

- Do you bring up your children «in the instruction and counsel of Christ»? Do you only concern yourself with their intellectual growth and not with the nature of their character?

- Do you direct your children to go to church regularly, to go to confession, to frequently partake of Holy Communion (properly prepared), and to go to Sunday school? Do you teach holy virtues by word and example? Have you taught them to pray in the morning, evening and before and after at each meal? Have you taught them to pray with respect and reverence?

- Are you careful of the things they read? Do you buy books and periodical of religious and cultural subjects for them to read and learn?

- Do you watch with whom they keep company and who their friends are?

- Do you lead them to sinful shows and entertainment or allow them to watch television unsupervised?

- Do you teach them humility and meekness and are you careful that they dress in a dignified way?

- Do you curse them when they upset you? Do you «send them to hell» or «to the devil»?

- Have you had abortions or do you prevent yourself from having children (i.e. contraception)?

- Have you been unjust to your children in the division of your estate?

- Do you as a parent believe that the responsibility of raising and educating your children rests only with your partner? You have an obligation to educate them and to read to them so that you can relieve you partner.

- Do you scorn your children by giving them insulting hand gestures and reprimand them with improper language?

- Does each of you love and respect the parents of the other?

- Do the grandparents of your children and other relatives get too involved in the family and cause disagreements and disputes?

- Do you interfere in your children's families?

- Is your partner a blasphemer? Have patience, and try hard to eliminate cursed blasphemy!

- Have you ever considered divorcing your partner?

- Do you allow your children to become fanatical about sports and even miss church in order to play (e.g. Sunday morning games)?

- Are you fair and just with your family, considering and respecting their views and wishes, or do you behave like a dictator?

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He who is accustomed to give account of his life at confession here will not fear to give an answer at the terrible judgment-seat of Christ. It is for this purpose that the mild tribunal of penitence was here instituted, in order that we, being cleansed and amended through penitence here below, may give an answer without shame at the terrible judgment-seat of Christ. This is the first motive for sincere confession, and, moreover, it must absolutely be made every year. The longer we remain without confessing, the worse it is for us, the more entangled we become in the bonds of sin, and therefore the more difficult it is to give an account. The second motive is tranquillity: the more sincere has been our confession, the more tranquil will the soul be afterwards. Sins are secret serpents, gnawing at the heart of a man and all his being; they do not let him rest, they continually suck his heart; sins are prickly thorns, constantly goring the soul; sins are spiritual darkness. Those who repent must bring forth the fruits of repentance.

Consciousness, memory, imagination, feeling, and will are helps to penitence. As we sin with all the powers of our soul, so penitence must be from our whole soul. Penitence in words only, without the intention of amendment and without the feeling of contrition, may be called hypocritical. Should the consciousness of sins be obscured, it must be cleared up; should the feeling be smothered and dulled, it must be roused; should the will become blunt and too weak for amendment, it must be forced; «the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.» (St. Matt. 11:12) Confession must be sincere, deep, and full.

—St John of Kronstadt (*My Life in Christ*, p. 280) orthodoxinfo.com

[1] Recommended are: 1) Repentance and Confession, by St. Nektarios (Roscoe, NY: St. Nektarios Greek Orthodox Monastery, 2002); 2) The Forgotten Medicine: The Mystery of Repentance, by Archimandrite Seraphim Aleksiev (Wildwood, CA: St. Xenia Press Skete, 1994); 3) Exomologation: A Manual of Confession, by St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite (Thessaloniki, Greece: Uncut Mountain Press, 2006), Part III, «Counsel for the Penitent».

[2] If you do not have a spiritual father, or do not think you need one, consider these materials on spiritual guidance.

[3] You might also consider whether it is a sin to work on holy days. See Elder Paisios the Athonite's comments on feast days and holidays.

[4] See the «The Rule of Fasting in the Orthodox Church,» by Fr. Seraphim (Rose) of Platina, and this excerpt from The Exomologation concerning fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays.

THE SACRAMENTS OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

First of all we must say that traditionally the Orthodox never counted the sacraments. The number of seven was adopted in Orthodoxy very recently under the influence of the Roman Catholic Church.

Traditionally the Orthodox understands everything in the Church to be sacramental. All of life becomes a sacrament in Christ who fills life itself with the Spirit of God.

The Orthodox baptize infants as well as adults as the new birth into the new life of Christ. Baptism is understood and celebrated as the person's participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. It is the person's Easter as he is born again into life eternal.

Chrismation (or confirmation) is the «sealing» of the new life in Christ by the life-creating Spirit. In Chrismation the person receives the «seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit» in order to have the power to live the new life in the new humanity of Christ. In this sense, chrisma-

tion is the person's personal Pentecost just as baptism is his Easter.

Holy Communion is the «sacrament of sacraments» in that it is the banquet of the Kingdom of God, the fulfillment of every other sacrament. In Holy Communion we partake of the Body and Blood of Christ, the Eternal Passover Lamb, Who makes us alive and holy with Himself. Through Holy Communion we become sons of God the Father, together with Jesus, filled with the «communion of the Holy Spirit.»

Marriage in Christ allows our human love to become divine and unending. There is no «until death do us part». The point is just the opposite. Christ comes to our human love, frees it from sin and grants it everlasting joy in His Kingdom of love.

By our anointing of the sick in Christ's name, we consecrate our sufferings with the sufferings of Christ and we are healed by Him; if not for more time in this world, certainly for an eternity in the Kingdom of God. Thus by anointing with oil in Christ's name, our

wounds become the way to Life and not to Death.

In confession, the sacrament of repentance, we come to Christ and receive His divine forgiveness. We are allowed once more to enter into Holy Communion with Him in the Church. We are reinstated into that life which we received in baptism and are renewed with that power which we were given in chris-

mation. The one sacrament within the Church which guarantees the identity and continuity of the Church in all times and places is the sacrament of priesthood, the «holy orders,» as they are called. The priesthood exists within the Church as the sign of the certain presence in the community of Christ Himself. Christ is not absent from the Church. He is present as its head and is manifested in the Body through the ministry of the priesthood. Thus the mystical life of the Church is fulfilled.

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THE SYMBOLISM OF THE ORTHODOX CROSS



The significance of the three-bar cross is a simple one. The short bar on the top represents the sign that was placed on the cross which read, «Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews» (in Latin the initials are «INRI»). The middle bar — the longest — is the bar upon which Our Lord's arms were stretched and nailed. The bottom bar is the footrest which supported Our Lord's body.

While many people popularly refer to this cross as a «Russian» cross, it actually predates the Christianization of Russia in 988 AD, although generally, in earlier depictions of the Crucifixion, the bottom bar is horizontal rather than angled. Very early depictions of the crucifixion, even those originating in Egypt, generally portray the triple bar cross. In certain parts of Central and Eastern Europe, the triple bar cross with a slanted footrest indicates that a given church is an Orthodox one, while a triple bar cross with a horizontal footrest indicates that a given church is a Byzantine Rite, or Greek Catholic, one.

Various reasons have been given for slanting the bottom bar. There is one tradition which states that, at the moment of His death, Our Lord's foot slipped and the footrest tilted. A highly symbolic interpretation states that the slanted bar refers to the thief crucified on Our Lord's right side — the «Wise Thief» who repented — who went to heaven and to the unrepentant thief crucified on Christ's left side who did not. Another explanation is that the slant is an attempt to depict that the footrest slanted downward, toward the viewer, albeit in a two, rather than three, dimensional form.

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WHAT IS THIS KINGDOM OF GOD?

The Kingdom of God is what Christ has brought to the world. The Gospel is full of Christ's insistence that the Kingdom of God is given to men by His coming. It is a Kingdom not of this world, but of God, a Kingdom of everlasting life in union with God, the Trinity.

Thus, we define the Kingdom of God as life in and with God. The Orthodox believe that this life is communicated to men in the Church through Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is a life where men worship and obey God and do His will by the presence and power of His spirit.

One saint has even defined the Kingdom of God as life in the Holy Spirit, which is the same definition given by Orthodox to the Christian Church itself.

What we know in the Church, in the Holy Spirit, of communion with God the Father through Jesus Christ, remains still a mystery. The Kingdom is really here, but in symbol and sacrament. At the end of the ages this Kingdom will come with observation, with power and glory, when Christ will be revealed and God will be «all in all.»

Thus because we Orthodox believe that the Kingdom is already

given to those who believe, and that the righteous dead have even a greater access to this Kingdom than we have on earth because of our mixture with the evil of this age, we insist that «heaven» is not a locatable place within the space of our created universe, but a spiritual, divine, condition of existence which will fill the universe at the end of time. It is «eternal life» already revealed to the saints in death and to the holy people of God within the sacramental life of the Christian Church.

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