

ORTHODOXY



Questions & Answers on Orthodoxy

The Orthodox Church holds many ancient customs and traditions that are important parts of our Christian worship. Some traditions are cultural while others are spiritual, but they all help us work together to worship the all-Holy Trinity and preserve our ancient faith. Let's address some of the common etiquette issues that arise in our church.

"If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." (1 John 1:7)

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Sign of the Cross & Lighting Candles

The sign of the Cross is a public profession of our Orthodox Christian Faith. The first two fingers and thumb of the right hand come together symbolizing the Holy Trinity. The two remaining fingers symbolize the Humanity and Divinity of Jesus Christ. Therefore, in our right hand, we hold the two major doctrines of our Christian Orthodox Church each time we make the sign of the Cross.

When Do We Sign the Cross?

We make the sign of the Cross before we eat, sleep, drive, enter or leave the church, travel or begin any major endeavor, acknowledging our desire to include God in these activities. In church, make the sign of the Cross:

- When you venerate the icons;
- When you light a candle;
- If you are a deacon, when you enter the sanctuary
- When you hear "Father, Son and Holy Spirit," "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us," "Peace be with all," "We worship You," and "We glorify You;"
- When the priest censes in your direction,
- At the end of the Gospel reading

Why Do We Light Candles During Worship?

After entering the church and making the sign of the Cross, we venerate all the icons and light a candle while saying a prayer. Candles are lit as an expression of our belief that Jesus Christ is the "Light of the world." A candle may be lit for the health and wellbeing of someone or in memory of a departed loved one.





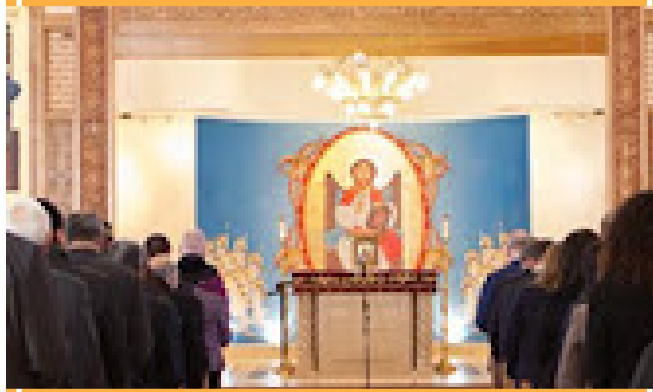
Church History

When attending Divine Services, we all have the responsibility of maintaining proper decorum and atmosphere in the church. This starts with arriving at Divine Services on time. On some Sundays, it almost seems like we have a revolving door at the back of the church. Use the restroom before coming to church and aim to remain still throughout the service.

We must remember that the church is the House of God. Reverence and good manners are required at all times. No irreverent or irrelevant conversations should go on in the Narthex or in the church. There are certain times during the Divine Services when everyone should be standing still and facing the East. Wherever a person happens to be at these moments, he or she should stop and stand reverently until the proper moment to be seated. These times generally are:

- When the priest is censing the altar, icons, and congregation throughout the service.
- Whenever the Holy Gospel is read.
- During the recitation of the Creed and Lord's Prayer.
- During the Consecration of the Holy Gifts.
- During Holy Communion.

To receive Holy Communion, the faithful should follow the order and flow set forth by the church when exiting and returning to their pew. The general rule is that whenever the priest is outside the Sanctuary, either with the censer or for giving a blessing, there should be no movement in the church. A still environment helps the congregation maintain a prayerful attitude throughout the services.



Posture in Church - Sitting & Standing

The proper posture is to stand during the Divine Services and sit down only when permitted by the priest. If you wish to stand throughout the entire service, please do so near the back so that the view of the altar is not blocked for those who are seated. While sitting during the service, one is not to observe the service as you would a movie or a TV show. Divine Services are not meant to entertain but to call the people of God to be attentive and worship Him. Therefore, it is not appropriate to posture yourself in a casual manner, such as crossing the legs or arms in church—this posture is too casual and too relaxed for being in the presence of God. Just think about it, when you get settled in your favorite chair at home, you lean back, cross your legs, and then your mind can wander anywhere it wants to. Remember that sitting in church is a concession, not the normative way of prayer. In fact, when you do sit in church, you should sit attentively - and not too comfortably, so as to keep your mind from wandering. When sitting in church, keep those feet on the floor, ready to stand at attention (which is what "Let us attend" means).

Posture in Church - Kneeling

Kneeling is an expression of prayer that has two characteristics: penance and or prayer. Commemorating the Resurrection each Sunday, the Canons of the Church prohibit kneeling. Recognizing the sanctity of the descent of the Holy Spirit during the Consecration of the Holy Gifts, it is acceptable to kneel in prayer at that time during the Divine Liturgy. Please remember, however, that from Pascha (Resurrection) to Pentecost Sunday, in celebration of the Resurrection, we do not kneel. Following the Divine Liturgy of the Pentecost Sunday, the Service of Kneeling is prayed and at that time, we resume kneeling as an expression of prayer.



Venerating Icons

"The saints, during their earthly life, are filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit. After their departure the same grace remains in their souls as in their bodies. The very same grace is present and active in their sacred images and icons"
(St. John of Damascus).

It is the practice of the Church to venerate, not worship icons. The Orthodox Church calls for the elaborate use of symbolism and iconography in the interior decoration of the church building. Icons are not simply portraits representing people, but graphic presentations of spiritual truths that are visual aids to contemplation and prayer. When we venerate icons, the honor is directed to Christ or to the Saint depicted on the icon, not to the wood, paint, or colors of the icon. In the Orthodox Church, the icons bear witness to the reality of God's presence with us in the mystery of faith. We are to look beyond the external and deep into the spiritual meaning of living the Christian life. Icons are the witnesses of the presence of the Kingdom of God to us, and so our own presence to the Kingdom of God in the Church. It is in the Orthodox Christian Faith that icons are not only permissible but are spiritually necessary because "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Christ is truly man and, as man, truly the "icon of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15, 1 Cor. 11:7, 2 Cor. 4:4).

