evening before we commune.

3. We should say the Preparatory Prayers for Holy Communion, which are contained in any good collection of Orthodox prayers for daily use. These prayers should be said in our Icon Corner at home, before going to Liturgy. Saying these prayers piously and attentively prepares us to receive the Mysteries to our spiritual benefit, rather than to our perdition.

4. Women should abstain from communing during their period. Men should abstain from communing if the evening before they had a nocturnal emission. This rule is summarized in the Second Canon of Saint Dionysios, which clearly states that all must approach Holy Communion “wholly clean both in soul and body.” The instances of bodily pollution in question involve natural functions in men and women and are not sinful in and of themselves. But they are manifestations of the fallen nature of

human beings and are a sign of our unclean state. As Archbishop Chrysostomos has observed:

Natural physiological processes need not be sinful to fall short of the spiritual ideal. Basic theology tells us this. We are lifted above our physiological natures, above even the goodness which remains in our fallen natures, when we join ourselves to Christ. We fast, approach the Chalice with the greatest possible purity, and prepare ourselves internally for communion with Christ, so that the best that we are may be joined to His perfection.<sup>86</sup>

5. If a Priest should happen to have a nocturnal emission the night before celebrating the Divine Liturgy and must Liturgize, he should, on awakening, immediately recite Psalm 50 (51) and read the “Rule Against Defilement,” a service appointed by the Church for such circumstances.

6. Generally, we should not commune if we are bleeding, for the very Blood of Christ enters into our bodies after we have received the Holy Mysteries. If we should happen to cut ourselves immediately after Holy Communion (within a few hours), we should bury any blood that we have shed, along with any bandages or material on which the blood has collected. This pious custom helps us to remember what an awesome thing Holy Communion really is.

The one exception to the rules of preparation for receiving the Holy Mysteries involves those who are ill or injured and in danger of dying. The dying should always receive Holy Communion, even if they have recently eaten or are bleeding. Whenever possible, of course, blood lost in such circumstances should be disposed of properly.

*The Proper Attitude Towards Holy Communion.* Many people, particularly in America, seem to have difficulty developing a proper attitude towards Holy Communion. They have at times been openly encouraged by their modernist Hierarchs and by self-styled “experts” to look upon receiving the Mysteries as a

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<sup>86</sup> Bishop [Archbishop] Chrysostomos, “Women in the Church,” *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (1991), p. 1.

privilege or even a right. They are lulled into carelessness by glib statements about how Christ loves us as we are and how we are all sinners before God. (Both of these things are, of course, true, but neither has any application to the reception of Holy Communion.) Thus, men and women are no longer being encouraged to bring their best before God, but rather are led to believe that they are doing God a service by sauntering up to the Chalice.

Other modernist leaders use the example of Saint John of Kronstadt as an excuse to commune without proper preparation. It is true that Father John exhorted his people to commune often, and to this end he conducted “mass” confessions in his Church. What these same modernists fail to acknowledge is the fact that Saint John was a charismatic leader who led a completely pure life (he and his Matushka, or wife, lived as brother and sister) and was in constant prayer to God. We know of no person living in America or Western Europe who is presently living a life that even approaches that of Saint John of Kronstadt. Only such a person would have the spiritual authority to ask people who are living in the world to commune daily or even weekly and to know whether or not this would harm them. Today’s modernist leaders also fail to tell believers that, if they wish to follow a man like Saint John, they must also be ready and willing to shout their sins aloud in the Church, as his followers did, and to keep the fasts and say the Preparatory Prayers for Communion. The spiritual discernment of Saint John of Kronstadt and the deep piety of his spiritual children are extremely rare commodities in our modern world. Using their example, then, to justify present-day lax practices is simply dishonest.

What should our attitude towards Holy Communion be? Let us seek the guidance of Saint John Chrysostomos:

When you see the Lord sacrificed and lying before you, and the High Priest standing over the sacrifice and praying, and all who partake being tintured with that precious blood, can you think that you are still among men and still standing on earth? Are you

not at once transported to heaven, and, having driven out of your soul every carnal thought, do you not with soul naked and mind pure look round upon heavenly things? Oh, the wonder of it! Oh, the loving-kindness of God to men! He who sits above with the Father...gives Himself to those who wish to clasp and embrace Him—which they do, all of them, with their eyes. Do you think this could be despised? or that it is the kind of thing anyone can be superior about?<sup>87</sup>

The Divine Liturgy actually unites the heavenly realm with the earthly. The Angels and Saints are present, as witnessed by hundreds of written accounts from Saints and holy people throughout the centuries. We are brought into the presence of the King of Kings, and He condescends out of inexpressible love, to allow us to partake in a mystical, yet very real, way of His Body and Blood. Thus, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem once told his catechumens:

Contemplate therefore the Bread and Wine not as bare elements, for they are, according to the Lord's declaration, the Body and Blood of Christ; for though sense suggests this to thee, let faith stablish thee. Judge not the matter from taste, but from faith be fully assured without misgiving, that thou hast been vouchsafed the Body and Blood of Christ.<sup>88</sup>

Once we come to a more profound understanding of what the Liturgy is and what is being accomplished on the Holy Table, our mundane and petty concerns about personal rights and the inconvenience caused by proper preparation for the Mysteries will naturally fade. In fact, this is what makes the Preparatory Prayers for Holy Communion so necessary. If we regularly say these prayers with piety and attention when we commune, the thoughts and concepts of deep repentance and humility contained within them will effectively eliminate any wrong attitudes we may have developed. A few of the ideas expressed in these

<sup>87</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Priesthood*, pp. 70–71.

<sup>88</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Lectures on the Christian Sacraments*, ed. F. L. Cross (Crestwood, ny: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977), p. 50.

prayers are listed below:

Accept...even me, O Lord, Lover of mankind, as Thou didst accept the sinful woman, the thief, the publican, and the prodigal; and take away the heavy burden of my sins, Thou that takest away the sin of the world, and healest the infirmities of mankind; Who callest the weary and heavy-laden unto Thyself and givest them rest, Who camest not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance [First Prayer of Saint Basil the Great].<sup>89</sup>

O Lord my God, I know that I am not worthy nor sufficient that Thou shouldest enter beneath the roof of the temple of my soul, for all is empty and fallen, and Thou hast not in me a place worthy to lay Thy head; but as from on high Thou didst humble Thyself for our sake, do Thou now also conform Thyself to my lowliness; and as Thou didst consent to lie in a cave and a manger of dumb beasts, so consent also to lie in the manger of mine irrational soul, and to enter into my defiled body [First Prayer of Saint John Chrysostomos].<sup>90</sup>

Thou Who by Thy burial didst lead captive the kingdom of hades, bury with good thoughts mine evil schemes, and destroy the spirits of evil. Thou Who by Thy life-bearing Resurrection on the third day didst raise up our fallen first forefather, raise me up who have slipped down into sin, setting before me the ways of repentance [Prayer of Saint Symeon the Translator].<sup>91</sup>

O Master Lord Jesus Christ our God, Who alone hast authority to remit the sins of men: Do Thou, as the Good One and Lover of mankind, overlook all mine offences, whether committed with knowledge or in ignorance. And vouchsafe me to partake without condemnation Thy Divine, glorious, immaculate, and life-creating Mysteries... [First Prayer of Saint John of Damascus].<sup>92</sup>

But this again I know, that neither the magnitude of mine offenses nor the multitude of my sins surpasseth the abundant

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<sup>89</sup> *Prayer Book*, 4th ed. (Jordanville, ny: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1986), pp. 355-356.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 357-358.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 361.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 362-363.

long-suffering of my God and His exceeding love for mankind; but with sympathetic mercy Thou dost purify and illumine them that fervently repent, and makest them partakers of the light, sharers of Thy divinity without stint [Prayer of Saint Symeon the New Theologian].<sup>93</sup>

Behold, I approach the Divine Communion.  
O Creator, let me not be burnt by communicating,  
For Thou art Fire, consuming the unworthy.  
But, rather, purify me of all impurity  
[Prayer of Saint Symeon the Translator].<sup>94</sup>

If we approach the Chalice with these thoughts in our mind, we will reap all of the spiritual blessings which Christ bestows upon His faithful servants.

After we commune, we should be careful about putting anything in our mouth that we do not intend to swallow. It is possible for some of the Mysteries still to be on our teeth or in our mouth, so we should always be careful, after communing:

1. Not to smoke (an unhealthy and unclean practice which Christians must avoid anyway<sup>95</sup>) or chew gum at any time for the next few hours.

2. To train small children not to put their fingers in their mouths.

3. Not to spit for any reason. If you are ill and are coughing or vomiting, you should not commune unless you have a life-threatening illness. If you suddenly become ill after communing, carefully clean up the *vomit* and bury it in a safe place that will not be stepped on.

4. Not to brush one's teeth or to gargle—both of which involve spitting—before evening, or at least until several hours have passed and one has eaten a meal.

All of these guidelines are based on the idea that we have

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 368–369.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 375.

<sup>95</sup> See Constantine Cavarnos, *Smoking and the Orthodox Christian*, trans. Bishop [Archbishop] Chrysostomos of Etna (Etna, ca: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1992).

just received God into ourselves. Therefore, we act in ways which show respect and consideration for the magnificent Gift that God has just bestowed upon us. There is a remarkable anecdote in the life of Saint Paisios the Great that will be helpful to those doubting that piety or impiety are reflected in such minutiae as spitting and oral hygiene. The anecdote concerns a fallen monk who had abandoned his calling and even his Faith through the beguilement of a certain Jewess:

This thrice–accursed woman fell into such an unfathomable chasm of destruction and arrived at such a profound state of shamelessness, that oftentimes she would take the head of this miserable one into her arms and, opening his mouth, would scrape his teeth with a thin piece of wood, in the event that some Pearl of the Holy Communion of the Immaculate Mysteries remained there.<sup>96</sup>

If, indeed, we truly believe this Gift to be the precious Body and Blood of Christ, how could we ever discard it or throw it aside as though it were an everyday thing? If we lose sight of Holy Communion as a Gift from God, we should think twice about communing. Unfortunately, those who have the most glib attitudes about the Mysteries are often those who commune most frequently. There is very little to be gained spiritually from such behavior.

There is another extreme which is equally destructive to spiritual life, and that is the habit of receiving the Mysteries only once or twice a year, rising out of the attitude that Holy Communion is so sacred that it should play no rôle in our everyday lives. Such people are starving themselves spiritually and will never experience the meaningful spiritual growth which comes from Holy Communion. It is true that there were hermits in the desert who went years without communing. Saint Mary of Egypt spent over thirty years in the desert without receiving the Mysteries. But she was not living in the world. She spent seven-

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<sup>96</sup> St. John the Dwarf, *Saint Paisios the Great*, trans. Leonidas Papadopoulos and Georgia Lizardos (Jordanville, ny: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1983), p. 42.

teen years in agonizing struggle with her flesh and another seventeen years in deep noetic prayer. Nobody living in the world in these times has a prayer life which even remotely resembles that of Saint Mary of Egypt. And even she, having become an Angel on earth, nonetheless, at the end of her life, sought out, above all else, a Priest to give her Holy Communion.

God has provided us with the Mysteries as a means to salvation. This is the thing which must be foremost in our minds. We are being seriously negligent of our souls if we refuse this help from God. Blessed Philotheos (Zervakos, †1980), the spiritual Father of Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Fili, lamented the deplorable attitudes of many people towards Holy Communion when he said:

Of this heavenly bread some people out of disbelief and impiety do not partake at all, while others out of ignorance, poverty of faith [Matt. 17:20], negligence and lack of true and pure love towards God, partake of it once, twice, or four times a year. Yet even during these few times they commune out of habit, because most of them draw near without fear, faith and love ['With the fear of God and with faith and love draw near,' Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom]. It is sorrowful and worthy of many lamentations that the Priest often comes out to the beautiful gate, to invite the Christians to commune, and no one comes to commune.... Where have we ended up! At least a few of the God-fearing Christians ought to commune at each liturgy.... May the all-good God enlighten, awaken and arouse everyone from the sleep of sloth and negligence. Then, when we have repented and been cleansed by repentance and confession, let us draw near with fear, faith and love to our pure God and become worthy heirs of His eternal and unending life and kingdom. Let no one who is unrepentant like Judas dare to approach the mystical table so that he may not be burnt up and handed over to the eternal fire....<sup>97</sup>

#### *D. Clergy Etiquette*

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<sup>97</sup> Elder Philotheos Zervakos, *Paternal Counsels*, trans. Father Nicholas Palis, Vol. 1 (Lancaster, pa: St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite Publication Society, 1991), pp. 41-42.

The following is a guide for properly addressing Orthodox clergy. Most of the titles do not exactly correspond to the terms used in Greek, Russian, or the other native languages of the national Orthodox Churches, but they have been widely accepted as standard English usages.

*Greeting Clergy in Person.* When we address Deacons or Priests, we should use the title “Father.” Bishops we should address as “Your Grace.” Though all Bishops (including Patriarchs) are equal in the Orthodox Church, they do have different administrative duties and honors that accrue to their rank in this sense. Thus, “Your Eminence” is the proper title for Bishops with suffragans or assistant Bishops, Metropolitans, and most Archbishops (among the exceptions to this rule is the Archbishop of Athens, who is addressed as “Your Beatitude”). “Your Beatitude” is the proper title for Patriarchs (except for the Œcumenical Patriarch in Constantinople, who is addressed as “Your All-Holiness”). When we approach an Orthodox Presbyter or Bishop (but not a Deacon), we make a bow by reaching down and touching the floor with our right hand, place our right hand over the left (palms upward), and say: “Bless, Father” (or “Bless, Your Grace,” or “Bless, Your Eminence,” *etc.*). The Priest or Bishop then answers, “May the Lord bless you,” blesses us with the Sign of the Cross, and places his right hand in our hands. We kiss then his hand.

We should understand that when the Priest or Bishop blesses us, he forms his fingers to represent the Christogram “IC XC,” a traditional abbreviation of the Greek words for “Jesus Christ” (*i.e.*, the first and last letters of each of the words “IHCOYC XPICTOC”). Thus, the Priest’s blessing is in the Name of Christ, as he emphasizes in his response to the believer’s request for a blessing. Other responses to this request are used by many clergy, but the antiquity and symbolism of the tradition which we have presented are compelling arguments for its use. We should also note that the reason that a lay person kisses the hand of a Priest or Bishop is to show respect to his Apostolic

office. More importantly, however, since both hold the Holy Mysteries in their hands during the Divine Liturgy, we show respect to the Holy Eucharist when we kiss their hands. In fact, Saint John Chrysostomos once said that if one were to meet an Orthodox Priest walking along with an Angel, that he should greet the Priest first and kiss his hand, since that hand has touched the Body and Blood of our Lord. For this latter reason, we do not normally kiss the hand of a Deacon.<sup>98</sup> While a Deacon in the Orthodox Church holds the first level of the Priesthood (Deacon, Presbyter, Bishop), his service does not entail blessing the Mysteries. When we take leave of a Priest or Bishop, we should again ask for a blessing, just as we did when we first greeted him.

In the case of married clergy, the wife of a Priest or Deacon is also informally addressed with a title. Since the Mystery of Marriage binds a Priest and his wife together as “one flesh,”<sup>99</sup> the wife shares in a sense her husband’s Priesthood. This does not, of course, mean that she has the very Grace of the Priesthood or its office, but the dignity of her husband’s service certainly accrues to her.<sup>100</sup> The various titles used by the national Churches are listed below. The Greek titles, since they have English correspondents, are perhaps the easiest to use in the West:

*Greek:* Presbyterera (Pres-vee-té-ra)

*Russian:* Matushka (Má-toosh-ka)

*Serbian:* Papadiya (Pa-pá-dee-ya)

*Ukrainian:* Panimatushka (Pa-nee-má-toosh-ka), or Pani-matka (Pa-nee-mát-ka)

The wife of a Deacon is called “*Diakonissa* [Thee-a-kó-nees-sa]” in Greek. The Slavic Churches commonly use the same

<sup>98</sup> It is, however, permissible to kiss the hand of a Deacon, just as we do that of an Abbot (even if not a Priest) or Abbess of a monastery or a revered monastic, out of respect or as a sign of dedication.

<sup>99</sup> Genesis 2:24; St. Matthew 19:6; St. Mark 10:8.

<sup>100</sup> See Presbyteria Juliana Cownie, “A ‘Share’ in the Priesthood,” *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (1996), pp. 7–9.

title for the wife of a Deacon as they do for the wife of a Priest. In any case, the wife of a Priest should normally be addressed with both her title and her name in informal situations (*e.g.*, “Presbytera Mary,” “Diakonissa Sophia,” *etc.*).

*Greeting Clergy on the Telephone.* Whenever you speak to Orthodox clergy of Priestly rank on the telephone, you should always begin your conversation by asking for a blessing: “Father, bless.” When speaking with a Bishop, you should say “Bless, Despota [Thés-po-ta]” (or “Vladika [Vlá-dee-ka]” in Slavonic, “Master” in English). It is also appropriate to say, “Bless, Your Grace” (or “Your Eminence,” *etc.*). You should end your conversation by asking for a blessing again.

*Addressing Clergy in a Letter.* When we write to a clergyman (and, by custom, monastics), we should open our letter with the greeting, “Bless, Father.” At the end of the letter, it is customary to close with the following line: “Kissing your right hand....” It is not appropriate to invoke a blessing on a clergyman, as many do: “May God bless you.” Not only does this show a certain spiritual arrogance before the image of the cleric, but laymen do not have the Grace of the Priesthood and the prerogative to bless in their stead. Even a Priest properly introduces his letters with the words, “The blessing of the Lord” or “May God bless you,” rather than offering his own blessing. Though he can do the latter, humility prevails in his behavior, too. Needless to say, when a clergyman writes to his ecclesiastical superior, he should ask for a blessing and not bestow one.

*Formal Address.* Deacons in the Orthodox Church are addressed as “The Reverend Deacon,” if they are married Deacons. If they are Deacons who are also monks, they are addressed as “The Reverend Hierodeacon.” If a Deacon holds the honor of Archdeacon or Protodeacon, he is addressed as “The Reverend Archdeacon” or “The Reverend Protodeacon.” Deacons hold a rank in the Priesthood and are, therefore, not laymen. This is an important point to remember, since so many Orthodox here in America have come to think of the Deacon as a kind of “quasi-Priest.” This is the result of Latin influence and poor teaching.

As members of the Priesthood, Deacons must be addressed, as we noted above, as “Father” (or “Deacon Father”).

Orthodox Priests are addressed as “The Reverend Father,” if they are married Priests. If they are Hieromonks (monks who are also Priests), they are addressed as “The Reverend Hieromonk.” Priests with special honors are addressed in this manner: an Archimandrite (the highest monastic rank below that of Bishop), “The Very Reverend Archimandrite” (or, in the Slavic jurisdictions, “The Right Reverend Archimandrite”); and Protobishops, “The Very Reverend Protobishop.” In personal address, as we noted above, all Priests are called “Father,” usually followed by their first names (*e.g.*, “Father John”).

Bishops in the Orthodox Church are addressed as “The Right Reverend Bishop,” followed by their first name (*e.g.*, “The Right Reverend Bishop John”). Archbishops, Metropolitans, and Patriarchs are addressed as “The Most Reverend Archbishop” (“Metropolitan,” or “Patriarch”). Because they are also monastics, all ranks of Archpastors (Bishops, Archbishops, Metropolitans, or Patriarchs) are addressed by their first names or first names and sees (*e.g.*, “Bishop John of San Francisco”). It is not correct to use the family name of a Bishop—or any monastic for that matter. Though many monastics and Bishops use their family names, even in Orthodox countries like Russia and Greece, this is absolutely improper and a violation of an ancient Church custom.

All male monastics in the Orthodox Church are called “Father,” whether they hold the Priesthood or not, and are formally addressed as “Monk (*name*),” if they do not have a Priestly rank. If they are of Priestly rank, they are formally addressed as “Hieromonk” or “Hierodeacon” (see above). Monastics are sometimes addressed according to their monastic rank; for example, “Rasophore-monk (*name*),” “Stavrophore-monk (*name*),” or “Schemamonk (*name*).” The Abbot of a monastery is addressed as “The Very Reverend Abbot,” whether he holds Priestly rank or not and whether or not he is an Archimandrite by rank. Un-

der no circumstances whatsoever is an Orthodox monk addressed by laymen as “Brother.” This is a Latin custom. The term “Brother” is used in Orthodox monasteries in two instances only: first, to designate beginners in the monastic life (novices or, in Greek, *dokimoi* [“those being tested”]), who are given a blessing, in the strictest tradition, to wear only the inner cassock and a monastic cap; and second, as an occasional, informal form of address between monastics themselves (including Bishops). Again, as we noted above, a monk should never use his last name. This reflects the Orthodox understanding of monasticism, in which the monastic dies to his former self and abandons all that identified him in the world. Lay people are also called to respect a monk’s death to his past. (In Greek practice, a monk sometimes forms a new last name from the name of his monastery. Thus a monk from the Saint Gregory Palamas Monastery [*Mone Agiou Gregorion Palama*, in Greek] might take the name *Agiogregorites*.)

The titles which we have used for male monastics also apply to female monastics. In fact, a community of female monastics is often called a “monastery” rather than a convent (though there is nothing improper, as some wrongly claim, in calling a monastery for women a “convent”), just as the word “convent,” in its strictest meaning, can apply to a monastic community of males, too. Women monastics are formally addressed as “Nun (*name*)” or “Rasophore–nun (*name*),” *etc.*, and the Abbess of a convent is addressed as “The Very Reverend Abbess.” Though traditions for informal address vary, in most places, Rasophore nuns are called “Sister,” while any monastic above the rank of Rasophore is called “Mother.” Novices are addressed as “Sister.”

There are, as we have noted, some differences in the way that Orthodox religious are addressed. What we have given above corresponds to a reasonably standardized vocabulary as one would find it in more traditional English–language Orthodox writings and among English–speaking Orthodox monastics. The influx of Latin converts into Orthodox monasticism and the phenomenon of “monasticism by convenient rule, instant

tradition, and fabrication,” as Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna has called it, are things that have also led to great confusion in the use of English terminology that corresponds more correctly to the vocabulary of traditional Orthodox monastics.

### *E. Monastery and Convent Etiquette*

Monastics are people who have been called out from the world to live the Angelic life. For this reason, lay people have always been encouraged to visit monasteries regularly, so as to form their own spiritual lives around those who represent the standard of spiritual dedication. Serious monastics who truly dedicate themselves to a life of prayer represent the true purpose of our being on this earth: to love God and our neighbor. After a short time in such an atmosphere, a lay person is able to detach himself from the hectic pace of daily living and to regain a more balanced perspective on life. Since most Orthodox monasteries are traditionally quite small—and especially in these times—, monastics often find it difficult to balance their life of prayer with the needs and distractions introduced by their guests. In order to preserve this delicate balance, the following guidelines have been developed over the centuries to ensure that visitors do not interrupt the spiritual lives of the monastics whom they visit. These rules apply equally to monasteries and to convents.

1. When arriving at the monastery, the Abbot (or Abbess) is always greeted in the same way that a Priest would be greeted. The Abbot is not always necessarily a Hieromonk, but he is always accorded the same respect.

2. You may greet the Brothers (or Sisters) of the monastery when you see them, but you should not press them for conversation. You should especially not converse with novices. Conversation and questions should be directed to the Abbot (or Abbess), if he (or she) is present, or to someone appointed to look after guests. Other monastics must have a specific blessing to speak with visitors. This is a very important part of a monastic’s training in obedience, and his or her silence should not be construed as coldness towards a visitor.

3. Normally, visitors are taken to the Church to venerate the Icons before doing anything else in the monastery. Many monastery Chapels have areas reserved for monastics. Lay people should respect these divisions and should not enter into such reserved areas.

4. The entire monastery grounds should be treated with the same piety as the inside of a Church. Children should not be allowed to run freely about, but should be quiet and stay close to their parents.

5. There are private areas in monasteries where lay people should not go unless invited. Depending on whether it is a monastery or a convent, certain areas will remain off-limits to visitors of either sex. Under no circumstances should men enter the private quarters of nuns or women the private quarters of monks.

6. When invited to dine in the refectory, visitors should refrain from all conversation during the meal, unless addressed by the Abbot (or Abbess). In most monasteries, women are not allowed to eat with the monks, but eat in a separate place. This applies to men who visit convents, as well. During the meal in the refectory, visitors should follow the lead of the Abbot throughout the entire meal. This includes standing behind your seat during the blessing; waiting for the Abbot to sit before taking your seat; waiting for the Abbot to eat before starting to eat; and waiting for the Abbot to take a drink (usually signaled by the ringing of a bell and a short blessing) before drinking anything. At the end of the meal, you should rise when the Abbot rises, whether you have finished your meal or not, and only continue eating if invited to do so. Normally, when the Abbot rises the meal is ended and the after-meal prayers begin.

7. Most monasteries have guest houses for visitors, usually away from the monastery proper. Some monasteries discourage overnight visitors. If you are staying at a monastery or its guest house, however, you should attend all of the Services that you are allowed to attend. (Some monastic communities do not

open most daily Services to lay people, since this can occasion distractions for the monks. You must determine from the Abbot or his representative which Services you are expected to attend.) If you are staying at the monastery itself and wish to leave the grounds for any reason, such as to take a walk, you should get a blessing for this. Naturally, cigarettes must not be smoked anywhere in the monastery or guest house. Since Orthodox monastics never eat meat, you should not prepare meals with meat, if you are staying in the guest house. You should, of course, leave your room or the guest house in the same condition that you found it. A monastery is not a motel or a vacation spot, so there are no maids hired to clean up after guests.

8. When visiting a monastery, even for a short time, you should always take a gift. These gifts can include olive oil, candles, sweets, fruit or vegetables, brandy, *etc.*

9. On the Feast Day of a monastery or its superior, one should send greetings or a small gift. The Feast Day of a monastery is an extremely important day in its spiritual life, and great blessings are derived by those who visit a monastery or Church on that day. Because of Protestant influence and a decline in Roman Catholic piety in America, converts from these faiths are often generally lax in their veneration of Saints. They often completely forget Feast Days, both those of their own Patron Saints (which should be celebrated with far greater festivity than birthdays) and those of monastic and Church communities. The Orthodox Church has never lost sight of the tremendous interaction between our physical world of the senses and the spiritual world of the Saints. Thus, pious believers who make sacrificial journeys to visit a monastery or Church on its Feast Day, according to Church Tradition, receive great blessings.

10. One major spiritual objective of any visitor to a monastery should be to seek to confess at the monastery. Women may in some instances confess to and seek the spiritual aid of a spiritual Mother in a monastic setting (though the Prayer of Confession itself, of course, must be said by a Priest). In fact, in Greece it is not unheard of even for men to seek out the counsel of a

particularly pious or spiritually gifted nun or Abbess. Our own Metropolitan Cyprian was deeply influenced by the advice of a spiritual Mother who foresaw his service to the Church. Saint Seraphim of Sarov also received a blessing to pursue the Angelic life from an Eldress.

When confessing at a monastery, make sure that you keep in mind that, while you have been quietly praying and collecting your thoughts during your visit, the monks or nuns have been attending a full cycle of Services, attending to their own Canons (private rule of prayer), preparing meals, often working at the tasks by which they support their communities, and looking after other important matters. Your Confession should, therefore, not present an occasion for idle gossip, extended talk, or curious prattle. Make your Confession short, concise, and contrite. And follow the advice that you are given to the letter. As well, a visitor should accommodate his schedule to that of the monastics and not insist on this or that time for Confession.

11. When leaving the monastery, the visitor should be sure to leave a donation for the hospitality received. The amount should be determined by the length of stay (and stays at monasteries should—unless you are traveling a long distance for a rare and infrequent visit—be limited to three days, under normal circumstances) and the number of meals taken (if you did not prepare them, as you normally should when staying in the guest house) and amount of utilities used. People often forget the cost of such things, particularly in the winter, when heating is very expensive. Whenever possible, one should leave an amount equivalent to at least half of the cost of a modest motel room for the same period. You will not be asked for anything, as that would violate the monastic rule of hospitality. Nonetheless, you should leave your donation with the Abbot (or Abbess), even if he (or she) protests. If all efforts fail, you can leave the offering anonymously in a candle box at the back of the Church. Remember the admonition of Saint Paul: “If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we reap your carnal

things?”<sup>101</sup>

When visiting a monastery or convent, do not be surprised or dismayed if you feel some initial trepidation or uneasiness. Often people come under some spiritual oppression when they first arrive at a monastery, particularly if it is the first such visit. One reason for this uneasiness is that as lay people we are humbled by the example true monastics set. This humility can assault our proud self-images and even cause us to be uncomfortable with monastics. If, however, we honestly and deeply recognize and acknowledge their sacrifices, their devotion, their obedience, and their humility, we can no longer be very impressed with our own efforts. This is the greatest blessing of visiting a monastery. Once we can admit our spiritual weaknesses and overcome them, we can begin to receive and appreciate the beneficial instruction available by the very presence of good monastics. This is not a comfortable process, either. One's first impulse may be to leave, in fact. But this will pass. Do not be discouraged by such feelings. They only mean that you will receive a greater blessing at the end of your visit.

Finally, do not become an ecclesiastical gadfly. Do not visit different monasteries and convents and then compare one with the other. Though a good Orthodox monastery must, of course, adhere to certain universal traditions, every community has its own style and its own customs. Find places that are beneficial to you and make them your spiritual retreats. If you do visit more than one community in finding a place which is suited to you, do not then constantly babble about what you saw at another place. You can become a source of temptation and scandal to the monastics who hear this. It is your place to draw on what is before you and to thank God for it. It is not your place to “comparison shop” or to compare one community with another or to carry gossip from one place to another. If you do so, your monastic pilgrimage will be harmful to yourself and to others.

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<sup>101</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:11.

## CHAPTER 3

### The Orthodox Cycle of Life

#### *A. Orthodox Baptism*

Great indeed is the Baptism which is offered you. It is a ransom to captives; the remission of offenses; the death of sin; the regeneration of the soul; the garment of light; the holy seal indissoluble; the chariot to heaven; the luxury of paradise; a procuring of the kingdom; the gift of adoption.<sup>102</sup>

The Mystery of Orthodox Baptism has been terribly misunderstood and misrepresented in Orthodox theological and spiritual thinking, particularly among Orthodox in the West. Roman Catholic and Protestant influences have greatly blurred the true meaning of what Baptism is and what it does for the believer. In fact, many nominal Orthodox Christians think of Baptism as some quaint initiation rite. But as Saint Cyril tells us, the Mystery of Baptism transforms the entire person—body and soul—, so that after Baptism we embrace a new life, spiritually restored to the state of innocence and purity for which God created us. Every sin is washed away by Baptism and every demon which has a hold on our hearts is literally drowned in the Baptismal waters. Immediately after coming up from the water of regeneration, before we even have an opportunity to think a sinful thought, we are sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit by the anointing of Holy Chrism. This anointing is not a mere symbolic gesture, but as Saint Cyril says, "...to you not in a figure, but in truth; because ye were truly anointed by the Holy Ghost.... For this holy thing is a spiritual preservative of the body, and a safeguard of the soul."<sup>103</sup>

Baptism and Holy Chrismation actually insure a person against internal demonic influence. The demons can always at-

<sup>102</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Sacraments*, p. 50.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

tack us from without, but after a person is Baptized and Christened, the demonic powers are limited in their ability to harm us from within—unless, of course, we are so unwise as to invite them back through evil thoughts and deeds. Our souls are completely cleansed of all stain by Baptism. We are restored, again, to purity. This has always been the greatest promise of Christianity: that if we “put off the old man with his deeds...the new man” will be “renewed in knowledge after the image of Him Who created him.”<sup>104</sup> Thus, we must never enter into Holy Baptism lightly, nor should we Baptize our children without careful consideration for their moral and spiritual instruction. After all, this cleansing is offered to us only once in our lifetime. If we soil this pristine garment through carelessness or spiritual indolence, we can cleanse it only with the bitter tears of repentance.

*Orthodox Baptism for Converts.* The Church was, in a sense, founded by converts. On the day of Pentecost, “about three thousand souls”<sup>105</sup> were Baptized, most of them adults and older children. These people all heard the Gospel (“Good Tidings”) from Saint Peter and made a conscious and voluntary decision to follow Christ and be “born of water and the Spirit.”<sup>106</sup> They were among the first members of the Christian Church. From that day until the present, there have been millions upon millions of souls who have received the regeneration of Baptism as adults, often after leading completely dissolute and vile lives. In response to this fact, the Church required very early on that a person who seeks to be united to Christ enter into a period of study, the catechumenate, in order fully to understand the seriousness of his commitment to God.

Unless a person is prepared to live as an Orthodox Christian for the rest of his life, Orthodox Baptism can leave him in the sad state referred to by our Lord:

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<sup>104</sup> Colossians 3:9–10.

<sup>105</sup> Acts 2:41.

<sup>106</sup> St. John 3:5.

He that is not with Me is against Me: and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth. When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.<sup>107</sup>

If a convert lightly dismisses his responsibilities towards God as an Orthodox Christian, then he is inviting true spiritual disaster upon himself and his family. This is particularly true of those who choose to be Baptized as adults. We will have no excuse on the Dread Day of Judgment, should we refuse to take upon ourselves the light yoke of living an Orthodox Christian life. And the condemnation that we invite on ourselves we will invite on our families, for having led them away from the Faith by our poor example. For this reason, the final decision to become an Orthodox Christian should, for an adult, be made only after a period of serious study and preparation.

*The Catechumenate.* When an individual, having sought the Truth, comes to believe that it resides in Orthodoxy, he should discuss his interest with an Orthodox Priest. The Priest will recommend reading material and should be available to discuss this material with the individual. Should no Priest be available locally, one can correspond by letter with a Church or monastery for guidance. Unfortunately, this guidance may be sometimes difficult to find. This is a sadly confusing time in the history of the Church, and the Church in America is a weak and fragmented institution. Those seeking the Truth in America must be very discerning and patient. Because there is no national Church in North America, many different ethnic groups have established ecclesiastical organizations in this country. This diversity opens the door to charlatans and spiritual frauds who prey upon the ignorant. Thus there are many innocent people who have been victimized by would-be elders or quasi-Orthodox gurus, who

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<sup>107</sup> St. Luke 11:23-26.

often take a few pieces of Tradition and make up their own brand of Orthodoxy—some of it under the ægis of “established” and “official” jurisdictions or the authority of self-proclaimed guardians of “canonicity.”

In such a circumstance, the best gauge any sincere person can use is his own conscience, but this must be an *informed* conscience. Saint Ignatius (Brianchaninov) once wrote that those who wish to know the Truth

...must seek out the will of God in Scripture for themselves....  
With weeping and heartfelt groanings implore God not to allow you to turn aside from His all-holy will and follow a fallen human will, your own or that of your neighbour—your [spiritual] adviser.<sup>108</sup>

It is better to listen to the dictates of conscience and continue to seek the Truth elsewhere. That is why God gives us a conscience: to protect us from ourselves and the chicanery of others. Also, even if we are Baptized and received into a particular group, this does not relieve us of our responsibility to the Truth. If the situation in which we find ourselves violates the Law of God or our God-given common sense, we have an obligation to act in accordance with the Truth, at all costs.

After having made contact with a Priest, a catechumen should study the catechetical materials recommended. Once a person becomes a catechumen, he should begin to incorporate the various aspects of Holy Tradition into his everyday life. He should begin to attend both Vespers and Divine Liturgy every weekend. This is also the time to establish a routine of prayer and fasting. We should begin to thank God for His bounty to us at each meal. We should set up an Icon Corner and maintain a vigil lamp. All of these things will make a catechumen's study of the Church much more relevant to his life, since, to be meaningful, Christianity requires more than simple study of the believer:

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<sup>108</sup> [St.] Bishop Ignatius (Brianchaninov), *The Arena*, trans. Archimandrite Lazarus (Jordanville, ny: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1982), pp. 48–49.

One of the differences between the eloquent philosophy of the Greeks and the faith of Christians is that the Greeks' philosophy can be clearly expressed in words and comprehended through reading, whereas the Christian faith cannot be fully expressed in words, and still less comprehended by reading alone. For the exposition of the Christian faith, the example of its expounder is indispensable; and for its comprehension and assimilation, both reading and the practice of what is read are necessary to the reader. When Patriarch Photius read the writings of St Mark the Ascetic on the spiritual life, he noticed a lack of clarity in the writer, about which he very sagely remarked: 'This does not proceed from any obscurity of expression, but comes about because the truths here expressed are better understood by practice (rather than through words), and I cannot comprehend them through words alone... and this,' he added, 'is not the case with these homilies alone or this writer alone, but is so in all the works that seek to expound the laws of asceticism, which are better understood in action.'<sup>109</sup>

The ancient tradition reflected in Saint Cyril of Jerusalem's writings shows us that people originally entered into a catechumenate at the beginning of the Great Fast. They would spend the entire period preparing for Great Saturday, when they were Baptized and Chrismated, during the day, in order to commune for the first time that night at the Paschal Liturgy. This is not a rule strictly observed in present times, but it is an ideal which we should emulate, whenever possible.

*Preparing for Baptism.* As we have noted, a catechumen should observe all of the fasting rules of the Church prior to Baptism. For the Baptism itself, a catechumen should prepare in the same way that he would for Holy Communion. Married couples should, of course, abstain from marital relations at this time as well.

*The Baptismal Service.* The Baptismal Service consists of three parts: Exorcisms, Baptism, and Chrismation. During the Exorcisms, the Priest reads a series of prayers which ask God to expel every demonic influence or spirit which has a spiritual

<sup>109</sup> *The Prologue*, Vol. 2, pp. 354-355.

hold on the candidate for Baptism. At one point, the Priest breathes on the person saying, "Expel from him (*her*) every evil and impure spirit which hideth and maketh its lair in his (*her*) heart."<sup>110</sup> Baptism is a serious assault against the demons, and the Service makes it very clear Whom the person is accepting and whom he is rejecting. Thus, three times the Priest asks the catechumen: "Dost thou renounce Satan, and all his Angels, and all his works, and all his service, and all his pride?"<sup>111</sup> And the catechumen answers, "I do,"<sup>112</sup> each time. This portion of the Service is extremely important, especially in these times. Many people have become involved in various occult practices. Though these things are at times done with innocent intentions or out of ignorance, demonic powers are able to enter into a person and even act through him as a consequence of such activities. The pre-Baptismal Exorcisms are quite essential in such circumstances.

The Exorcisms are immediately followed by a declaration of faith in Christ, after which the catechumen recites the Symbol of Faith (the Nicene Creed). The Symbol expresses the Church's understanding of Who Christ is and what He did for us. By reciting the Symbol, the catechumen is making a personal statement of his Faith before God. After the Exorcisms, the Priest blesses the Baptismal water, whether in the font or in a stream, in preparation for the Baptism. These prayers contain very clear statements as to the true nature of the spiritual assault which Baptism is:

We pray thee, O God, that every aerial and obscure phantom may withdraw itself from us; and that no demon of darkness may conceal himself in this water; and that no evil spirit which instilleth darkening of intentions and rebelliousness of thought may descend into it with him (*her*) who is about to be baptized.

...Wherefore, O Lord, manifest thyself in this water, and grant that he (*she*) who is baptized therein may be transformed;

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<sup>110</sup> *Service Book*, p. 273.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 274.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

that he (*she*) may put away from him (*her*) the old man which is corrupt through the lusts of the flesh, and that he (*she*) may be clothed upon with the new man, and renewed after the image of him who created him(*her*)....<sup>113</sup>

The Priest then blesses olive oil, “the token of reconciliation and of salvation from the flood,”<sup>114</sup> part of which is then used to bless the water and part of which is used to anoint the person being Baptized. After the anointing, the catechumen is fully immersed in the water three times. Complete immersion is very important, since any part of the body which is not immersed is not cleansed and is subject to demonic attack. In the days of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, when there were Deaconesses to Baptize women, even adults were often Baptized naked. But in these times, without a female Diaconate, it is neither practical nor spiritually correct to do this. Our understanding of the body and the impurity—sad to say!—which we find even among Christians dictates that we Baptize people modestly (in decent swimwear, for example).

Immediately after the Baptism, the newly illumined Christian dons a pure white robe with red Crosses emblazoned on the back and each breast (or, in the case of an infant, new white clothes). The following *troparion* is sung, as this is done: “Vouchsafe unto me the robe of light, O thou who clothest thyself with light as with a garment, Christ our God, plenteous in mercy.”<sup>115</sup> The Priest then anoints the newly illumined Christian with Holy Chrism, so as to grant him the fullness of the Gift of the Holy Spirit. In the earliest times, the Apostles themselves laid hands on each person that was Baptized into the Faith, as described in the Acts of the Apostles:

Now when the Apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them,

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 278–279.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 279.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 280.

that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet He was fallen upon none of them: only they were Baptized in the Name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.<sup>116</sup>

As the Church grew, it became physically impossible for an Apostle or Bishop personally to lay hands upon each new convert without there being a long delay. So the Church began to bless a special mixture of oil and spices, called "Chrism," which, when applied by an Ordained Priest and accompanied by specified prayers, functions in the same way as a physical laying on of hands. New Chrism is periodically blessed and the old Chrism added to it, thus perpetuating a chain of blessing reaching all the way back to the Early Church.

The brow, the eyes, the nostrils, the lips, the ears, the breast, both hands, both feet, and between the shoulders are anointed with the Holy Chrism. Every part of the body which interacts with the physical world is "sealed," as it were, with the Gift of the Holy Spirit, rendering the individual immune to internal demonic assault. A small amount of hair is also cut from the head of the newly Baptized person to signify his new commitment. There remains thereafter the lifelong task of maintaining this purity by seeking God with one's whole being and strengthening the flesh through prayer, fasting, and full participation in the spiritual life of the Church; in short, by living a truly Orthodox life.

*Infant Baptism.* Because of the transforming power which resides in the Mystery of Baptism, Orthodox Christians seek to have their children Baptized very young, usually after the child is forty days old. The purpose of child Baptism, too, is the regeneration of the individual, for sin is not just a set of "wrong acts," but a condition which besets human beings from the very moment of birth. Children, too, are stained by the ancestral sin of Adam and Eve and need the enlightenment of the Mystery of Baptism. One major advantage of infant Baptism is that the

<sup>116</sup> Acts 8:14-17.

Church provides a sponsor for the child who agrees to take responsibility for the child should anything happen to the parents. To sponsor a child at Baptism means that, should the child be left an orphan, the sponsor would be expected to take the child into his home and raise him to adulthood. The Godparent is also responsible for the child's spiritual development and is even expected to remind the child's natural parents of their responsibilities, should they become lax in their instruction of the child. The responsibilities of a sponsor are awesome and demanding. A sponsor must, therefore, be a sober Orthodox Christian and an upright person.

In the West, where heterodox sects and cults have proliferated, infant Baptism is often condemned. It is argued that a child is either without sin and not in need of Baptism—a clearly wrong teaching—or that he is unable to benefit from Baptism because he cannot “understand” it. With regard to the latter argument, we must keep in mind that Holy Baptism itself, not the preparation for it that we appoint for adult converts, enlightens our spiritual faculties and gives us understanding. A child who is Baptized is enlightened and thus grows in Christian knowledge, benefited by the good guidance of his Christian parents. To believe that spiritual enlightenment depends on a mature human intellect is to believe that retarded children or the feeble of mind cannot benefit from the Mysteries of the Church—an impious idea at best. With regard to the Roman Catholic practice of sealing infant baptisms with “confirmation” at the “age of reason,” this is an illogical practice that is wholly inconsistent with ancient custom and which many Latin theologians decry for the very reasons that we Orthodox also dismiss sectarian arguments against infant Baptism.

### *B. Marriage and Family Life*

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and the two shall be one flesh.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Genesis 2:24.

Traditional Orthodox family life is a truly beautiful expression of the way that Orthodox Christians live in the world, but not of it. Unfortunately, this way of life is very difficult to observe in the West, precisely because those who choose to live it usually have very little in common with Western values and generally retreat into ethnic enclaves to survive. This leaves many sincere Western converts in the difficult position of trying to adopt a way of life for which they have no model. Though this situation is clearly not ideal, there is no reason for despair. When we seek to adapt our lives to a traditional Orthodox standard, we must always remember that this standard is based on the teachings found in Holy Scripture. Saint Paul, especially, understood the tremendous influence that family life has on the life of the Church. This influence can be ultimately traced to the relationship which God created for husband and wife. In a Christian family, two people surrender their individual egos to one another, in order to become a single identity greater than the sum of the two parts. This model is then extended as children are added to the family and families become communities, which ultimately form a society. Saint John Chrysostomos exhorts us to understand this fact:

The love of husband and wife is the force that welds society together. Men will take up arms and even sacrifice their lives for the sake of this love.... Because when harmony prevails, the children are raised well, the household is kept in order, and neighbors, friends, and relatives praise the result. Great benefits, both for families and states, are thus produced. When it is otherwise, however, everything is thrown into confusion and turned upside-down.<sup>118</sup>

When we marry as Orthodox Christians, we agree to submit our lives to God and to our spouses. This extends to our personal possessions as well. Everything that we have and everything that we are become communal. Holy Matrimony is a Mystery of the Church, not a simple contract to be broken when

<sup>118</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *On Marriage*, pp. 44-45.

it is no longer convenient or personally profitable. If we are not ready and willing to enter into a marital relationship with a sense of true commitment, personal sacrifice, and spiritual purpose, we would do well not to marry at all. Of the necessary sacrifice of our personal will, Saint John Chrysostomos writes:

After marriage, you are no longer two, but one flesh, and are your possessions still divided? Love of money! You have both become one person, one organism, and can you still say, 'my own'? This cursed and abominable phrase comes from the devil. Things far nearer and dearer to us than material possessions God has made common to all: we can't say, 'my own light, my own sun, my own water.' If all our greater blessings are held in common, why should money not be? ...Above all, remove from your soul this notion of 'mine' and 'yours.'<sup>119</sup>

This is the first step that a man and wife must take before they can hope to have anything resembling a Christian marriage. An Orthodox Christian home is modeled on the relationship between Christ and the Church. Each person has a specific function in the family unit, and all of these functions are important for a stable family relationship.

### *The Husband.*

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it.... So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.<sup>120</sup>

The rôle of the husband and father has been blurred and distorted in the modern world. This rôle is often minimalized or even forgotten. The selfish attitudes which led to the American phenomenon of "no-fault divorce" have also eroded our understanding of what a man's responsibilities to his family are. If a man chooses to marry a woman in the Orthodox Church, he should do so with the full intention of taking the lead in the growth and development of the spiritual life of his family. He

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>120</sup> Ephesians 5:25, 28.

should voluntarily take on the responsibility of setting up an Icon Corner, arranging for the necessary materials to keep the vigil lamp lit, organizing and leading the family in prayer on a daily basis, seeing to it that the family attends Divine Services regularly (which includes regular Confession and reception of the Holy Mysteries), and ensuring that the children are properly instructed in the Faith. In short, the husband should feel himself no less responsible for the spiritual life of his family than that of his wife. In fact, he should, again, take the lead in building up a Christian home. This is one of the most significant ways that a man can demonstrate his love for his wife. A deep spiritual life at home creates the atmosphere of stability and love which most women crave and in which most men thrive.

A husband's love must be sacrificial and it must be openly expressed to the wife. Women require affection and stability, in order to feel secure in the marriage relationship. Most men do not naturally express their feelings of love with the same comfort as women. Saint Paul's admonition that men should love their wives focuses on the demonstration of that love; for left to themselves, most men often take it for granted that their feelings are understood. Saint Chrysostomos also speaks to this issue:

Finally, never call her [the wife] by her name alone, but with terms of endearment, honor, and love. If you honor her, she won't need honor from others; she won't desire praise from others if she enjoys the praise that comes from you. Prefer her before all others, both for her beauty and her discernment, and praise her. She will in this way be persuaded to listen to none that are outside, but to disregard all the world except for you. Teach her to fear God, and all other good things will flow from this one lesson as from a fountain and your house will be filled with ten thousand blessings.<sup>121</sup>

One sure way to have a home full of love and joy is for the husband to express his love openly. But this love must be sacrificial, even in the face of suffering poverty, serious or debilitating ill-

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<sup>121</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *On Marriage*, p. 63.

ness, or death. A man must seek to emulate in his love for his family the love that our Lord showed for the Church: a love which led Him to the Cross.

*The Wife.*

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the Church: and He is the Saviour of the body. Therefore as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.<sup>122</sup>

These verses are often cause for a great deal of controversy in these times of self-love. Modern society has been preaching for the last fifty years that we must look out only for ourselves and force all of those who enter into our lives, be they husbands, wives, children, or even God, to take a place behind the goal of self-fulfillment. The major goal of the Orthodox Christian family, however, is precisely the subduing of the self in favor of the family unit. This submission is expected not only of the wife, but of all members of the family. It is, indeed, a submission required not only of the wife, but of the husband: "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God."<sup>123</sup> Many men conveniently forget this verse when demanding some form of strict obedience from their wives, a demand that often rises from nothing more than their selfish desires to dominate another person. In a healthy Orthodox family, all members of the family unit submit themselves to the Will of God by actively seeking what is best for the family and never seeking what is best for any particular individual. The husband may have the responsibility for leading the family through its sojourn on this earth; but this is because in any organization, someone must make decisions and take final responsibility for them. Though a wife should follow her husband's lead in all things, in order to see that the family functions well, she should do so by assisting her husband in making intelligent and rational decisions which are in accor-

<sup>122</sup> Ephesians 5:22-23.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 21.

dance with the teachings of Christ.

Saint Paul's admonitions to both the husband and the wife point to an interesting psychological fact: neither men nor women are naturally inclined to give their partners what they need most. As we have noted, women naturally seek to be loving and nurturing. They crave this kind of attention. Such attention does not come naturally to most men; rather, they must be taught to be openly loving with their wives. By the same token, what men crave most from those around them is respect. A man will actively seek out this respect wherever it may be found. This is why Saint Paul emphasized the submission of wives to their husbands. The best way to keep a man focused on his family is for the wife to give him this respect. Her respect for him will inspire his love for her, thereby fulfilling her needs as well. This is an interesting balance which God has created. The more the man loves his wife, the more she respects him. The more she respects him, the more he will love her. This is the cycle which produces relationships that endure for a lifetime:

As a man is to his wife, so Christ is to the Church. Man is the head of woman, and Christ is the Head of the Church. A woman obeys her husband, and the Church obeys Christ. A man loves his wife as his own flesh, and Christ loves the Church as His Own flesh. A man loves his wife as he does himself, and the wife is in awe of her husband. Christ loves the Church as His Own self, and the Church is in awe of Christ...<sup>124</sup>

This is the basis of an Orthodox Christian marriage. To settle for anything less is to deny ourselves a tremendous blessing from God.

### *The Children.*

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.<sup>125</sup>

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment

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<sup>124</sup> *The Prologue*, Vol. 2, p. 238.

<sup>125</sup> Proverbs 22:6.

with promise:) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.<sup>126</sup>

Herein are described the responsibilities that each person shares in an Orthodox Christian home. Both the parents and the children must conform themselves to these rôles in order for the family to function as God intends. The primary responsibility for this proper functioning rests on the parents. If they choose to nurture a child at home, in an atmosphere of humble piety and sincere love for God, the child will grow up with a deep respect for God and the Church. This means that from the moment the child is born, his life should revolve around a daily cycle of prayer, fasting, and regular attendance at Divine Services. The child's earliest memories should be those of prayer, simple love, and Orthodox living. If a child has always fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays, for example, the very idea of breaking a fast will be repugnant to him at a later age. Small children love rules and become quite incensed if those rules are broken. Combined with the good example of parents who follow the Church's traditions, this natural instinct can serve to instill in them a true love of the Orthodox way of life.

In these times, the cult of material gain and self-indulgence has chosen to portray children as a burden. The demands placed on all members of this society to meet some mythical standard of affluence have convinced the majority of couples that both the husband and the wife must seek employment outside the home. Multiple children are more expensive to care for in such circumstances and thus, because of the materialistic focus of the parents, children are viewed as burdensome. In Orthodox families, children are considered a blessing. The children are nurtured within the home, even if that means a lower standard of living for the family. The natural dynamics of Orthodox family life work diligently to focus the parents' energies on the children and one another, rather than on the self. Thus material gain and self-satisfaction are of less importance. This traditional Orthodox way of life is the surest way to a life which is pleasing to

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<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:1-3.

God. Saint John Chrysostomos tells us:

Pray together at home and go to Church; when you come back home, let each ask the other the meaning of the readings and prayers. If you are overtaken by poverty, remember Peter and Paul, who were more honored than kings or rich men, though they spent their lives in hunger and thirst. Remind one another that nothing in life is to be feared, except offending God. If your marriage is like this, your perfection will rival the holiest of monks.<sup>127</sup>

As Orthodox children grow and mature, we must constantly seek to inspire them by reading aloud from Scripture and from the Lives of the Saints. As they enter school they need to be challenged to live their Faith by keeping the fasts and by praying. Modesty and sobriety should be encouraged. All of these things combine in a child's life to strengthen his faith and deepen his love for God, the Church, and the family:

Concern for spiritual things will unite the family. Do you want your child to be obedient? Then from the beginning bring him up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Don't think that it isn't necessary for a child to listen to the Scriptures; the first thing he will hear from them will be, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and immediately you will begin to reap your reward. Don't say, 'Bible reading is for monks; am I turning my child into a monk?' No! It isn't necessary for him to be a monk. Make him into a Christian! Why are you afraid of something so good? It is necessary for everyone to know Scriptural teachings, and this is especially true for children. Even at their age they are exposed to all sorts of folly and bad examples from popular entertainments. Our children need remedies for all these things! We are so concerned with our children's schooling; if only we were equally zealous in bringing them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord! And then we wonder why we reap such bitter fruit when we have raised our children to be insolent, licentious, impious, and vulgar.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *On Marriage*, pp. 61–62.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

If we choose the path of least resistance and go along with the world's attitudes, our home lives will reflect the chaos of ideas and beliefs in the world. If we follow the Orthodox standards of family life, we will raise happy, pious, and well-adjusted children.

With regard to children and discipline, two important Scriptural passages should guide us: "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes"<sup>129</sup> and "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying."<sup>130</sup> These verses have been misquoted by many people—particularly Protestant Fundamentalists—and used as an excuse to abuse and mistreat children as a matter of course. Such abuse has nothing to do with the Patristic understanding of discipline in the family. There are times, particularly with small children, when a quick swat on the rear or a paddling is necessary. This is the "rod" of which Scripture speaks and which we use in the Orthodox home. Unfortunately, this way of discipline has been all but lost on the children of this generation. Parents opt for the path of least resistance when their children are small, only to languish in a home full of contention, loutishness, and self-loathing when these children reach adolescence. Children have a deep need for restraints, and they are sorely troubled when they cannot find them. Without limitations on their behavior—limitations at first reinforced by controlled and limited physical force—, they cannot define who and what they are and how they fit into the world. Children who have no self-control and who have not been taught restraint inwardly dislike themselves. Indeed, they find it very difficult to develop self-respect.

In the end, an Orthodox man and woman must look upon their children as a Divine gift—as a precious treasure loaned to them by God. If they are careful to rear their children in piety and with discipline, parents will gain the favor of God and, to be

<sup>129</sup> Proverbs 13:24.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 19:18.

sure, His aid in their task of looking after the family. Addressing men, Saint John Chrysostomos assures us of these truths about the family and its worth before God:

Therefore, let us be greatly concerned for our wives and our children, and for ourselves as well, and as we educate both ourselves and them let us beg God to help us in our task. If He sees that we care about this, He will help us; but if we are unconcerned, He will not give us His hand. God helps those who work, not those who are idle. No one helps an inactive person, but one who joins in the labor. The good God Himself will bring this work to perfection, so that all of us may be counted worthy of the blessings He has promised, through the grace and love for mankind of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, with Whom, together with the Holy Spirit, be glory, honor and power to the Father, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.<sup>131</sup>

### *C. An Orthodox Approach to Death*

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?<sup>132</sup>

Death, for an Orthodox Christian, is not considered the end of existence. Rather, it is a transition to eternal existence. We are all eternal creatures, and the experiences of countless Saints and pious Orthodox from the time of the Apostles up to this present day serve to confirm this fact. We were never intended to die. That is to say, our souls were never intended to separate from our bodies, as they do in this life. This is why death is so traumatic to us. We instinctively feel revulsion and pain at this unnatural separation. Saint John of Damascus wrote of this in an *idiomelon* for the Service for the Departed:

Truly most frightening is the mystery of death, how the soul is violently separated from its concord with the body and, by divine decree, the most natural bond of their cohesion is severed. Wherefore, we implore Thee, O Giver of Life Who lovest mankind, to grant rest to the departed one in the dwellings of the righteous.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *On Marriage*, pp. 61–62.

<sup>132</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:55.

According to accounts both from Orthodox sources and secular researchers in the last twenty years, the soul, immediately after death, maintains a complete awareness of who and where it is. It continues to function as though it were in a body, since it contains within itself, in fact, the personality and all of the attributes of the human being. Its bond with the body is a strong one that is only broken slowly, as it begins to function in eternal existence and in the spiritual realm.

From Apostolic times, the Church has also understood a direct connection between this world and the next. Thus it has developed very specific Services and traditions surrounding the parting of the soul from the body. These Services fulfill the double purpose of helping to assuage the grief of those left behind and of assisting the soul through its most difficult passage from this world to the next. The Church prescribes that, in addition to a Funeral Service, periodic Memorial Services be celebrated for the soul. Saint Macarios inquired of an Angel who often accompanied him about the significance of these Services. The Angel replied thus:

‘When, on the third day, the body is brought to the Temple [Church], the Soul of the dead man receiveth from his Guardian Angel relief from the grief which he feeleth at parting from his body. This he receiveth because of the oblation and praise which are offered for him in God’s Church, whence there ariseth in him a blessed hope. For during the space of two days the Soul is permitted to wander at will over the earth, with the Angels which accompany it. Therefore the Soul, since it loveth its body, sometimes hovereth around the house in which it parted from the body; sometimes around the coffin wherein its body hath been placed: and thus it passeth those days like a bird which seeketh for itself a nesting–place. But the beneficent Soul wandereth through those places where it was wont to perform deeds of righteousness.’<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Constantine Cavaros, *The Future Life According to Orthodox Teaching*, trans. Bishop [Archbishop] Chrysostomos and Archimandrite [Bishop] Auxentios (Etna, ca: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1983), p. 21.

<sup>134</sup> *Service Book*, p. 612.

Here again we are told that during the entire time of preparation for burial, the soul of the departed one is still here in this world, usually present at the Funeral Service. The soul is in a position to see all that is going on, for good or for ill. This helps to explain the Orthodox custom of showing respect for the body of the dead. This respect is not idle or empty, but affords, like the Funeral Service, comfort and assistance to the departed person's soul, giving it hope for what lies ahead. The actual burial itself is done very quickly, usually after the body has rested in state overnight.

Some of the Church's service books give detailed descriptions of what death entails for the Christian. We read in one such book the following:

'On the third day He who rose again from the dead commandeth that every Soul, in imitation of his own Resurrection, shall be brought to heaven, that it may do reverence to the God of all. Wherefore the Church hath the blessed custom of celebrating oblation and prayers on the third day for the Soul.

'After the Soul hath done reverence to God, He ordereth that it shall be shown the varied and fair abodes of the Saints and the beauty of Paradise. All these things the Soul vieweth during six days, marvelling and glorifying God, the Creator of all. And when the Soul hath beheld all these things, it is changed, and forgetteth all the sorrow which it felt in the body. But if it be guilty of sins, then, at the sight of the delights of the Saints, it beginneth to wail.... After having thus viewed all the joys of the Just for the space of six days, the Angels lead the Soul again to do reverence to God. Therefore the Church doth well, in that she celebrateth service and oblation for the Soul on the ninth day.

'After its second reverence to God, the Master of all commandeth that the Soul be conducted to Hell, and there shown the places of torment, the different divisions of Hell.... Through these various places of torment the Soul is borne during thirty days, trembling lest it also be condemned to imprisonment therein.

'On the fortieth day the Soul is again taken to do reverence to God: and then the Judge determineth the fitting place for its incarceration, according to its deeds. Thus the Church doth rightly

in making mention, upon the fortieth day, of the baptized dead.<sup>135</sup>

The place where the soul is sent on the fortieth day is called the “Middle State.” Here souls experience a foretaste of Paradise or Hades as they will know them after the General Resurrection and the fearful Last Judgment. Saint Nectarios of Aegina refers to this Middle State as follows:

In this state the souls of the righteous have a foretaste of the blessedness prepared for them, while the sinners experience to a certain extent the eternal and complete suffering that awaits them.... The righteous in Heaven and the sinners in Hades have only a foretaste of the blessedness or suffering that awaits them.<sup>136</sup>

The state of the soul is not fixed in the Middle State, but can be influenced and improved—even in Hades—by the prayers and offerings of faithful believers on this earth. This Middle State should not be confused with the Latin innovation of purgatory. The purgatorial flames and torments sometimes described in medieval literature are a complete myth, according to Orthodox teaching. The souls of the dead are not cleansed or purged of their iniquities by many years of burning torment. Once the soul parts from the body, the ability of the soul to change its own status disappears. Only the prayers of the Faithful can assist the soul after death. The soul experiences torment only in Hades, and then purely as a result of the sins it committed in earthly life. No other torment is permitted or even necessary. Saint Mark of Ephesus said of this: “For if the remission of sins is accomplished for the sake of prayers, or merely by the Divine love of mankind itself, there is no need for punishment and cleansing (by fire).”<sup>137</sup>

With specific regard to the prayers that can be offered for those in the Middle State, we should note that offering prayers

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 612–613.

<sup>136</sup> Cavarnos, *Future Life*, p. 30.

<sup>137</sup> Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose), *The Soul After Death* (Platina, ca: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1980), p. 212.

and memorials for the righteous is also a way for us to help our own spiritual lives. This is made evident in the life of Saint Athanasia the Abbess:

St Athanasia the Abbess (April 12th) commanded her nuns to prepare a table for the poor and needy for forty days after her death. The nuns observed this only for ten days, then stopped it. The saint then appeared, accompanied by two angels, and said to the nuns, 'Why have you not carried out my instructions? Know that by alms and the prayers of the Priest for the souls of the departed during the forty days, the mercy of God is invoked. If the departed souls are sinful, they receive through these alms God's forgiveness of their sins; and, if they are sinless, then they are efficacious for the forgiveness of those who do the alms.' She is, of course, thinking here of alms and prayers linked with a great love for souls of the departed. Such alms and prayers are indeed of help.<sup>138</sup>

*When Death Approaches.* What should we do for an Orthodox friend or loved one as he is nearing death? Our first consideration should be to see that the dying person communes, if at all possible. The Service of Anointing can also be conducted, but this Service is properly meant for the healing of disease and for the recovery of health. If death seems inevitable, we should accept it and look after the dying person's soul. Seeking after miracles in such situations can often violate our Christian understanding of death, which is not a fearful thing for those who have prepared for it. Thus, when a dying person communes, after confessing his sins, his soul is cleansed of all which might imperil it. He departs for eternal life without fear and with great joy and hope.

*After Death Occurs.* Once a person has died, a Priest should be called to read the prayers for the departure of the soul from the body. There is no rush to say the "Last Rites," a purely Roman Catholic innovation which grew out of a distortion of the Service of Anointing. The body should not be embalmed, for

<sup>138</sup> *The Prologue*, Vol. 3, p. 15.

which reason it is best to arrange for burial as quickly as possible—preferably the next day after death. A major problem with embalming is the proper disposal of the blood, which must be treated with great care if the person has communed. But embalming is also an unnatural procedure which seeks to “preserve” the body after the soul has departed. When the day of the General Resurrection arrives, no amount of embalming fluid will in any way assist Christ in raising a dead body anew. In most states in the United States, there is no legal requirement for embalming, although there are authorities who might attempt to convince the family that there is. In the face of such resistance, the family should simply insist that the wishes of the deceased and his family be observed. As well, unless it is required by law, the family should not allow an autopsy. Such procedures violate the sanctity of the body, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit. If circumstances require one, it should be as limited as possible.

As soon as possible after death, the body should be taken to the funeral home, washed, and clothed in simple clothes, such as those suitable for attending Church. If the deceased was an adult convert to Orthodoxy, he should be buried in his Baptismal gown, which can be placed over other clothing, if desired. The family should select a simple wooden casket—nothing elaborate or ostentatious. After the body is placed in the casket, it should be covered by a *savanon*, or burial shroud, which has a depiction of the Burial of Christ on it. If possible, the body should then be taken immediately into the Church, feet first, and placed in the center of the Church with the deceased facing the Altar. The Psalter should be read continuously over the body all night, until the time of the Funeral.

During the Funeral, mourners should avoid excessive emotional displays. Wailing and loud sobbing should be avoided, as this shows disrespect for the deceased and is inappropriate for a Christian, who looks to the afterlife with anticipation. After the Funeral is finished, the body is taken out from the Church, feet first, to the graveyard for burial. After the burial, the family should arrange for a meal for those attending the Funeral. If a

meal is not possible, then the family should at least offer traditional hospitality: a small glass of brandy and a sweet or cookie. For the first week after the death, members of the community should take food to the family of the departed, so that they will be better able to cope with their grief and be relieved of the burden of preparing meals.

Memorial Services should be held on the third, ninth, and fortieth days after death, as well as on the anniversary of the person's death and on his Name Day. As many Churches and monasteries as possible should be contacted to offer prayers for the deceased. His name should also be submitted for commemoration at as many Divine Liturgies as possible. These commemorations are very important, as each commemoration is a real blessing for the soul as he or she, completing the cycle of Orthodox life, confronts our Lord at the throne of His glory.