

ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

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O Come, let us Worship and bow down before our King and God.

O Come, let us worship and bow down before Christ, our King and God.

O Come, let us worship and bow down to Christ Himself, our King and God.

This invitation marks the beginning of each day for the Orthodox Church. It comes from the office of Vespers, and it expresses the attitude which is at the heart of Orthodoxy. The Worship of God - the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, - is fundamental to the life and spirit of the Orthodox Church.

Since Worship is so important to Orthodoxy, the best introduction to the Orthodox Church is for the non-Orthodox to attend the Divine Liturgy or the celebration of one of the major Sacraments. At first, the visitor may be overwhelmed by the music and the ceremonies, but it is in Worship that the distinctive flavor, rich traditions, and living faith of Orthodoxy are truly experienced.

DIMENSIONS OF WORSHIP

Worship is an experience which involved the entire Church. When each of us comes together for Worship, we do so as members of a Church which transcends the boundaries of society, of time and of space. Although we gather at a particular moment and at a particular place, our actions reach beyond the parish, into the very Kingdom of God. We worship in the company of both the living and the departed faithful.

There are two dimensions to Orthodox Worship which are reflected throughout the many Services of the Church. First, Worship is a manifestation of God's presence and action in the midst of His people. It is God who gathers His scattered people together, and it is He who reveals Himself as we enter into His presence. The Worship of the Orthodox Church very vividly expresses the truth that God dwells among His people and that we are created to share in His life.

Second, Worship is our corporate response of thanksgiving to the presence of God and a remembrance of His saving actions - especially the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Orthodox Worship is centered upon God. He has acted in history, and He continues to act through the Holy Spirit. We are mindful of His actions and we respond to His love with praise and thanksgiving. In so doing we come closer to God.

EXPRESSIONS OF WORSHIP

Worship in the Orthodox Church is expressed in four principal ways:

1. The **Eucharist**, which is the most important worship experience of Orthodoxy. Eucharist means *thanksgiving* and is known in the Orthodox Church as the Divine Liturgy.
2. The **Sacraments**, which affirm God's presence and action in the important events of our Christian lives. All the major Sacraments are closely related to the Eucharist. These are: Baptism, Chrismation, Confession, Marriage, Holy Orders, and Anointing of the sick.
3. **Special Services and Blessings**, which also affirm God's presence and action in all the events, needs and tasks of our life.
4. The **Daily Offices**, which are the services of public prayer which occur throughout the day. The most important are Matins, which is the morning prayer of the Church, and Vespers, which is the evening prayer of the Church.

CHARACTERISTICS

Although Orthodox Services can very often be elaborate, solemn, and lengthy, they express a deep and pervasive sense of joy. This mood is an expression of our belief in the Resurrection of Christ and the deification of humanity, which are dominant themes of Orthodox Worship. In order to enhance this feeling and to encourage full participation, Services are always sung or chanted.

Worship is not simply expressed in words. In addition to prayers, hymns, and scripture readings, there are a number of ceremonies, gestures, and processions. The Church makes rich use of non verbal symbols to express God's presence and our relationship to Him. Orthodoxy Worship involves the whole person; one's intellect, feelings, and senses.

Services in the Orthodox Church follow a prescribed order. There is a framework and design to our Worship. This is valuable in order to preserve its

corporate dimension and maintain a continuity with the past. The content of the Services is also set. There are unchanging elements; and there are parts which change according to the Feast, season, or particular circumstance. The regulating of the Services by the whole Church emphasizes the fact that Worship is an expression of the entire Church, and not a composition on a particular priest and congregation.

An important secondary purpose of Worship is the teaching of the Faith. There is a very close relationship between the Worship and the teaching of the Church. Faith is expressed in Worship, and Worship serves to strengthen and communicate Faith. As a consequence, the prayers, hymns, and liturgical gestures of Orthodoxy are important mediums of teaching. The regulating of the Services also serves to preserve the true Faith and to guard it against error.

The celebration of the Divine Liturgy and Sacraments is always led by an ordained clergyman. In the local parish, this will generally be a priest who acts in the name of the bishop, and who is sometimes assisted by a deacon. When the bishop is present, he presides at the Services. The vestments of the clergy express their special calling to the ministry as well as their particular office.

Since Worship in Orthodoxy is an expression of the entire Church, the active participation and involvement of the congregation is required. There are no "private" or "said" Services in the Orthodox Church and none may take place without the congregation. This strong sense of community is expressed in the prayers and exhortations which are in the plural tense. The congregation is expected to participate actively in the Services in ways such as singing the hymns; concluding the prayers with "Amen"; responding to the petitions; making the sign of the Cross; bowing; and, especially, by receiving Holy Communion at the Divine Liturgy. Standing is the preferred posture of prayer in the Orthodox Church. The congregation kneels only at particular solemn moments, such as the Invocation of the Holy Spirit during the Divine Liturgy.

The Litany is an important part of Orthodox Services. A litany is a dialogue between the priest or deacon and the congregation, which consists of a number of prayer-petitions, followed by the response "Lord, have mercy" or "Grant this, O Lord." Litanies occur frequently throughout the Services and often serve to distinguish particular sections.

Orthodox Worship has always been celebrated in the language of the people. There is no official or universal liturgical language. Often, two or more languages are used in the Services to accommodate the needs of the congregation. Throughout the world, Services are celebrated in more than twenty languages which include such diverse ones as Greek, Slavonic, Arabic, Albanian, Rumanian, English, and Japanese.

Orthodox Christian Worship

COME AND SEE...

All are welcome to worship with us at Ascension Greek Orthodox Cathedral. The Divine Liturgy is celebrated both in Greek and English each Sunday beginning at 10:00 am. For information on this or other topics of Orthodox Christianity, please call the Cathedral office at (510) 531-3400 or visit its website at www.ascensioncathedral.org

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