

Some straight answers about the Orthodox Church

Why haven't I heard of the Orthodox Church before?

Beats me! It's been around since the day of Pentecost. You probably haven't heard about it because we are a conservative Church that sounds no trumpets in our social programs but rather attempts to lead individuals, each in his or her own circumstances, into communion with God, the very purpose for which the Church exists. Believe it or not, there are perhaps three million of us in North America, and at least 150 million throughout the world.

Are you like the Catholics or the Protestants?

Well, the Orthodox Church is "catholic" in the fullest meaning of the word: "whole and not confined." But some 500 years before the reformation split western Europe into Protestant and Roman Catholic, Orthodox Christians protested against the Pope of Rome and his attempts to become supreme over the Church in the 11th century, as well as some doctrinal innovations. The Orthodox Church remains unchanged in doctrine and faith since the early Church of the Apostles (yes, we've been around that long.)

That's a pretty bold claim, isn't it?

It is a bold statement, but when you consider that Jesus Christ promised that he would found His Church and that it would endure unchanged in faith and practice, the gates of hell not prevailing until he came again, it's altogether refreshing (and confirms one's faith!)

Do you believe in the Bible?

No. We believe in God! We do, however, believe the Bible to be God's inspired word a part of the Tradition of the Church. (II Thessalonians, 2:15) In fact, it was the Church which gave us the Bible as we know it today! (You didn't think it just fell from heaven as we have it, did you?)

Why should I come to the Orthodox Church or any church for that matter?

Why should you go to work or school, "for that matter"? It is totally natural! As a child of God you must worship him in some way, somehow, with your Christian brothers and sisters. This is a scriptural teaching. The Orthodox Church offers the most meaningful and rich expression of faith and worship there is (you'd have to see it to believe it)! Why settle for less? (Another bold statement, right?)

I thought you had to be Greek or Russian to be Orthodox?

Come on, did you really believe that? the Orthodox Church is not a country club! The Kingdom of Heaven is "equal opportunity". You are welcome regardless of where your ancestors came from. You are also welcome to bring with you your national customs and culture. Just keep the Gospel of Jesus Christ first and foremost. The Orthodox Church adopts the culture and language of the country she finds herself in.

Do you have to confess your sins to a priest?

No. You confess your sins to God in the presence of a priest who will help you overcome them and proclaim God's forgiveness, as promised in Holy Scripture. If you choose, you may confess to the entire congregation, following the practice of the early Church. (Admitting that you have sins is the beginning of repentance - that's half the battle already!)

If I joined your Church, would I have to come to every service?

The only things we have to do in this world are to pay taxes and die! Coming to Church will give you a deduction for the former and prepare you for the latter. You come because you want to come, whenever there is a service. Shotgun Christians are doubters of their own faith. No one forces you. Your attendance and participation is your natural response to God's place in your personal spiritual life, as well as a testimony to faith in His existence in His Body, the Church and Community of Believers.

How long is one of your service?

Not long enough for those striving for spiritual growth and renewal. In minutes, the Divine Liturgy (such as our service on the Sabbath and Lord's Days) is a bit longer than an episode of General Hospital (but without the corruption and commercials!)

What does it cost to be a member of the Orthodox Church?

It costs you your life!

No, I mean in dollars and cents!

It costs you all that you have!

You must be joking!

No, it's the truth. When you commit yourself to Jesus Christ and His Church, you will come to understand that everything you possess is a gift from Him to be used for His glory. For example, if you are living as best you can according to Jesus Christ's teachings, your life is giving glory to God. Then even your grocery bill for the food which sustains and nourishes your life, is a contribution to the glory of God. This is the Orthodox understanding of the term "stewardship".

Come on now, how much are "the dues"?

Okay, enough theology! The scriptural ideal is 10% (a tithe) of your gross income. But unless you submit last year's tax return, no one would know how much you earn. You give as much as you can conscientiously, on a regular basis but not because God "needs" the money. Man does have a need, however, to give - we know that from our day-to-day experience (particularly as Christians).

All right, now on to your worship. I was told that the Orthodox worship pictures. Isn't that against the Commandments?

Sorry, you were told wrong! The Holy Icons ("pictures") are honored as reminders of the Glory and Presence of God, and venerated as such. ONLY God, the Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit are due worship. (How can the Church practice that is so contrary to God's Law?) That is one reason you will find no statues in Orthodox temples - their inclusion in our tradition never developed as that too closely resembled the pagan piety of the early days of our Church, during the time of the Apostles. But icons, rather than attempting to depict reality, point to the Kingdom of God. They are often referred to as "picture windows to Heaven". In other words, you will not only hear the Gospel in an Orthodox Church, you will see it! The icons act as "tools" in our spiritual worship and witness to the sanctification of all creation and matter that occurred when Christ Jesus, the Son of God, took on human flesh. The Divine/Human Person of Jesus became the living icon of God (John 10:30; 14:6-11) in the flesh.

You keep mentioning "The Church" over and over again. Why?

Basically, Jesus Christ did not come to establish such a thing as "Christianity". Even the word is not in the Holy Scriptures. What Christ Jesus did do was to establish the Church, which Scripture calls both His Body and His Bride. the communion which man seeks with God is found by being part of the Church, something which St. Paul calls a "great mystery", whereby we become members of Christ: "of His flesh, and of His bones." (Ephesians 5:30) The Bible also tells us that such as were being saved were added to the Church (Acts 2:47). They were not merely making "decisions for Christ" -- again, not a Scriptural term -- but they were repenting, being baptized for the remission of their sins, and being added to the Church. (Acts 2:38 ff) There, they were continuing steadfastly in the Apostle's doctrine and fellowship, the Breaking of Bread (what is commonly called Holy Communion today), and prayer. Finally, from the day of Pentecost, the "birthday" of the Church, the Bible never speaks of Christians who were not a part of it. This sort of sums up why we speak so much of "The Church".

Where can I find more information?

You can check the Religion section at the public library. Especially helpful is a book called *The Orthodox Church*, by Timothy Ware. It's also available at many book stores. Or, you may contact:

*The Monks at
ASCENSION MONASTERY
Orthodox Church in America
P. O. Box 397
Resaca, Ga. 30735
(706) 277-9442*

The End and Glory Be to God

