A CHALLENGE TO YOU FROM JESUS CHRIST

I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me will live.” (John 11:25)

How are Jesus' words a challenge to you? If you're like most people, your life is probably in a rut. You do the same things every day: work, eat, sleep, pass the time. By the time most people reach 30 or 35, they feel they've gone about as far as they can go: the only thing left to do is to kill time until time kills you.

Jesus says that life is much more than that: it has a fullness, a richness when it is lived with Him. He says:

“I came that they might have life... and have it to the full.”

WHAT IS "LIFE TO THE FULL"?

What is this fullness of life Christ promises? What excitement does He offer us? The Bible tells us what this life without limit is:

“This is eternal life: for men to know You, the only true God, and to know Jesus Christ whom You sent.” (John 17:3)

“But I know about God and Jesus – it hasn't done anything for me!” – and you're right. Knowing God is very different from knowing about Him, just as reading a file about you is worlds apart from being your friend. We are invited by Christ to know Him, to enter into a relationship with Him, to be His friend.

Having this relationship with God and His Son will provide us with enough excitement for an eternity. When we know God we see:

- that God loves us with an endless love;
- that we are made in His image, in His likeness (cf. Genesis 1:26);
- that we are invited to be the adopted sons and daughters of God (cf. Ephesians 1:5) and sharers in His divine nature (cf. 2 Peter 1:3);
- that the Spirit of God dwells within us (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:16);
- that life with Him is a daily progress from glory to glory (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:18).

And when we know these things, the trials and disappointments in life fade in comparison. “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31).

HOW THIS LIFE COMES TO US

We can claim this promised new life from Christ for ourselves and transform our way of living into "Life to the Full" by letting Christ into our lives. He calls to us:

- Accepting Baptism – “No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born again of water and the Spirit” (John 3:5).
- Regularly Receiving His Body and Blood – “I tell you the truth: if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you will not have life in yourselves” (John 6:53).
- Involving Ourselves with His Church – “Jesus said to His disciples, ‘Whoever listens to you, listens to Me; whoever rejects you rejects Me; and whoever rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me’” (Luke 10:16).
- Allowing Him to Change Our Way of Living – “The Spirit has given us life; He must also control our lives” (Galatians 5:25).

Christ offers us this life: He does not force it on us. The choice is ours to make. I can say:

“Jesus, I don't trust Your offer of life. I don't think You can change my life for me. I don't believe what You say about baptism and communion. I don't want to be involved with Your Church or change my way of doing things. I'll stay right where I am.”

Or I can say:

“Jesus, I don't fully understand Your offer of life, but I trust You. I hear You knocking at the door of my heart and I want You to come in. Because I accept that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God, I accept what You say about baptism and communion. I accept how You identify Yourself with Your Church and commit myself to it. Work in me by Your Holy Spirit to change me into a sharer of Your glory.”

But that is the choice we all must make, once we have truly heard Christ's invitation to a fuller life. Do you choose life? Or refuse it?
This invitation comes to you from a Church of the Byzantine Catholic tradition. Our ways have come down to us from the very first Christians who lived in the Holy Land. We came here with few material goods, but with the treasure of this ancient Christian Tradition. We invite you to share this treasure and in it to discover the life Christ offers us.

“We behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in” (Revelation 3:20). God knocks, but waits for man to open the door — He does not break it down. The grace of God invites all but compels none. In the words of John Chrysostom: ‘God never draws anyone to Himself by force and violence. He wishes all men to be saved, but forces no one’ (Sermon on the words ‘Saul, Saul...' 6 (PG. 51, 144)). ‘It is for God to grant His grace,’ said Saint Cyril of Jerusalem (died 386); ‘your task is to accept that grace and to guard it’ (Catechetical Orations, 1, 4).

But it must not be imagined that because a man accepts and guards God’s grace, he thereby earns ‘merit.’ God’s gifts are always free gifts, and man can never have any claims upon his Maker. But man, while he cannot ‘merit’ salvation, must certainly work for it, since “faith without works is dead” (James 2:17).

Metropolitan Kallistos (Timothy) Ware
The Orthodox Church

We call upon You, Lord our master, come to our help; hear our petition and have mercy on our souls. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, enlighten our mind.

In faith I knock at Your door, answer me in Thy mercy. Open my eyes to behold Your truth and worship Your holy name. Protect my youth, as I have trusted in Your mercy.

Give to me, Lord, a pure heart. Grant to my intellect the wisdom of salvation from Your absolute perfection.

Vest me with a spiritual weapon against the evil one. Seal me with Your holy name and deliver my life from destruction.

I have followed You with love because of Your goodness, May I not be ashamed. My Master and merciful Father I intend to belong entirely to You, and I adore You.

O Good Shepherd! make me a lamb of Your flock. Glory to Your name, Father of the world and king of life; let my prayers enter before Your majesty like an oblation.

You who hear all and accept petitions, listen to our prayers and have mercy on us.

From a Hymn of James of Saroug
According to the age-old tradition of the Byzantine Churches, both Catholic and Orthodox, the home is a kind of church, because it houses an assembly of believers. When people occupy a new house, the priest performs a consecration, anointing the four walls with holy oil and sanctifying the house with holy water and incense. Psalms are chanted and the Gospel story of Jesus' visit to the house of Zacchaeus (cf. Luke 19:1-10) is proclaimed. At the conclusion the traditional prayer for “Many Years” is sung by the priest for the family members.

When the family moves into a new dwelling, they choose an eastern wall, preferable in the living room, for the icon corner. This corner is furnished with icons of Christ, the Theotokos, the holy cross and the patron saints of the family members. Some families preserve heirloom icons, handed down for generations, or icons of special clan or family patrons. The icon corner usually includes a lectern or small table upon which are placed a cross, a small incense burner, the Holy Scriptures and prayer books.

Since icons are considered to be sacraments of the special presence of the holy ones depicted in them, oil lamps are burned before them. At the door of the house one often finds a special icon of the Theotokos, known as the Doorkeeper, guarding the dwelling from all harm.

People entering a Byzantine home may often go directly to the icon corner and greet the holy icons with a bow or a kiss, sometimes before greeting the people, just as one does when entering church.

In Eastern Christian tradition, all prayers, both public and private are said facing the East, “for as lightning that comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man” (Matthew 24:27). Thus churches are always built with the apse pointing East, towards the rising sun, symbolic of Jesus Christ, the Sun of Justice. In church the priest, deacon, and people worship standing upright, facing this direction, awaiting the One who will lead them to the heavenly promised land, the New Jerusalem. In their homes, therefore, Eastern Christians unite themselves with their brothers and sisters throughout the world and pray standing up, facing the East.

The custom of standing at prayer can be traced both to the Old Testament and to pagan antiquity. God commanded His people to eat the Passover meal “standing, with loins girt and staves in their hands” (Exodus 12:11). The pagan Greeks always stood while praying before their idols.

Early Christians imitated the Greeks, reasoning that man, the only animal that walks erect and is created in the image and likeness of God, should pray standing to exemplify his dignity as a child of God.

Kneeling was done only as a sign of repentance for sin. In addition, early Church councils forbade kneeling on Sunday, commanding the faithful to stand as a testimony to their belief in Christ's resurrection. Consequently Eastern Christians do not regularly kneel at prayer in their homes as Western Christians often do.

In prayer we rise to the throne of God who has given us access to Himself. We also attempt to take the lifestyle of heaven and bring it ‘down’ to reorient our daily activities. Fasting is one such practice. It stands out in contrast to the ways of the world around us, especially in a culture such as ours that endorses continual consumption. When we put aside food,
entertainment, pleasure in the spirit of fasting we are saying to the world, “We are not from here.” When we fast we recognize that life is not simply to be found in the enjoyment of material creation, but in the relationship we have with its Creator.

Closely linked to fasting is almsgiving, another denial of the way of this world. Our society promotes consumerism. It says, “Build up for yourselves treasures on earth.” We say, with St. Paul, that material goods are given us not only to satisfy our own needs, but for the doing of good. We say, as Christ did, that our kingdom is not ultimately of this world and imitate His love for mankind by the way we use the resources He has given us.

Finally, while our place is in the heavenly realm, we do not have full possession of it yet. And, so we find ourselves each day engaged in an unseen warfare, “not against human forces but against the principalities and powers, the rulers of this world of darkness” (Ephesians 6:12). Many of our Church’s daily prayers are invocations asking for help and protection against the powers of evil. We recognize that there is more to the world in which we live than what is visible on the physical level.

Living, then, as citizens of the heavenly realm, we surround ourselves at all times with means of access to that kingdom. Icons are found in our homes, like churches, and we gather there for prayer. We bring the values of that realm to bear in our domestic affairs as well. There we fast and we extend hospitality in Christ’s name, deepening our experience of our true homeland. We try to live every day in an atmosphere of the kingdom, to continually remind ourselves that our baptism has made us actual coheirs with Christ of all that the Father has promised.

HYMNS FROM THE BLESSING OF A NEW HOME

TROPARION (TONE 8)

As salvation came to the house of Zacchaeus by Your entrance, O Christ, Now by the entrance of Your sacred ministers and with them Your holy angels, Grant Your peace to this house and mercifully bless it, Saving and illumining all who desire to live in it.

STICHERON (TONE 5)

Bless this house, O Lord, and fill it with the good things of Your earth, Preserving unharmed from every evil circumstance Those desiring to live in it with piety Grant to them all heavenly abundance and Your earthly blessings, And, as You are compassionate, Be merciful according to Your great mercy.


Also adapted in part from the 2nd edition of A Guide for the Domestic Church (Eparchy of Newton, Office of Educational Services, 2012).
In the first century, cities such as Jerusalem, Antioch, and Ephesus held faith-filled communities bound together in one rapidly growing Church. Unknown to them, they were only the first steps on the road which would take Christianity around the world. Antioch was a vital crossroad in the journey. Directions chosen there have guided the spread of faith down to our day.

Its location destined Antioch to be a mixture of diverse cultures. Caravans from Asia Minor, Persia, India, and even China traveled through this natural meeting place for East and West. Merchandise from afar was sent to large warehouses before being transferred to barges and hauled down the Orontes River to waiting ships.

Great powers struggled to control the city because of its strategic location and, more importantly, because of its growing wealth and influence. The Greeks hellenized Antioch, marking it with their culture and philosophy. Inevitably, as Rome extended its borders, the city became a Roman stronghold. Even before Rome made it the capital of its Syrian province in 64 AD, Antioch was a favorite haunt of Roman soldiers. Roman culture added to the city's luxury with a forum, an amphitheater, a Roman bath, a hippodrome, a theater, and an aqueduct carrying water to fountains, public buildings, and villas in the city. Wealthy and dazzling to behold, Antioch deserved its title, "Golden."

From a religious standpoint, the city reflected its cosmopolitan character. The Greeks worshipped the gods of Olympus. Roman soldiers in the area remained pagan neighbors, a large Greek-speaking Jewish colony prayed to the God of Abraham. Primarily traders, they kept their Jewish faith in synagogues near the foot of the city. Wealthy and dazzling to behold, Antioch deserved its title, "Golden."

From a religious standpoint, the city reflected its cosmopolitan character. The Greeks worshipped the gods of Olympus. Roman soldiers in the area remained loyal to Mithras, god of the Persians. Alongside their pagan neighbors, a large Greek-speaking Jewish colony prayed to the God of Abraham. Primarily traders, they kept their Jewish faith in synagogues near the foot of Mount Silpius. This southern section of the city was also where the Jewish community lived.

**ANTIOCH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

Peter was the first apostle to reach Antioch. In a cave on the slopes overlooking the Jewish colony he preached in what tradition calls Christianity's oldest church, the Grotto of Saint Peter. Near here the famous Chalice of Antioch, originally thought to be the cup used by Christ at the Last Supper, was discovered in 1910. Later studies date it between the third and sixth centuries. Still, the intricacy of the design housing the chalice suggests how the faith of the Christian community grabbed hold among artisans such as this skillful smith.

Antioch's Christians debated difficult questions about observance of Jewish law. They sent Barnabas and Paul to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for help. The Council of Jerusalem (cf. Acts 15:1-35) decided to free the gentile converts of any restrictions imposed by Jewish law. Now the Christians were an entity in themselves, with no ties to the Jewish community. In effect, the Council opened the way to a Church universal in character.

With their different religious backgrounds, Antioch's Christians debated difficulties about observance of Jewish law. They sent Barnabas and Paul to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for help. The Council of Jerusalem (cf. Acts 15:1-35) decided to free the gentile converts of any restrictions imposed by Jewish law. Now the Christians were an entity in themselves, with no ties to the Jewish community. In effect, the Council opened the way to a Church universal in character.

Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch with a letter confirming the decision of the Council. During his two years there, Paul's initial fervor and zeal for the spread of the Church became a consuming fire. Antioch would be the Church which sponsored his apostolic mission to the gentiles.

In the year 57, Paul's third missionary journey was never completed. Christians in Antioch waited for him, only to hear that he had been arrested and taken to Rome to be martyred. There too Peter ended his journeys with a martyr's death.

Antioch had its own martyrs as the emperors of Rome attempted to stamp out the new religion. At the end of the first century, refusal of Christians to worship pagan gods incensed Emperor Trajan. Ignatius, third bishop of Antioch, was arrested and taken to Rome to be devoured in the arena. En route, the chainbound Ignatius wrote to the faithful scattered from the Near East to Rome.

The keynote of all his letters was unity in belief among all Christians. His letter to the congregation in Smyrna contains the first reference in Christian literature to the term "Catholic Church." Ignatius constantly insisted on unity with the bishop by faith in and obedience to his authority. He also upheld the Virgin birth and called the Eucharist "the flesh of Christ" and the "medicine of immortality." Issues he raised would be argued for centuries by theologians in Antioch and those who followed, leading to the discord he warned against.

**ANTIOCH IN THE CHRISTIAN EMPIRE**

Antioch remained the most prominent city in the Middle East throughout the Roman era. In 297 AD the Emperor Diocletian made it the capital of a province stretching from Cyprus to Mesopotamia. With Jerusalem destroyed in 70 AD, Antioch became the hub of Christian influence in the East.

While Antiochans emphasized Christ's divinity, Antiochans also debated the nature of His humanity. Diodore of Tarsus pursued their dualistic Christology and stimulated his influential disciples, including John Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia. Another student of Lucian, Arius of Alexandria, argued a Trinitarian heresy, Arianism, that only the Father was fully God.

Disputes on the relation of Christ's humanity to His divinity led to a fracturing of the Christian community. In 431 the Council of Ephesus condemned Nestorianism, whose followers would be driven out of the Empire and find a home in the Assyrian Church. In 451 the Council of Chalcedon condemned Monophysitism, further splintering the Church. Those Antiochans who rejected Chalcedon evolved into the Syrian Orthodox Church, while the chiefly Greek-speaking Antiochans who accepted this Council became known as Melkites. Two centuries later the Syriac-speaking monks of St.
Maron’s monastery would form their own jurisdiction, the Maronite patriarchate. The tangle of distinctions has endured. Today the patriarchal heritage of Antioch is claimed by Catholic Maronites, Syrian Orthodox, and Syrian Catholics, as well as by two Greek-Byzantine patriarchs, the Orthodox and the Catholic Melkite.

The Church of Antioch was also a center for ascetic, liturgical and missionary activity throughout this period. Monasticism flourished in the Syrian desert and the mountains of Cilicia and the Lebanon. Antiochian missionary activity was responsible for establishing the catholicates of Georgia and Persia. To this day the Christians of the Malabar coast (South West India) refer to their communities as “Syrian Churches”. The liturgical tradition of Antioch – associated with such names as John Chrysostom, John of Damascus, Romanos the Melodist – would be brought to Constantinople and provide the dominant influence on the entire Byzantine way of worship.

THE DECLINE OF ANTIOCH

During the next 500 years Antioch slowly slipped from its place of prominence. The Churches’ Christological disputes had divided the community along its two major ethnic lines, Greek and Syrian. The Greek Church of Antioch increasingly looked to Constantinople for support and direction. As a result the Greek patriarchate of Antioch tended to become increasingly dependent on the Church of Constantinople.

The city had experienced a devastating fire and earthquakes in the fifth century, but it was violent conquest by the Muslim Arabs in the seventh century heralded its decline as a center of any importance. The next six hundred years were regularly punctuated by conquests and reconquests by Byzantines (989) Seljuk Turks (1071), Crusaders (1098), and Baibars (1268).

The most devastating of these invasions for the Greek Church of Antioch was that of the Crusades. When the Crusaders were in power they sought to impose a Latin patriarch and bishops on the Church. As a result the Greek hierarchs spent most of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries wandering, from Cilicia and Constantinople to Asia Minor as their see experienced wave after wave of conflict and pillage. Finally in 1366 the Greek Patriarch moved his see to Damascus, retaining only the title of Antioch as a souvenir of its ancient prominence.

Today what was once the glory of the young Church is modern Antakya in southern Turkey. It was cut off from the rest of Syria after World War I as a part of the great migration of peoples orchestrated by the western powers. Modern apartments dot the hillside where spacious villas once stood. But the legacy of Antioch cannot be defined by ruined walls. Like the mustard tree, its deep roots and far-reaching branches belong to one Church wherever it has spread. Its heirs are those Christians who, century after century, continued to live out the truth contained in that tiny mustard seed planted there by Christ’s apostles.

Adapted from an article by Sister Jean David Finley, originally published in Catholic Near East Magazine, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Fall, 1985). Reprinted with permission.
BYZANTINE CHRISTMAS: FEAST OF RECREATION

St. Gregory of Nazianzus sums up the Eastern Christian view of Christmas in his famous statement that the Nativity of Christ "is not a festival of creation but a festival of recreation." The birth of Christ, although a historical event, is not an end but a means to the renewal, sanctification, and recreation of the whole universe. Actually we commemorate, not so much the birth of a child, but the ultimate rebirth and transfiguration of all mankind and with it the whole world of creation. The world, held in bondage by reason of man's perversion, this is the world Christ redeemed. Christ redeemed humanity and by taking humanity to Himself He redeemed the world.

THE NATIVITY ICON AND THE THEOLOGY OF CHRISTMAS

Perhaps the best expression of this basic approach of the Eastern Christian to Christmas is the traditional icon of the birth of Christ. The icon of the nativity contains two main lessons. First it teaches the reality of the event: the indisputable reality of the birth of God into human affairs, the incarnation of Christ, underlining by its details both the divinity and the humanity of the word made flesh. Secondly, the image indicates the effect of this wondrous event on the world and its ultimate recreation in the reconciliation of all things on earth and in heaven (cf. Colossians 1:20).

The sacred icon brings together all creation to join in the "happening" of Christmas, to render service and thanks, each in its own way:

- What shall we bring You, O Christ, for being born on earth for our sake? For each of the creatures who have their being from You brings thanks to You: angels their songs, the heavens a star; the wise men gifts; the shepherds wonder; the earth a cave; the wilderness a manger; but we – the Virgin Mother (Vespers Sticheron)

As we examine the icon more carefully we notice that central to it is a swirling darkness, the mouth of the great abyss, the cave of Bethlehem, symbolic of the soul, the body, the world, in awful and inexorable continuity struck by sin and hungering for the light of redemption to pierce the darkness. And light points out the light which shatters the darkness! The star of Bethlehem casts its long rays illuminating the One who broke the bonds of hell, darkness, and death forever and by His self-emptying was born for our sake: the Child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger, prefiguring the very cave-sepulchre and shrouds of His death and burial.

THE MOTHER OF GOD (THEOTOKOS)

Attending the newborn One is the Mother of God, the holy and ever-virgin Mary, who occupies a central role in the drama of redemption and is larger in scale than the other figures. She is the "renewal of all born on earth", the new Eve, mother of all recreated mankind. She is mankind's great gift to the Incarnation and through her all mankind gives its assent to the wonder of the mystery. She sits, the living throne of the King of all, and by the absence of the usual signs of the suffering of childbearing proclaims the wonder of the virgin birth and the divine nature of the One she bears.

Dumb nature is also given a central position by the presence of the ox and the ass, ever deemed important by the Church despite the fact that the Scriptures do not mention their presence. Yet they always appear in the center, representatives of the whole world of nature recreated by the coming of the Savior.
JOSEPH’S DOUBT: THAT OF ALL MANKIND

Joseph is seen strangely dejected outside the central grouping. He is not the father, and this point is emphatically made by separating him from the group. He sits troubled, doubting, and worried against the blackness of the cave which reaches around him in his unbelief. He is struggling to accept the miracle that takes place before him and in that struggle represents not only himself but all mankind who with similar turmoil wrestles with the fact of the Incarnation which seems beyond words or reason. Wistfully he looks back over his shoulder to consider the holy scene. In many icons Satan, disguised as a shepherd, stands before Joseph and tempts him – as he has done to many since – to disbelieve the virgin birth.

The temptation of Joseph is balanced by the faith and belief of the Magi who approach on horseback following the star and in another scene arrive at the foot of the manger to present their gifts and themselves, “the beginning of the nations”, to the Lord.

Angels representing the celestial world carry out their two-fold function of adoring and glorifying the Savior as well as announcing to the unseen shepherds the good tidings of glad joy. The icon is usually completed by a most tender scene transmitted by the apocryphal gospels stressing the humanity of the Christ in His submission to the requirements of nature as He is carefully bathed by two midwives.

The icon of the nativity of Christ is the visual rendition of the song of the Church at this feast:

Today the Virgin gives birth to the One transcendent in essence; and the earth offers a cave to the Uncontainable One. Angels with the shepherds give glory and wise men journey onward following the star; for to us is born a newborn Child who is God from all eternity.

(Kontakion of the Feast)

The Eastern Christian who venerates this icon proclaims the wondrous event of the birth “of the One transcendent in essence” and the attending recreation of the whole universe which has now been set in motion by the birth of this little Child “who is God from all eternity”.

Christ is born: glorify Him!

Beholding him who was in God’s image and likeness fallen through transgression, Jesus bowed the heavens and came down. Without changing, He took up His dwelling in a virgin womb so that He might recreate fallen Adam, who cried to Him: “Glory to Your manifestation, O my Deliverer and my God!”

(Sticheron at the Liti)

Man fell from the divine and better life. Though made in the image of God, he became through transgression wholly subject to corruption and decay. But now the wise Creator fashions him anew: for He has been glorified.

(First Ode of the Canon at Orthros)
Christian Church vestments were not inherited from any other religion but gradually evolved out of the ordinary dress of the people of the Roman Empire. In those first days of Christianity the clergy presided in their ordinary clothing, although undoubtedly costlier and more beautiful garments were used. The Church therefore, did not invent vestments but rather a conservative instinct naturally retained something of the gracious and ample vesture once worn by all Mediterranean peoples. Beyond conservatism it seems that a deep human instinct prefers special clothing for ceremonial occasions and thus many of the ancient world religions have evolved ritual garments for their priests.

The use of such dress over the course of centuries and in all parts of Christendom gave rise to a sense of stability and continuity which is important in a religion concerned with external verities. Vestments strikingly remind the participants at the sacred mysteries that they are wonderfully joined to all generations of past believers forming but one undivided family of faith which spans both time and space. Finally, the sacred vestments of the clergy clothe over, to some extent, the individual personality of the officiating priest who acts at the altar not simply in his own name but as the one Christ who still “is offered and offers” the Holy and Divine Liturgy. The use of noble and flowing vestments born in Christian antiquity tend to underscore the uniqueness of this Christ-action.

At present the following liturgical vestments are used by Byzantine clergy, both Orthodox and Catholic (numbers refer to indications on the center illustration):

**VESTMENTS OF THE DEACON**

1. **Sticharion** – the tunic, which is worn by anyone serving in The Holy Place, is in fact the baptismal garment, the robe of glory. Since no other vestment is worn over the deacon’s Sticharion, it is generally more ornamented then that of the priest who uses it as an undergarment.

2. **Epimanikia** – the cuffs worn by the deacon and higher ranks of clergy. The priest and bishop wear the cuffs over the sleeves of the sticharion while the deacon places them underneath his sticharion’s broader sleeves.

3. **Orarion** – the diaconal stole, a long band ornamented with crosses and often the word “holy” repeated three times. The orarion is worn on the left shoulder, passes across the chest and falls down front and back.

**VESTMENTS OF THE PRIEST**

1. **Sticharion** (discussed earlier)

2. **Epitrachelion** – the priestly stole, a long band worn around the neck and falling down to the ground in front where the two extremities are sewn together. It is usually marked with seven crosses.

3. **Zone** – the sash or belt, girding the sticharion and passing over the epitrachelion to hold it in place.

4. **Epimanikia** or cuffs (discussed earlier)

5. **Phelonion** – this outer cloak has the same origin as the Roman *chasuble*. Its very full form in the Byzantine usage is reminiscent of the ancient *paenula* which gradually replaced the Roman toga as the outer garment of the upper classes toward the close of the imperial period. This ample vestment is often cut slightly up the front to facilitate arm movements and is marked by a large cross on the back.

6. **Epigonation** – a lozenge shaped ornament suspended by a cord from the left shoulder and hanging at the right knee. It is properly a Bishop’s vestment but is worn by some priests as a sign of dignity. It probably originated in the imperial regalia as a sort of purse or bag but now is purely ceremonial, marked with a cross and made of cloth covered cardboard.
VESTMENTS OF THE BISHOP

1. Sakkos – that vestment proper to Bishops which gradually replaced their use of the phelonion. Directly copied from late imperial regalia, it is a shorter tunic with ample sleeves and marked with a cross on the back. It is worn over the sticharion or under-tunic.

2. Omophorion is probably one of the most ancient of the Bishop's vestments with a strictly symbolic origin. Copied from the scarf of office worn by the Roman Emperor and other officials, it identified the Bishop as head of the community. A large, long band of cloth it is marked with crosses and is passed around the neck hanging in front and behind. A "small" omophorion worn simply around the neck and hanging in two pendants on the chest is properly worn in place of the large one after the gospel at the Liturgy. The omophorion is worn by all Eastern Bishops and by Western metropolitans in an abbreviated form (the pallium).

3. Pectoral Cross (discussed later)

4. Engolpia (discussed later)

5. Crown – the Bishop's head covering, adapted from the imperial regalia when the Byzantine clergy began assuming civil functions. The crown is embroidered and bears small icons and is often surmounted by a cross. Some Archimandrites and Archpriests, although not of episcopal character, have the right to the use of the crown.

6. Dikerion and Trikerion – candlesticks used by the Bishop to give solemn blessings. The dikerion holds two candles, symbolizing the dual nature of Christ as God and Man. The trikerion holds three candles, symbolizing the Trinity.

The Bishop also wears all the vestments of a presbyter indicated above with the exception of the phelonion.

The Eagle Rug – Bishops stand at their throne on a small oval or circular rug on which is embroidered an eagle in flight above a city. This represents his governance of the local Church under his care.

PERSONAL CLERICAL DRESS

Besides these liturgical vestments, Byzantine clergy employ several distinctive garments for their ordinary dress. These are simply ritualized forms of the ordinary dress of the Middle East which is still regularly worn in traditional societies. These include:

Mandyas – or mantle is the monastic choir and processional cloak. A Bishop's mandyas is generally purple in color and is adorned by icons of the four evangelists and by ornamental bands, suggesting the streams of grace flowing through the Bishop's ministry. The mandyas is closed at the front bottom as well as at the neck.

Pateritsa – the pastoral staff of a Bishop or Abbot. It is terminated by two serpents looking toward an orb surmounted by a cross, and is reminiscent of the brass serpent erected by Moses to heal the Israelites. The Bishop carries a shorter and simpler staff of wood topped by a simple knob when walking.

Pectoral Cross – In the Byzantine usage this is not a distinctive emblem of Bishops but may be worn by any priest as a sign of a special honor or dignity. In the Russian usage all priests make use of it. The Bishop wears the pectoral cross in conjunction with the Engolpion.

Engolpia or medallions depicting Christ and the Mother of God are a distinctive sign of the Bishop in the Byzantine Church. A Bishop usually wears one with the pectoral cross; a Metropolitan, Archbishop or Patriarch employs two.

Kamelavkion – a cylindrical hat with a small brim on top worn by the three orders of priesthood. Monks, Bishops (since they were monks) and certain dignitaries cover this hat with the Epanokamelavkion, the black monastic veil.

The (outer) Rason - a wide-sleeved tunic worn over the Andirion or inner rason (not visible in the illustration). The andirion, which may be of any color, is usually girt by a sash or, in the case of monks, by a leather belt.

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CELEBRATING NAMEDAYS

Your name is important. Nothing sounds as pleasant to us as our own name. A child will beam with pleasure when his name is recognized; the adult may conceal his delight, but usually feels it just the same.

Today people choose names for children on a far different basis than in the past. Parents often pick a name because they like the sound of it; so we find people of Middle Eastern background with names like Scott, Kimberly or Odette. Others even name their children after sports or entertainment personalities of the moment.

Traditionally, on the other hand, people chose names for more substantial reasons: to express continuity with their family they would ‘recycle’ the names of parents, grandparents or other relatives. Thus the family of John the Baptist was surprised when his mother chose a name that was not common among them: “None of your relatives has this name” (Luke 1:61).

Christians have long chosen the names of saints from the liturgical calendar to proclaim their link with their spiritual family, the Church. This was often a costly kind of witness for believers living in a non-Christian society, as their very names (Nicholas or George, Elias or Barbara) labeled them automatically as Christians. Rather than conceal their minority status behind ambiguous names, these believers proclaimed their identity with the Church of Christ by choosing saints’ names.

The Church calendar lists a number of saints whose memory may be observed each day of the year. Persons who bear the name of these saints have traditionally kept their memorial with special observances on their behalf. In the Byzantine tradition people whose names are not found on the calendar of saints would keep the Transfiguration of Christ (August 6) or the Dormition of the Theotokos (August 15) as their name-days, depending on whether they were men or women.

OBSERVING NAMEDAYS

A number of popular customs are practiced among Byzantine Christians on namedays. Commonly a service would be celebrated in the parish community. Sometimes it would be a service of intercession in the saint’s honor or the Divine Liturgy itself, especially if it were a major saint’s day. The persons named after the saint or the family celebrating the feast would offer the bread for the Liturgy and sweet bread or wheat for the artoklasia which would be shared by the worshippers.

The celebration would normally conclude with a festive party. Often favors or token gifts would be part of the day, but with this significant difference. The person whose name day it is gives the gifts rather than receives them. Giving is, after all, the best sign of gratitude for Christians.

In the family much can be done to initiate children into this custom of celebrating namedays. In earlier years the child will simply delight in being the center of attention yet again. In building up a child’s sense of self worth, his own name is his primary identification. He sees the saint as therefore someone like himself, and a hero at that!

Soon, however, children begin to ask questions about death, heaven and hell. Having a relationship with those who have died in Christ (the saints) can help to conquer the child’s natural fear of death. Later the idea of children giving gifts or favors on their name-days would be another weapon in the parents’ arsenal against possessiveness and materialism, cravings which affect every child.

In the home, icons of the patrons of family members should be obtained and placed in the family icon corner or in the rooms of the individual family members. On the nameday these icons could be placed in a special setting surrounded by candles and flowers. The family could go to church for the Liturgy or arrange for a special service preceding a festive gathering in the home. The life of the saint could be read or related at mealtime and special treats served. The gathering could be capped with the singing of “God grant you many years” to the one whose nameday it is. Inventive families have planned skits, made mini pilgrimages to local churches named for the saint followed by a trip to the child’s favorite restaurant, or created banners and other home decorations about the patron. The child can help prepare the liturgical or party foods, make or pick out favors to give to friends or relatives or otherwise help with the day’s preparations.

The Church is one body in Christ: one household of all the baptized living or dead with Christ as its Head. Maintaining and celebrating our association with one of the great saints of Christian history helps us see this Church, not as an impersonal institution, but as it is truly meant to be: one family under the lordship of its Head.

COMMON NAMES AND NAMEDAYS

Every day of the year between five and ten saints are remembered on Byzantine calendars alone. Some of the more popular ones are listed below.

Andrew – November 30
Ann – July 25
Anthony – January 17
Barbara – December 4
Basil – January 1
Catherine – November 25
Christina – July 24
Christopher – May 9
Cyril – June 9
Daniel – December 17
David – Sunday after Christmas
Dimitri – October 26
Elias – July 20
Elizabeth – June 25
Gabriel – July 23
George – April 23
Gregory – January 25
Habib – November 15
Helen – May 21
Ignatius – December 20
Irene – May 5
James – October 23
John (the Theologian) – May 8
John (the Baptist) – June 24
John (of Damascus) – December 4
Joseph – Sunday after Christmas
Jude – June 19
Julia – December 21
Julian – February 6
Brief notices about their lives can be found in the liturgical calendar available in many parishes. There are several sources for fuller versions of the Lives of the Saints. Here are a few:

- **Orthodox Saints: Spiritual Profiles for Modern Man** in four volumes by the Very Rev. Father George Poulos. Each volume gives over 100 two-page biographies of saints as they appear on the church calendar.

- **The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints** in seven volumes (September through March) from Chrysostom Press. Each volume contains numerous biographies of varying lengths for the saints commemorated during a given month.

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**FAMILY FESTIVALS**

Many Eastern Christians have the custom of observing “family feasts”. On these occasions they would celebrate in a particularly solemn way one of the major Church festivals (one of the Great Feasts or major saint’s days) as their family’s patronal feast. Generally this means that the extended family (brothers, cousins, etc.) would participate in the Church services of the feast together, usually offering the bread, wheat, wine and oil for the artoklasia service and the bread for the Divine Liturgy. Thus we find a petition in the artoklasia service for “those who are offering these oblations and celebrating this feast.”

In many places those who had the means would offer refreshments to those attending this celebration in gratitude for the blessings the family has received. This custom is not so frequently practiced in this country but would seem to be especially well suited to supporting both the natural family’s sense of unity and its commitment to the parish family as well.
Everything You Wanted to Know About Lent But Were Afraid to Ask

The Great Fast or Lent – there are three others on the Byzantine calendar: before Christmas, before the Dormition (August 15) and before Sts. Peter and Paul (June 29) – is the seven week period of preparation before the celebration of Pascha (Easter). It is like a retreat held by the whole Church: a time of spiritual renewal, a time of repentance.

Why this three (fasting, prayer and almsgiving)?

The reason for giving up something is that something better may take its place: especially the things of God. We fast so that we may “lay aside all earthly cares, that we may receive the King of all”. Does your life depend on food? You must eat to live, but no matter how much you eat, you are going to die. Life depends, not on food, but on God, the Giver of life. We fast to experience that on a deep level. Fasting has been prescribed by Christ Himself. The Church can and should remove from the realm of obligation this or that exercise of fasting, but the Church cannot dispense us from Christ’s command to fast. We must each comply with that command as best we can. And, of course, the abstaining from food should lead to an abstaining from sin and evil intentions.

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Where did Lent come from?

The early Christians kept vigil during the last few days of Holy Week. As time went on, the vigil was extended to approximately forty days. It was a period in which the catechumens (candidates to become Christians) were given a last, intensive preparation for baptism, chrismation and the Eucharist. It was also a time when the penitents (“big time” sinners, such as lapsed Christians) did penance, relearning the basic and beautiful lesson of the mystery and dignity of being a Christian and our way of life in the Lord. They were reconciled with the rest of the faithful at the end of Lent.

Since the season was a type of “boot-camp in Christianity” for the catechumens and penitents, all the faithful entered into preparation with them. Lent became a type of renewal and “refresher course” for all believers.

Isn’t Lent kind of morbid and negative?

Repentance is not “giving up”: it is a turning back to God whom we realize is the very source and goal of our life. He is our life. By repentance we realize we aren’t where we should be: we are far from our Father. Our happiness, our wholeness, our sense of identity, well-being and joy flow from being close to God as the very center of our lives. So Lent, the time for repentance, is the time to rediscover this truth, to be convinced of it and make it more of a conscious reality in our everyday lives. In Pascha, the Easter mystery, Christ gives us a chance to be “born again” as children of God: as complete men and women possessing the life, grace and joy of God which completes and heals our nature as human beings.

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But why the big interest in 40 days?

The number also speaks to us of the forty days Jesus spent in the desert after His baptism, when He resisted temptation, giving Himself to a close communion with His Father, the source of His life. As He embraced His mission as His Father’s servant and our redeemer during that time, so we try to take our own mission as Christians more seriously during Lent.

Finally, the forty days call to mind Moses and Elijah, who spent that amount of time preparing for important encounters with God. We too will encounter Him in His paschal mysteries where He reveals to us who He is, how He loves us, who we are and the real meaning of life.

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Why this three (fasting, prayer and almsgiving)?

They are recommended by the Scriptures and Tradition. They get to the very root of repentance, which is turning back to God. They help strip away the glitter of a false self, a false view of the world and others (secularism) and aid in discovering our true identity, our relation to God, others, the world and ourselves. Fasting helps us discover our true hunger for God at the root of our being and our total dependence on Him as the source of our life and strength. Serious prayer puts us in communion with Him. Almsgiving helps us share God, His gifts and ourselves with others, establishing a true communion with them in the Lord.

So what should I do during Lent?

On “do”: rather “be” a lenten Christian. Live a lenten style of life. Remember the basics: you are trying to turn more fully to God (repentance) and taste more fully the beauty and dignity that are yours as a child of God.

You must think about that – which means eliminating some distractions – and seriously turn to Him. The Church has three traditional helps for this: fasting, prayer and almsgiving.

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Then what does fasting mean in practice?

In practice, fasting is expressed through abstaining from certain foods for certain times. To follow our full Eastern program of fasting would mean:

- Abstaining from all food and drink from midnight until noon on all weekdays; and
Not eating any meat or dairy products during the whole time of Lent.

The minimum asked by our Church for Lent is that we abstain from meat on the following days: the first day of Great Lent, all Fridays, and the Thursday, Friday and Saturday of Holy Week. It is also expected that we abstain from meat on most Fridays of the year and strongly recommended that we abstain from meat on every Wednesday of Great Lent as well. We should abstain from all food and drink from midnight to noon at least on the first day of Great Lent, and the Thursday, Friday and Saturday of Holy Week, if not every day of the Lenten season.

Each family or individual should understand why we fast (the spiritual purpose), pray over it and then decide what is to be done in this regard during the holy season.

AND THE ALMSGIVING?

Material gifts were given us by God as gifts over which we are to be responsible stewards. You are to use those gifts — and the gifts that you are — sacramentally. All things are potentially sacramental, since they are intended for communion with God and with each other. When we share the goods of the earth in love, we are “in communion”, in fellowship in and with the Lord.

How are you handling your material possessions? They are not ends in themselves, but they are to produce that communion. Are they? Look around you, and the Lord will show you how to give alms, and exactly what you should share. One idea is to save the money gained by fasting and use it for charitable purposes.

THAT SOUNDS GREAT. WHEN DO WE START?

We already have started: you have been thinking about it for quite a while. And the Church too has a time of preparation for Lent, when it “primes the pump”, giving us ideas, motivation and direction for Lent. For four Sundays before Lent starts we think about our need for God, about repentance and fasting, God’s judgement and our need to forgive one another.

Lent actually begins on Clean Monday, the day after the last of these pre-Lenten Sundays, Cheese-Fare Sunday. And since the Church day always begins at sunset, our first lenten service is on Sunday evening. We have the beautiful Forgiveness Vespers, at which we are reconciled with each other before beginning the lenten journey and usually have the opportunity for the sacrament of penance.

WHAT ABOUT ASH WEDNESDAY?

We don’t have Ash Wednesday. The Western Church begins the holy season on Wednesday with their proper services. The Eastern Churches start two days earlier because we use a different counting system to arrive at the traditional forty days.

The Western lent consists of forty days excluding Sundays — leading up to Easter Sunday. The Eastern Churches keep forty days without interruption leading up to Lazarus Saturday, the first day of Holy Week. This accounts for the different starting dates.

Through greed we were once stripped naked, overcome by the bitter tasting of the forbidden fruit, and we were exiled from God. Let us turn back in repentance, fasting from the food that gives us pleasure. Let us purify our senses on which our Enemy makes war. Let us strengthen our hearts with the hope of grace, and not with foods which brought no benefits to those who trusted in them. Our food shall be the Lamb of God on the holy and radiant night of His Rising. He is the Victim offered for us, given in communion to the Apostles on the evening of the Mysteries, who scatters the darkness of ignorance by the Light of His Resurrection!

(Vespers, Meatfare Sunday)
Have you ever tried to look straight into the sun? The brightness of that created orb of light is so stunning that blindness results if we do not avert our gaze. What then can we say of the radiant splendor of the mystery of Christ's resurrection? Surely this uncreated brilliance lies beyond the reach of the eyes of our souls. Yet the Psalmist sings: “In Your light shall we see the light.” (Psalm 35:9, LXX).

A prism! If you want to experience the luster of pure natural light without having to dim your eyes before its power, refract that light through a prism and behold the colors of the rainbow! In the same way the Church takes the radiance of the Risen Christ and refracts it through the prism of its liturgical life.

Behold the mystery of the Risen Christ rendered accessible to the soul of man: contemplate Him as the liberator of Adam and Eve from sheol, ascending to the Father, and sending the Holy Spirit.

In doing this the Church follows the example of the Gospels. Compare the four accounts of the end of the Master's sojourn among us in the flesh. Notice that in St. Luke's account in Chapter 24 the entire mystery is presented in one breathless exclamation: the empty tomb, the announcement of the angels, the evening meal with the pilgrims to Emmaus, the appearance to the Apostles, the promise of the Spirit, and the Ascension.

Read it once through and see if you don't have the impression that all these events were experienced as one – in rapid, dizzying succession. After all, it was Eternity breaking down the wall of separation from the world of time. But later St. Luke himself – in the Acts of the Apostles – and the other evangelists came to contemplate the Mystery according to the prismatic pattern the Church would later adopt for its festal cycle: first Pascha (the Resurrection), then the Ascension, and finally Pentecost.

WE ARE RESTORED TO GOD

Concerning the Feast of the Ascension, St. John Chrysostom asks “What is it we commemorate this day?” The golden-mouthed Patriarch of Constantinople replies to his own question: “This day all mankind was restored to God.”

In the beginning when God created mankind “after His own image and likeness,” He planted a thirst in our heart that could be slaked only by God Himself. As St. Augustine said, “You have made our hearts for You, a Lord, and they shall not find their rest until they rest in You.” Though the fall deadened this appetite for Divinity, it did not destroy it utterly.

The Son of God emptied Himself of the Godhead so that His poverty could enrich our humanity with Divinity. He took upon Himself a human nature and united it to His Divine Person. By the Resurrection He destroyed human mortality; by His Ascension He brings back to the Father in His own Person His human nature – and ours. Listen again to Chrysostom:

“We who were unworthy of earthly dignity now ascend to a heavenly kingdom, and enter into heaven, and take our place upon a royal throne. This nature of ours, because of which the Cherubim guarded the gates of Paradise, this day sits high above the Cherubim… This day they see our nature upon the royal throne, shining in immortal beauty and glory.”

“From dust to dust” – this was to have been our fate. But if we accept to follow Christ, we find that our journey ends not as earth in earth, but Godlike in heaven.

FORTY DAYS OF PREPARATION

When the evangelists speak of the forty days that separate, or rather unite, Easter and the Ascension, we must reflect on the mystical character of the number forty. In the Scriptures, forty usually implies a period of transition: the forty years of wandering in the desert before the Israel of old could enter the Promised Land; the forty days’ fast by which our Lord prepared for His earthly ministry; the forty hours Our Lord spent while in the tomb destroying death by His own death.

Scholars tell us that the ancients revered this number because it was the product of the four points of the compass (or alternatively, the four elements or the four seasons) and the “perfect” number, 10 – the number which points to infinity.

The forty days of Christ's risen life are meant to stand as an invitation for us faithful who “have been baptized into Christ” at Pascha to “put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27). The Ascension reveals the destiny of humankind: to be united intimately with God. What the serpent had craftily suggested in Eden, “You shall be gods,” now becomes reality. As St. Peter proclaims in his second epistle:
“He has granted to us His precious and exceedingly great promises; that through these you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world by lust.”

(2 Peter 1:4)

During the forty days of Lent we tried to make good that escape through repentance. During the forty days of Pascha we glory in our newness of life, realizing that this life is His. “I now live – not I, but Christ lives in me!” (Galatians 2:20). This is the joy of the Ascension feast. It is the feast of humanity’s own destiny achieved by Christ’s compassionate love for mankind.

Listen to the Mystery glorified in this festival sticheron from Vespers:

In Adam human nature fell to the depths of the earth, O Lord. 
In Yourself have You restored it. 
Today You have lifted it above the powers and principalities of heaven. 
You loved it and granted it a throne with You. 
You had compassion on it and granted it a share in Your own destiny.

REVEALED BY THE CLOUD

The feast of the Ascension, then, is not the feast of the Lord’s farewell. How can we rejoice if we are left orphans, bereft of the fellowship of Christ? It is the feast of the Lord’s presence! Though He is taken up in His body, His presence is revealed, not hidden, by the cloud.

In Exodus the Holy Spirit led the first Chosen People on their pilgrimage by His presence in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. The cloud of the Ascension prefigures the fiery tongues of Pentecost; both cloud and fire, as in Exodus, are signs of the presence of Christ’s Holy Spirit.

Before He ascended to the Father, Jesus could be here or there, then or later; but once ascended, He is present everywhere and always – by His Spirit, through His Church, in you and in me. Truly, in this light do we see the Light.
HOW HOLY IS TRADITION?

During the past 20 years the Bible has been exerting its authority in a new and exciting way in the lives of many Christians. Countless individuals have discovered the beauty and power of the Word of God. People are trying to do what is right, to live “by the Bible”. More and more people are asking “What does the Bible say about...?” Sometimes people have been led to question the need for anything but the Bible in Christian life. In this article we hope to treat a number of questions often posed concerning Tradition. We will use the Bible itself to find some of the answers.

IS THE BIBLE FUNDAMENTAL TO CHRISTIANITY?

Yes, through the Holy Scriptures “…you can learn the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and can profitably be used for teaching, for refuting error, for guiding people’s lives, and teaching them to be holy. This is how the man who is dedicated to God becomes fully equipped and ready for any good work” (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

THEN ALL I NEED TO DO IS FOLLOW THE BIBLE?

Not exactly. The Bible itself tells us “Stand firm, then, brothers, and keep the traditions that we taught you, whether by word of mouth or by letter” (2 Thessalonians 2:15, emphasis added). The apostles did not write down everything they did or taught, but they expected them to be followed nonetheless.

Well, isn’t everything necessary for salvation written in the Bible?

Yes, but not everything helpful for salvation is written in the Bible. John said he could have written a lot more about Jesus (cf. John 21:25). Surely other accounts about Jesus and His teachings would be helpful and life-giving, but the fullness of His teachings was never written down. We know of one of them that was never recorded in the Gospels (cf. Acts 20:35) and it was surely not the only one.

In the same way, the apostles did not write down everything they did or taught. Paul notes, “Do all the things that you learned from me and have been taught by me and have heard or seen that I do” (Philippians 4:9). Their Church practiced these things, not merely because they were written, but because they were done. Thus, for example, the disciples of the apostles fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays and observed daily hours of prayer (cf. The Teachings of the Twelve Apostles, c 120 AD). Besides the written Word of God, then, Tradition helps us to be fully equipped to be mature servants of the Lord.

BUT DIDN’T JESUS CONDEMN TRADITION?

Jesus condemned Jewish tradition only when it rendered God’s Word void. Jesus said, “The scribes and the Pharisees occupy the chair of Moses. You must therefore do what they tell you and listen to what they say; but do not be guided by what they do, since they do not practice what they preach” (Matthew 23:2-3, emphasis added). He thereby affirmed Tradition. But Jesus rebuked the Pharisees when they neglected God’s Word. “You pay your tithe of mint and dill and cummin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law – justice, mercy, good faith! These you should have practiced without neglecting the others” (Matthew 22:23, emphasis added). Notice that the other traditions and practices were not to be rejected, but kept in proper perspective.

Sometimes people attach greater value to familiar customs than to the Word of God. Or they cherish practices which are actually contrary to basic expressions of Holy Tradition. This kind of behavior is not of God and it contradicts authentic Tradition as well as the Bible.

BUT HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT IS AUTHENTIC TRADITION?

We believe by faith that the Church is the temple of God, the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, who guides the Church to all truth (cf. John 16:12-13). Authentic Tradition reflects the guidance of the Holy Spirit by its coherence and continuity. It does not contradict Scripture and is consistent with what has been upheld by the Church from the beginning.

CAN THERE BE NEW TEACHINGS?

No, but teachings might appear new because they are stated more clearly or definitively in new or different circumstances. However to be authentic expressions of Holy Tradition they cannot be “new” in the sense that they are not in harmony with the Scripture or established teachings of the Tradition. Thus the term Holy Trinity is never found in Scripture; but it does speak with new clarity the truth of the Father,
Son and Holy Spirit which the Scripture does certainly teach.

**IS THIS TRADITION WRITTEN DOWN ANYWHERE?**

There are many outward forms or expressions of Tradition, such as the teachings of the Ecumenical Councils and the common teachings of the Church Fathers which are written. Other forms of Tradition may be thought of as more practiced than written. Thus the prayers and forms of the liturgy (e.g., the sign of the cross), the feasts and fasts of the Church year, and the “visible Tradition” of iconography, also reflect the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Likewise the effect of the Spirit’s presence in the lives of the saints indicates that the Tradition of the Church is not simply a matter of books, but is lived out by the People of God.

**ISN’T THIS UNNECESSARILY COMPLICATED? AFTER ALL, ANYBODY CAN INTERPRET THE BIBLE.**

Can they? – Not everyone possesses the same gift, or the same measure of a gift. “Each one of us, however, has been given his own share of grace, given as Christ has allotted it” (Ephesians 4:7) The Holy Spirit dwelling in the Church has given the gift of teaching to the community, but not to everyone in it. Writing about St Paul’s epistles, St Peter says, “There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures” (2 Peter 3:16). Since it is the coherent and continuous expression of the Spirit’s guidance in the Church, Holy Tradition is necessary for understanding the Bible as it has been lived out among the people of God.

**HOW ARE WE TO VIEW THOSE WHO REJECT HOLY TRADITION?**

Tradition is the voice of the Spirit in the life of the Church. To reject Tradition is to reject a most vital work of the Spirit. And so we should be careful not to accept the biblical interpretations of those who cut themselves off from this life if they contradict Holy Tradition.

When possible we should lovingly and patiently explain that Scripture and the other forms of Holy Tradition are one. God continues to dwell in His people and shape them. He does not contradict Himself; but neither does He limit Himself as to the means by which He shapes us.

Adapted with permission from Br. Daniel F. Stramara, Jr., *What the Bible Says About Tradition* (Pecos, NM, Dove Publications, 1984)
HOW LOVELY IS YOUR DWELLING PLACE

Heavenly King, Consoler, Spirit of truth, present in all places and filling all things, the Treasury of blessings and the Giver of life: come, O Good One, and dwell in us. Cleanse us of all stain and save our souls."

This prayer begins every service in the Byzantine Churches. It clearly teaches that God is everywhere and especially within the faithful themselves. Why then, do we Eastern Catholics feel the need to build churches and to pray to God in them? If God is everywhere, what need is there of a church building? Tradition dating back to the Old Testament answers our question.

God is eternal and omnipresent – that is, He exists outside the dimensions of space and time. But mankind lives in a finite world marked especially by space and time. We live here. We live now.

The problem then arises: how to live here and now with our God who exists beyond space and time? Mankind vacillated between two tendencies: either to worship God in everything and everyone (pantheism), or to say that God, being outside time and space, is nowhere and therefore non-existent, (atheism).

The solution lay beyond the groping minds of natural man until God Himself showed the way in the Old Testament. By creating sacred space and sacred time, God enabled humanity to experience His presence everywhere and always – a Divine Presence beyond the realm of the senses. From the Ark of the Covenant to the Temple in Jerusalem with its regular sequence of prayer and sacrifice during the hours of the day and night, the Old Testament Church was brought into communion with the Eternal and Everywhere God.

In the New Testament this movement of Divine Condescension brought to perfection: Christ Himself becomes the New Temple and all those baptized into Him become other Christs manifesting God’s presence here and now.

For this reason Christians build church buildings where they can come together – apart from the gloom of this world – to realize their role as bearers of light in the darkness. “In Your Light we shall see the light” (Psalm 35:9, LXX). Here the Christian beholds the luminous splendour of God as a sign of his own calling to irradiate the world with the love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Therefore, the church building, of its very nature, must be different from the dismal world around it. It must be nobler, more beautiful. In the Latin tradition, it is drawn heavenward by one or more lofty spires pointing to the “be-all and end-all” of life, Christ reigning triumphantly from His Cross. In the East the church is crowned by a spacious dome, emblem of heaven descending to earth, in which we see the All-powerful Christ into Whom we are being transformed.

SANCTIFYING A HOLY PLACE

After we have lavished every perfection of human skill on building a church, we must contemplate its true nature it is no less than an image of Christ. And if an image of Christ, then an image of the Christian himself for we are other Christs “in whom the Divinity dwells bodily” (Colossians 2:9). This revelation or theophany occurs during the solemn Consecration of a Church.

The rite begins with a threefold procession around the church with the relics that will be enshrined within the altar. Why relics? Because these are the earthly remains of fellow Christians who have been so perfectly transformed into mirrors of God’s glory that even their flesh remains suffused with the Divine Energies. The bishop prays:

May You be blessed forever, O God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who through the veil of His flesh consecrated for us an entrance into the Church of the First-born, who are written in heaven... look upon us Your sinful and unworthy servants who now celebrate the consecration of this honorable church to be a symbol of Your most holy Church, that is, of our own body which You have willed to be called Your temple and members (limbs) of Your Christ.

Reciting Psalm 132 (LXX) the bishop anoints the altar:

“Behold, how good and joyful it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like precious ointment poured upon the head, running down Aaron’s beard, down to the hem of his robes. It is as if the dew of Hennon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life evermore.”

The service reenacts on the altar and church building a rite similiar to the baptism and chrismation of a Christian. Clearly the Church is to be a model of what it means to lead the Christian life – both are to be filled with prayer and sacrifice, offering and bless-
ing, peace and communion, mercy and truth, joy and love.

The ceremony revolves around hallowing the altar table – into whose central pillar the holy relics are cemented with sacramental wax, even as we are called into intimate fellowship with all the saints in Christ. The altar is then baptized – that is, washed with rose water three times; finally it is chrismated so as to become “a throne of glory, and the dwelling place of God.”

The bishop proceeds through the church anointing the four walls “symbolizing the sanctification of all humanity by Christ's Grace,” as Symeon of Thessalonika writes.

Nothing remains but to consummate the mystery by serving the Divine Eucharistic Liturgy. Space and time melt away and we, the faithful, behold the ineffable beauty of the Face of Christ. Transfigured ourselves, we go forth into the world revealing by our presence that God dwells among us. As St. Peter writes:

“Now that you have tasted that the Lord is good, you come to Him, the living Stone – rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to Him, you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual dwelling to be... a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.”

(1 Peter 2:4-5,9)

You have made of the Church a resplendent heaven, enlightening all the faithful; wherefore we stand in the midst of this holy dwelling place and we cry out to You: “Make firm this house, O Lord!”

When the Word came to us in the flesh, the Son of Thunder, writing, says: “We have seen with brightness the glory which the Son had from the Father, full of grace and truth. And to as many of us as have received Him in faith He gave the power to become children of God.” Being born again, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, but having been sustained by the Holy Spirit, we have raised up a house of prayer and we cry out: “Make firm this house, O Lord!”

Kondakion and Ikos, Dedication of a Church

How to Keep the Lord’s Day

There’s a time and place for everything!” How often was that saying used on us in our childhood, or so it seemed, when we were determined upon some unapproved activity. Perhaps in turn we have used it on our own children with the same finality. Despite the way in which this truth is so often abused, it has a very real relationship to the experience of God’s people.

The rhythm of life it suggests is very basic to humanity. “There is a time to be born and a time to die” (cf. Ecclesiastes 3:1-15), and also a time to give over to the Lord. The fourth Mosaic commandment spelled this out for the Jews:

“Six days shall you labor and perform all your tasks. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. You shall do no work on it; neither shall your sons or daughters or your servants: not even the cattle or the strangers who may be staying with you.” (Exodus 19:9-10)

For the Jews, this Day of Rest came to symbolize the rest taken by the Lord Himself after creation (cf. Genesis 1:31), and was a celebration of the Creator and His works.

The New Creation

Jesus changed this concept of the Sabbath as a Day of Rest. He worked on it: teaching, healing and doing good. He violated the letter of the Law in Jewish eyes and thus earned the opposition of the leaders of Israel: “Some of the Pharisees said, ‘This man is not from God, for He does not keep the Sabbath’” (John 9:16). A New Creation was being ushered in: God’s “rest” was not as final as it had seemed.

The first Christians augmented the Sabbath with a new festival, the Lord’s Day, the first of the week. This was the day of Christ’s resurrection, “the day that the Lord had made”, and it became a day on which the Christians gathered for worship, teaching and fellowship. Thus the Sabbath, festival of the first creation, took second place to the Lord’s Day, celebration of the New Creation.

The Eastern Tradition

In the Eastern Churches, reverence for the Sabbath – Saturday – continues. It is sanctified by the Divine Liturgy and on it we sing hymns such as the following, recalling the first creation:

To You, O Lord, Ordainer and Creator of the world, the universe offers the God bearing martyrs as the first fruits of nature. Therefore by their prayers and by the intercession of the Mother of God, preserve Your Church and our country in safety and peace: You who alone are most merciful

Kontakion for Saturdays

Perhaps it is because of this continued observance of the Sabbath that the Eastern Churches have not considered Sunday as primarily a Day of Rest, but as a Day of Worship: to be given over to the Lord and His purposes.

Today we are accustomed to a minimum approach to Sunday worship: a Divine Liturgy, preferably short. Better yet, go on Saturday night and ‘get it out of the way’. A far cry from the practice of the early Church when a Sunday Liturgy might last all night (cf. Acts 20:7-12).

It is also hard to reconcile this attitude with our present day tradition of Sunday worship in the Eastern Churches, where the Divine Liturgy is certainly meant to be the highpoint of our celebration, but not the only facet to it. In our observance, the Lord’s Day begins with Saturday Vespers, which announces the weekly remembrance of the Lord’s resurrection. It continues with Sunday Orthros, the morning service of the Church, and reaches its climax in the Eucharistic Liturgy, where the Lord comes into the midst of His faithful ones. In many churches the Eucharist then spills over into a fellowship hour, where the believers gather to enjoy one another’s company in the Lord.

An Approach for Us

Clearly, in the Eastern Churches, we are urged to give the Lord much more of His day than one hour of it. Nor is this to be limited to the time spent in worship services. What keeps us from finding our ‘R&R’ in the Renewal and Recreation of God’s People? Private prayer and reading, fellowship groups, visiting the sick or the infirm: all these make most appropriate ways of sanctifying the entire Lord’s Day.

Saturday evening can be, as is intended, a time of anticipation and preparation. Attending vespers and making your confession are the most public ways of preparation. Reflecting on the scriptures, particularly the readings appointed for Sunday, or reciting the prayers in anticipation of receiving the Eucharist can easily be done at home alone or with the family. In this way our spirits are attuned to the
coming of the King of all, whose Day we begin to observe.

Sunday morning orthros or hours are often served in the churches. Otherwise we can read them privately, listen to tapes or to religious music on the radio to continue our sanctification of the Day. After the Liturgy, many people enjoy taking their meals together, prolonging the communion of the Holy Table in a gathering of love. Instead of parking in front of the TV or card table, we might more enjoy spending a Sunday afternoon with a bedridden or confined friend, advising a youth group or attending a Christian fellowship of some kind. Simply sharing a family outing with a lonely neighbor is a very down-to-earth way of continuing Jesus' practice of healing on the Sabbath! The possibilities are endless, if we are determined to love the Lord with our whole self on His Day.

Is this ‘swimming upstream’? – fighting the ordinary ways of our society, where Sunday means business as usual all around us? Of course it is, but does it come as any surprise that we who “have been baptized, anointed with the Holy Spirit, filled with His light and made holy”, as our christening service says, should find our joy where unbelievers would not: in Him who is the source of our life? “Do not be conformed to the spirit of this world,” writes St. Paul, “but be transformed by the renewal of your mind that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2).

A wholehearted observance of the Lord’s Day makes a fitting witness to our willingness to entrust our whole life to Him and to “put on the new nature created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:24).

ON THE LORD’S DAY

On the Lord’s own day, assemble in common to break bread and offer thanks, but first confess your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure.

(Didache, 1st Century AD)

The apostles further appointed: On the first day of the week let there be service, and the reading of the Holy Scriptures, and the oblation: because on the first day of the week our Lord rose from the place of the dead and on the first day of the week He arose upon the world, and on the first day of the week He ascended up to heaven, and on the first day of the week He will appear at last with the angels of heaven.

( Teaching of the Apostles, 2 – 2nd Century AD)

And on the day of our Lord’s resurrection, which is the Lord’s day, meet more diligently, sending praise to God that made the universe by Jesus, and sent Him to us, and condescended to let Him suffer, and raised Him from the dead. Otherwise what apology will he make to God who does not assemble on that day to hear the saving word concerning the resurrection, on which we pray thrice, standing in memory of Him who arose in three days, in which is performed the reading of the prophets, the preaching of the Gospel, the oblation of the sacrifice, the gift of the holy food?

(Apostolic Constitutions 2, 7:59 – 400 AD)
I HAVE COME THAT THEY MAY HAVE LIFE

HIS IS ETERNAL LIFE, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3). In these few simple words from the Holy Gospel we find the Biblical vision of our life’s goal set forth. Life without end means knowing God and Jesus His Son.

Most of us feel that we know God and Jesus because we know the facts about God which the Church teaches. But knowing God and knowing about God are very different. The person who knows the contents of God’s “file” (the Scriptures, the Creed, etc.) does not necessarily know God personally. We can know many facts about God and even repeat what we know to others without ever encountering Him in a life-giving way. As we read in the Epistle of James, “You believe that there is one God. You do well; but even the demons believe – and they tremble” (James 2:19). Knowing facts about God does not automatically transform anyone into a person of dynamic faith.

Many people live their entire life with a “beginners’ faith.” They may accept the Gospel and the Tradition and live a pious life. Their faith is real, but it is the faith of children who accept what they are told without having any personal experience to back it up. Their faith is in something unknown and remote, not something known firsthand. As a result hardship or temptation may seriously shake this kind of faith. You cannot fight any challenge to your faith with only a theory of God.

A person whose faith is based on their awareness of God’s active presence in their life, however, will know God through experience as power and life. For them the assertions of Christ – I am the way, the truth, the life, the vine, the good shepherd – are not abstractions. They are images which describe the actions of God as they have encountered Him in their own life. They know the truth of St Paul’s assertion “We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).

Many people have found the following exercise helpful in seeing the hand of God in their life. Take a few moments to recall all the coincidences that you consider turning points in your life. Imagine how your life might have developed without those coincidences and experiences. Do you think that these coincidences are just random events or are connected in a way we can only begin to comprehend? Are the formative events of our lives merely accidental or coincidental?

The believer knows that the universe did not come about by chance – it is ultimately the work of God. The person who is aware that his or her life has a purpose and direction must see the same divine hand at work. The mature believer comes to know the presence of God not only in these climactic moments but also at every moment in their lives. They are no longer just reading “God’s file;” they know Him at work, giving them a place in His plan for the salvation of the world. They become eager to take an active place in His service.

Knowing God personally in our lives is not opposed to knowing Him as He has revealed Himself in the world. If our personal experiences seem at odd with the Scriptures, the Fathers or the common witness of the historic Churches, then our experiences may lead us to delusion. If “God” is telling us to violate the commandments, for example, we can be sure that the source of that message is not God. Our own imagination or the promptings of demonic powers may be the source of these urgings.

THE APOSTOLIC TRADITION

The source of our Scriptures, our liturgy and many of our practices of prayer and fasting – was born from the apostles’ personal experience of Christ in the flesh and of the Holy Spirit whom they received after the resurrection. Key elements came to be synthesized in the early creeds, particularly the Nicean-Constantinopolitan Creed formulated at the first two Ecumenical Councils and confessed at every Divine Liturgy. This Apostolic Tradition is further expressed in the writings the Church Fathers, the texts of the Churches’ liturgies, and the witness of the saints. It presents us with a picture of God as:

CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

The Source of all that is: the One to whom we owe all our thanks for whatever we are and whatever we have.

THE HOLY TRINITY

In a way we cannot comprehend. God is the Father of His eternal Son and Word, and the One from whom the Holy Spirit proceeds.
God so loved the world that as Jesus of Nazareth, the eternal Word of God becomes man to share our world, like us in all things except sin. He took on our humanity, showing us that our frail and fragile bodies can bear the presence of God.

The Gospels give us images of what the Lord Jesus is meant to be for believers of all times. In them we see Him as:

- The Bread of Life (cf. John 6:32-59) ... the One who would nourish and strengthen us throughout our life.
- The One who would quench our thirst with the Holy Spirit (cf. John 8:37-39)
- The Light of the World (cf. John 8:12) ... who would illumine our path in this life.
- The Gate (cf. John 10:7) ... the One through whom we go to find pasture.
- The Good Shepherd (cf. John 10:14) ... who would – and did – lay down his life for His sheep.
- The Way, the Truth and the Life (cf. John 14:6) ... the only One through whom we have access to the Father.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, experienced all the weaknesses of human life, including temptation, but without sin (cf. Hebrews 4:15). His physical presence among us was necessarily short like ours; yet His presence would continue forever with us in another way. He promised that the Father would send the Holy Spirit as “another Paraclete, to be with you al-
ways” (John 14:16). The Spirit did, in fact, come upon the Church as Jesus promised to:

- “Teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you” (John 14:26)
- Testify to the truth of Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior of the world (cf. John 15:26).
- Empower the Church to bestow forgiveness of sins (cf. John 20:22-23).

It is through the Holy Spirit that we experience Christ in the Church. The Spirit inspired the writing and collecting of the Scriptures to touch the hearts of people of every age. It is the Holy Spirit who empowers the mysteries as vehicles of Christ’s saving, nurturing and forgiving love. It is the Spirit who bestows a multitude of gifts in the Church for the good of all. It is this same Spirit who has led Christians through the ages from “beginner’s faith” to holiness and ultimate glorification as saints.

God is thus not just the source of our earthly life but of our eternal life as well through Jesus Christ. Immersing ourselves in this life we can experience all that union with God can provide. As the Lord Jesus affirmed, “I have come that they may have life and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).
ICONS: IMAGES OF GLORY

Icons play an important role in the spiritual life of Byzantine Christians, both Catholic and Orthodox. An icon is not merely a picture of Christ or of a saint, much less a religious decoration, but an expression of the most fundamental realities of our faith and a making present of the heavenly reality they depict.

GOD TRULY WITH US

The first reality of faith expressed in icons is that the Word of God truly and completely became one of us in Jesus Christ. He was not simply manlike: He was truly human, like us in all things except sin as the Scripture says. Our icons of Him proclaim the truth of His humanity while stressing His divinity as well. As St John of Damascus noted, “Of old God, the incorporeal and uncircumscribed, was not depicted at all. But now that God has appeared in the flesh, I make an image of the God who can be seen.” This is why icons are not symbolic designs (depicting Christ in symbol, as a lamb, for instance, is forbidden in Byzantine tradition) but realistic images of the One who is truly one of us.

WE SHALL BE CHANGED

In the Scripture we are promised that the Lord “will give a new form to this lowly body of ours and remake it according to the pattern of His glorified body.” (Philippians 3:21). And so the second reality to which icons point is that of the glorified body of the new creation.

Icons are realistic images, but they do not seek to depict the flesh of our fallen human nature, but the glorified bodies of those who are filled with the Holy Spirit. Sanctity is possible, the icon proclaims, and will fill even our bodies with the light of the Spirit of God. This is why the iconographer does not strive for the natural realism of a photograph. This would only reproduce the physical reality of this world.

Rather his intention is to suggest spiritual beauty, transfiguration, deification. It also explains why the figures in icons are usually heavily draped with clothing. Naturalistic art exposes the flesh, glorying in physical beauty. In icons it is generally only the face and the eyes and – through them the soul – which are shown. In Byzantine icons the physical presentation is meant to be colored by the spiritual reality just as the body of Christ reflects divine glory in a physical way.

WINDOW TO HEAVEN

The icon has nothing in common with the decorative art we have in our homes, offices, or subway stations meant to adorn our living space. Icons are meant to call us to prayer, to an encounter with the Lord whom they reveal. This is why we pray before icons and fill our churches with them. We carry them in procession, bow before them and kiss them. A Byzantine church, in which all the walls are covered with holy icons, pulls us out of the mundane world of this age and into the life of the world to come. We see the effect of the grace of the Holy Spirit which we receive in the holy mysteries when the believer lives in this light of that grace.

The most customary manner of reverencing an icon in church is as follows: make one or two metanies then kiss the icon and then make a final metany, place your candle in the stand and move away. It is the custom in many places to kiss the feet on an icon of Christ, the hands on an icon of the Theotokos, and the forehead on the icon of a saint.

ICONS IN THE HOME

Our use of icons is not restricted to the church building. God is with us wherever we are, and so it has become customary for Eastern Christians to proclaim His presence in their homes and workplaces by setting up icons. In particular the family prayer or icon corner is the focus of a household’s Christian identity and the place in the home where family prayer is conducted.

Customarily a corner is chosen which faces east and there the family’s sacred objects are gathered. Most common are the icons of Christ and the Theotokos, the holy cross, and the icons of the patron saints of each member of the family. The icon corner usually includes a lectern, shelf or small table upon which are placed a cross, the holy Scriptures, and a small incense burner. Many people also keep containers of holy oil, holy water, and antidoron as well as other blessed objects (palm, flowers, etc) on the table in their icon corner.

In addition to the icon corner many people place a special icon of the Theotokos near the door of the house. People venerate this icon, known as the ‘Doorkeeper’, on leaving or entering the house to ask for blessing on their comings and goings. It is also common to place in the dining room the icon of the Hospitality of Abraham, which represents the
Trinity in the form of the three angels who dined with Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18). Icons of the family members' patron saints are often put in their bedrooms as well.

Since icons are considered to be sacramental, revealing the special presence of the holy ones depicted in them, candles or oil lamps are kept burning before them. The faces of true icons are painted in such a way as to reflect the light of the lamps, just as the person depicted in the icon reflects the grace of the Holy Spirit within them.

A hanging lamp suspended from the ceiling or from a bracket over the principal icon in the icon corner is the most traditional way to adorn the icons. Some people leave a candle burning in their icon corner all the time. Others light the lamp and burn incense on occasion, such as on Sundays or the Great Feasts. Still others burn the lamp when they are praying, or when in need of a special blessing or protection.

**BLESSING AN ICON**

Icons are often blessed simply by being placed on the holy table during the Divine Liturgy. There are also specific prayers for the blessing of icons, appropriate to the subject of the icon (Trinity, Christ, Theotokos, saints) as well as a general prayer which may be used for any icon. The priest would say the prayer then sprinkle the icon with holy water. Everyone would then venerate the newly-blessed icon. If a bishop is blessing the icon, he anoints it with chrism rather than with holy water.

Master, infinite in Your divine nature, You condescended in these latter days to become incarnate and finite: for in assuming our body, You accepted all its properties. Wherefore we represent Your likeness and embrace it with the Model in mind. Through it we ascend to You and, following the divine tradition set by the apostles, we draw from it the grace of healing.

The grace of truth has shone forth and the predictions of old have been clearly fulfilled: for behold, the Church has put on the incarnate likeness of Christ, the new world of icons transcending adornment. As the tabernacle of the Covenant held the presence of God, so do icons show forth the presence of the One we worship and revere. By venerating them we never go astray. It is a glory for us to kneel in true worship of the incarnate Christ. Let us then embrace His icon, O believers, and cry out, "O God, save Your people and bless Your inheritance!"

(Vespers, Sunday of Orthodoxy)
THE BOOKS OF CHRONICLES describes how King David contributed great resources toward the building of a temple and describes his reason in prayer to God: “All things come from You, and of Your own we have given You.” (1 Chronicles 29:14) For David, all is of God; we are simply returning to Him what He has entrusted to us.

Our great act of thanksgiving as Christians is the Eucharist where we join Christ as He offers Himself to the Father for our salvation. As the holy gifts are raised up in offering, the Church unites itself to Christ’s oblation in language similar to David’s: “We offer You Your own of what is Your own, in all and for the sake of all.”

We are called to apply the same sentiment to our daily lives, making of them an act of worship. Our lives as Christians are meant to reflect that all we have is a gift of God given, not for our self-gratification, but for the service of the One to whom they really belong. The way of life which sees all that we are and all that we have as set apart for God and His purposes we call stewardship.

In the Parable of the Talents (cf. Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-26), Jesus speaks of a householder entrusting certain sums to his servants in his absence. Upon his return the master calls for an accounting, commending those who used these talents to build up their master’s holdings. As with the servants in this parable, what has been given to us is not really ours; it is simply entrusted to us and we are accountable for the care of what we have received.

In the Gospel the Lord tells us to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33). Christ calls us to reorder our priorities, to place all of creation in a proper perspective in light of the Kingdom of God, where all else pales compared to our relationship with God. We are to “commend ourselves, one another and our whole life” to God.

OF WHAT ARE WE STEWARDS?

When we make an inventory of all that we have and all that we are, we realize just how much has been placed in our hands. We are meant to reverence the Giver by the way that we use His gifts, and to make them fruitful for His Church and for the world:

- The Gift of Life – Life itself is our most basic gift. Thus we frequently glorify God as the “Giver of life” and as “the Lover of mankind.” We are called to work as stewards of life, the gift of God, by treating our own life with respect, not squandering what we have been given. Believers are also called to take concrete action and, whenever possible, to cooperate with others, working to affirm God as Lord of life from conception to natural death for all God’s children.

- Our Relationships – We have been created in the image of God, the communion of the Holy Trinity. For us to reflect that image in us, our dealings with our spouses and children, our parents and extended family, and all those whom God has placed in our life should mirror God’s love for us. Our willingness to extend forgiveness for the offences we may suffer at their hands validates what we say in the Lord’s Prayer, “Forgive us as we forgive.”

- The Material Creation – In Genesis, God is depicted as placing the first man in the garden “to till it and care for it” (Genesis 2:15). Humanity is first and foremost the recipient of the material creation and also its steward. While primitive peoples often have a more respectful relationship with the earth, modern society has more frequently been its users and abusers.

- The Gospel – Believers have received an even more precious blessing than life. Through faith and baptism we have the gift of communion with God in Christ. We express our stewardship of the Christian life by participating in the Church’s work of evangelization: sharing that life with those who have not yet received it and with those in whom it has become weak. As Christ told a man He had healed, “Go home to your friends and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you” (Mark 5:19).

- Our Church – The liturgies, theologies and particular customs of our Churches contribute something unique to all the Churches, but only if we observe them as authentically as possible. Like any other gift, our Tradition is meant to be cherished and used, not just for ourselves, but in the service of the One who has given it to us. The material resources of our churches may often be shared with other Christians as well, particularly newer immigrants seeking to worship in their own tradition.
Our Individual Gifts – “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10). The Scriptures frequently speak of the particular gifts individual believers have received, not to build themselves up, but “for the good of all” (1 Corinthians 12:7). There is hardly any gift which cannot be employed in the service of Christ and His Body. Many people were raised to believe that working in the Church was the business of the clergy and religious. The clergy have specific charges in the Church, but their primary purpose in the community is “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12), to see to it that the Church is in truth a priestly people, faithfully fulfilling its mission in the world.

Our Material Resources – More than 15% of what Jesus spoke about in the Gospels was about our money, our wealth. For Jesus, money and possessions and their proper use was highly important to our spiritual growth. He encouraged us to entrust everything to God and not worry about tomorrow (cf. Matthew 6:33).

**HOW ARE WE TO OFFER?**

In the Scriptures we find several principles which can govern the way we offer back to God what is His. They speak about aspects of our sharing with God and His people:

- First Fruits – The Old Testament speaks of offering to God the "first fruits" of our possessions, thus recognizing Him as the provider of all we are and all we have. By giving God our "first fruits" we insure that we are putting Him first in our lives.

- Proportional Giving – “All shall give as they are able, according to what the Lord your God He has given you” (Deuteronomy 16:17). Here people are charged to give in proportion to how God has blessed them.

- Our Abundance – St Paul establishes another principle: God will provide us with enough for our needs; anything over that – our abundance – is for doing good (cf. 2 Corinthians 9:8-9). In two prayers at the mystery of crowning the priest asks God to pour out this blessing upon the couple “…that, having sufficiency in all things they may abound in every work that is good and acceptable to You.”

- Stewardship – the care of all that we are and have in trust for the One who has given it to us – is nothing less than the imitation of God’s love in action. St Gregory the Theologian phrased it this way: “Give something to God to thank Him that you are able to do good to others and are not one of those who need to be assisted, and that others gaze at your hands and not you at theirs... Be a god for the unfortunate, imitating God’s mercy.”

“Being a god” is the ultimate end of stewardship. “The most divine in a human person is precisely this: to do good. You can become god without any labor – do not miss your chance to reach deification.” (St Gregory the Theologian, Discourse 14:26; 17, 10)
LITURGY OF THE KINGLY HIGH PRIEST

The Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great lies at the very heart of the spiritual life of the Byzantine Christian. It prepares him for the greatest feasts of the Church year. The searing strains of this eucharist prayer usher in the vigils of Christmas and Theophany as well as sanctifying Holy Thursday and Great Saturday. In addition, it is the Liturgy that nourishes the faithful during the Lenten struggle on the Sundays of the Great Fast. No wonder, then, that this cherished rite is served on the heavenly birthday of its author, January 1. A happy coincidence has it occur on the feast of the Circumcision. The day on which the kingly High Priest shed His first drops of blood to redeem His people also sees the commemoration of the high priest Basil, whose name means king and whose words to this day accompany the hallowing of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ.

St. Basil has many claims to honor. He was born into a remarkable family. His father, also named Basil, was a bishop. After the elder Basil’s death, his mother Emilia joined his sister Macrina in the desert to lead a monastic life. His younger brother Gregory did not enter the monastery but rather chose marriage as a path of salvation. He became bishop of Nyssa. All are revered as saints.

St. Basil is one of the greatest of the Greek Fathers of the Church – being ranked with Sts. John Chrysostom and Gregory the Theologian. He was a prolific author and is especially remembered for his peerless treatise On the Holy Spirit. Few have influenced religious life as much as he by his Rule for Monks. In addition, he was an exemplary bishop of one of the major sees of the Christian East, Ceasarea in Cappadocia.

St. Basil enjoys high esteem even among children, for his name figures in so many Greek Christmas carols. On January 1st a great treat called the vasilopita (St. Basil’s cake) is blessed and served up at a party. A coin has been blended into the batter.

Whoever gets the piece with the coin will have an especially blessed new year and will be responsible for throwing the next year’s vasilopita party. A cynic once suggested that many coins have been swallowed so as to avoid the New Year’s party. We can rest assured that the Great Cappadocian’s memory suffers no tarnish on this account!

If you ask the average Byzantine Catholic or Orthodox layperson why he honors St. Basil so greatly, he will without hesitation tell you it is because of the sublime liturgy that bears his name and which, in all probability, at least in its central prayer (the anaphora) is the work of his hands.

This solemn doxology includes a long series of petitions begging the All-Mighty to “remember” the needs of all the faithful. As you read the excerpts from this masterpiece of exalted prayer you will learn why Byzantium sings of its Great St. Basil:

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION FROM THE LITURGY OF ST. BASIL

Be mindful, O Lord, of Your holy, catholic and apostolic Church, which extends from end to end of the universe; give peace to her whom You have redeemed with the precious Blood of Your Christ; preserve also this holy church until the end of the world.

Be mindful, O Lord, of those who offered You these holy gifts, and of those through whom and for whom they offered.

Be mindful, O Lord, of those who bring offerings to Your holy churches and of our benefactors, and of those who remember the poor; reward them with Your rich and heavenly favors; in place of their earthly, temporal and perishable gifts, grant them Your heavenly ones, eternal and incorruptible.

Be mindful, O Lord, of those who are living in deserts, on mountains, in the dens and caves of the earth.

Be mindful, O Lord, of those who are living in virginity and who, with reverence and according to asceticism, pursue an honorable way of life.

Be mindful, O Lord, of our civil authorities; give them profound and enduring peace; speak into their hearts good things for Your Church and for all Your people; that in their tranquility, we may lead a calm and quiet life, in all piety and integrity.

Be mindful, O Lord, of every principality and authority, and of our brethren in the government and the armed forces; preserve
the good in Your goodness; make the bad be good according to Your kindness.

Be mindful, O Lord, of the people standing round and of those who are absent for honorable reasons, and have mercy on them and us according to the great extent of Your mercy. Fill their storehouses with every good thing; preserve their marriages in peace and harmony; foster the children, guide the young, support the aged, encourage the fainthearted, reunite the separated, lead back those who have strayed and join them to Your holy, catholic and apostolic Church; free those who are troubled with unclean spirits; sail with those upon the sea, journey with the travellers, defend the widows, protect the orphans, free those in captivity, heal the sick and be mindful, O Lord, of all those who are in tribunals, mines, exile and bitter servitude, as well as those in any affliction, necessity or distress.

And be mindful, O Lord, our God, of all who beseech Your great tenderness of heart, and of those who love us and of those who hate us, and of those who have asked us, though unworthy, to pray for them.

Be mindful of all Your people, and upon all of them pour out Your rich mercy, granting to all the petitions that are for their salvation. Of those whom we have not remembered through ignorance or forgetfulness or multitude of names, also be mindful, O God, who know the name and age of all – who know each one even from his mother’s womb.

For You, O Lord, are a help to helpless, hope to the hopeless, a savior to those tossed about in the tempest, a harbor for the sailor, a physician for the sick; be all things to all men – You know each one and his request, each house and its need. Deliver, O Lord, this city and every city and country from famine, plague, earthquake, flood, fire, sword, the attacks of foreign peoples and from civil wars.
LIVING IN THE HEAVENLY REALM

When he writes to the Ephesians, St. Paul praises God who “has bestowed on us in Christ every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realm” (Ephesians 1:3). Not only has Christ ascended in glory: “Both with and in Christ Jesus He raised us up and gave us a place in the heavenly realm” (Ephesians 2:6). We have become citizens of paradise, fellow heirs with the saints, people who live the divine life and share in the nature of God!

It is the Eastern Churches’ awareness of this truth which has been responsible for the formation of their ‘ethos’ or style of Christian living. Ours is an ‘other-worldly’ Church — stressing the holiness of God, our role as worshippers at His throne, our fellowship with the saints, and the like — because we know we belong, not to this world, but to the heavenly realm. This sense is most felt in our church buildings where we see the Church as heaven on earth and in our belief that our Church’s chief ‘business’ on earth is the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. Some see this as ‘irrelevant’, but if Paul’s teaching is true, our commitment to the heavenly realm is simply a case of knowing where our true home is.

A LIFESTYLE FOR THE KINGDOM

It is not only in our liturgical life that we live in the heavenly realm. It affects our daily life as well. We live in two worlds, as it were. One we share with every other member of the human race. The other, the heavenly realm, is ours because of our union with God in Christ: and our daily life is means to reflect this share we have in God’s kingdom. This is why religious expression in Eastern Christianity is part and parcel of our everyday behavior.

We look to the heavenly realm in the standards we are called to live by, the standards of the gospel, for we believe in and direct our lives by realities unseen in this world:

The world around us often cannot understand the standards of the gospel; more often the gospel standards are directly opposed to the wisdom of the world. The society in which we live sees the meaning of life in terms of success, prosperity, possessions and earthly pleasures. The believer cherishes his share in the divine nature far above these other realities, and this affects the way he acts, the decisions he makes, the priorities he sets for his life.

Because God has given us a place in the heavenly realm, we are in continual contact with beings whom the world around us does not even know exist: the Holy Trinity, the Theotokos, the saints and heavenly powers. The communication we call prayer is our natural mode of conversation with the Lord whose life we share and with those of every age who are our fellow partakers in this life. Prayer, and continual prayer in particular, are a hallmark of our commitment to the heavenly realm.

PRAYER, FASTING, AND ALMSGIVING

In prayer we rise to the throne of God who has given us access to Himself. We also attempt to take the lifestyle of heaven and bring it ‘down’ to reorient our daily activities. Fasting is one such practice. It stands out in contrast to the ways of the world around us, especially in a culture such as ours that endorses continual consumption. When we put aside food, entertainment, pleasure in the spirit of fasting we are saying to the world, “We are not from here.” When we fast we recognize that life is not simply to be found in the enjoyment of material creation, but in the relationship we have with its Creator.

Closely linked to fasting is almsgiving, another denial of the way of this world. Our society promotes consumerism. It says, “Build up for yourselves treasures on earth.” We say, with St. Paul, that material goods are given us not only to satisfy our own needs, but for the doing of good. We say, as Christ did, that our kingdom is not ultimately of this world and imitation His love for mankind by the way we use the resources He has given us.

Finally, while our place is in the heavenly realm, we do not have full possession of it yet. And, so we find ourselves each day engaged in an unseen warfare, “not against human forces but against the principalities and powers, the rulers of this world of darkness” (Ephesians 6:12). Many of our Church’s daily prayers are invocations asking for help and protection against the powers of evil. We recognize that there is more to the world in which we live than what is visible on the physical level.
Living, then, as citizens of the heavenly realm, we surround ourselves at all times with means of access to that kingdom. Icons are found in our homes, like churches, and we gather there for prayer. We bring the values of that realm to bear in our domestic affairs as well. There we fast and we extend hospitality in Christ's name, deepening our experience of our true homeland. We try to live every day in an atmosphere of the kingdom, to continually remind ourselves that our baptism has made us actual coheirs with Christ of all that the Father has promised.

“Enter eagerly into the treasure-house that lies within you, and you will see the treasure-house of heaven: for the two are the same, and there is but one single entry to them both. The ladder that leads to the Kingdom is hidden within you, and is found in your own soul. Dive into yourself and in your soul you will discover the rungs by which to ascend.”

(St. Isaac the Syrian)

“The fruits of the earth are not brought to perfection immediately, but by time, rain and care; similarly, the fruits of men ripen through ascetic practice, study, time, perseverance, self-control and patience.”

(St. Anthony the Great)

The choirs of saints have discovered the fountain of life and the gate of Paradise. May I also through repentance find the way to You, O Lord! I am the lost sheep. O Savior call me back to Your fold and save me.

O Lord, who with Your own hand have fashioned me from nothingness and adorned me with Your divine Image and who, when I transgressed Your commandments, did cast me down into the dust whereof I had been made: deign, O Lord, to restore me to Your likeness, that my original beauty may be restored in me.

I am the image of Your ineffable glory, even though I bear the wounds of sin. Look with compassion on Your creature, O Lord, and purify me in Your mercy, and grant me the beloved homeland, making me again a citizen of Paradise.

(From the Evlogitaria of the Dead)
Many people in the world believe in the one God. But so many of them find it impossible to imagine that God has become man in Jesus Christ. The very idea that God could come to earth and suffer all that we suffer in life is incomprehensible to them. People who balk at the idea of the incarnation often believe in something which may seem more incredible yet. They embrace the teaching that “God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27).

How could human beings like us be in God’s image? We know ourselves and our weaknesses. Surely the author of Genesis knew human nature also. How could this author make such a claim? And how could the Spirit of God, who inspires the Scriptures, speak to us through these words?

Yet we know that all creation reflects something of God who is the Source of its being. It is God’s presence which upholds everything that is, so that in some way everything mirrors its Creator. The great forces of nature – the galaxies and planets, the mountains and oceans – suggest to many the wisdom of God. To be human, then, is to be a lover in the image of the One who is love itself.

### IMAGE AND LIKENESS

Seeing God as the Holy Trinity, Christians believe that the relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is at the core of God’s very being. God is a communion of love and this communion is not closed in upon itself but is extended to embrace all creation. In a similar way relationship is at the heart of our being. We are made for communion with one another and most importantly for communion with our Creator, God. Not only are human beings created by God, but we are created in God and for Him. In the broadest sense we are made for worship.

“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” (Genesis 1:26)

These words introduce the story of our creation in the book of Genesis. Many Church Fathers, like St. Irenaeus, saw in them a distinction between what we already are and what we have the chance to become. From our creation in God’s image we have the innate ability to love. We can know what is good and choose to embrace it. As God’s love is extended freely to His creation, mankind in His image is given the freedom to extend our love or to withhold it.

To be created after God’s likeness means something more. It means that we were created with the fullest possibility of relating to God and to one another already in view. The fully developed human being would be one fully resembling the One who made us.

At mankind’s creation, St Irenaeus wrote, man was a child. Just as infants are born with the potential to develop into adults, mankind was created as a spiritual infant. That he was to develop was clear; the certainty that he would mature fully was not.

### WOUNDING THE LIKENESS

The book of Genesis teaches that the relationship of men and women with their Creator was quickly ruptured. Adam and Eve are tempted to become “like God” on their own, despite the warning that they “would surely die” if they did not follow the directions of their Maker. Striking out on their own, they showed a mistrust of God which altered their relationship forever. The image of God in humanity would remain; the likeness was so scarred that it became impossible for men and women to fulfill their potential as God intended. The only One who could perfectly realize human nature was the eternal image of the Father, His only-begotten Son: “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation, for by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible... All things were created through him and for Him... For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell” (Colossians 1:15-19).

And so the Word of God, the icon of the Father, would become human to completely fulfill human nature in Himself. As a Sufi poet once wrote, “When God wanted to see His
face He sent Jesus to the world.” And because He had become one with us, the Son of God could restore the likeness of God in us as well. Created in God’s image, we could re-embark on the journey of fellowship with God in Christ, our “hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27).

Only the Lord Jesus truly reflects for us the love of God. But those who have put on Christ in baptism and who sustain their union with Him will be transformed into “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4), sharers in His likeness. This transformation, which the Fathers called theosis (deification), is the goal of our life as Christians; but it is also the journey to that goal. What begins here is meant to be completed in the age to come.

RESTORING THE LIKENESS

Theosis as a process begins with baptism. We begin allowing the gift of our baptism to impact our life when we make a godly life the main goal of our existence. We try to keep the commandments, to observe the Lord’s precepts on prayer, fasting and almsgiving, and to live the life of the Church. Theosis will grow in us as we become more aware of God’s presence within us and in our life at every moment: an awareness cultivated perhaps by the Jesus Prayer. We discover the meaning of St Gregory of Sinai’s words: “Become what you are. Find Him who is already yours. Listen to Him who never ceases speaking to you. Own Him who already owns you.”

As we begin entrusting our entire life to Christ God, we may understand Christ’s words, “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect,” (Matthew 5:48) in terms of what we do: “If I am accomplishing all this, I am becoming perfect in God’s sight.” A deeper sign that we are growing in the journey of theosis is when we seek to become more like Jesus the Servant. As St Paul urged, “Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, who – though he was in the form of God – did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness and found in human appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:5-8).

As Christ’s attitudes of humility, obedience and mutual service become more ingrained in us, we reflect ever more the life of God. Our love for others and for all creation grows as we reflect the mind of Christ in us. We become what we are: people who live by God’s divine life in us and partake in His divine nature.
MAN: THE LIVING IKON

When Russian Ambassador Gromyko first met with U.S. Secretary of State Schultz, what do you think they shared? Snapshots. Pictures of their grandchildren!

GOD'S PHOTO ALBUM

When all like sitting around and looking through old family albums, discovering our roots. It helps us establish our identity. It's the same when we look at Christ, the Son of God, and realize that we are His brothers and sisters. We find our identity and fulfillment in the family of God. If we don't take a good look at God our Father and Jesus our Brother, will we really know who we are? Will we know what it means to be created in His likeness?

The Scriptures tell us that Jesus is the Image of God, the divine ikon. Did you know that you are to be a living ikon? Just what is an ikon and should Christians have them? In this article we hope to touch on these questions and the importance of becoming images of Christ.

MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

We all see ourselves in those we love; of course, more so physically in relatives. This is even true of God. "God looked at everything He had made, and He found it very good" (Genesis 1:31). But most pleasing to God of all His artistic masterpieces is mankind. That means you! Do you know why? Because: "God created man in His image; in the divine image He created him; male and female He created them." (Genesis 1:27)

It's as if we're God in miniature! Now, of course, we aren't the same as He is, but we are made in His likeness: "For God formed man to be imperishable; the image of His own nature he made him." (Wisdom 2:23)

So we're all just 'naturals' when it comes to being Godlike, even if that 'talent' seems buried. God can't help but love us; we're His kids. He looks at us and sees Himself. We make His heart skip a beat. He's proud of us, and He just loves showing us off to the rest of His creation, especially the angels. But they can't quite figure it all out: why He keeps on loving us; why He puts up with the bunch of rebellious kids. Sometimes I wonder too why He puts up with me. But He does. Not only that; He helps me change and become more like Him.

BECOMING IMAGES OF CHRIST

How? Well, first of all He sent His Son, the one He joyously thundered about from heaven: "This is my Son, the Beloved; my favor rests on Him." (Matthew 3:17). You see, He just can't help Himself. He sent His Son to be an example for us. "This, in fact, is what you were called to do, because Christ suffered for you and left an example for you to follow the way He took." (1 Peter 2:21).

To be a Christian, then, is to follow in Christ's footsteps. The word for 'example' in the text from Peter is hypogrammatos in the Greek. Sounds fancy, doesn't it? But it's a very simple word. Do you remember your kindergarten blackboard? On the top of it was the alphabet printed in clean cut, white lettering, and you had to trace underneath the same letters, stroke for stroke. Well, that's exactly what a hypogrammatos is - a chalkboard with the alphabet on top for kids to practice how to write.

The Father wants us to be schooled in the wisdom of His Son. He asks us to try and try again until we can trace His Son's footsteps, walk in His shoes.

But tracing the pattern of His life, becoming like Jesus, isn't something we do on our own. No, He holds our hand and guides us as we try to copy Him: "Anyone who did accept Him, He empowered to become children of God." (John 1:12)

This power comes from the Spirit. "The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. All of us, gazing on the Lord's glory with unveiled faces, are being transformed from glory to glory into His very image by the Lord who is the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:17-18). It is by spiritually contemplating the Lord that we are made like Him. The word translated by 'gazing' actually means to look into a mirror. Now this mirror, like the image, is Christ, the Wisdom of God.

The author of Hebrews picks up on this when he says, "This Son is the reflection of the Father's glory, the exact representation of the Father's being, and He sustains all things by His powerful word." (Hebrews 1:3). We get our English word 'character' from the Greek word used in this passage, which means 'exact representation'. Have you ever played in candle wax, dipping your fingers into it to make a mold? When you peel the wax away, an impression of your fingerprint remains in it.

This is what the Greek word 'character' means The Jerusalem Bible translates it as "perfect copy".

When life gets us hot under the collar, that's usually when the Lord tries to impress His image on our lives. He has His finger on us. He's giving us 'character'. He's making us into a 'perfect copy' of His Son. "We know that by turning everything to their good God cooperates with all those who love Him, with all those that He has called according to His purpose. They are the ones He chose specially long ago and intended to become true images of His Son, so that His Son might be the eldest of many brothers" (Romans 8:28-29).

SHARING IN THE DIVINE NATURE

This process is what the early Church called theosis or deification: becoming like God. The apostle Peter teaches, "That divine power of His has freely bestowed on us everything necessary for a life of genuine piety, through knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and power. By virtue of of them He has bestowed on us the great and precious things He promised, so that through these you who have fled a world corrupted by lust might become sharers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:3-4).

This is the good news of the Incarnation! The divine nature took on human nature, in order that we might participate in the divine life.

It is because of the mysteries of the Incarnation and Resurrection that we are sure that we too can be transfigured. When God became man, taking on flesh, He sanctified created matter. Matter, after all, is not evil. In fact, when God had finished creating everything, He said, "It is very good".

Creation is God's masterpiece of love. "We are God's work of art, created in Christ Jesus to live the good life as from the beginning He had meant us to live it." (Ephesians 2:10). Several times Paul tells us that Christ is the image of God. The word 'image' in Greek is ikon. From apostolic times Christians have made images, icons of Christ. Icons are plaques or sacred objects bearing paintings of Christ, the Mother of God, angels or saints. They represent the real essence of a person. Jesus Christ is literally the Ikon of God, the exact physical representation of the invisible God. We are called to be living ikons of Christ. To see Jesus is to see the Father. To see us, we hope, is to see Christ.
IKONS, INSTRUMENTS OF GRACE

Prayer and faith in God's grace is what allows Christ to dwell more fully in us. Holy images (ikons) can help us in our becoming representations of the divine life. Ikons aren't supposed to be portraits of saints, but something like caricatures, except that they portray the good points, not the bad. They are symbolic depictions of their holiness and way of life. By looking at an ikon and meditating on the life of the person it represents, we can be inspired to be transformed into the image of Christ.

Saints, recognized by the Church, are people who have had their lives changed by Christ. They have been born again into the heavenly family, transformed into the image of Christ. We are all called to be saints, holy ikons of Christ.

Ikons, like other holy objects, are instruments of grace and healing. God's grace works through the symbols and the object itself. Ikons of saints are somewhat like relics. The grace of God in the saint is in the ikon. Many people have been healed by touching ikons in prayerful faith. It is the Holy Spirit who has sanctified and empowered the holy objects. He heals through the physical dimension as well as the nonmaterial, because in God's becoming man the created order has been redeemed and made holy.

HONORING THE SAINTS

Now that doesn't mean we worship the ikon or the saint. Worship and adoration are reserved for God alone. But we should honor and pay respect to the saints. Who hasn't given a standing ovation to some prominent person? How much more so we should honor and pay recognition to those outstanding people of faith who have run the race well. St. Paul said, “Take me for your model, as I take Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:1). If we follow Christ, how can we not help but end up walking with and following others who have already followed Christ? Paul again says, “My brothers, be united in following my rule of life. Take as your models everybody who is already doing this and study them as you used to study us” (Philippians 3:17).

ARE IKONS IDOLS?

Some might object, though, that meditating on or praying in front of an ikon is idolatry. This objection has been raised before. Over three hundred bishops gathered together in 787 at what is now known as the Second Council of Nicaea. They discussed the matter, and this is what they concluded: it is holy and good to pay honor and reverence before an ikon of either Christ, the Mother of God, angels or saints; but to God alone belongs worship and adoration.

Here are some of their reasons. Scripture says, “You shall not make yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything in heaven or on earth beneath or in the waters under the earth” (Exodus 20:4). But five chapters later God says, “For the two ends of this throne of mercy you are to make two golden cherubs; you are to make them of beaten gold” (Exodus 25:19). God also commanded Moses to fashion a bronze serpent in the image of the biting snakes. What! Has God contradicted Himself? Of course not! The difference is the next verse after the command not to make images: “... you shall not bow down before them or worship them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God ...” (Exodus 20:5). Images and works of art aren't evil; worshiping them is. If God truly became man, we can surely paint pictures of Him.

WE ARE LIVING IKONS

Our lives will be sanctified and transformed the more we contemplate Jesus, the ikon of God in the flesh. Prayerfully meditating on the lives of the saints before their ikons will likewise inspire us to also become living images of the Divine Life, for the transforming power of God rests upon the ikon. This is our calling: to share the image of the God-Man (cf. Romans 8:29).

Let us, therefore, revere one another and see the image of God in our fellow human being. And if we think it is hard to find it in some, let us help them discover it. Imagine it! We can see God every day if we choose to. Why don't you show someone a token of appreciation for being a sign of God's love in your life?

And the next time you look in a mirror, take a good look and realize you are the image of God being changed from glory into exceeding glory!
In our contemporary culture, it is usual to be precise about names. Businesses have corporate titles, musical and literary compositions have copyrighted designations, all of which are protected by law. Legal documents confer specific names on individuals and to change one’s name is a matter for the courts.

This is, of course, a fairly recent development in history, chiefly in the Western world. In the Middle East as our Church developed there was a much greater fluidity in the use of names. In addition there is even a difference in the terminology employed in the Middle East today vs. that which we use in this country.

In the Western world today our Church is called Melkite Greek Catholic (Grec Melchite Catholique), as is explained below. In the Middle East we are generally known as Room Katuleek, literally “Roman Catholic”, just as those whom we call Antiochian or Greek Orthodox here are known as Room Orthodox (“Roman Orthodox”) there. However the Rome they are referring to in these titles is not the Rome in Italy, but Constantinople, which the ancients called New Rome. Those whom we call Roman Catholics here are known as Lateen (Latins) overseas.

This often causes confusion when immigrants arrive from the Middle East and, with a literal translation, speak of themselves as Roman Catholics when they actually mean Room Katuleek. It is also confusing for others who come to our churches and are confronted with the multitude of names our Church uses. It is to help clarify some of this confusion that the following definitions are offered.

**MELKITE**

This term comes from the Semetic words for king, “melko” or “melek”. The king in this case was the Byzantine emperor who supported the teachings of the council of Chalcedon, held in 451. The opponents of this council, most of whom were in the Middle East, called its supporters Royalists (malikiyyeen). So the name, which today refers to the Byzantine Catholics of the Middle East, originally was an insult aimed at all Christians, both Eastern and Western, who supported the Council of Chalcedon.

**GREEK (“ROOM” IN ARABIC)**

This word refers to the spiritual tradition of the Greek Fathers which our Church follows. At the time of Christ, Greek was the spoken language in the major cities of the Middle East. The New Testament and the writings of the most important Church Fathers were composed in Greek. In contrast, people in the rural areas spoke Aramaic or Syriac, the historic language of the Chaldean, Maronite and Syrian Churches. Only after the Muslim conquest of the Middle East did Arabic become the universal language of this area.

**CATHOLIC**

This word means universal. When we say that the Church is Catholic we mean that it teaches universally and completely the full Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. In contrast, sects stress one doctrine and exclude another.

Using this word to describe the historic Church is usually credited to St. Ignatius of Antioch who employed it in the second century. Thus the Greek-speaking Christians of the Middle East were the first to be called Catholics.

And so to say that we are Melkite Greek Catholics means that we are a Church which:

- Is in the fulness of the Gospel (Catholic);
- Follows the Traditions of the Greek Fathers; and
- Is in harmony with the Chalcedonian teachings.

There are a number of other names associated with our heritage, although they are not part of the official name of our Church. These are:

**BYZANTINE**

This word refers to the city of “New Rome” mentioned above. Originally known as Byzantium, it is chiefly known in history as Constantinople, the “city of Constantine”. Its present name is Istanbul, the Turkish pronunciation of the Greek words for “in the city”. Our Church follows the ritual of the Great Church of Constantinople for the Divine Liturgy.

**ANTIOCHIAN**

At the time the Christian Church began, Antioch was the capital of the Roman province of “the East” (Anatolia). It was the principal economic center of the entire Middle East, as it was at the crossroads of trade routes connecting Europe and Asia. For these reasons it quickly became the center of Church life in the area as well. Although the city was destroyed by an
in the seventh century, the chief hierarchs of Churches in the Middle East still bear the title patriarch of Antioch and all the East.

For the first thousand years of Christian history, the Greek Church in the Middle East employed the Antiochian ritual, which greatly resembles the liturgy of the Syrian or Maronite Churches. The only difference was in language: they prayed in Syriac and we in Greek. During the Middle Ages, especially as a result of the Muslim conquest and the Crusades, the Greek Christians of Antioch were drawn closer and closer to their brethren in Constantinople. For many years the Antiochian patriarchs and bishops actually lived in Constantinople and were influenced by its usages. In time the Byzantine liturgical tradition became the accepted practice among the Antiochian Greeks and it is that worship tradition we follow today.

ORTHODOX

This word literally means “right glorifying”. Like the term Melkite, it was first used to describe those who remained faithful to the true faith in the theological controversies of the early centuries. One of the most ancient and respected ways of describing the Church and its people, it is – along with the word Catholic – the term usually used in our liturgical texts to refer to the Church.

In modern usage, the term is employed as a specific designation by two major groups of Eastern Christians. In the first group are those Byzantines of various ethnic jurisdictions (e.g., Albanian, Bulgarian, Carpatho-Russian, Greek, Middle Eastern, Romanian, Russian, Serbian) who accept the Council of Chalcedon and are generally referred to as “Eastern Orthodox”. The second group includes those non-Byzantines (e.g., Annenians, Copts, Ethiopians, Syrians) who do not follow Chalcedon and are usually called “Oriental Orthodox”. Since what divides them is precisely the acceptance of the teachings of an ecumenical council, it is evident that these two groups of Churches are not in communion with one another.

EASTERN

Based on Mediterranean geography as seen from a European perspective, those Churches whose heritage sprang from the Eastern Mediterranean area have been called Eastern, while those whose heritage is that of western Europe have been called Western. It is interesting to note that those Churches of Syriac or Assyrian tradition consider Byzantines as Westerners!

UNIATE

Originally used in eastern Europe, this is a derogatory term used to refer to Byzantine (Greek) Catholics. Literally it means those who are living in an “unia”, or dependence for favors on the Church of Rome.
Our Life is in God

It’s my life!” the assertive person insists. “I can do whatever I want.” The timid are told to “get a life,” meaning that they should pursue the goals of the age: financial security, independence, travel and all the things — and people — that it can buy. A “full life” is one that includes all these things and more.

In fact, “Our years are as fragile as a spider’s web” (Psalm 89:9 LXX), able to be taken from us at a moment’s notice. Even the longest earthly life is over in the blink of an eye. Trees outlive us; parrots outlive us — we are “mere scraps of life,” in the words of theologian Olivier Clement. No matter how forcefully we may work at seizing life, we are doomed to fail.

“We live a ‘dead life,’ according to Gregory of Nyssa, in a world permeated by death, in which everything gravitates continually towards nothingness” (The Roots of Christian Mysticism, 1995, p. 15).

The bit of life we have is merely a momentary share in the life of the only One who truly exists, who will never face death: God, the Source of all life.

When Moses encountered God in the mysterious burning bush he asked for God’s name, and God replied “I am the One Who Is” (Exodus 3:14). This name — YHWH in the Hebrew (variously rendered as Jehovah, Yahweh or Yahwa) and ο ὄν (o ón) in the Greek Septuagint — expresses the unique character of God. He did not receive life from any other nor will His life come to an end; He simply Is, unto all ages.

This Existing One, the only One who truly is, has nevertheless shared His being in the incredible profusion of creation. From vast galaxies to the tiniest organisms, everything in creation exists because He does. They exist — not by the chance occurrences of impersonal forces but by the will of a Person whose existence overflows beyond Himself. He creates simply that others may exist. “He fashioned all things that they might have being” (Wisdom 1:14).

This outpouring of being which we call creation is the first hint we have that the One-Who-Is is also the One who loves. People of all cultures through the ages have found God in creation. Although they have often confused God with the most powerful forces of nature, such as the stars, people have found Something or Someone beyond themselves in the created world. As St Paul wrote, “Ever since the creation of the world his invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made” (Romans 1:20).

Still, we see more of God in creation than awe-inspiring power and divinity. We see love — the love of God manifest in this drive to share existence with all sorts of creatures. As St. Maximos the Confessor expressed it, “When God who is absolute fullness, brought creatures into existence, it was not done to fulfill any need, but so that His creatures should be happy sharing His likeness, and so that He Himself might rejoice in the joy of His creatures as they draw inexhaustibly upon the Inexhaustible” (Centuries on Charity III, 46).

In the New Testament we come across God the Existing One again, in a surprising way. We are told that “No one has ever seen God. The Only-Begotten, the Existing One (ο ὄν) in the bosom of the Father – He has made Him known” (John 1:18). The One who revealed Himself to Moses, to Elijah and the prophets was in fact the Word of God who would in time take on our human nature as Jesus of Nazareth.

St Hilary of Poitiers tells of how his journey to faith leapt forward when he encountered the Word in the Gospel:

“I became acquainted with the teaching of the Gospel and of the apostles... My intellect overstepped its limits at that point and I learned more about God than I had expected. I understood that my Creator was God born of God. I learned that the Word was God and was with Him from the beginning. I came to know the light of the world.... I understood that the Word was made flesh and dwelled among us... Those who welcomed him became children of God, by a birth not in the flesh but in faith. ...This gift of God is offered to everyone... We can receive it because of our freedom which was given us expressly for this purpose.

“But this very power given to each person to be a child of God was bogged down in weak and hesitant faith. Our own difficulties make hope painful, our desire becomes infuri-
ating and our faith grows weak. That is why the Word was made flesh: by means of the Word-made-flesh the flesh was enabled to raise itself up to the Word... Without surrendering His divinity God was made of our flesh... My soul joyfully received the revelation of this mystery. By means of my flesh I was drawing near to God; by means of my faith I was called to a new birth. I was able to receive this new birth from on high... I was assured that I could not be reduced to non-being.” (The Trinity 1)

Christians, who have experienced Christ as the Lover of mankind and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, have learned to see God as love in the mystery of the Trinity. At the same time God exists as truly One but also in a communion of love as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is love, first of all in the relationships of Father to Son and Holy Spirit, then in the outpouring of Himself in all creation and in the incarnation of His Word. To us He is love in another way. He not only shares being with us, but the potential for relationship with Him. The book of Genesis expresses this relationship as walking with God in the Garden; we might say that we are invited to “play in God’s yard,” to be drawn into the place where He dwells.

In our Tradition this is expressed in the icon of the angelic Trinity by St Andrei Rublev. Three angels, representing the Trinity are shown surrounding a table interacting with one another. But there is a fourth side of the table and we, the viewers, are drawn into this fourth side, as it were experiencing the Trinity from within.

This is the fullness of life to which we have been called. Our “life is communion with God,” St Irenaeus writes, “and separation from God is death” (Against Heresies V, 27, 2). To truly “get a life,” then, is strive for communion with the God who is completely beyond us and yet so loves us that He offers Himself to us so that we may be filled with His life.
he world's Catholic Bishops, assembled in council, fell into hushed silence as the bearded, black-robed hierarch, striking in his ebony-veiled stove-pipe hat in a sea of white miters and copes, approached the podium to speak. Suddenly the two observers representing the Russian Orthodox Church rose to their feet and removed their own headgear as Patriarch Maximos IV (Sayegh) addressed the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council. Later, when interviewed by the press, Archpriest Vitaly Borovoi explained, “We listen to the words of a Patriarch with the same reverence as that due to the Holy Gospels – by standing with heads uncovered.”

What is the title which engenders such awe? What role and function in the life of the Church do the bearers of such an august title play? Whence did it arise? Why is the role of Patriarch barely known among Roman Catholics? To answer these questions we must travel back in time to the infancy of the Church and in place back to its cradle.

It is likely that the apostles, following Christ’s saying that He had come first to the lost sheep of Israel, exercised their ministry among the Jewish colonies spread throughout the Roman Empire. Then, as now, Jews tend to congregate in big cities. In fact, the early Church was so identified with urban centers that the word *paganus*, meaning country-dweller, became synonymous with *nonChristian*.

Once established in the principal cities, the Church began to spread outward over the countryside. The Daughter-Churches created by the great centers always looked to these centers for direction and support as to “Mother-Churches.” A Mother Church was called the metropolis or mother city. In time, five of these metropolitan Sees enjoyed special prestige and honor because of their civil importance and because they were associated with the direct activity of the Apostles, especially St. Peter. These five sees were called the pentarchy or five-fold centers of rule. Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem were the five Patriarchal Sees of the early Church.

If the Metropolitan Sees were named Mother Churches, the patriarchal title means “father-ruler.” St. Peter’s ministry had begun in Jerusalem and continued in Antioch. The preaching of St. Peter spread to Alexandria through the writing of his disciple, St. Mark and, by tradition, to Constantinople through the apostolate of Peter’s brother, St. Andrew. The patriarchs of two of the primatial churches, Rome and Alexandria, were called by the special name POPE or *Papa*. To this day the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria is called “Pope.” This explains why Eastern Christians always speak of the Pope “of Rome”, in order to distinguish him from his brother patriarch, the Pope of Alexandria.

In time the unity of the Churches was broken. In the early fifth century the Assyrian Church split from the others in the Nestorian controversy. Later in the same century the Greek and Latin Churches on one hand supported the Council of Chalcedon while the Coptic and Syrian Churches did not. Then in the eleventh century The Greek and Latin Churches found themselves divided. Still later various missionary efforts resulted in the restoration of communion between groups of Eastern Christians and the Roman See.

In each of these cases the variously divided or realigned Churches maintained for themselves the Patriarchal structure so historic in Eastern Christianity. As a result there are five heads of communities employing the title Patriarch of Antioch: the Greek Catholic, the Greek Orthodox, the Maronite, the Syrian Catholic, and the Syrian Orthodox. There are three Patriarchs of Alexandria: the Coptic Catholic, the Coptic Orthodox and the Greek Orthodox. In addition the Melkite Patriarch of Antioch is also the Patriarch of Alexandria and Jerusalem for the Greek Catholics. Similar situations occur among the Assyrian, Chaldean and Armenian communities.

Vatican II recognizes the Patriarch as Father and Head of the Church over which he presides together with his synod of bishops. As supreme arbitrator in liturgical and discipline matters, the Patriarch serves as a unifying force for his flock which is scattered over the world.

For most of the last millenium, the Patriarchate of the West has been separated from its sister Churches in the East. As a result, Western Catholics began to blur the distinction between the two roles of the Pope of Rome: as Patriarch of the West and as first hierarch of all the Churches.
The Pope of Rome is the Patriarch of the West. Whenever he acts to reform the Western Church’s liturgy or its discipline of fasting and abstinence or marriage laws, he is acting in virtue of his Patriarchal authority over the Western or Roman Church. These functions are discharged for their respective Churches by the Eastern Catholic Patriarchs with their synods.

Since Vatican II had decreed the full revitalization of the Patriarchal office in the Eastern Catholic Churches according to the experience of the Undivided Church of the first millennium, we can expect these venerable Churches of the pentarchy to continue to flourish to the extent that “they take pains to return to their ancestral traditions.”

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**THE MELKITE PATRIARCHS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Patriarch</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1724-1759</td>
<td>Cyril VI (Tanas)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1759-1760</td>
<td>Athanasius IV (Jawhar) - first term</td>
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<tr>
<td>1760-1761</td>
<td>Maximos II (Hakim)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1761-1788</td>
<td>Theodosius V (Dahan)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1788-1794</td>
<td>Athanasius IV (Jawhar) - second term</td>
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<tr>
<td>1794-1796</td>
<td>Cyril VII (Siage)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1796-1812</td>
<td>Agapios II (Matar)</td>
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<td>1812</td>
<td>Ignatius IV (Sarrouf)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1813-1814</td>
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<td>1814-1815</td>
<td>Macarios IV (Tawil)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1816-1833</td>
<td>Ignatius V (Kattan)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1833-1855</td>
<td>Maximos III (Mazloom)</td>
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<td>1856-1864</td>
<td>Clement (Bahous)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1864-1897</td>
<td>Gregory II (Youssef-Sayour)</td>
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<td>1898-1902</td>
<td>Peter IV (Geraigiry)</td>
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<td>1902-1916</td>
<td>Cyril VIII (Jeha)</td>
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<td>1919-1925</td>
<td>Dimitrios I (Cadi)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1925-1947</td>
<td>Cyril IX (Moghabghab)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1947-1967</td>
<td>Maximos IV (Sayegh)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1967-2000</td>
<td>Maximos V (Hakim)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000-2017</td>
<td>Gregorios III (Laham)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017-present</td>
<td>Youssef I (Absi)</td>
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Adapted from an article originally published in Catholic Near East Magazine, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Fall, 1984). Reprinted with permission.
E
astern Christians have always had a
special relationship to the Bible. Af-
fter all, it was they – and their ances-
tors – who wrote it, under God’s in-
spiration. No wonder, then, that they have pre-
served an approach to the Holy Scripture that
is uniquely their own. The Christian East es-
pecially finds the Old Testament teeming with
images that prefigure or foreshadow persons,
places and events that will come to fulfillment
in the New Testament. This approach is called
typology. An excellent example is the story of
Pentecost as narrated by St. Luke in the Acts
of the Apostles.

THE MYSTERY FORESHADOWED

O understand the meaning of Pente-
cost, one must first turn to the Old
Testament. How does it prefigure
the outpouring of the Holy Spirit
upon the world? Among the Jewish forebears
of Christianity, Pentecost (from the Greek
word “fiftieth”) was the feast day that occurred
fifty days after Passover, which recalled the
deliverance of God’s people by the sacrifice
of the Paschal Lamb and the crossing of the
Red Sea. Pentecost commemorated the giving
of the Law by God to Moses on Mount Sinai.
At the same time it was a festival of the first-
fruits. The very first crops that grew were sac-
rificed to God as a sign of hope in the har-
est to come.

In typically Eastern fashion, St. Luke
weaves his narrative of the Christian Pente-
cost with the themes that foreshadow it in the
Hebrew Scriptures. In the New Testament, the
sacrificial victim is the Spotless Lamb of God,
Christ Himself, Who rises from the dead and
delivers mankind from the bondage of sin in
the waters of Baptism. Fifty days later, the de-
cent of the Holy Spirit marks the giving of
the New Law, the New Covenant sealed by
God Himself. Even the first-fruits figure in the
narrative of the Acts. The three thousand who
were converted by St. Peter’s first sermon are
a pledge of the harvest of believers to come.

Other Old Testament types or figures al-
so appear in Luke. The sound of a wind recalls
the Spirit blowing over the water at creation
in Genesis. The tongues bring to mind God’s
creative Word, calling the earth and all its
creatures into existence. Fire is also a fre-
fquent sign of God’s presence, as it was in the
Unburned Bush and the Pillar of Fire. And so
fiery tongues appear on Pentecost, signifying
that nothing other than God’s own power is
being communicated. Even the sermon of the
Apostles, understood by the crowd of various
nations and races, was prefigured in the Old
Testament. The pride of Babel has been re-
versed by the humility of Christ, Who sends
His Spirit as a pledge of eternal life.

These themes alone would suffice for a
rich theology of Pentecost, but the Eastern
soul loves to transcend the historical dimen-
sions of reality and scale the heights of mysti-
cal communion with God Himself. Christians
of the East see Pentecost primarily as the final
self-revelation of God to man: the Trinity
made known.

Even at the very beginning of Jesus’ pub-
lic ministry, man beheld the mystery of three
Persons in one God:

the Spirit in the form of a dove con-
ﬁrmed the truth of His Word.

(Troparion of the Theophany)

At Your baptism in the Jordan, O Lord,
the worship of the Trinity was revealed
For the Father’s voice bore witness to
You by calling You His Beloved Son. And

But at Pentecost the faithful bask in the noon-
day light of the fullness of revelation:

Come, all you nations of the world: let
us adore God in three holy Persons, Fa-
ther, Son and Holy Spirit – Three in One.
From all eternity, the Father begets the
Son, equal to Him in eternity and
majesty, equal also to the Holy Spirit glo-
riﬁed with the Son in the Father – Three
Persons, and yet a single Power and
Essence and Godhead. In deep adora-
tion, let us cry out to God: “Holy is God
who made all things through the Son
with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit!
Holy the Mighty One through Whom the
Father was revealed to us and the Holy
Spirit came to this world! Holy the Im-
mortal One, the Spirit, the Counselor,
who proceeds from the Father and re-
poses in the Son! All-holy Trinity, Glory
to You!”

(Doxastikon, “Kneeling” Vespers)

Since the Father and the Son have already
been amply revealed in Scripture, the Eastern
Church focuses on the Holy Spirit as the pro-
tagonist of this day’s mystery.

O Hidden and Incomprehensible God,
Everlasting and Infinite. You are known
in a single essence and are adorned by
Three Holy Persons. You exist in three
proper characteristics in knowable and
reasonable natures, yet You are one God,
known in Three Holy Persons, a Perfect
Trinity, made up of Three Perfect Beings, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. O God the Father, You deigned to create man in Your image, but through his evil will he went astray to the worship of demons. You sent Your Son, the Word, from Your inscrutable depths. He became a man, and without change, communicated with us plainly and explained the mystery of God to us. He made us understand what could not be understood. He also taught us about the Three Divine Lights which ineffably come forth from You: True Spirit, Comforting Spirit, Wise Spirit. Spirit, Lover of mankind, Spirit, Foundation of prophets, Spirit, Wisdom of apostles, Spirit, Guide of teachers.

(Maronite prayer)

Nor are the other Old Testament “figures” ignored by the Eastern Christian celebration of Pentecost. Witness this transformation of the Babel theme:

When the Most High came down and confused the tongues, He divided the nations; but when He distributed the tongues of fire, He called all men to unity. Wherefore we glorify the Holy Spirit with one accord.

(Kontakion of Pentecost)

The symbolism of the first-fruits is seen in turn in the Byzantine-Slav practice of wearing green vestments and festooning churches with fresh greenery on the feast of Pentecost. For the Eastern Christian, the color which calls to mind the life of the newly-awakened earth also represents the life-giving Spirit: the One whom the Anaphora of St. Basil calls “the First-fruits of eternal good, the life-giving Power, the Fountain of Sanctification.”

CHRISMATION: OUR PERSONAL PENTECOST

It is impossible to think of Pentecost and the descent of the Holy Spirit without mentioning the Mystery of Chrismation. In the Old Testament, the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb and the crossing of the Red Sea brought the Chosen People to Mount Sinai, where God revealed His Law. In the New Testament, the sacrifice of the Lamb of God and the pouring of the waters of Baptism bring God’s people to Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit imparts His gifts and writes the New Law upon the hearts of all.

Just as the Old Testament Pentecost was intimately connected with Passover, Chrismation is so intimately linked with Baptism that it is never separated from it and the Eucharist. Thus, in the East, Baptism and Chrismation are always conferred at the same time.

Finally, let us contemplate the icon of Pentecost with the crowned figure in the center foreground. It is Kosmos – the World destined to be restored in Christ through the transfiguring energy of the Holy Spirit in the Church, an image personalized for us in the words the beloved St. Seraphim of Sarov: “Aquire the Spirit of Peace, and a thousand around you will be saved!”

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First century Corinthians were a rowdy lot. Their city was a bustling port, a gathering spot for every kind of person, idea, and version in the Mediterranean world. St Paul spent 18 months there, evangelizing and building up the Church.

But people do not change overnight, and so brought many of their ingrained habits into their new faith. Paul wrote to them repeatedly to tame their excesses. One of his complaints concerned their behavior at the Eucharist. They came to eat the One Bread but fought among themselves at the Table. And so Paul instructed them:

“Anyone who eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will be behaving unworthily toward the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone is to recollect himself before eating this bread and drinking this cup; because a person who eats and drinks without discerning the Body is eating and drinking his own condemnation. In fact, that is why many of you are weak and ill and some of you have died” (1 Corinthians 11:27-30).

Paul perceived that spiritual illness and death result from “not discerning the Body” in the Eucharist. What does this mean?

**DISCERNING THE BODY**

“Discerning the Body” refers to our awareness of what the Eucharist is and what the consequences of receiving it are for our lives. The recipient is expected to know what he or she is receiving and to act accordingly. To the best of our ability we should know that:

- The Eucharist is the mystical body and blood of Christ which we receive “for the remission of sins and for eternal life”. This demands that we “approach with fear of God, with faith and with love” (Liturgy of St John Chrysostom), marvelling at the great privilege we have been given of receiving these mysteries through no merit of our own.

- The Eucharist is given so that “those who share the one Bread and the one Cup be united to one another in the communion of the Holy Spirit” (Liturgy of St Basil). This demands that we who presume to receive the sacrament of unity be committed to oneness of life with those around us. To do otherwise is not to discern the Body.

From the fourth or fifth centuries almost to our present day this need to discern the Body was so instilled in people that the majority of Christians stayed away from Communion except on the greatest feasts. Rather than go through what was considered appropriate preparation, they stayed away from the Lord’s Table. In the last hundred years, this trend has been reversed and most people regularly approach at every Liturgy. Often, however, some give the impression that they are not “discerning the Body”, because of their behavior at the Liturgy. They talk continually throughout the service, even as they approach the mysteries, leave with the holy gifts still in their mouth, or nurse long standing grudges against others, even with those who have just shared the Eucharist with them! It is evident that, while we rejoice that more people are heeding the Lord’s invitation to eat and drink, we must grieve that many are not discerning the Body.

Because “discerning the Body” demands both reverence for the holy gifts and love for one another, our Church over the centuries has developed the following practices in preparation for receiving the Eucharistic mysteries:

**MUTUAL FORGIVENESS**

Referring to the Jewish temple sacrifices, the highpoint of worship in His day, Jesus taught: “If you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering” (Matthew 5:23). Worship offered with a heart clouded by resentments and emotional “unfinished business” is not acceptable to God.

And so the first aspect of preparing to receive Communion is resolving any differences we might have with others. Our Church incorporated this command of Christ into the Liturgy as the holy kiss where, before the great prayer of offering (anaphora), we are enjoined to “love one another so that with one mind we may confess” what God has done for us. Many Eastern Christians also have the custom of making the rounds of their relatives and friends and asking forgiveness of each before they receive Communion. The sense of both these practices is clear: we cannot receive the sacrament of love without love in our hearts. And if it isn’t there, we must do something about it!

**THE EUCHARISTIC FAST**

Another way of heightening our awareness of the unique gift of divine life which is ours when we share in the Eucharist is by observing the Eucharistic fast. As we prepare for the spiritual experiences of Pascha or Christmas by redirecting our energies through fasting, so too we do the same to prepare for Christ’s Eucharistic banquet. By it we are proclaiming that we are waiting to be nourished, in expectation of being filled with the fullness of the supersubstantial Bread of life.

While it is not applied legalistically as in the past, the fast retains its value for those who see it as a reminder that Christ is our nourisher and our nourishment as well. People are encouraged to fast from midnight, if possible, or at least a few hours according to their state of health. Approaching the Lord’s Table on a full stomach or stopping off in the church hall for a cup of coffee before Liturgy as some do – at least indicates that we have not been waiting for the Bridegroom’s coming before feasting.

**THE Eucharistic Fast**

The prayerbooks of our Church contain a wealth of prayers in preparation for receiving the Eucharist. In some churches a few of these prayers may be recited or sung in common at the Liturgy. People are also encouraged to direct their attention to the coming encounter with the Lord in this mystery by praying some of these prayers the evening and/or morning before attending the Liturgy. Some of these prayers may be found in the books commonly used in our parishes (e.g., *Publican’s Prayer Book*). It is particularly important that parents read these prayers with their families before coming to church, especially when they have young children, so that the special character of the Eucharist may be impressed on them.

**PRAYERS OF PREPARATION**
APPROACHING THE HOLY TABLE

It is folly not to approach Holy Communion with great awe, purified by prayer and fasting according to our ability (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:26-31). At the time of Communion, we come forward with the right hand crossed over the left and held to the breast. While the person in front of you is communicating, make one or two metanies. If the priest does not know you by name, mention it as you approach so that he can repeat it in the Communion formula. Then open your mouth widely and do not attempt to say anything else (amen, thank you, etc.) while the priest administers the holy mysteries to you.

The mouth must be fully open; the tongue may be extended or not. Most Byzantine Churches administer Communion with a spoon. When receiving in this manner, the tongue should not be extended, nor should the communicant close his mouth until the spoon has been removed.

If the priest is carrying a communion cloth, wipe your lips with it after communicating, then step aside and again make a metany before going back to your place.

GIVING THANKS TO THE LORD

The final chants, litany and prayers of the Liturgy are meant to express our gratitude for the gift of life we have been given. “We have seen the true Light, we have received the heavenly Spirit...” It is the time to remember the life to which we have been called and for which we have been empowered through the Eucharist.

As with the prayers of preparation, the Church has a number of thanksgiving prayers intended to be said after Communion. In some churches a few of them may be recited while people are receiving the antidoron or afterwards. It is helpful to our striving to discern the Body if we listen attentively to these prayers or read them on our own. Again, reciting them as a family after returning home from the Liturgy is another way of helping children learn to know the great mystery they have received.

DISCOURSE OF ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM ON PREPARING FOR HOLY COMMUNION

Early beloved and most cherished brethren, who are gathered in this holy temple to adore the living God in piety and justice and partake of the holy, immortal, spotless, and awesome mysteries of Christ: hear me, humble and unworthy as I am, for it is not I who speak and teach you, but the grace of the all-holy, good, and life-creating Spirit. I speak, not on my own, but as I was taught by the Holy Canons, the God-bearing Fathers, and the ways of our Holy Church as received by the holy apostles, instructed by God. I am the humblest and smallest of men: I do not know your actions nor do I know your needs, but I do know the fear of God which commands each and every one of us, both men and women, small and great: Let none of you who is guilty of sin and who is gnawed by his or her conscience dare to draw near this sacred Fire before repenting and confessing or to come in ridicule, because God is a consuming Fire.

To those who draw near in faith and fear of Him who is our God and King and the Judge of all mankind, He will completely burn away your sins and will fill your souls with light and sanctification.

But to the faithless who draw near without shame, He burns and sears both soul and body. “For this reason there are many among you who are sick and, being sick, sleep”; that is, many die without having repented or been forgiven.

Therefore, my brethren, I implore you and say: let no blasphemer, perjurer or liar, no fornicator, adulterer or sodomite, no magician or fortune teller, no thief or heretic draw near to the awesome mysteries of Christ or touch them without having confessed and prepared himself, for “it is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

“The word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword that pierces the very joints and marrow of our heart and bones.” Behold, therefore, my brethren, let no one who is unrepentant, unprepared, or unworthy draw near and receive these dread Mysteries, for He says “I am the Lord your God, and there is none before me: I destroy and I give life, and you shall not escape out of my hands.”
The purpose of the Mystery of Repentance is to confront the fact that, despite our Baptism into Christ and the putting on of Christ, sin is still in us. We constantly fall away from the New Life we have received. We have turned away from God, refused His love for us, and gone our own way.

We then realize that we lost something precious. We know we need to be healed, to be reconciled, and to be reunited. We have a deep desire to return and to receive what we have lost. Like the Prodigal Son, we must want with all our heart to return. Then remembering God’s ever-present love for us, we gain the courage, turn around, and return to begin a new life.

God forgives us in His Church through Christ. This forgiveness is seen most clearly in the Mystery of Repentance. As a Sacrament, it is an encounter in which we meet Jesus Christ and through which we are saved. Christ is seen in His Body the Church, represented by the priest-confessor. Because he stands in the name of His Body, the priest stands in the place of Christ.

At the time of Confession we confess to Christ and before the priest. The priest accepts our confession of sins and our desire to be reconciled on behalf of the Church, the Body of Christ. We are accountable to the other members of this Body. No one member of the Body of Christ stands alone.

The priest not only receives our confession on behalf of the community, but he also invokes God’s mercy and forgiveness for us on its behalf. Christ forgives us as the sign of His love for us, and the priest speaks to us of this love as He urges us to return to Christ with all our hearts.

We come to be healed because we have broken away. We have forgotten how to love. God’s forgiveness is a healing that brings us into union with Him and His Church once again. We are given a chance, once again, to begin a new life as a newly-baptized person. The Mystery of Reconciliation is often called “a second Baptism” or the “Baptism of tears” – a Baptism into Christ Who is the forgiveness of our sins. In this “second Baptism,” into Christ we are restored to New Life in Christ in His Church.

**The Lord Says: “You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart”**

- Is my heart set on God so that I really love him above all things as a child loves its father? Am I faithful to his commandments or am I more concerned about the things of this world? Have I a right intention in what I do?
- God spoke to us in his Son. Is my faith in God firm and secure? Have I been careful to grow in my understanding of the faith, to hear God’s word, to listen to instructions on the faith, to avoid dangers to faith? Have I been always strong and fearless in professing my faith in God and the Church? Have I been willing to be known as a Christian in private and public life?
- Have I prayed morning and evening? When I pray, do I really raise my mind and heart to God or is it a matter of words only? Do I offer God my difficulties, my joys, and my sorrows? Do I turn to God in time of temptation?
- Have I love and reverence for God’s name? Have I offended him in blasphemy, swearing falsely, or taking his name in vain? Have I shown disrespect for the Mother of God and the saints?
- Do I keep Sundays and feast days holy by taking a full part, with attention and devotion, in the liturgy.
- Are there false gods that I worship by giving them greater attention and deeper trust than I give to God: money, superstition, spiritism, or other occult practices?

**The Lord Says: “Love one another as I have loved you.”**

- Have I a genuine love for my neighbors? Or do I use them for my own ends, or do to them what I would not want done to myself? Have I given grave scandal by my words or actions?
- Have I contributed to the well-being and happiness of the rest of my family by patience and genuine love? Have I been obedient to parents, showing them proper respect and giving them help in their spiritual and material needs? Have I been careful to give a Christian upbringing to my children, and to help them by good example and by exercising authority as a parent? Have I been faithful to my husband (wife) in my heart and in my relations with others?
- Do I share my possessions with the less fortunate? Do I do my best to help the victims of oppression, misfortune, and poverty? Or do I look down on my neighbors, especially the poor, the sick, the elderly, strangers, and people of other races?
- Does my life reflect the mission I received in baptism and chrismation? Do I share in the apostolic and charitable works of the Church and in the life of my parish? Have I helped to meet the needs of the Church and of the world and prayed for them: for unity in the Church, for the spread of the Gospel among the nations, for peace and justice, etcetera?
- Am I concerned for the good and prosperity of the human community in which I live, or do I spend my life caring only for myself? Do I share to the best of my ability in the work of promoting justice, morality, harmony, and love in human relations?
- In my work or profession am I just, hardworking, honest, serving society out of love for others? Have I paid a fair wage to my employees? Have I been faithful to my promises and contracts?
- Have I obeyed legitimate authority and given it due respect?
- If I am in a position of responsibility or authority, do I use this for my own advantage or for the good of others, in a spirit of service?
- Have I been truthful and fair, or have I injured others by deceit, calumny, detraction, rash judgment, or violation of a secret?
- Have I done violence to others by damage to life or limb, reputation, honor, or material possessions? Have I been responsible for advising an abortion or procuring one? Have I kept up hatred for others? Am I estranged from others through quarrels, enmity, insults, anger? Have I been guilty of refusing to testify to the innocence of another because of selfishness?
Have I stolen the property of others? Have I desired it unjustly and inordinately? Have I damaged it? Have I made restitution of other people's property and made good their loss?

If I have been injured, have I been ready to make peace for the love of Christ and to forgive, or do I harbor hatred and the desire for revenge?

CHRIST OUR LORD SAYS: “BE PERFECT AS YOUR FATHER IS PERFECT.”

Where is my life really leading me? Is the hope of eternal life my inspiration? Have I tried to grow in the life of the Spirit through prayer, reading the word of God and meditating on it, receiving the sacraments, self-denial? Have I been anxious to control my vices, my bad inclinations and passions, e.g., envy, love of food and drink? Have I been proud and boastful, despising others as less important than myself? Have I imposed my own will on others, without respecting their freedom and rights?

What use have I made of time, of health and strength of the gifts God has given me to be used like the talents in the Gospel? Do I use them to become more perfect every day? Or have I been lazy and too much given to leisure?

Have I been patient in accepting the sorrows and disappointments of life? How have I performed mortification so as to “fill up what is wanting to the sufferings of Christ”? Have I kept the precept of fasting and abstinence?

Have I kept my senses and my whole body pure and chaste as a temple of the Holy Spirit? Have I dishonored my body by fornication, impurity, unworthy conversation or thoughts, evil desires, or actions? Have I given in to sensuality? Have I indulged in reading, conversation, shows, and entertainments that offend against Christian and human decency? Have I encouraged others to sin by my own failure to maintain these standards? Have I been faithful to the moral law in my married life?

Have I gone against my conscience out of fear or hypocrisy?

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**PRAYERS OF CONFESSION**

Before you approach the priest, say the Trisagion Prayers and the following:

- Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on us. At a loss for any defense, we sinners offer this prayer to You, the Master: have mercy on us.
- Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.
- O Lord, have mercy on us, for we have put our trust in You. Rise not in full anger against us and do not remember our transgressions, but look down upon us even now in the depth of Your mercy and save us from our enemies; for You are our God and we are Your people. We are all the work of Your hands and we constantly call upon Your name.
- Now and always and forever and ever, Amen. Blessed Mother of God, open the portal of your deep mercy to us who put our trust in you, so that we may not be brought to confusion but, through you, may be delivered from adversity, for you are the salvation of the Christian fold.

I have sinned, O Lord; have mercy. O God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

Confess your sins to God in the presence of the priest, saying:

Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, I confess to You all the hidden and open sins of my the heart and mind which I committed. I ask of You, the merciful and righteous Judge, forgiveness and the grace to sin no more.

Then make your confession. The priest may counsel you or pray with you. Then, laying the stole over your head, he will pray the prayer of forgiveness and dismiss you.

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ITALY MELKITE EPARCHY OF NEWTON

http://melkite.org/

Photo courtesy of St. John Chrysostom Melkite Church
Atlanta, Georgia
the Melkite story goes back a long way: to the very dawn of Christian history. The Melkites, or Byzantine (Greek) Catholics of Middle Eastern origin, are descendants of the early Christians of Antioch (Syria).

Today the term Melkite is used to refer to those Catholics whose ancestry is Middle Eastern and who follow the Byzantine Tradition in worship, theology, and spirituality. As Rome was the most powerful city in early Western Europe and spread her manner of worship throughout the surrounding area, so too the Greek capital, Constantinople (originally called Byzantium), spread her traditions and customs to the countries closest to her.

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS IN MELKITE HISTORY

The Melkites have a rich history beginning in the time of Jesus Christ. The Christian Church is founded by Jesus Christ as is recorded in the Gospel of Saint Matthew: “...upon this rock I will build My Church” (Matthew 16:18).

Fifty days after Christ’s resurrection from the dead and ten days after His ascension, the apostles and disciples were gathered together in Jerusalem and mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles. “And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind ... And there appeared to them tongues as of fire... And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.” After this time began the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Saint Peter established the Church in Antioch (Syria), Saint Mark in Alexandria (Egypt) and Saint James in Jerusalem. Our Church dates back to these foundations. It was also in Antioch that the followers of Jesus were first called Christians (cf. Acts 11:26).

C. 33 AD –
The Christian Church is founded by Jesus Christ as is recorded in the Gospel of Saint Matthew: “...upon this rock I will build My Church” (Matthew 16:18).

110 AD –
This marks the first recorded use of the words Catholic Church, employed by Saint Ignatius of Antioch to distinguish the Christians who adhered to the Church founded by Jesus Christ from those who joined the churches of sectarians.

325 AD –
A meeting of bishops is held in Nicaea. Here the groundwork is prepared for what eventually evolved into an order of precedence among the five major Churches of early Christendom: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem.

451 AD –
A dispute about who Jesus was is settled by a meeting of bishops held at Chalcedon. The Byzantine Emperor and the assembled bishops agreed that Jesus was both “true God and true man”. Those who followed the decision of this council were called Melkites or “King’s Men” because they accepted the correct understanding of Jesus Christ which was shared by the Emperor.

622 AD –
Muslim conquests in the Middle East put Christians in a secondary position and begin a gradual erosion of their numbers and strength.

1054 AD –
Rome and Constantinople separate for a variety of reasons, political and cultural as well as doctrinal. This separation from Rome gradually takes hold throughout the other Eastern Churches.

1071 AD –
The Seljuk Turks crush the Byzantine army and drive the Greek Christians from the Middle East.

12–13TH CENTURIES AD –
Latin Crusaders invade the East to re-capture the holy places from Muslim control. Roman Catholic bishops are imposed upon Antioch and Jerusalem.

13TH CENTURY AD –
Mongolian invasions of the Latin West and the Byzantine East drain the resources of Christendom. Muslims reassert their dominance in the Levant.

1453 AD –
Constantinople falls to the Ottoman Turks. Their expansion throughout the East continues.

At a later date, by decree of the Ottoman Sultan, all Greeks in the Middle East are made subject to the Patriarch of Constantinople. Byzantine bishops take control at Antioch and Jerusalem.

1724 AD –
Patriarch Cyril VI of Antioch, due to the efforts of Archbishop Eftimios (Saflı) of Saida and Tyre, affirms the union with Rome which had existed between East and West during the first thousand years of Christianity.

From this time the Melkite Church of Antioch is formally divided between Greek Orthodox (those not in union with Rome) and Greek Catholics (those in union with Rome). The term Melkite begins to be associated exclusively with the Catholics.

1772 AD –
The Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarch of Antioch, Theodosius VI, extends his jurisdiction over Melkite Catholics in the Churches of Alexandria and Jerusalem.

19TH CENTURY AD –
Melkite Greek Catholics begin to emigrate to North and South America, Australia and Africa.

1966 AD –
An exarchate for Melkites in the United States is established with Bishop Justin (Najmy) as the first exarch. A similar jurisdiction is set up in Brazil under Bishop Elias (Cueter).

1977 AD –
The American exarchate becomes a full eparchy (diocese) under Archbishop Joseph (Tawil). In the next few years bishops of various ranks are appointed for Canada, Argentina, Australia and Western Europe.

MAJOR HISTORICAL EVENTS

Throughout the almost 2000 year history of Christianity in the Middle East there have been a number of events which have contributed to the making of the Melkite Church as it exists today. Among the most important are the following:

1071 AD –
The Seljuk Turks crush the Byzantine army and drive the Greek Christians from the Middle East.

110 AD –
This marks the first recorded use of the words Catholic Church, employed by Saint Ignatius of Antioch to distinguish the Christians who adhered to the Church founded by Jesus Christ from those who joined the churches of sectarians.

451 AD –
A dispute about who Jesus was is settled by a meeting of bishops held at Chalcedon. The Byzantine Emperor and the assembled bishops agreed that Jesus was both “true God and true man”. Those who followed the decision of this council were called Melkites or “King’s Men” because they accepted the correct understanding of Jesus Christ which was shared by the Emperor.

622 AD –
Muslim conquests in the Middle East put Christians in a secondary position and begin a gradual erosion of their numbers and strength.
WHY ARE THERE EASTERN CATHOLIC CHURCHES IN AMERICA?

It was natural for the first Eastern Catholic immigrants to want to worship in the fashion of their homelands. And so their Churches followed them to the shores of America. In those early days, Roman Catholics noticed many unfamiliar features about these new arrivals. Their customs and languages were different; their churches unusual, their ceremonies unfamiliar. Accustomed as American Roman Catholics had been to standing alone amid the widespread Protestant rejection of Catholicism, they were unable to see anything Catholic in what was not Roman as well. Today with better education, Roman Catholics understand their Eastern Catholic brethren better and often find their ways of life and approaches to God meaningful and helpful.

MISSION FOR TODAY

Any Church exists to bring its people to the Lord. There are many for whom the style of Christian living practiced in our Church is more compatible than contemporary Western forms. For these people the Melkite Church can serve a very important function: it can be their way to God.

Our presence is also a witness to the universality of Christ’s Church. In us Roman Catholics can see others, as Catholic as themselves, expressing the faith in different forms, with different traditions and understandings. They come to realize that the Catholic Church includes far more than the one tradition in which they were raised.

To the extent that we are true to ourselves, we can exist as a living example that one can be faithful to a different heritage and yet be in communion with Rome. To the degree that we feel the need to adapt our ways to Roman practices, we show that such fidelity and communion with Rome are incompatible. In either case we exist as an example, for good or bad, of what other Churches can expect if they were to achieve union with the Church of Rome.

The fruit of our long history of joy and suffering must be a passion for unity and love for all mankind. We stand today as Christians seeking to bring ourselves and others closer to God in the faith given to us by the apostles. As Catholics of the Byzantine tradition we stand as landmarks in the journey of the Churches toward full communion. We have a special responsibility given by God to show our faithfulness to the historic Catholic faith as expressed in our own unique heritage so that we might in this way contribute to the healing of our fragmented world and the reunion of the fractured Body of Christ, the divided Christian Church.

“One prime source of spiritual assimilation for Eastern Catholics has been the phenomenon known as ‘latinization,’ the copying by Eastern Catholics of the theology, spiritual practices and liturgical customs of the Latin Church. Latinization implies either the superiority of the Roman rite — the position denounced by Vatican II — or the desirability of the assimilation process, an opinion with which we cannot agree. Not only is it unnecessary to adopt the customs of the Latin rite to manifest one’s Catholicism, it is an offense against the unity of the Church. As we have said above, to do this would be to betray our ecumenical mission and, in a real sense, to betray the Catholic Church ...

To be open to others, to be able to take our rightful place on the American Church scene, we must start by being fully ourselves. It is only in our distinctiveness that we make any kind of contribution to the larger society. It is only by being what we are that we retain a reason for existence at all.”

Archbishop Joseph Tawil
The Courage to be Ourselves

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS IN MELKITE HISTORY

OFFICE OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES
MELKITE EPARCHY OF NEWTON
http://melkite.org/
Photo courtesy of Rt. Rev. John Azar
The incomparably rich writings of our Fathers are the voice of your own ancestors in the faith. Their names are known throughout the Christian world - Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil the Great, the two Gregories, John Chrysostom, John of Damascus, and the rest. We alone can truly say that they are bones of our bones, flesh of our flesh: ours in the truest sense of the term. They lived in the lands of our origin and the riches of their inheritance is now the treasured possession of the entire Church. Still we are the most rightful heirs of their inestimable treasures, for we are their very descendants, sons of the same soil. However true this may be, we do not live in the past, but in the present. Why must we exert so much energy to preserve the heritage of days long since past, we who are such a minority in American Catholicism? Since we live in the United States now, why do we not simply follow the majority of Catholics and become Latin? These questions are often heard and deserve answers. We can do no better than recall the teaching of Vatican II which declared: “History, tradition, and numerous ecclesiastical institutions manifest luminously how much the universal Church is indebted to the Eastern Churches. Therefore, ...all Eastern rite members should know that they can and should always preserve their lawful liturgical rites and their established way of life ... and should honor all these things with greatest fidelity.”

Our incomparable patrimony

For a long time the principle of the superiority of the Roman rite, which had become general during the Middle Ages, prevailed in the West. The Latin tradition was considered the only true Catholic tradition, and this led to a certain fixedness among Catholics: the Latin way is the only way! Events of the succeeding centuries only served to heighten the feeling among Latin Catholics that to be Catholic one had to be Roman. Vatican II put an end to this provincialist view of the Church once and for all. The Church cannot be identified, it stressed, with any one culture, nation, or form of civilization without contradicting that universality which is of the essence of the Gospel. The existence of Eastern Churches as part of the Catholic family, although they have distinct customs and traditions in all areas of Church life, dramatically shows that to be Catholic one does not have to conform to the Roman model. Indeed, the Roman Church, as the Council affirmed, has learned many lessons of late from the East in the fields of liturgy (use of the vernacular, Communion in both kinds, baptism by immersion), of Church order (collegiality, synodal government, the role of the deacon), and spirituality. In a very real sense, the Western Church “needs” a vibrant Eastern Church to complement its understanding of the Christian message.

Ecumenical vocation of Eastern Catholics

By our fidelity to maintaining our patrimony, by our refusal to be assimilated, the Eastern Churches render a most precious service to Rome in still another area of Church life. Latinizing this small number of Easterners would not be a gain for Rome; rather it would block - perhaps forever - a union of the separated Churches of the East and West. It would be easy then for Orthodoxy to see that union with Rome leads surely to ecclesiastical assimilation. Thus it is for the sake of ecumenism - to create a climate favorable to the union of the Churches - that the Eastern Catholic must remain faithful to his tradition. This providential vocation which is ours opens to the Church an unlimited perspective for preaching the Gospel to all peoples who, while they accept faith in Christ, must still remain themselves in this vast assembly of believers. From what has been said above, it is easy for us to find our place in America’s pluralistic societies with its varied Churches and religious groups. In the new famous words of the late Patriarch Maximus IV, “We have, therefore, a two-fold mission to accomplish within the Catholic Church. We must fight to insure that Latinism and Catholicism are not synonymous, that Catholicism remains open to every culture, every spirit, and every form of organization compatible with the unity of faith and love. At the same time, by our example, we must enable the Orthodox Church to recognize that a union with the great Church of the West, with the See of Peter, can be achieved without being compelled to give up Orthodoxy or any of the spiritual treasures of the apostolic and patristic East, which is opened toward the future no less to the past.”

A danger: the ghetto mentality

We have not yet mentioned the principal dangers which threaten our communities and their mission to the Churches: the ghetto mentality and the assimilation process. In a ghetto life is closed in upon itself, operating only within itself, with its own ethnic and social clichés. And the Parish lives upon the ethnic character of the community; when that character disappears, the community dies and the parish dies with it. One day all our ethnic traits - language, folklore, customs - will have disappeared. Time itself is seeing to this. And so we can not think of our communities as ethnic parishes, primarily for the service of the immigrant or the ethnically oriented, unless we wish to assure the death of our community. Our Churches are not only for our own people but are also for any of our fellow Americans who are attracted to our traditions which show forth the beauty of the universal Church and the variety of its riches.

A second danger: assimilation

Without doubt we must be totally devoted to our American national culture. We must have an American life-style. We must be fully American in all things and at the same time we must preserve this authentic form of Christianity which is ours and which is not the Latin form. We must know that we have something to give, otherwise we have no reason to be. We must develop and maintain a religious tradition we know capable of enriching American life. Otherwise we would be unfaithful to our vocation. It is often easier to get lost in the crowd than to affirm one’s own personality. It takes more courage, character, and inner strength to lead our traditions to bear fruit than it takes to simply give them up. The obsession to be like everyone else pursues us to the innermost depths of our hearts. We recognize that our greatest temptation is always to slip into anonymity rather than to assume our responsibility within the Church. And so, while we opt for ethnic assimilation, we can never agree to spiritual assimilation. One prime source of spiritual assimilation for Eastern Catholics has been the phenomenon known as ‘latinization’; the copying by Eastern Catholics of the theology, spiritual practices, and liturgical customs of the Latin Church. Latinization implies either the superiority
of the Roman rite - the position denounced by Vatican II - or the desirability of the assimilation process, an opinion with which we cannot agree. Not only is it unnecessary to adopt the customs of the Latin rite to manifest one’s Catholicism, it is an offense against the unity of the Church. As we have said above, to do this would be to betray our ecumenical mission and, in a real sense, to betray the Catholic Church. For this reason many parishes are attempting to return to the practice of Eastern traditions in all their purity. This has often entailed redecoration of the churches and elimination of certain devotions on which many of the people had been brought up. In some places, our priests, attempting to follow the decree of the Council in this matter have been opposed by some of their parishioners. Other priests have been reluctant to move in this direction, as they feared that division and conflict would result. We should all know in this regard that a latinized Eastern Church cannot bear anything but false witness, as it seems to be living proof that Latinism and Catholicism are indeed one and the same thing. To be open to others, to be able to take our rightful place on the American Church scene, we must start by being fully ourselves. It is only in our distinctiveness that we can make any kind of contribution to the larger society. It is only by being what we are that we retain a reason for existence at all.

**GRATITUDE TO OUR FOREFATHERS**

Immigrants from Western Europe to the United States had less to do than our fathers did to adapt themselves to the American life-style. The Easterner, on the other hand, found himself immersed in a far different world than that which he knew. The temptation was great to throw off his entire heritage and become what he was not. And so we remember with gratitude our fathers and grandfathers and the priests who accompanied them from the old country for the foundations we have in this immense continent. Those who followed them have also worked well, often building splendid churches with the assistance of the Latin hierarchy. Now we are in the age of the young, American-born priests. To them especially falls the task of perfecting the work begun before them. They are still too few in number, but we hope with confidence that their number will increase. We cannot be grateful enough to those Roman Catholic bishops of this country who took the steps necessary to preserve our heritage while we had no hierarchy of our own on these shores. We think most of all of the late Cardinal Richard Cushing, undoubtedly the greatest benefactor of our church in the United States. Thanks to his apostolic openness and love, he worked for the establishment of our exarchate and generously endowed it with his psychological and financial support once it had been erected. For this reason we have directed that a solemn Liturgy be celebrated annually in our cathedral to perpetuate his memory.

**TOWARD THE FUTURE**

His is not the place to describe in detail the projects we are currently working on. We only list some here: a diocesan religious education program for both adults and youth, a unified text and musical setting for the Divine Liturgy to be followed by similar texts for the other services of the Church, such as the sacraments, a diocesan handbook which we will soon be happy to offer to the faithful and to the friends of our Church, a periodical which will also appear before long, and the general sharing with the faithful of our pastoral responsibility, as in parish councils and an active diaconate among other things. Also high on our priority list are the concerns of youth. Without the participation of the young, we can be assured that all our work is in vain and that our communities will disappear. And so we look forward to implementing a diocesan youth program as well before long. We also recognize that we are reaching only a small number of our faithful while the majority of them are unknown to us. Like the Good Shepherd concerned about the lost sheep, we ask ourselves what can be done for them. We are presently in the process of studying these situations and hope to provide for their pastoral care where possible. With what joy, then, was it to hear Bishop Mark Hurley of Santa Rosa, California observe in a recent speech that “in many of our dioceses Eastern Christians are without churches of their own. It is the duty of the Latin bishops to see that the venerable rites of the East are preserved.” The bishop then called on the Eastern Catholic bishops in America to form parishes in these areas so that “the example of the East may continue to instruct Western Catholics and that the true universality of the Catholic Church may be experienced.
THE EASTER ICON: DEATH IS NO MORE

Contrary to the usual Western artistic portrayals, the traditional Eastern Christian icon of the resurrection is unique in that the actual resurrection of Christ is never shown. Following the lead of the Gospels which are silent about that moment and give no indication of how Christ rose, the Eastern iconographer has accepted the mysterious and unfathomable character of the event and the actual impossibility of depicting it. In fact, Eastern tradition is rather disinterested in the physical aspects of the resurrection, operating on the belief that one who stops short at the mere historical event can never comprehend the full significance and mystery of the event for all mankind.

For the Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Christian, the real significance of Christ’s resurrection is the Pascha or Passover from death to life. St. John Chrysostom stresses this point in his famous Easter homily, still read in Byzantine churches before the Easter Liturgy:

“O Death, where is your sting? O hell, where is your victory? Christ is risen and you are overthrown. Christ is risen and the demons are cast down. Christ is risen and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen and life is freed. Christ is risen and the tomb is emptied of the dead; for Christ, being risen from the dead, has overcome Death and has become the Leader and Reviver of those who have fallen asleep."

Against all that we know, see or feel, the resurrection of Christ teaches that Death is no more and that we are now “Sons of the Resurrection”, as early Christians in the Middle East called themselves. Even the dead in the graves are no longer under the power of Death but already have within themselves the seed of the new life. In the Passover of Christ from death to life we accomplish this Passover as His people, His community, His chosen inheritance.

Thus the resurrection of Christ is never considered as an isolated event but only in relation to the transformation of our mortality that it effects: the risen Christ is the principle of our incorruptibility and deification.

THE HARROWING OF HELL

The icon of the resurrection, therefore, does not depict the actual moment of Christ’s rising but rather the descent into hell. This is represented as taking place in the depths of the earth, shown by the rocklike formations and the gaping black abyss in the foreground. Dominating hell is the figure of the risen Lord, larger in scale than the other figures and by His very posture indicative of life, movement, and action. Resplendent in white garments and surrounded by a mandorla of light in shades of blue covered with stars, the Christ figure shatters the darkness of hell by His presence. Below Him in the abyss lie broken chains, locks, keys, and sometimes the very gates of hell, heralding the complete destruction of the power of Death over mankind from this moment on. And yet, amid the glory and victory, the wounds of the passion are clearly visible on the hands and feet of the Savior: as ever, Christ leads to glory through suffering, pain, and self-immolation.

The central message of the icon is seen in the tender lifting up of Adam and Eve from the tombs of their imprisonment and death. Listless and lifeless, they contrast with the vitality of Christ, Life itself, who draws them to Himself, into the radiance of the new life and the light of incorruption which is now to be theirs.

As Adam and Eve, the firstborn of the human race, are raised; so all of us, their descendants, experience with them His boundless love and celebrate with them the annihilation of Death, the destruction of hell, and the beginning of a new life which is eternal. As the great theologian, St. John of Damascus, expressed it, “When He had freed those who were bound from the beginning of time, Christ returned from the dead, having now opened for all of us the way to resurrection.”

Approaching this wonderful scene of the resurrection of all mankind as portrayed in the raising of Adam and Eve, are the Just Ones of the Old Law who had hoped with expectation of this day. Especially significant among the patriarchs, prophets, and holy men are David the King with regal crown, accompanied by St. John the Baptist and Forerunner whose hand pierces the mandorla of light, ever pointing out Him who is the light and salvation of all mankind.

Far from being an attempt to depict the historical setting, the Eastern icon of the resurrection is a profound meditation on the deepest theological meaning of Easter. Easter is truly for us the Passover (Pascha), for Christ through His passion and resurrection brought us back from the curse of Adam and the bondage of Satan to the state of the people of God. “Today is the day of the resurrection: O nations, let us be jubilant; for this Passover is the Passover of the Lord, in that Christ has
made us pass from death to life and from earth to heaven: we who sing to Him triumphant praise.” (First Ode of the Eastern Canon).

Comprehending this great mystery of mysteries and feast of feasts, let us all glorify his third-day resurrection: “Christ is risen from the dead and by His death He has trampled upon death and has given life to those who were in the tomb.” (Troparion of Pascha).

Today Hades tearfully sighs: “Would that I had not received Him who was born of Mary, for He came to me and destroyed my power. He broke my bronze gates and, being God, delivered those I had been holding captive.” Glory to Your cross and resurrection, O Lord!

Today Hades tearfully sighs: “My power has vanished! I received One who died as mortals die, but I could not hold Him. With Him and through Him I lost those over whom I had ruled. I had held control over the dead since the world begin, and lo, He raises them all up with Him.” Glory to Your cross and resurrection, O Lord!

Today Hades tearfully sighs: “My power has crumbled, for the Shepherd who was crucified has raised Adam, and those whom I had possessed I lost. Those whom I had swallowed up by my might, I have given up completely: for the Crucified has emptied the graves and the power of death has vanished.” Therefore glory to Your cross and resurrection, O Lord!

(Office of Great Saturday Stichera)

THE EASTER ICON: DEATH IS NO MORE

(The Resurrection)

OFFICE OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES
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THE FAST OF THE THEOTOKOS

The first two weeks in August in the Byzantine tradition are set aside as a time of special observance called the Fast of the Theotokos. As with other fasting seasons during the year, this Fast is kept in preparation for the observance of a Great Feast. As the Great Fast prepares for the celebration of Pascha and Pentecost and the Advent Fast anticipates the feasts of Christmas and Theophany, this fast centers around the celebration of the Great Feasts of the Transfiguration of Christ (August 6) and the Dormition of the Theotokos (August 15).

Looking at these feasts we see why the Church highlights this time as a special season of celebration. Christmas and Theophany proclaim the presence of Christ in the world, His historic coming in the flesh. Easter and Pentecost celebrate the fulfilled purpose of His coming: the presence of the Holy Spirit by the power of Christ's resurrection. The feasts of the Transfiguration and Dormition point out to us what the fulness of that divinization actually means: the transfiguration of our physical bodies that they too might share in the divine nature, as we are “transformed from glory to glory into His very image” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

FEASTS OF GLORY

It is this physical glorification which we celebrate in the two Great Feasts of August. On the feast of the Transfiguration we look on the glorified body of Christ, the model of our future risen bodies. On the feast of the Dormition we celebrate Mary's glorification and realize that already one of our race share in that transfiguration which awaits us all in the kingdom to come.

According to the ancient Tradition of the Church, Mary died and was buried in the garden of Gethsemane, where Christ had prayed after the Last Supper. When her tomb was re-opened soon after, it was found to be empty, a sign which the Church took to mean that the Lord had honored the body in which He had taken flesh by translating it incorrupt to glory, according to the pattern of His glorified body (Philippians 3:21). Thus our union with God in Christ will be so profound and complete that it will totally renew and recreate us in a way we cannot now begin to envision.

Thus Mary already shares in the glory which awaits us all after Christ's second coming. This process of glorification we call in the Eastern tradition deification, the “becoming partakers in the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4) which is the goal of our life in Christ. “God became man,” the Fathers often said, “so that man might become God”. The feasts of the Transfiguration and Dormition point out to us what the fullness of that divinization actually means: the transfiguration of our physical bodies that they too might share in the divine nature.

RITES OF THE SEASON

As with the Church's other festal seasons, there are several special observances associated with this time of celebration:

- **Water Blessing** — On August 1 a special service to the Theotokos is held to begin the season. Water is blessed, a frequent sign of the transfiguration in Christ. As Christ (the cross) comes in contact with the water, it is transformed into a sign of His presence. We drink this water in anticipation of our complete transformation which we are recalling in these days. Obtain some of this water from church and keep it in your icon corner. Drink some daily during this fast and keep it for blessing the home on any occasion.

- **Paraklisis Service** — While we are celebrating this transformation, we know that as individuals we have a long way to go for that process to be complete. And so on each weekday of this fast, the
Church serves Paraklisis, asking the Mother of God to intercede for us in furthering our transfiguration: “Quiet the storms within me, dispelling the surge of depression.” we pray. “Pacify the rise of my passions and quiet the stormy turbulence of my sins, you who have given birth to the merciful Lord”. Attend the Paraklisis service in church as often as it is offered during these days. At other times you may choose to add an ode from the canon of the service to your daily prayers. The text of this prayer is found in “Publican’s Prayer Book”.

Feast of the Transfiguration (August 6 – one of the Twelve Great Feasts) — This feast, popularly called the ‘Feast of the Lord’ in the Middle East, celebrates the physical glorification of the body of Christ as described above. Traditionally it is the name day of all men, especially those who names are not commemorated at other times on the Church calendar. The observance of this feast is highlighted by the Blessing of Grapes, another hint of the transformation awaiting us. The grape is a recognized symbol of transfiguration in Christian tradition. As the prayer of blessing reminds us, it is the grape which is transformed into wine and then, at the Divine Liturgy, into the blood of Christ. As we eat these blessed grapes, we are reminded once more of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit within us, leading us from one step of deification to another.

Feast of the Dormition (August 15 – one of the Twelve Great Feasts) — This feast, the feast of the Lady, recalls the physical glorification of Mary as she shares in the resurrection life of her Son. In some Byzantine Churches herbs and flowers are blessed on this day, recalling the tradition that sweet fragrance filled the empty tomb of Mary when it was first opened. Use the flowers you receive in church in your icon corner to adorn the icon of the Theotokos whose glorification we are celebrating.

Since the liturgical celebration of this period so clearly points to our final transfiguration, the season offers a particular reminder to us of our call to cooperate with the Holy Spirit within us in furthering our deification. By observing the traditional practices of fasting seasons — increased prayer, especially attendance at the Paraklisis service, and the observance of a personal rule of fasting and sharing of earthly goods — we remind ourselves of that invitation ever ours to draw closer to the One who calls us to share His life and glory.
THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH DEFEND THE SANCTITY OF LIFE

Excerpts from the sayings of the early church fathers. One of the allegations promoted by supporters of abortion is that the Church, at its earliest days, was silent on the question of abortion. The following selections from the Fathers will give ample witness to the contrary.

THE DIDACHE CIRCA AD 120:
“Thou shalt not murder a child by abortion.” – 2:2

“The Way of Death is filled with people who are ... murderers of children and abortionists of God’s creatures.” – 5:1-2

THE EPISTLE OF BARNABAS CIRCA AD 125
“Thou shalt love thy neighbor more than thy own life. Thou shalt not murder a child by abortion.” – 19:5

THE APOCALYPSE OF PETER CIRCA AD 135
“I saw a gorge in which the discharge and excrement of the tortured ran down and became like a lake. There sat women, and the discharge came up to their throats; and opposite them sat many children, who were born prematurely, weeping. And from them went forth rays of fire and smote the women on the eyes. These were those who produced children outside of marriage and who procured abortions.” – 26

“Those who slew the unborn children will be tortured forever, for God wills it so.” – 2:264

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA CIRCA AD 150-180
“Our whole life can go on in observance of the laws of nature, if we gain dominion over our desires from the beginning and if we do not kill, by various means of a perverse art, the human offspring, born according to the designs of divine providence; for these women who, in order to hide their impiety, use abortive drugs which expel the child completely dead, abort at the same time their own human feelings.” - Paedagogus 2

ST. ATHENAGORAS CIRCA AD 165
“We say that women who induce abortions are murderers, and will have to give account of it to God. For the same person would not regard the child in the womb as a living being and therefore an object of God’s care and then kill it. . . . But we are altogether consistent in our conduct. We obey reason and do not override it.” - Legatio 35

TERTULLIAN CIRCA AD 160-240
“‘For us [Christians] we may not destroy even the fetus in the womb, while as yet the human being derives blood from other parts of the body for its sustenance. To hinder a birth is merely a speedier man-killing; nor does it matter when you take away a life that is born, or destroy one that is coming to birth. That is a man which is going to be one: you have the fruit already in the seed.” - Apology 9:6

“They (John and Jesus) were both alive and present yet still in the womb. Elizabeth rejoiced as the infant leaped in her womb; Mary glorifies the Lord because Christ within inspired her. Each mother recognizes her child and is known by her child who is alive, being not merely souls but also spirits.” - De Anima 26:4

MINUCIUS FELIX CIRCA AD 180 – 225
“There are women who swallow drugs to stifle in their own womb the beginnings of a man to be — committing infanticide before they even give birth to the infant.” - Octavius

ST. HIPPOLYTUS CIRCA AD 170-236
“Reputed believers began to resort to drugs for producing sterility and to gird themselves round, so as to expel what was conceived on account of their not wanting to have a child either by a slave of by any palty fellow, for the sake of their family and excessive wealth. Behold, into how great impiety that lawless one has proceeded by inciting adultery and murder at the same time.” - Refutation of all Heresies 9:7

COUNCIL OF ELVIRA CIRCA AD 305
“If a woman becomes pregnant by committing adultery, while her husband is absent, and after the act she destroys the child, it is proper to keep her from communion until death, because she has doubled her crime.” - Canon 63

ST. BASIL THE GREAT CIRCA AD 330-379
“She who has deliberately destroyed a fetus has to pay the penalty of murder. . . . Here it is not only the child to be born that is vindicated, but also the woman herself who made an attempt against her own life, because usually the women die in such attempts. Furthermore, added to this is the destruction of the child, another murder.” - Letter 188:2

“Moreover, those, too, who give drugs causing abortion are deliberate murderers themselves, as well as those receiving the poison which kills the fetus.” - Letter 188:2

ST. AMBROSE OF MILAN CIRCA AD 339-397
“The wealthy, in order that their inheritance may not be divided among several, deny in the very womb their own progeny. By use of parricidal mixtures they snuff out the fruit of their wombs in the genital organs themselves. In this way life is taken away before it is born. . . . Who except man himself has taught us ways of repudiating children?” - Hexameron

ST. JEROME CIRCA AD 342-420
“They drink potions to ensure sterility and are guilty of murdering a human being not yet conceived. Some, when they learn that they are with child through sin, practice abortion by the use of drugs. Frequently they die themselves and are brought before the rulers of the lower world guilty of three crimes: suicide, adultery against Christ, and murder of an unborn child.” - Letter 22:13
THE APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS CIRCA AD 380

“Thou shalt not slay thy child by causing abortion, nor kill that which is begotten. For everything that is shaped, and has received a soul from God, if slain, it shall be avenged, as being unjustly destroyed.” - 7:3

ST. JOHN CHRYSTOSOM CIRCA AD 340-407

“Why sow where the ground makes it its care to destroy the fruit? Where there are many efforts at abortion? Where there is murder before birth? For you do not even let the harlot remain a mere harlot, but make her a murderer also. You see how drunkenness leads to whoredom, whoredom to adultery, adultery to murder; or rather something even worse than murder. For I have no real name to give it, since it does not destroy the thing born but prevents its being born. Why then do you abuse the gift of God and fight with His laws, and follow after what is a curse as if a blessing, and make the place of procreation a chamber for murder, and arm the woman that was given for childbearing unto slaughter?” - Homily 24 on Romans
n Eastern Christian thought the Holy Trinity – one in essence but distinct in persons – is the model for unity in the Church. The distinctness of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is not in conflict with their unity as one God. So too the Church is meant to be one in essentials without losing the distinct theology, spirituality, liturgy or organization by which they strive to express the mystery of Christ.

EXPERIENCE OF THE MIDDLE EAST

he history of the Churches of the Middle East bears eloquent witness to legitimate pluralism. On the positive side, the various local Churches developed complementary traditions in harmony with their respective cultures (Greek, Syriac, Assyrian, Armenian, Coptic), which enrich us all. When these Churches diverged in what was seen to be essentials, however, their distinctness became the basis of disunity. And this disunity gave people cause to say that the Christians got the message of Christ all wrong. Thus Islam came to the fore.

During the c. 1200 years of the rule of Arab and Turkish caliphs in the Middle East, the various Christian Churches were somewhat frozen in time by the politics of the age. This helped maintain their distinctness but also their disunity, as overlords never seek to unify their subjects. Only in the present day have all these Churches begin to rediscover their unity and express their common faith in Christ in various official statements.

Such an initiative, of great importance for the Melkite Church, took place at the 1995 session of the Synod of Bishops of our patriarchate. Kyr Elias Zoghby, the retired Archbishop of Baalbeek, and a long-time Synod of Bishops of our patriarchate. Kyr Elias Zoghby, sister of the Melkite bishops at their July, 1996 Synod meeting in Rabweh, Lebanon unanimously approved a statement entitled Reunification of the Antiochian Patriarchate. It was then presented to the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, Ignatius IV and has since been circulated widely. The text is as follows:

**REUNIFICATION OF THE ANTIOSHIAN PATRIARCHATE**

he Fathers of the Synod of the Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarchate convened in Rabweh, Lebanon July 22 to July 27, 1996 and studied the documents presented by the patriarchal commission established by His Beatitude Maximos V (Hakim) on March 23, 1996. This commission consists of Archbishops Elias Zoghby and Cyril Salim Bustros; the patriarch asked them to do whatever is necessary through communications and meetings with the Orthodox patriarchal and synodal commission to achieve Antiochian unity through oneness of heart, and to find ways for the two Churches-Melkite Greek Catholic and Greek Orthodox-to return to communion with each other and into unity within one Antiochian patriarchate. His Beatitude, Patriarch Maximos V and the Fathers of the Holy Synod are happy to report the following:

1. They thank His Beatitude, Patriarch Ignatius IV (Hazim) and the Synod of the Greek Orthodox Church for their concern on this subject, and the brotherly announcement they gave concerning this unity in the final communiqué of their Holy Synod convened. October 16-22, 1995. They share what the Orthodox said [at this synod] “that since receiving the mutual representatives in the 1974 synod with great love, we look forward together to Antiochian unity, preserving our one heritage and one worship which is the fount of one belief.”

2. They all look forward to the day when the Melkite Greek Catholics and the Greek Orthodox in the Antiochian patriarchate return to being one Church and one patriarchate. They affirm to all that this reunification does not mean a victory of one church over another, or one church going back to the other, or the melting of one church into the other. Rather, it means putting an end to the separation between the brothers that took place in 1724 and led to the existence of two separate independent patriarchates, and returning together to that unity that prevailed in the one Antiochian patriarchate before the separation.

3. They see that this reunification has become possible today due to the progress in the communion of faith that has taken place through the grace of God in recent years on the international level through the Joint International Theological Commission between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches. This commission produced four documents announcing unity of faith in basic doctrines: “The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity” (1982), “Faith, Sacraments and the Unity of the Church” (1987), “The Sacrament of Orders in the Sacramental Structure of the Church” (1988), “Uniatism, Method of Union in the Past, and the Present Search for Full Communion” (Balamand, 1993). They consider their task of reestablishing communion within the Church of Antioch a part of reestablishing full communion between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches on the international level.

4. The Joint Commission will discuss one point further, that is, “The role of the Bishop of Rome in the Church and in the Ecumenical Councils.” On this subject the Fathers of the Synod adopt what was stated in the Second Vatican Council: “To give due consideration to this special feature of the origin and growth of the Eastern Churches and to the character of the relations which obtained between them and the Roman See before separation” (Decree on Ecumenism #14); and also what His Holiness, Pope John Paul II said in his encyclical *That All May Be One* (Ut Unum Sint) #61: “The Catholic Church desires nothing less than full communion between East and West. She finds inspiration for
this in the experience of the first millennium.” Concerning the primacy of the Bishop of Rome, the Fathers declare that they are inspired by the understanding in which East and West lived in the first millennium in light of the teachings of the seven Ecumenical Councils, and they see that there is no reason for the separation to continue because of that primacy.

5. Based on the unity in the essence of the faith (that existed in the first millennium), the Fathers of the Holy Synod see that “communicatio in sacris” is possible today, and that they accept it, leaving the ways and means of its application to the joint decisions of the two Church Synods, Melkite Greek Catholic and Greek Orthodox.

6. The Fathers of the Holy Synod announce that they will remain in full communion with the Apostolic Church of Rome and at the same time will work out with her precisely what is required for them to enter into communion with the Antiochian Orthodox Church.

7. They commend the efforts that the ecumenical leaders of our Church have made, especially Archbishop Elias Zoghby, who has been laboring for this more than twenty years. They thank the members of the Joint International Theological Commission for their accomplishments, and ask them to continue the dialog on this subject. The Fathers delegated the Synodal Ecumenical and Theological Commission to deeply research the ways of unification, and discuss its canonical and pastoral implications, and to hold joint conferences and conventions to include the faithful of both Churches on the path toward this unity.

8. Finally, they ask all their faithful to join in prayer that the holy will of God be fulfilled in all of us, and that the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ to His heavenly Father be accomplished: “that they may be one, just as we are one ... that the world may know that You have sent me” (John 17:21-23).

OUR ROLE IN THIS QUEST

The Melkite Synod’s request for the prayers of each of us (#7, above) is focussed on the divine will: “that the holy will of God be fulfilled in all of us”. As was mentioned above, Christian unity is very much the will of God. But the Synod is asking for more specific, more directed prayer. Their request is that we pray that God’s will (unity) “be fulfilled in all of us,” both our Melkite Greek Catholic Church and the Antiochian Greek Orthodox Church.

To pray wholeheartedly that the day come when our Antiochian Greek Churches can truly glorify God “with one mind and one heart,” we need to feel strongly – as Christ does – that disunity is against the divine will. As Churches, we need to recognize Christ’s longing for unity and to pray that our Churches come to feel that longing. We need to pray that our Churches feel the pain of disunity. It is only when we feel disunity as pain that we will be moved to heal it.

In his explanation of the Profession of Faith, Orthodox in Union? Yes! Uniate? No!, Archbishop Zoghby points out that the more involved we are with the Church, the more unmoved we seem to be by the disunity of our patriarchate. “For us the Latins are strangers, whom we love fraternally in Christ. The Orthodox, however, are our own cousins, our brothers by blood. We often live under the same roof... Our Eastern Catholic people seem to suffer even more than we hierarchs do from the schism which nothing can justify. When shall we, the pastors of these Churches, have also suffered enough from these divisions to put, finally, an end to it?”

While we can pray that the members of the various Commissions be responsive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we should also be praying that our own hearts and minds be cleansed of any negative sentiments or feelings of superiority to other Christians and that our bishops and priests be moved to pray for these intentions in every public liturgical service in our parishes and to make this movement towards Antiochian unity known throughout our community, that God’s will for our Church “be fulfilled in all of us.”
THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

In the course of history no symbol has expressed the mentality of Christians more faithfully than the cross. The cross is the concrete expression of the Christian mystery, victory through defeat, of glory through humiliation, of life through death. It is the symbol of a God who became man to die as a slave to save creatures. It is the symbol of a life that is not afraid to look to the height and breadth and depth of things because in every direction its arms remain outstretched.

It is interesting to note that long before Christ the symbol of the cross was held in high esteem and venerated by many pagan cultures as a sacred sign of the stability and the integrity of the universe, pointing to the four directions of the compass and gathering to itself the entire cosmos. More amazing still, this ancient symbol would in the "fullness of time" become the instrument of redemption and the means of the glorification of the Son of Man; as St. John Chrysostorn says. "I call Him king because I see Him crucified: it belongs to the king to die for His subjects." Crucifixion, death, salvation, kingship, glory – the cross!

IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Because the pagan world could not and would not understand such a deep mystery, such "foolishness", the early Christians hesitated to use the cross openly as a sign of the new faith. When it did appear, it was usually disguised as an anchor or was intertwined amid vines. With the liberation of the Church from persecution under the Emperor Constantine, however, the cross slowly emerged as the sign of the Christians. Eusebius relates that the cross even supplanted the Roman eagles on the military standards: En touto nika (Gain the victory with this).

Despite their reticence to use the cross as a public symbol before the fourth century, the Christians did make wide use of it as early as the second and third centuries to sign themselves on the forehead. In the second century Tertullian reports: "In all our travels and movements, in all our coming in and going out... whatever employment occupies us, we mark our foreheads with the sign of the cross." In the fourth century St. Cyril of Jerusalem writes, "Let us not be ashamed to confess the Crucified. Let the cross be our seal, made with boldness by our fingers on our brow and in everything..."

By the sixth century in the East, probably due to the raging Monophysite heresy which denied the double nature of Christ as both God and man, two fingers began to be used to trace the sign of the cross, now no longer on the forehead but more boldly with a larger sign made on the body. The succeeding centuries saw further modifications emanate from Eastern tradition because of a desire to profess more explicitly the belief in the triune God and the double nature in Christ. The thumb and two fingers were extended to symbolize the Trinity while the ring finger and the little finger were folded back on the palm to profess the God/Man, Jesus Christ.

This newer usage also spread to the Western Church where we read Pope Leo IV writing in the middle of the ninth century instructing his clergy: "Sign the chalice and the host with a proper cross... with two fingers outstretched and the thumb hidden within them, by which the Trinity is symbolized. Take heed to make this sign rightly." In the thirteenth century Pope Innocent III directed most explicitly that the sign of the cross be made with three fingers from the forehead to the breast and from the right to the left shoulder, the actual way it still is made by the majority of Eastern Christians. The Western Church retained this ancient form till about the fourteenth century when gradually the open hand was introduced and the sign began to be made in an inverted fashion, from left to right, perhaps mistakenly following the lead of the priest who in blessing inverts his movement so it would be seen correctly by the congregation before him.

OUR PRESENT FORM

Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Catholics place great emphasis on the sign of the cross as a profession of faith in the three basic doctrines of Christianity: the Holy Trinity, the double nature in Christ and the mystery of redemption. This act of faith in the teachings of Christianity is also an act of consecration to God of all human activities: thoughts, affections, and actions.
The gesture is presently made by joining the fingers (thumb, index and middle finger together and erect; third and little finger down on the palm) and lifting the hand first to the forehead, then to the breast, to the right and then to the left shoulder. In the Scriptures right generally represents good and left evil, and in the Creed the Son is said to sit at the right hand of the Father, thus the signing of the right shoulder first. Eastern Christians sign themselves often especially at every mention of the name of the Holy Trinity and in conjunction with the metany or bow made to reverence holy things such as the altar or an icon.

The sign of the Cross is a symbol of faith, a sign that shall be contradicted, a standard to lead on toward final victory as St. John of Damascus teaches: “For wherever the sign shall be, there also shall He be”.

**THE PRIESTLY BLESSING**

When a priest blesses with the sign of the cross, his hand is held in a posture meant to convey that the blessing is not from the priest himself but from Christ God. The fingers spell out “IC XC”, the first and last letters of the Greek for Jesus (IHCYOC) Christ (XPCTOC). “At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth” (Philippians 2:10).
THEOTOKOS: MOTHER OF GOD

Mary, the Mother of Jesus, was deeply steeped in the Bible and Jewish Tradition. So well was she versed in the Scriptures that the New Testament presents her as quoting and applying them in her everyday life: when she visited her cousin Elizabeth, and at the wedding in Cana. But this humble woman who pondered the Scriptures is quite often misunderstood. We shall try to answer questions about Mary using the Bible as meditated upon by the Church in Tradition.

MOTHER OF GOD (THEOTOKOS)

The first one to call Mary this was her cousin Elizabeth when she asked, “Why should I be honored with a visit from the mother of my Lord?” (Luke 1:43). The Greek word for “Lord” was the common word used to mean God. When we say that Mary is the Mother of God we do not, of course, mean that she existed before God, the Holy Trinity, but that she is the mother of Jesus. The apostle John teaches us that the Word who is God was made flesh. This is Jesus born of Mary. If Jesus is God made flesh and Mary is truly His mother, then she deserves the title Mother of God. As a title this term dates back to the 200’s. It was used as a defense of Christ’s divinity at the Council of Ephesus in 431.

EVER-VIRGIN

Many ask why Mary should be called ever-virgin when “Jesus had brothers and sisters” (cf. Matthew 13:55). The Aramaic language spoken at Jesus’ time used the word “brother” for “relative.” Eastern Christians understood that James, the “brother of the Lord” (cf. Galatians 1:19), was Joseph’s son from his first wife and the others mentioned may have been cousins, nephews, etc.

The Tradition of the Church has stated that Mary is both physically and spiritually pure and immaculate. Mary was consecrated to God in a very special way, and so she offered her perpetual virginity to God as a gift. After bearing God in her womb she would not allow herself to be known by another. Her virginity is actually spiritual purity manifested in an everlasting physical way: Mary’s first husband is the Lord God.

IMMACULATE

The Virgin Mary was begotten for a unique purpose – to bear God’s seed within her. She was predestined to be the Bride of God in a unique way. Because Mary bore Jesus, the Wisdom of God, in her body she had to be sinless. As it is written, “No, Wisdom will never make its way into a crafty soul nor stay in a body that is in debt to sin...” (Wisdom 1:4). Her sinlessness is due to God’s prerogative and her free, grace-sustained cooperation.

It is only by God’s saving grace that one can be preserved from sin. Just like us, Mary needs God as her Savior and Lord. We believe that Mary freely and fully cooperated with God’s saving grace. A special grace was given her and she participates fully in this grace.

This is why Christian Tradition has long considered Mary as a model of the Church, which Paul says is to be “… holy and immaculate, without spot or wrinkle or anything of that sort” (Ephesians 5:27). The earliest extant writing that describes Mary is this way is from St. Ephrem the Syrian about AD 370, but the belief is indirectly stated as early as 150.

ASSUMED INTO HEAVEN

It is through Tradition that we believe Mary was taken up into heaven. This belief is traceable to the 400’s, when Mary was looked to as a sign of the promise that at Christ’s coming we will all be caught up into heaven (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

This should not appear so impossible. The Bible states that Enoch and Elias were taken into heaven. Enoch walked with God in purity of heart (cf. Genesis 5:24). In Sirach it is written, “Enoch pleased the Lord and was taken up, an example for the conversion of all generations” (Sirach 44:16). In the same way Mary’s place in glory stands as an example and promise to us.

“FULL OF GRACE”

When the Bible was translated into the Latin Vulgate (385), Luke 1:28 was rendered “full of grace”, although the Greek means “highly favored”. The English translations of our prayers have adopted the popular rendering, although we do not use the Latin Vulgate, because Mary can truly be said to be full of grace. All spiritual blessings have been given us in Christ (cf. Ephesians 1:3). Paul further states that the goal of the Christian is to be “… filled with the utter fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:19). Mary, carrying the Son of God in her womb, was definitely filled with this utter fullness, the fullness of grace which is a free gift.
We as Christians believe that "... there is only one mediator between God and mankind, Himself a man, Christ Jesus, who sacrificed Himself as a ransom for them all. He is the evidence of this, sent at the appointed time ..." (1 Timothy 2:5-7). But we also believe that this appointed time was bound up with a woman, Mary. The prophet Micah wrote concerning the Jewish people, "Yahweh is therefore going to abandon them till the time when she who is to give birth gives birth." (Micah 5:2)

This verse immediately follows the prophecy of Bethlehem as the Messiah's birthplace. Hence saving grace is directly tied to Mary, the woman who bore Jesus.

Mary is an instrument of salvation. She cooperated and worked with, but did not initiate, God's saving grace. Similarly when we are a channel of grace to someone, it does not detract from Christ, but flows from Him and builds up His Body. "We are God's co-workers..." (1 Corinthians 3:9) and God's work is salvation. Therefore, being united to Him, we share in the work of redemption. Mary shares in this work in a special way.

Mary is a powerful intercessor because of her deep union with the Holy Trinity. Her portion in life is the fullness of intimacy with God. God has chosen to use her in extraordinary ways.

From the beginning of the Church Mary has been seen as the Mother of us all by reason of our being members of Christ her Son. St. Justin the Philosopher (died 165) saw Mary as a model of the Church. He and later Fathers, such as St. Irenaeus, a disciple of St. Polycarp who was himself taught by the Apostle John, all saw Mary as the New Eve.

As Jesus is the New Adam, Lord of the New Creation (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:45-49), Mary is the New Eve who undid what the first Eve had done. The first Eve disobeyed God and brought sin and death into the world. The New Eve, Mary, believed God's message to her and obeyed, bringing salvation and life to the world in her Son Jesus, who crushes the head of the serpent. She is seen as a type of the Church just as Peter and Paul saw Sarah (cf. Galatians 4:21-31; 1 Peter 3:6).

The earliest existing witness of Christians asking Mary's intercession dates back to the 200's. As a matter of fact, the Nicene Creed which all Christians profess was heavily influenced by the creed delivered to St. Gregory the Wonderworker by the Virgin Mary around the year 260.

The Catholic and Orthodox Churches have thus always had a devotion to Mary, Mother of God, but some of the faithful have misunderstood her proper place, as they have misunderstood many other things. Mary is not divine: she can never be equal to God. She, like we, participates in the divine nature, though in a fuller and deeper way. Due to God's will and her free and loving cooperation, she is more intimately united to the divine nature. And so we honor her as the crown and fruit of creation found pleasing and acceptable to God.
VESPERS: THE PRAYER OF SUNSET

When I was a young boy – during the War years – we faithfully observed a little ritual in our home, not from a sense of piety, but to aid the war effort. We would not turn on the lights until five o'clock, “when it got dark”. In my child's mind this quickly became associated with the end of the day and the change of pace it brought. It became the signal for my mother to begin preparing supper, and it meant my father would soon be home from work.

Long before electricity, the lighting of the household lamps heralded the evening. In the Book of Exodus, chapter thirty, it is reported that God commanded Moses to see to it that seven lamps were lit in the Tabernacle between sunset and nightfall:

“…Aaron must burn fragrant incense each morning when he trims the lamps and between sunset and nightfall when he puts them back… You are to make these offerings of incense before the Lord without fail from one generation to the next.”

Early Christians, continuing a practice already long established among the pagans, would bless the evening light with a short prayer of praise. Soon they began to augment this very simple rite with a hymn and other prayers. But even when a regular routine of prayer was organized in the church building, the blessing of the evening light remained the pivot on which all the other ceremonial gestures revolved.

These early Christians made Psalm 140 their evening prayer, because of the phrase “Let the lifting of my hands be like an evening sacrifice.” Even to this day, the recitation of Psalm 140 is an integral part of vespers, the evening service of prayer. The other phrase of the opening verses, “Let my prayer rise like incense before You…”, probably urged them to restore the lapsed rite of burning fragrant spices. The first gentile Christians had disdained the use of incense because it was so intimately connected with pagan rituals, but as the acute danger of idolatry began to subside, the study of Scripture moved them to restore the use of incense as an act of worship, since it is written in Exodus that this oblation is a “perpetual ordinance”.

VESPERs TODAY

Today the Horologion, the book of official daily prayers for use in Church, preserves these elements. In the course of time, other elements were added, notably a portion of Scripture, especially on those days when one would expect the whole body of the faithful to assemble, such as the greater feasts or special fast days. Other psalms were also added, some read quietly for the congregation to reflect upon and others chanted by the cantor with the people singing a refrain (prokimenon). To prepare everyone for the service, an introductory psalm was added at the very beginning. Today that is Psalm 103, which speaks of the rhythm of the day: man going out to work in the morning and returning in the evening. And to express the intercessions of the entire community, a set of petitions was added at the end, in which the deacon led the people in prayer for their various needs. Originally there was only one such litany and it was found toward the end of the service. Today this set of petitions has been divided up and there are now at least three litanies in vespers.

Yet more important than the structure or the historical evolution of the service is the spiritual message it conveys. The coming of physical darkness reminds us that the influence of darkness is ever ready to engulf us, and only the light that is Christ can reveal its tricks and expose its frauds. Christ is – and must always be – the light in our lives.

The Scripture itself teaches us the meaning of the incense. It reports in the sixteenth chapter or the Book of Numbers that a plague broke out among the Jews when they grumbled against the Lord. Aaron, the high priest, took a censer and “performed the rite of atonement over them and the plague was checked.” The incense also reminds us of the pillar of fire, seen as a column of cloud by day, which was the mysterious vehicle of God's presence while the Israelites were wandering in the desert. It is also said that the incense represents the Holy Spirit, who, as the Book of Genesis relates, was hovering over the void at the beginning of creation, ready to bring forth life.
IN THE DOMESTIC CHURCH

Perhaps we cannot always attend these evening prayers in church, but there is no reason why we cannot observe our ancient traditions at home. Before the holy icons we ought to have an oil lamp or a candle burning. Each evening this lamp could be lit with the whole family present, perhaps before or after dinner. The family could recite the first verses of Psalm 140, perhaps sing the evening hymn, *O Joyful Light*, or use some other suitable prayers. A grain or two of incense might be offered. Small burners and proper size charcoals for this purpose are usually available in shops that serve the religious or domestic needs of our people. The sweet fragrance in the air might serve to remind the whole family of the presence of God, and to promote peace and tranquility in the household.

PRAYERS FROM VESPERS

At nightfall, dawn and noon we sing to You, we bless you, we give thanks to You and we beseech You, O Master of all and Lover of mankind, guide our prayers aright as an offering of incense before You. Let not our hearts be led to words or thoughts of wickedness, but save us from all those who pursue our souls. For all glory, honor and worship are Your due – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – now and always and forever and ever. Amen.

*O Joyful Light of the holy glory of the Father immortal: heavenly, holy, blessed Lord Jesus Christ!* Since we have come to the setting of the sun and have seen the evening light, we praise God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is proper for You to be praised at all times by fitting melodies, O Son of God, giver of life. Therefore all the world glorifies You!

Deign, O Lord, to keep us this evening without sin. Blessed are You, O Lord, God of our fathers – praised and glorified is Your name forever. Amen. O Lord, let Your mercy rest upon us for we have placed our trust in You. Blessed are You, O Lord, teach me Your statutes. Blessed are You, O Master, grant that I may understand Your statutes. Blessed are You, O Holy One, enlighten me with Your statutes. Everlasting is Your love, O Lord, turn not away from the work of Your hands. Indeed, praise, adoration and glory are Your due – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – now and always and forever and ever. Amen.

Now You shall dismiss Your servant, O Lord, according to Your word in peace; because my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared before the face of all peoples: a light to the revelation of the Gentiles and the glory of Your people Israel.
WALKING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

WHEN THE LORD JESUS WAS ASKED which commandment was the first, He replied that the first is to love God with your whole being. But He immediately added a second – inseparable from the first – to love your neighbor as yourself. His questioner agreed, adding that to live this way “is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices” (Mark 12:28-34).

In this Jesus was saying nothing new – He was expressing the teaching of the Torah – but legalists often tried to restrict the meaning of neighbor to mean people like us. Jesus’ response was the parable of the Good Samaritan where the true neighbor turns out to be, not the priest or the Levite, but the despised heretic. We are to love all those whom God loves: in short, everyone.

Inevitably touched by the spirit of our age, we may see Jesus’ insistence on love in the light of 1960’s “flower power.” The Scriptures’ picture of love calls for much more than good feelings. In his epistle to the Romans, for example, St Paul outlines some concrete ways to love, giving us his image of a righteous believer:

“Let love be sincere. Hate what is evil, hold on to what is good. Love one another with mutual affection and anticipate one another in showing honor. Do not grow slack in zeal but be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, and persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints; exercise hospitality. “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Have the same regard for one another; do not be haughty but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. Do not repay anyone evil for evil; be concerned for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, on your part, live at peace with all. … Do not be overcome by evil but conquer evil with good.” (Romans 12:9-21)

St Paul continues by urging support for the state “Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs are due, obedience to whom obedience is due, honor to whom honor is due” (Romans 13:7). He urges that we go beyond correct behavior in concern for the weak. “We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please our neighbor for his good, that he may be edified.” (Romans 15:1-2)

RELATING TO THE SOCIETY IN WHICH WE LIVE

St Paul’s summary speaks to us of several levels of relationships, reflecting the life of a godly person in the world. In terms of the wider society the godly strive to live in harmony with the images of God around them, allowing Christ’s way to inform their interactions. “Do not repay anyone evil for evil; be concerned for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, on your part, live at peace with all” overcoming evil, not with even more evil, but with good.

When others will not live amicably with us, then we are told to “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.” We are given the examples of Christ on the cross, of St. Stephen and the martyrs of all ages, and of so many who prayed for their Communist oppressors or who today intercede for Islamic extremists.

The godly believer respects the state and fulfills the obligations of citizenship which in our society includes more than paying taxes and customs.

All believers are called to pray for our public servants and our armed forces that they may exercise their responsibilities in righteousness. As we pray in the Liturgy of St. Basil, “Preserve the good in their goodness, and through Your own goodness make the evil become good.” While we are to respect and honor all mankind, we are not to accept their values when they run counter to godliness. Because something is generally accepted in society (“Everybody’s doing it.”) does not mean that it is acceptable in God’s sight. Rather we are told to “Hate what is evil, hold on to what is good.” Believers of every age have had to deepen their knowledge of the Gospel to be able to discern what should be affirmed in the culture around them and what must be resisted.

RELATING TO THE CHURCH

In terms of the Church the godly person relates to other believers in a more intense way than to the wider society at large. We are called to “Love one another with mutual affection.” We should expect our relationships among fellow Christians to be deeper than those among fellow workers, students or others with whom we do not share at the Eucharistic Table. St Paul would have us outdo one another in showing honor – not simply by words but deeds. We are urged to “Contribute to the needs of the saints” and to “exercise hospitality” to believers who may come into our life.
We are always faced with the temptation to prefer some believers over others because of their ethnicity or economic status. To us then St Paul insists, “Have the same regard for one another; do not be haughty but associate with the lowly.”

Disagreement on political or religious matters is another frequent cause of disunity in the Church. In such cases St Paul’s warning, “Do not be wise in your own estimation” may be a welcome reminder for mutual love. Rather “We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak.” Sometimes it is more important to be together than to be right.

In terms of our relationship with God St Paul emphasizes perseverance. “Do not grow slack in zeal, but be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, and persevere in prayer.” There is a cycle in our liturgical and prayer life, yet there is also repetitiveness, reflecting that we are, after all, always repentant sinners before our Creator and Redeemer. The basic text of the Jesus Prayer, repeated over and over, is the symbol of this quality to our prayer life that may come to mind.

Yet we know that life’s hardships and simply the changing circumstances of our lives can affect our zeal for the Christian life and even our hope in the Lord. Godly believers are called to be steadfast in prayer—not that God needs to be convinced of our sincerity, but that we need to become people of prayer in everything that life brings us. Again St. Paul gives us our cue: “Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in all circumstances for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1Thessalonians 5:16-18).

The godly believer, therefore, is to be honest, ethical, trustworthy, and innocent in dealing with those around them: in short, to reflect Christ’s love for the world.

The godly believer is to be committed to prayer, unswerving in belief and steadfast in faith before God.

The godly believer is to be dedicated to the community of the faithful, both locally in the parish and beyond in the wider Church, the Body of Christ.
WELCOME TO THIS HOLY HOUSE

We learn much about people from being in their homes, and we can learn about the Eastern Christian community by seeing the place where they express their relationship to God and to each other. The church building, then, helps us 'see' the Church. It reveals the very nature and meaning of what the Church is: a communion of God and His people.

- The Narthex (entrance hall) symbolizes the call to repent, to continually change our ways, to live a new life. It is decorated with icons (images) of the Old Testament prophets who prepared the Jews to encounter God in Jesus Christ. On entering the narthex we recall the need to prepare ourselves to meet the Lord. This is also the place where people are received into the Church through Baptism and Chrismation and enter into a relationship with God and His people.

- The Nave (body of the church) symbolizes the body of believers. Here the people gather for worship. They are surrounded by icons on the walls of saints of past ages. This reminds us that we are one with all the believers of every age who make up the Body of Christ.

- The Holy Place (altar area) represents the glory of God. The Holy Table at its center represents the throne of God. As such it is covered with rich fabrics, representing the Lord clothed with majesty (cf. Psalm 92).

- Heaven and earth are joined by Jesus Christ. This is represented in a Byzantine church by the Icon Screen which joins the Holy Place to the body of the church. Adorned with images of Christ and those central to the mystery of His coming, the screen reminds us that only through Him do we have access to God.
The Pantokrator, the main icon in a Byzantine church is that of Christ the All-powerful which dominates the assembly. It represents Christ as He is now, “seated at the right hand of the Father, whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead” (Nicene Creed). This reminds us that Christ is the Head of our Church, the One Who presides at our worship and through Whom we live.

**Icons** – These images are the distinctive art form of the Christian East. The brightness of their colors is meant to suggest the radiance of the divine life while the simplicity of their lines represents the tranquility of one who rests in God. They are not simply decorations, but proclaim the nature of the Church and the life of grace to which we are called.

**Icon Stands** – Here icons of special importance to the local community are placed, such as the representations of the holyday scenes. Believers honor the presence or events by kissing these icons and lighting candles before them.

**Incense** – Perfumed incense is burned during services to recall the cloud which covered the Israelites in the desert (cf. Exodus 13), symbolizing the presence of God. As we see ourselves enveloped in the clouds of incense, we recall that we are in God’s presence.

**The Eternal Light** – This is a lamp always kept burning before the Holy Place to represent the never-ending presence of God.

**Ripidia** – These circular images, placed on either side of the Holy Table, are inscribed with icons of the cherubim (angels). Similar to images used since the time of Moses (cf. Exodus 25) they remind us that the Holy Table is truly the throne of God.

The last three items mentioned are drawn from the customs of the Jewish Temple as recorded in the Old Testament. Several other items in Byzantine churches recall the Old Testament as well. Behind the Holy Table we see a Sevenbranched Candlestick, on the Table is an Ark (cf. Exodus 25) in which rests – not the Ten Commandments of the Old Covenant – but Christ’s Body and Blood of the New Covenant. All these items remind us that the New Covenant of Christ completes and fulfills the Old.

The unity and mutual love we proclaim in our churches must be expressed in our daily life; otherwise it is only pretense. The is why we have a Fellowship Room where we can share with people of our community what we have professed before the Holy Altar.

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May we all discover in our own lives the Divine Plan for us which our church building expresses in physical form.
WHAT EASTERN CHRISTIANS BELIEVE

The mystery that God is with us is a fact in our lives. His presence has been experienced by people from the beginning right to our own day. People have reflected on this mystery and tried to express it in words: what we call theology. Some of these teachings have been recognized by the Church as authentic reflections of its experience of God. These are the doctrines of the Church, which serve much like route markers for us, keeping us along the right road to God. Chief of these are those summarized below: the core teachings of our Church.

THE MYSTERY OF GOD

God’s inner life is unknowable, because it is beyond our capacity to understand. He is the Holy One: so unique and perfect that He cannot be compared with others. Using our own reasoning we can only assume that He is the most excellent perfection of everything we know to be holy, true, good and beautiful. But how he is we do not know, because He is beyond all our experience, even beyond existence as we know it. As the Divine Liturgy expresses it, He is “beyond our grasp or understanding, beyond sight or comprehension.”

“We should certainly avoid too human an image of God, as someone sitting on a throne with his feet on a footstool. His throne and footstool are His infinite omni-potence which embraces everything in the hollow of His hand. The imagery borrowed from created things signifies that God exists in them and outside them, that He both transcends and pervades them, that He surpasses all creatures and yet dwells in them.”

(St. Hilary of Poitiers, The Trinity)

GOD REVEALS HIMSELF

God, who is so far beyond us, has reached out to us, revealing to us something of Himself. Everyone can look about and see in the wonders of nature the Creator, whose very Word causes them to be. More especially we catch a glimpse of Him by looking at people, made in His image and likeness. But we get our clearest picture of God because He has directly communicated himself to us in what we call Divine Revelation.

He has freely opened himself to us so that we may share in His divine life. Forming a people, Israel, God dealt with them through judges and kings, priests and prophets. He fed them, protected them, liberated them, loved them, corrected, punished and forgave them. He taught them that He alone is God, compassionate and true to His promises. He showed himself, not only as the Holy One, but as our Father as well.

GOD ACTS IN CHRIST

These signs of God’s presence and revelations of His love find their climax in the coming of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, into the world. “God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him may not die, but may have eternal life” (John 3:16). The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the supreme expression of God’s revelation to us. In Christ we see God as the Lover of mankind, emptying Himself for us. We see Him as the victorious Lord, trampling upon Death and giving life to those in the tomb of separation from God. We see Him as the King of Glory, fully alive and in union with His Father — the definitive and irrevocable communication of God to us.

THE HOLY SPIRIT: GOD WITH US

At the close of His earthly ministry Christ promised His followers that He would send them another in His place who would be with them forever: “the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father” (John 15:26). This Spirit came upon the Church at Pentecost and remains with us as the seal and Guarantee of the Kingdom to come, the power of God working among us. It is the Holy Spirit who “provides every gift. He is the One who inspires prophecy and perfects the priesthood: it is He who grants wisdom to the illiterate and turns simple fishermen into wise theologians. Through Him divine order comes into the organization of the Church.” (Vesper Hymn for Pentecost).

THE HOLY TRINITY

And so God the Unknowable has reached out to us in love, revealing Himself in the process as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Thus mankind’s deepest experience God has shown us something of the Living Reality of God which we could never have discovered on our own. We see that God is One, and yet at the same time Three. He is one in essence and being, one in activity and power, but three in person. The Fathers of the Church described this mystery as the Holy Trinity, the sacred community calling us to share in the riches of God-life. They recognized that, by God revealing Himself in this way, we have been given a glance at the very nature of the Unknowable One, so that we might desire fellowship with Him.

THE CHURCH

His fellowship with the Holy Trinity comes to us in the Church, the assembly of those whom God has called to be His people. While the Holy Spirit is the continuation of Christ’s divine presence among us, the Church is His Body: the extension of His physical presence in the world. The Church is thus the Temple of God in which the Spirit dwells, as the human body is the dwelling place of the human spirit.

“The communion in the Holy Spirit,” the fellowship He builds which joins us to God in a divine community. Our mission as Church, our purpose for being is “to proclaim the wonderful acts of God” (1 Peter 2:9): to be a witness of God’s revealing love to all mankind. As members of the Church
we are part of Christ's Body, inseparably joined in Him to the Trinity, the living stones which make up God's temple. In this is our life.

**THE HOLY MYSTERIES**

We take this life through many ways. Most ways in which the Spirit enlivens us are the holy mysteries or sacraments. A mystery is a prayer of the Church in which we ask the Lord to transform a natural situation into a vehicle of His saving grace: a prayer which, because it is made in His Body's name, is unfailingly answered. Thus water and the re-enacting of Christ's death and resurrection become a way of entering into an intimate relationship with Christ (*baptism*). In the same way, invoking the Holy Spirit over bread and wine enables us to achieve a physical union with Him in His Body (*Eucharist*). Through all the mysteries and the Church's other prayers of blessing, every aspect of our life can be transformed and set apart as a means of praise to the One who calls us to share His life.

“...Go to Him and drink, for He is the spring. Go to Him and be enlightened, for where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”

(St Ambrose of Milan, Commentary on Psalm 118)

**THEOSIS**

The greatest gift of God to us is the gift of sharing His life. We have been made "part-takers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4); a process begun in us at our christening. When we live a life of faith, this relationship is deepened, furthering the process of our divinization or theosis. This movement continues in us through life and death and will not be complete until the resurrection of all mankind on the last day. Then our risen bodies as well as our spirits will share in the resurrection life and partake in glory. "We know we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

**THE THEOTOKOS**

In our worship special honor is continually given to the Virgin Mary. This is not simply a matter of pious devotion, in honoring her as Theotokos (Mother of God) the Church is affirming two basic aspects of Christian faith: a) that the Jesus whom she bore is truly the Son of God incarnate, dwelling in our midst as true man; and b) that the journey of theosis which was opened to us through her assent to Gabriel's message (cf. Luke 1:26-38) has been realized in her person. "...for this all ages to come shall call me blessed" (Luke 1:48). Thus it is that we place the icon of the Theotokos containing Christ in her womb on the eastern wall of our churches. This image, placed as it were between heaven and earth, recalls that it is through the Theotokos that God and mankind are joined in Christ.

**EXPERIENCING GOD'S REVELATION**

We have been brought to experience God's self revelation and to become sharers in His very nature. This is our glory and our joy. This is also the core of the Christian message, the Good News we proclaim at our christening and re-affirm whenever we confess the Nicene Creed. This is the heart of our faith and the source of our confident assurance and trust in God who will complete what He has begun in us as He leads us to an ever greater intimacy with Him.
WHAT IS AN EASTERN CHURCH?

The Christian Church was born in the Holy Land, what we call the Middle East today. As it spread, the Church took on the ways of the nations which accepted it. In this country, most Christian churches are ‘western’ because their roots are in western Europe, and their ways reflect the culture of the German, Irish or Italian immigrants who founded them.

Some American churches, including ours, were started by people from Eastern Europe or the Middle East. They still keep the ways of the Holy Land: Jerusalem, where Christ founded His Church; Antioch, where the name ‘Christian’ was first used; Damascus, where Saint Paul was converted. Because our ways reflect this Eastern culture, we are called ‘Eastern’ Churches.

At the time of the early Church, there were several rich cultures in the Middle East and each of them has given rise to a different church tradition. The traditions of this church reflect the Greek or Byzantine culture, and so we are called Greek Catholics or Byzantine Catholics (from Byzantium, the ancient name for Constantinople).

Greek Catholics in the Middle East were also nicknamed ‘Melkite’, because they followed the faith of the Byzantine emperor, or ‘melek’.

WHAT IS DISTINCTIVE ABOUT OUR TRADITION?

As Eastern Christians we have a particular style of Christian living all our own. We especially stress:

- A belief in our call to be divinized
- Union with God through the Holy Mysteries
- A ‘public’ life of worship, fellowship and service
- A ‘secret’ life of prayer, fasting and sharing
- The need for ‘spiritual warfare’.

Our most important belief is that we are called “to become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4), not just to be ‘saved’ from sin. We see ourselves as invited to live the very life of God, to become intimately related to God, to be physically united to Christ and to have the Holy Spirit dwell within us! The Church Fathers saw this as the reason for Christ’s coming: “God became man so that man might become God” (St. Athanasius).

This relationship comes about when we receive in faith the Holy Mysteries (what western Churches call sacraments). In Baptism we are made one with Christ as we reenact His burial and resurrection. This reliving takes place when we are buried (immersed) into the water and are raised from it. We immediately receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, “the first of God’s gifts” (Romans 8:23) in Chrismation (Confirmation). In receiving the Eucharist, we recognize that our mortal bodies are united to the Body and Blood of Christ as a token of the life to come, when they shall be united to Him in glory forever. Thus we see these Mysteries, not merely as pious devotions, but as encounters with God, actually producing the effects they symbolize.

As members of God’s family, we belong to one another, and so we live an active Community Life as Church. Most importantly, we join one another in worship. Our style of worship in the Eastern Churches reflects the presence of the risen Christ among us in glory and joy. All the senses take part in our worship to express this glory. We see icons, vestments, candles; we smell incense and perfumes; we hear continual singing; we taste blessed foods and use physical gestures such as bowing, prostrating and crossing ourselves to express our wonder at the glory of God.

Another important aspect of our community life is our Joy in Each Other’s Company, expressed in the frequent meals and social times we share. Finally, we open ourselves to Support One Another in the trials of daily life. In this way the unity we celebrate at the Eucharist is lived out day by day.

Besides this public Christian life, the Eastern Churches also stress a Personal Spiritual Life “in secret, so that your Father, who sees all in secret, will reward you” (Matthew 6:6). Chief of these is Personal Prayer in the silence of our own hearts, where we can speak honestly with God. Thus one of the most popular prayers in the Christian East is the so called ‘Jesus Prayer’, which sums up our need for God’s love: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner”.

In addition, Eastern Christians are called to Fast and to Share Their Goods in secret as Jesus commanded (cf. Matthew 6:1-8). By refusing to gratify ourselves endlessly whenever we want, we reflect our need to continue our conversion day by day.

Though we are called to be divinized, we realize that this process is long: “The gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life” (Matthew 7:14). The most difficult obstacle to our growth is the weakness and brokenness of our personalities. This is why the Eastern
Churches call on their members to engage in a Spiritual Warfare in the arena of their hearts, learning to subject their weaknesses to the divinizing power of the Holy Spirit working within them. Eastern Christians are urged to conduct this warfare with the help of a Spiritual Guide. Counseling, then, is not something for those with problems, but for all of us who seek to grow in our relationship with God.

All these beliefs and practices date from the earliest days of Christianity in the Holy Land. By continuing to observe them, we maintain a living connection with the early Church. We cherish our Tradition as a continuous stream flowing from the first Christians to us under the guidance of the Holy Spirit: truly the 'old time religion' in a new land.

THE EASTERN CHURCHES TODAY

The Eastern Churches today belong to several different traditions and communions. The Catholic Communion embraces all the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. The Eastern Orthodox Churches (Greek, Russian, Antiochian, etc.) form a second communion following the Byzantine rite and acknowledging the seven ecumenical councils of the first millennium. The Oriental Orthodox Churches of the Armenian, Coptic, and Syriac traditions make up a third communion, acknowledging only three ecumenical councils. The Church of the East has not been in communion with any of these Churches since the fifth century, but has a fraternal relationship with the Catholic Churches, particularly the Chaldean Church. We can also group these Churches according to their spiritual and liturgical traditions:

- **Alexandrian Tradition:**
  - The Coptic Orthodox Church, Patriarchate of Alexandria
  - The Coptic Catholic Church, Patriarchate of Alexandria
  - The Eritrean Orthodox Church
  - The Ethiopian Orthodox Church
  - The Ethiopian Catholic Church

- **Armenian Tradition:**
  - The Armenian Apostolic Church
  - The Armenian Catholic Church

- **Byzantine Tradition:**
  - The Eastern Orthodox Churches, with 14 autocephalous Churches and an equal number of autonomous Churches
  - The Byzantine Catholic Churches, with 5 autonomous (sui juris) Churches and 4 free-standing eparchial Churches

- **Antiochian (West Syrian) Tradition:**
  - The Syriac Orthodox Church
  - The Syriac Catholic Church
  - The Malankara Orthodox Church
  - The Syro-Malankara Catholic Church

- **East Syrian Tradition:**
  - The Assyrian Church of the East
  - The Chaldean Catholic Church
  - The Syro-Malabar Catholic Church
  - The Maronite Catholic Church (which draws on both East and West Syrian traditions)
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in worship, as follows:

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which means 'to bow in reverence'. This bow has been made a specifically Christian action in Byzantine practice by joining to it the sign of the cross, meant to straightjacket your piety, but rather to enable you to enter fully into our Eastern experience of the worship of the Lord.

In making a metany, bow from the waist while extending your right hand until your fingertips touch the ground; then rise and make the sign of the cross, saying the prayer “O God, be gracious to me, a sinner”.

In Byzantine practice worship is not a matter of doing it ourselves. Eastern Christians traditionally express their relationship with God by performing the metany and other gestures of worship whenever they pray at home or in the church building. Since these gestures are not common in Western religious or secular culture, the following guide is offered. It is not meant to straightjacket your piety, but rather to enable you to enter fully into our Eastern experience of the worship of the Lord.

In making a metany, bow from the waist while extending your right hand until your fingertips touch the ground; then rise and make the sign of the cross, saying the prayer “O God, be gracious to me, a sinner”.

BEGINNING THE SERVICE

Worshipping in the house of the Lord

ow lovely is Your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes it faints for the courts of the Lord: my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God!” (Psalm 83:2-3, LXX)

For Old Testament Jews the temple at Jerusalem, about which the above words were written, signaled the special relationship they had with God. The Lord, the only true God, had chosen them as His people and dwell in their midst in this temple.

For Christians the dwelling place of God is not a building. Rather it is the people of God itself, the Church community, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, the church building represents and makes visible for us this relationship we have with God. The design and iconography of the Byzantine church building in particular strives to represent in a visible way this relationship from God’s side, as it were. Surrounded by the saints (represented on the walls), under the headship of Christ (represented in the dome) and by virtue of His incarnation (represented by the icon screen), we have been brought to stand before the throne of God (represented by the Holy Table) to receive a share in His life.

Just as the design of the Church building recalls what God has done to bring us to intimacy with Him, what we do in that building signifies our side of the relationship. By our worship in the church we recognize God’s saving and forgiving love for us. We acknowledge that we owe Him our very lives and that we belong fully to Him, that it is to Him that we “commend ourselves, one another and our whole life”.

In the original Greek of the New Testament the word worship is proskineo, which means ‘to bow in reverence’. It is a physical action, drawn from the ceremonial of royal courts, meant to express the attitude of our hearts before the King of all. This connection has been maintained in the Eastern Churches where to worship still means to bow down before the Lord. This bow has been made a specifically Christian action in Byzantine practice by joining to it the sign of the cross. This action, a deep bow coupled with the sign of the cross, is the distinctive action of Byzantine worship which we call the metany. Used continually in both private and liturgical worship, it expresses our dependence upon God’s saving love and our confident assurance that He continually bestows it.

Whether or not a service is in progress, refrain from all unnecessary conversation in the nave of the church. People who come early to church generally do so for moments of spiritual preparation. If you wish to hold a conversation with someone before the service, please go to the narthex, the hall, or outside to do it.

DURING THE SERVICE

The opening doxology of any prayer or service:

Whenever the Holy Trinity is glorified by name:

Whenever we are blessed by a sacred object, such as the cross, the Holy Gospel, the chalice or an icon:

Whenever any of these sacred objects is carried before us in procession:

In some churches, whenever we are blessed or incensed:

In some churches, whenever we wish to intensify our prayer by an expression of personal fervor (e.g., when saying “I believe...” or personalizing the petition of a litany):

At the Divine Liturgy, after the words of Christ (“Take, eat... take, drink...”) are said.

Besides its use on first entering the church, the metany is also frequently employed in worship, as follows:

Whenever invited to by the clergy (e.g., “Come let us worship and bow down...”):

Each time the trisagion (“Holy God, holy mighty One...”) is said:

After the reading of psalms, at the words “Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia: glory to You, O God!”:

Whenever we approach to receive Communion, or to receive or venerate a sacred object:

After the epiclesis (invocation of the Holy Spirit) at the Divine Liturgy.

ENTERING THE CHURCH

Worshipping in the house of the Lord

In most churches one or more icons are placed in the narthex or vestibule, the place of preparation, then proceed into the nave. In many churches the narthex contains one or more tables where candles may be obtained and the offerings collected. In addition to monetary offerings, it is customary in many places for people to offer the consumables used in the divine services: holy bread, wine, oil or incense.

It is also the practice in some churches to record prayer intentions at a table in the narthex. People write the names of those for whom they wish prayer in a book or on pieces of paper which are given to the clergy for veneration.

In making a metany, bow from the waist while extending your right hand until your fingertips touch the ground; then rise and make the sign of the cross, saying the prayer “O God, be gracious to me, a sinner”.

In most churches one or more icons are placed in the narthex, at the door of the nave, or in the middle of the church for veneration. The most customary manner of reverencing an icon is as follows: make one or two metanies then kiss the icon and then make a final metany, place your candle in the stand and move away. It is the custom in many places to kiss the feet on an icon of Christ, the hands on an icon of the Theotokos, and the forehead on the icon of a saint.

It is customary to make three metanies on first entering the nave of the church to reverence the presence of God before venerating other icons or going to your place.

The opening doxology of any prayer or service:

Whenever the Holy Trinity is glorified by name:

Whenever we are blessed by a sacred object, such as the cross, the Holy Gospel, the chalice or an icon:

Whenever any of these sacred objects is carried before us in procession:

In some churches, whenever we are blessed or incensed:

In some churches, whenever we wish to intensify our prayer by an expression of personal fervor (e.g., when saying “I believe...” or personalizing the petition of a litany):

At the Divine Liturgy, after the words of Christ (“Take, eat... take, drink...”) are said.

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Each time the trisagion (“Holy God, holy mighty One...”) is said:

After the reading of psalms, at the words “Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia: glory to You, O God!”:

Whenever we approach to receive Communion, or to receive or venerate a sacred object:

After the epiclesis (invocation of the Holy Spirit) at the Divine Liturgy.
Another gesture frequently employed is praying with raised hands. Often mentioned in Scripture, this has remained the most characteristic prayer posture in all religions of the Middle East. It is most generally used in our Church’s worship whenever the Lord’s Prayer is recited. At the Divine Liturgy in some churches people also raise their hands at the words “We lift them up to the Lord” before the anaphora.

Entrances or processions are frequently held in Byzantine worship, bringing the Gospel Book, the holy gifts, or icons into the midst of the congregation. As mentioned above, it is customary to make the sign of the cross when these objects are carried past us. In some places people may reach out and touch the object or the garment of the priest carrying it as well. It is generally the custom to turn and face the procession as it passes, so as not to turn our backs on the liturgical rite.

Frequently whenever the Holy Gospel is read, some worshippers will come forward to stand under the sacred book as a sign of devotion. In some churches the Gospel Book is presented to these people for veneration after the reading.

RECEIVING COMMUNION

It is folly not to approach Holy Communion with great awe, purified by prayer and fasting according to our ability (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:26-31).

At the time of Communion, we come forward with the right hand crossed over the left and held to the breast. While the person in front of you is communicating, make one or two metanies. If the priest does not know you by name, mention it as you approach so that he can repeat it in the Communion formula. Then open your mouth widely and do not attempt to say anything else (amen, thank you, etc.) while the priest administers the holy mysteries to you.

In the Melkite Church Communion is generally given by intinction: the holy bread is dipped into the chalice and placed in your mouth. The mouth must be fully open; the tongue may be extended or not. Most Byzantine Churches administer Communion with a spoon. When receiving in this manner, the tongue should not be extended, nor should the communicant close his mouth until the spoon has been removed.

If the priest is carrying a communion cloth, wipe your lips with it after communicating, then step aside and again make a metany before going back to your place.

AFTER THE SERVICE

At the end of the Divine Liturgy it is customary for the priest to distribute the remainder of the holy bread which had not been consecrated. This bread, called antidoron, may be consumed at this time or taken home to be eaten during one’s private prayers or shared with a family member unable to come to church. It becomes a way of expressing our unity with the worshipping community even when we cannot attend the Liturgy.

After other services and, in some churches after the Liturgy as well, the holy cross or an icon may be presented for veneration. In either case, approach the priest, make one or two metanies, venerate the cross and/or receive the antidoron, and kiss the hand of the priest who gives it. Then step aside, make another metany and depart.