

# TEN WAYS TO PARTICIPATE IN WORSHIP: PAY ATTENTION, BE STILL AND PRAY

**1.** We participate in worship through frequent communion. This is the most important way of participating in the Divine Liturgy. When the priest comes forward with the holy chalice and lifts it high, he says, «With Fear of God, with faith and love, draw near.» Come close to commune with God. That's a command, an instruction. After all, what is the holy Eucharistic Liturgy all about? Simply, it's the way the Church prepares, consecrates, and administers the sacrament of Holy Communion. Receiving Holy Communion, receiving Christ, is the central act of the Divine Liturgy.

**2.** We participate in worship through faithful gathering together as the Church. The Divine Liturgy begins with the words, «Blessed be the Kingdom of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.» What's a kingdom? The place where a king reigns. Who's the King? GOD. Who are the subjects? CHRISTIANS. Where does the king reign? Where God is present and the Christians are present. God's kingship is made manifest in us during worship. One cannot be manifesting the Kingdom liturgically if he's not there. Being present is crucial to the liturgical life.

**3.** We participate in worship through entering into it responsively. The language of the Liturgy contains a number of dialogues in various parts of the service. For example, the priest says, «Let us lift up our heart.» The words of the Liturgy in these dialogues invite us to involvement and participation. But because we are not taught to participate in worship, these dialogues often go unnoticed and unheeded, the commands they contain often are not obeyed in the people's hearts.

**4.** All Orthodox services include «litanies» as for an example «Let us pray unto the Lord», in which the priest names a petition, and the choir responses — either «Lord, have mercy» or «Grant this, O Lord.» The priest is not actually addressing himself to God in these petitions: he's addressing the whole congregation. He's saying (for another example), «For the peace from God and salvation of our souls, let us pray to the Lord.» The choir sings the response, but they are not really praying either they give the same response to all the petition. It's really the congregations role to pray these prayers. If the congregation does not enter in, then nobody is praying!

How does one pray the litany? Simply do what the priest says. The priest says, «Let us pray for the peace from God and for salvation of our souls.» You can just say in your heart. «Dear Lord, grant us your peace from above and the salvation of our souls.» You can also think of particular people and situations you want to pray for with each petition. Then the prayers are no



longer just-words; you are now following the instruction of the litany.

**5.** We participate in worship through singing. Many Orthodox people are not accustomed to singing in Church, they are afraid of being conspicuous. But even in a parish where the Choir does all the singing, it's possible to sing along with the choir softly. You don't have to sing loud enough to be heard, but sing! The patristic tradition tells us that in the past they did sing. We need to revive this tradition in all our Churches.

**6.** There two places in the holy Divine Liturgy where we generally say the words, instead of singing or chanting them—the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. The people say the Creed and the Lord's Prayer as a body. In the Lord's Prayer it is clear that we are talking to God; our challenge is to make the prayer our own, so that it truly expresses our thoughts and feelings.

But the Creed is different. To make the Creed come alive, you must consider to whom your're confessing. I find if I think of talking to God, it really becomes personal. Because I'm telling God what I believe, it is a prayer and it touches my head and my soul.

**7.** We participate in worship through physical actions. Instructions such as «Let us bow our heads to the Lord» require you to worship with you body. There are many ways we use our bodies in worship in the holy Divine Liturgy. The most important way that we use our bodies in worship in the Orthodox Church is when we make the sign of the Cross. Making the sign of the Cross is one of the most profound things a Christian can do. To make this sign of the Cross is to mark ourselves, to identify ourselves as Christians.

**8.** We participate in worship through listening to the readings and the sermon. What are we told at the beginning of the readings? «Let us be attentive.» Unfortunately we tend to make those words into mere ritual. But the words actually are saying to us. «Pay attention. Listen! There's something very important here.» That's an instruction! Christians ought to really perk up and listen to what the holy Epistle, and the holy Gospel has to say.

**9.** We participate in worship through involvement in its structure. The holy Divine Liturgy as it exists today has an organization and pattern. That structure is revealed primarily in what we call the Little Litanies, if which we pray, «Again in peace let us pray to the Lord.» The Little Litanies come at the ends of the nine significant portions of the Liturgy. If you understand this structure, you're able to participate in it.

These repeated litanies do not contribute to the length of the service, which most Orthodox consider to be a problem. But if you begin to participate in the Divine Liturgy and do the things the Liturgy instructs you to do—guess what? The Liturgy gets shorter! You don't notice the length of the Liturgy, why because you didn't attend as a mere observer, just waiting for the final blessing to go home.

**10.** Finally, we participate in worship through personal devotion. The Liturgy can be understood in a literal sense, and it can also be understood as symbolic. Some of the things we do in the Liturgy today have no real meaning except as symbols. Take the Holy Great Entrance. The Holy Great Entrance (when the priest carries the gifts around the church, and if a deacon is serving he assist) originated in Constantinople where they would begin the Holy Divine Liturgy in one Church, then more to a special saint's Church or chapel to conclude it. In order to conduct the Liturgy, they had to move the bread and wine, the chalice and paten, to the new location. So it became a grand procession. Today, we do the whole Liturgy, in the same building, but we still have the great procession, the Great Entrance, when we sing, «Let us receive the invisible King.»

What does it mean for us today? Not much, if all we do is remember the fifteen centuries ago they moved the elements of the Sacrament from one Church to another. But if you think of the procession (the Holy Great Entrance) as symbolizing Christ bearing His Cross on the day He was crucified for your salvation that act can become an act of personal worship and devotion. ●

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One of the distinctive characteristics of the Holy Orthodox Church is its changelessness, its loyalty to the past, its sense of living continuity with the ancient Church. This idea of living continuity may be summed up in one word: Tradition. As St. John of Damascus says: «We do not change the everlasting boundaries which our fathers have set, but we keep the Tradition, just as we received it» [On the Holy Icons, II, 12]. «To an Orthodox Christian, Tradition means the Holy Bible; it means the Creed; it means the decrees of the Ecumenical Councils and the writings of the Fathers; it means the Canons, the Service Books, the Holy Icons, etc. In essence, it means the whole system of doctrine, ecclesiastical government, worship and art which Orthodoxy has articulated over the ages» [Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, p.204].

We take special note that for the Orthodox, the Holy Bible forms a part of Holy Tradition, but does not lie outside of it. One would be in error to suppose that Scripture and Tradition are two separate and distinct sources of Christian Faith, as some do, since there is in reality, only

one source; and the Holy Bible exists and found its formulation within Tradition.

As Orthodox, however, while giving it due respect, we realize that not everything received from the past is of equal value. The Holy Scriptures, the Creed and the dogmatic and doctrinal definitions of the Ecumenical Councils hold the primary place in Holy Tradition and cannot be discarded or revised. The other parts of Holy Tradition are not placed on an equal level, nor do they possess the same authority. The decrees of the Councils since the Seventh Ecumenical Council (787) obviously do not stand on the same level as the Nicene Creed, nor do the writings of, for example, the Byzantine theologians, hold equal rank with St. John's Gospel.

Here we must also distinguish between Tradition and traditions. At the Council of Carthage in 257, one of the Bishops remarked «The Lord said, I am Truth. He did not say, I am custom» [The

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Opinions of the Bishops on the Baptizing of Heretics, 30]. Many traditions that have been handed down are merely cultural variations, theological or pious opinions, or simply plain mistakes. [One need only recall the whole problem of the reform of the Russian liturgical books under Patriarch Nikon and the ensuing Old Believer schism to see the truth of this.]

Orthodox loyalty to Tradition [the things of the past] is not something mechanical or lifeless, however. Tradition is a personal encounter with Christ in the Holy Spirit, as Bishop Kallistos affirms. «Tradition is not only kept by the Church it lives in the Church, it is the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church» [The Orthodox Church, p.206]. Thus Tradition must be seen and experienced from within. Tradition is a living experience of the Holy Spirit in the present. While inwardly unchanging (since God does not change), Tradition constantly assumes new forms,

supplementing the old, but not superseding it.

Our Lord tells us that when the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth (John 16:13) and this promise forms the basis of Orthodox respect for Holy Tradition. Thus, as Fr. Georges Florovsky expresses this idea: «Tradition is the witness of the Spirit; the Spirit's unceasing revelation and preaching of good things.... To accept and understand Tradition we must live within the Church, we must be conscious of the grace-giving presence of the Lord in it; we must feel the breath of the Holy [Spirit] in it.... Tradition is not only a protective, conservative principle; it is, primarily, the principle of growth and regeneration.... Tradition is the constant abiding of the Spirit and not only the memory of words» [Sobornost: the Catholicity of the Church, in The Church of God, pp. 64-5].

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