

In the first Great Litany of the Divine Liturgy we pray for those enter into the holy house of the Lord with "faith, reverence and the fear of God." It is with this attitude that we are to enter into the Temple of the Lord. The first thing we do when we enter the Church is make the sign of the Precious and Life-giving Cross three times, each time making a bow from the waist (Gr. *metanoia*) and saying:

1. Thou hast created me, O Lord, have mercy!
2. God be merciful to me, a sinner!
3. Countless times have I sinned, O Lord, forgive me!

(In the Russian practice it is customary to first make the Sign of the Cross then bow, in the Greek practice one first bows then makes the sign of the Cross.)

After entering the temple we venerate the Holy Ikons, the Holy Cross, Relics or the Holy Gospel by making two metanoias and the Sign of the Cross, kissing the ikon and then making a third metanoia with the Sign of the Cross. We do not worship or pray to the holy ikons. The honour that we show to the ikon goes to the person represented in the ikon and shows our love towards that person. Just as ordinary pictures remind us of people whom we love, so the ikons remind us of Holy Persons and the events that brought about our salvation. We honour ikons in much the same way as we respect the portraits of those whom we love and esteem. When we venerate the Cross we are worshipping the Lord who died thereon. When we kiss the Gospel book we venerate to Word of God contained therein. We venerate the ikons of the saints who are our role models for the Christian life, for "God is glorified in his saints" (2 Thess. 1:10) We do not do not ask help from the ikons, but from God, through the intercessions of His saints. When venerating ikons we kiss the feet of the Saviour, the hand of the Theotokos and other saints. Of the Crucifix, always kiss the feet or the lower bar. When venerating holy objects or receiving Holy Communion women ought to remove all lipstick before coming into church.

It is customary after venerating the ikons to place a lighted candle before it as a sign of the

sincerity of our prayer. The lighting of a candle is also an offering to God and a sign of joy. Blessed Jerome remarks that "throughout all the churches of the East, when the Gospel is about to be read, tapers are lighted though it be broad daylight, not to scatter the darkness, but as a sign of joy; that under the symbol of bodily light, that Light may be shown forth of which we read in the Psalter, 'Thy word, O Lord, is a lantern to my feet and a light unto my paths.'"

#### **Kneeling and Prostrations**

Kneeling in the Orthodox Church is not the same as in Western confessions. We do not kneel, heads upright but remain in the prostration position, on our knees with our heads touching the floor. This is done when the priest (or deacon) proclaims, "Again and again on bended knee let us pray to the Lord," during the kneeling prayers of Pentecost.

#### **Kneeling and prostrations are not allowed:**

1. On Sundays because it is the day of the Resurrection of our Lord
2. From the Nativity of Christ through Theophany
3. From Pascha until Pentecost Sunday
4. On the day of the Transfiguration.
5. On the day of the Exultation of the Holy Cross (except three prostrations before the Cross)
6. During the day in which Holy Communion has been received.

We make no prostrations from the Entry at the Vespers of a feast, until "Vouchsafe, O Lord" at the Vespers on the day of the feast itself. Kneeling is a sign of sorrow and repentance and we should not be sorrowful on days commemorating the events, which brought about our salvation

#### **Standing in Church**

The proper posture of worship for Orthodox Christians is standing. For this reason Orthodox Churches traditionally do not have pews or chairs. The Lord said, "When you shall stand to pray, forgive if you have anything against anyone." (Mark 11:25) The First Ecumenical Council held in 325 AD directed Christians that "standing let them offer prayer to God" (20<sup>th</sup> Canon.) It is also testified to by the Apostolic Constitutions, the Christian

writers and Fathers of the early Church and the canons of the Ecumenical councils (1:20; 6:90.) We are even instructed in the Liturgy, "Let us stand aright! Let us stand in fear! Let us attend, that we may offer the Holy Oblation in peace." Standing is a sign of reverence and honour towards God. Just as we stand to honour an important person or victor in some contest so much more do we stand to honour God Who took on our human nature, suffered and died for our sakes and triumphed over the Devil. Until recently only the elderly and infirm were allowed to sit at certain parts of the services. Since the habit of sitting during the divine services has developed and has become a deeply rooted custom in some places, the Church has allowed sitting at certain parts of the Liturgy.

1. We stand at the blessing at the beginning of the Liturgy, "Blessed is the Kingdom..." We may sit for the Great Litany which follows, but stand at the priest's exclamation at the conclusion of the Litany and remain standing until after the reading of the Gospel. In some parishes it is customary to sit during the reading of the Epistle.
2. At the Litany after the Gospel: "let us say with all our soul..." we sit until the Cherubic Hymn ("Let us who mystically represent the Cherubim...")
3. At the Litany after the Cherubic Hymn: "Let us complete our prayer unto the Lord..." we sit until the exclamation at its conclusion at which time we remain standing until the Litany before the "Our Father."
4. At the Litany before the "Our Father": "Having commemorated all the saints..." we sit. We stand for the Lord's prayer and remain standing until the end of the Liturgy.
5. We sit for the sermon and announcements.

It is forbidden for anyone, including the elderly and infirm, to sit at the following parts of the Liturgy:

1. When the priest censes.
2. At the Little Entrance with the Gospel Book.

# Entering the Temple of the Lord

3. At the Great Entrance with the Gifts.
4. When the Creed is sung and until the end of “We praise Thee.”
5. The consecration of the Holy Gifts.
6. At the “Our Father.”
7. From the exclamation, “With the fear of God and with faith and love draw near,” to the very end of the Liturgy.
8. When the priest blesses us.

## **Behaviour in Church**

When in church we should at all times show respect for the holiness of the place. It is an offence to God to whisper and laugh or to chew gum. We face the front of the Church and don't look around or watch the choir. The service is not a concert. When standing we do not fold our arms or place them behind our back and when seated we do not cross our legs. It is great to see family and friends when we come to church, but we should wait until after the service is finished to talk to them. When we converse with someone we give him or her our undivided attention and don't think about anyone else. In the Divine Services we should be giving our undivided attention to God alone. In the Cherubic Hymn we are called upon to “lay aside all earthly cares, that we may receive the King of all” We should fix our thoughts on God and forget about everything else. Saint Ambrose of Milan (4<sup>th</sup> cent) says of those who misbehave in church that they come into church with small sins and go away with great ones. We must watch our outward behaviour and our language for even the ground around the Church is consecrated. This also applies to the church hall and classrooms.

In Church we must not be ashamed of our Faith, and expressing it in outward signs and rites of the Church. He who is ashamed of the Faith is not a true Christian. As Christ said, “Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven.” (Matt 10:32-33)

The Liturgy is by no means the work of the priest or choir alone. The word “leitourgia” literally means, “work of the people” – the whole people of God. As baptized Orthodox Christians we are all

members of the Royal Priesthood and no Liturgy can take place without the presence and participation of the faithful. The services are a dialogue between the priest and the people and all the prayers (except the prayer for the priest said during the Cherubic hymn) are in plural: “In peace let *us* pray to the Lord...” etc... Therefore the faithful should join in the singing, and especially of the Creed and the Our Father.

## **Leaving God's House**

We must never leave the church until the service is concluded and the Dismissal announced. We are told to “Depart in peace” to which we respond, “In the name of the Lord.” This teaches us exactly how we are to leave the temple. Those who have received Holy Communion must remain in Church for the Thanksgiving prayers, but everyone can benefit from these prayers. While these prayers are being read, we must remain silent and must not start any conversations until we have left the church.

The antidoron (which means “instead of the gifts”) is blessed bread which comes from the part of the Prosphora that has not been consecrated. It is distributed at the end of the Liturgy in order that those who have not received Holy Communion may receive a blessing. Those who have received Holy Communion do not approach to receive antidoron (nor do they venerate ikons, the Cross or kiss the priests hand.) They have received the Heavenly King Himself and have no need of any other blessing. When receiving antidoron we cross our hands, the right over the left. Antidoron must be consumed reverently and immediately. It is customary to take some home to those who through illness were not able to attend the Liturgy, but it must be consumed before any other foods and not mixed with other foods or eaten with butter or jam.

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