

Orthodox Etiquette

In the Orthodox Church there are many customs and traditions that are an important part of our worship. Some traditions and/or forms of etiquette are cultural and some are pious; some are essential and some are not. This is by no means a definitive listing, but merely a review of some of the customs that are an integral part of participation in the liturgical life of the church. For further questions, please ask Father Christoforos.

Attire

It is important to dress in a manner that is modest, appropriate and respectful. We must attend services dressed in a manner not to impress others, but to present ourselves to God. Our best judgment and vigilance is required.

Lighting Candles & Entering the Church

Lighting candles is an important expression in Orthodox worship services. We light them as we prayerfully enter the Church. When lighting a candle, the worshiper prays that his or her life will shine forth full of faith. Lighting a candle symbolically honours Christ and affirms one as His follower. The burning candle symbolizes the warmth and sincerity of our prayers. It is also a common practice to light a candle for someone in need, to honour a saint, or to commemorate a deceased loved one. When we enter, we should light a candle and then reverence the icons or Book of the Gospels which are presented in the Narthex by making the sign of the Cross and kissing them (this is a sign of spiritual love and respect, not the worship of an object). After paying reverence to the icon and lighting our candle in the Narthex,

parishioners should immediately and quietly enter the Nave of the church, in order to actively participate in the worship of the Lord our God.

Venerating Icons

When entering an Orthodox Church, it is customary for the worshiper to venerate the icons on stands in the narthex. The most common form of veneration is to light a candle, bow slightly while making the sign of the cross and kiss the icon before entering the Nave of the Church. The Orthodox Church draws a very clear line of distinction between venerating and worshiping icons. The worship of icons is idolatrous, whereas veneration is respect and reverence for the subject of the icon rather than the article itself.

Seating in the Church

Gathering together in the House of the Lord to worship Him and join together in prayer is such a privilege and joy that we must not fear to draw near to the Lord with our hearts, with our mind, and with our bodies. As the faithful children of God, we must never shy away from taking a position in the Church that is closest to the altar of our Heavenly Father by sitting in a pew farthest from the altar and leaving the front pews awkwardly empty. When entering the Church we must intentionally seek the available pew that is closest to the altar of the Lord our God in the front of the Church.

Commencement & Conclusion of Divine Services

Commencement of Services: The time to arrive for any sacred service is before the service is scheduled to begin. In other words, we should be seated in our pew before the commencement of a service. On Sunday

mornings, it is absolutely vital for faithful Orthodox Christians to be present from the beginning of the Divine Liturgy at 10:00am in order to be prayerfully prepared to hear the Word of the Lord proclaimed in the Epistle and Gospel readings and thus sufficiently ready to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. It is an absolutely important expression of our faith that we punctually and consistently attend the services of the Church. Such faithful action not only nourishes our own soul, but sends an important message to our children, visitors and inquirers alike. To our families with young children, all we can ask is to do your best. As our children become older, their behaviour and/or understanding will improve. We as a parish must show our patience as well to our youngest attendees!

Conclusion of Services: The impulse to leave the church and or 'step out early' during the course of a service is wrong. Every service of the Orthodox Church is replete with meaning and spiritual nourishment from beginning until the end. Just as coming late to a service of the Church is disruptive (such as when parishioners congregate throughout the parish facility to talk during the service and remain distinctly outside of the Sanctuary), so too is the act of leaving a service before its conclusion very disturbing to the worship of the Church. Out of respect and love for God and His Church, members of the Evangelismos family must strive not to arrive late or leave early.

Let Us Attend

During the course of any Church service we must always seek to maintain our prayerful focus, actively participate in the responses, and remain attentive, even when seated. In Orthodox cultures, crossing one's legs is considered very disrespectful. Therefore, crossing one's

legs in church is not permitted; not because it is wrong per se, but because it is too casual and relaxed for being inside the Church. During the course of services, the faithful should follow along, sing and rejoice in the presence of God. Finally, the faithful must wait until the Fellowship Hour to greet family and friends. It is not appropriate for people to have conversations during Divine services - even when they technically take place outside of the Sanctuary. When parishioners of the Annunciation come to Church, it is our overriding priority to speak to God through our collective prayers, hymns and thanksgiving; we must never make the Lord our God wait to hear from us.

Handling the Blessed Bread

Upon receiving Holy Communion and/or at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy, it is customary for all those who participated in the prayer of the Church to come forward to receive a piece of “blessed bread” as a sign of thanksgiving. While the bread that is distributed is not consecrated, it is blessed and as such, it should be consumed carefully and respectfully. Everyone that attends Divine Liturgy, Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike, may receive the blessed bread as an expression of love and Christian fellowship.

Proper Form of Addressing a Priest

The parish priest is sent by the bishop and the Church to be the spiritual father of the local community. At the behest of the bishop, the priest is the leader, the guardian and the teacher of the Orthodox Christian faith in a parish. As such, it is traditional for people to address him as “Father,” and kiss his right hand when greeting or receiving something

from him (especially during the course of any service). The tradition of kissing the priest's hand is a liturgical act through which we show respect for the priesthood in general and the sacramental life of the Church.

The Sign of the Cross

People usually put their initials or some other sign on things that they want to mark as their own. When we want to show that a thing belongs to Christ and is consecrated to Christ, we mark it with a cross. The cross is the sign of our Lord Jesus Christ, who came down to earth to suffer for us and was crucified on a cross for our salvation. Crosses are placed on church buildings, on Holy Bibles, on priestly vestments, etc. All Christians wear crosses because they all belong to Christ. In addition, on certain occasions we make the sign of the cross on ourselves because we want especially to remind ourselves that we belong to Christ.

How Do We Make the Sign of the Cross?

To make the Orthodox sign of the cross correctly, we place our thumb and the first two fingers of our right hand together to a point. This expresses our faith in the One God in Three Persons, the Holy Trinity: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The two remaining fingers are placed against our palm to show our belief in the two natures of Christ the Son of God: that He is both True God and True Man (man without sin). In making the sign of the cross, we first touch our forehead to make our mind and thoughts pure in order to understand the teachings of Christ. Then we touch our chest to make our heart holy and kind, and to fill our heart with love for Christ and for other people. Then we touch our right shoulder and then our left

shoulder so that we may receive from God spiritual and physical strength to do good works. We touch our right shoulder first in order to remind us that when Jesus Christ ascended into Heaven, He sat at the right hand of God in Heaven.

When we make the sign of the cross, we should make it carefully, reverently and earnestly, and should always bow our head slightly as a sign of humility and reverence.

When Do We Make the Sign of the Cross?

Quite often during the Divine Services of the Church as well as other times during the day we make the sign of the cross. We should make the sign of the cross:

1. Both upon entering the House of God and upon leaving it.
2. Every time the words, "The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit," are mentioned (The Holy Trinity).
3. When we hear or say the Trisagion, "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us" (Agios o Theos, etc).
4. When we hear the name of the Blessed Theotokos, the Virgin Mary and the names of the Saints.
5. Before and after receiving the Sacrament of Holy Communion.
6. At the end of the recitation of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer.
7. After the reading of the Holy Gospel.
8. When we kiss an icon, a cross or the Holy Gospel.
9. Before and after each meal.

10. Before and after our prayers and whenever we ourselves feel that **we should.**

How Many Times Should We Make the Sign of the Cross?

Preferably, we should make the sign of the cross three times. The three times symbolize the Holy Trinity and the three days that Christ was dead. However, we may make it only once, or as many times as we wish, provided that each time it is done with care, reverence, humility and in earnest.

General Church Etiquette

We do not enter or leave the Sanctuary when:

1. The Priest is facing the congregation.
2. The Priest censes the congregation.
3. During a Procession, the Small Entrance, when the Priest carries the Holy Gospel; or during the Great Entrance, when the Priest carries the Holy Gifts.
4. During the reading of the Epistle and the Gospel.
5. During the Sermon.