

SOME STRAIGHT ANSWERS ABOUT THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

Why haven't I heard of the Orthodox Church before?

It's been around since the day of Pentecost. You probably haven't heard about it because we are a conservative Church that sounds no trumpets in our social programs but rather attempts to lead individuals, each in his or her own circumstances, into communion with God, the very purpose for which the Church exists. Believe it or not, there are perhaps three million of us in North America, and at least 150 million throughout the world.

Are you like the Catholics or the Protestants?

Well, the Orthodox Church is «catholic» in the fullest meaning of the word: «whole and not confined.» But some 500 years before the reformation split Western Europe into Protestant and Roman Catholic, Orthodox Christians protested against the Pope of Rome and his attempts to become supreme over the Church in the 11th century, as well as some doctrinal innovations. The Orthodox Church remains unchanged in doctrine and faith since the early Church of the Apostles.

That's a pretty bold claim, isn't it?

It is a bold statement, but when you consider that Jesus Christ promised that he would found His Church and that it would endure unchanged in faith and practice, the gates of hell not prevailing until he came again, it's altogether refreshing (and confirms one's faith!)

Do you believe in the Bible?

We believe in God! We do, however, believe the Bible to be God's inspired word a part of the Tradition of the Church. (II Thessalonians, 2:15) In fact, it was the Church which gave us the Bible as we know it today!

Why should I come to the Orthodox Church or any church for that matter?

Why should you go to work or school, «for that matter»? It is totally natural! As a child of God you must worship him in some way, somehow, with your Christian brothers and sisters. This is a scriptural teaching. The Orthodox Church offers the most meaningful and rich expression of faith and worship there is (you'd have to see it to believe it)! Why settle for less?

I thought you had to be Greek or Russian to be Orthodox?

The Orthodox Church is not an ethnic church. The Kingdom of Heaven is «equal opportunity». You are welcome regardless of where your ancestors came from.

You are also welcome to bring with you your national customs and culture. Just keep the Gospel of Jesus Christ first and foremost. The Orthodox Church adopts the culture and language of the country she finds herself in.

Do you have to confess your sins to a priest?



You confess your sins to God in the presence of a priest who will help you overcome them and proclaim God's forgiveness, as promised in Holy Scripture. Admitting that you have sins is the beginning of repentance.

If I joined your Church, would I have to come to every service?

You come to Church because you want to come, whenever there is a service. No one forces you. Your attendance and participation is your natural response to God's place in your personal spiritual life, as well as a testimony to faith in His existence in His Body, the Church and Community of Believers.

How long is one of your service?

Not long enough for those striving for spiritual growth and renewal. In minutes, the Divine Liturgy (such as our service on the Sabbath and Lord's Days) is a bit longer than an episode of average TV show (but without the corruption and commercials...)

I was told that the Orthodox worship pictures. Isn't that against the Commandments?

The Holy Icons («pictures») are honoured as reminders of the Glory and Presence of God, and venerated as

such. ONLY God, the Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit are due worship. (How can the Church practice that is so contrary to God's Law?) That is one reason you will find no statues in Orthodox temples — their inclusion in our tradition never developed as that

too closely resembled the pagan piety of the early days of our Church, during the time of the Apostles. But icons, rather than attempting to depict reality, point to the Kingdom of God. They are often referred to as «picture windows to Heaven». In other words, you will not only hear the Gospel in an Orthodox Church, you will see it! The icons act as «tools» in our spiritual worship and witness to the sanctification of all creation and matter that occurred when Christ Jesus, the Son of God, took on human flesh. The Divine/Human Person of Jesus became the living icon of God (John 10:30; 14:6-11) in the flesh.

You keep mentioning «The Church» over and over again. Why?

Basically, Jesus Christ did not come to establish such a thing as «Christianity». Even the word is not in the Holy Scriptures. What Christ Jesus did do was to establish the Church, which Scripture calls both His Body and His Bride. the communion which man seeks with God is found by being part of the Church, something which St. Paul

calls a «great mystery», whereby we become members of Christ: «of His flesh, and of His bones.» (Ephesians 5:30) The Bible also tells us that such as were being saved were added to the Church (Acts 2:47). They were not merely making «decisions for Christ» — again, not a Scriptural term — but they were repenting, being baptized for the remission of their sins, and being added to the Church. (Acts 2:38 ff.) There, they were continuing steadfastly in the Apostle's doctrine and fellowship, the Breaking of Bread (what is commonly called Holy Communion today), and prayer. Finally, from the day of Pentecost, the «birthday» of the Church, the Bible never speaks of Christians who were not a part of it. This sort of sums up why we speak so much of «The Church».

Where can I find more information?

You can check the Religion section at the public library. Especially helpful is a book called The Orthodox Church, by Timothy Ware. It's also available at many book stores.

http://web.mit.edu/ocf/www/orthodox_qna.html

WHY SHOULD WE BELIEVE IN GOD?

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The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity, which is central to the Orthodox Faith, is not a result of pious speculation, but the over whelming experience of God.

The doctrine affirms that there is only One God in whom there are three distinct Persons. In other words, when we encounter either the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit, we are truly experiencing contact with God. While the Holy Trinity is a mystery which can never be fully comprehended, Orthodoxy believes that we can truly participate in the Trinity through the life of the Church, especially through our celebration of the Eucharist and the Sacraments, as well as the non-sacramental services.

Man cannot control nature on a large scale. Can he control sun rise, sunset, rotation and revolution of the earth? Being human, if scientists can create water, what is the greatness of God in creating water, so think many people. Can scientists create water sufficient for the whole world by their experiments? Can they create oceans with hydrogen and oxygen? Imitation is human, creation is divine. Man uses mind. He is forgetful; God uses heart. He is forgiveness.

Love doesn't live together with ego and pomp. It is very easy to please God. You need not boast of your finances or intelligence; you need not utter the toughest language or greatest poetry on the earth to please

him. Simple or no language is sufficient to pray. Empty hands and a heavy heart are all that God needs to fulfill your greatest wishes. Then all the troubles will be vanished and you will see the Sun of happiness shine on your heart. Chanting the name of God acts like anaesthesia; though you are in the whirlpool of troubles, you will cross it with no trace of pain with His name on your lips. Never challenge God. Be humble, yearn for his love, strive for his grace, and let your eyes and heart be filled with true love for Him. There will be no miracle left to be taken place in your world of God. For this, blind 'Faith' is the first step on the ladder of Realization to reach your final destination called 'God.' Take one step towards God and he will take thousand steps towards you. God is a blend of mother, father, friend, guide and philosopher. This single word 'God' seems so small but it has the whole of universe in it.

Spirituality is an easy path to reach God. Prayer without faith is like an artificial flower without fragrance. No good cause can dare to invite obstacles if only you have blind faith in God. One who has time for God in this busy mechanical world is the true son of God. Let your faith in God be blind and your heart be open. Surrender to God from below; God will render his blessings from above.

God is omnipresent; man's lack of faith prevents him from seeing God. God's existence cannot be denied be-

cause of his invisibility. Can we deny the existence of the Sun because of the blockage of the clouds? When we wait with patience until the clouds are dispelled by a strong wind, we can witness the sun. Similarly, with the blowing of the wind of Faith, the cloud of doubt gets shattered and God becomes visible.

The Orthodox Church throughout the ages has maintained a continuity of faith and love with the apostolic community which was founded by Christ and sustained by the Holy Spirit. Orthodoxy believes that she has preserved and taught the historic Christian Faith free from error and distortion, from the time of the Apostles. She also believes that there is nothing in the body of her teachings which is contrary to truth or which inhibits real union with God. The air of antiquity and timelessness which often characterizes Eastern Christianity is an expression of her desire to remain loyal to the authentic Christian Faith.

Orthodoxy believes that the Christian Faith and the Church are inseparable. It is impossible to know Christ, to share in the life of the Holy Trinity, or to be considered a Christian apart from the Church. It is in the Church that the Christian Faith is proclaimed and maintained. It is through the Church that an individual is nurtured in the Faith.

