

Introduction to the Parish Handbook

The handbook which you have just opened is intended to help us live an Orthodox lifestyle, and understand more fully the Traditions of the Holy Church. It is a simple publication for use by members of the Orthodox Church of the Holy New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia, in the God protected city of Norwich, Connecticut, USA.

Since the very first days of our life as a parish (our first Divine Liturgy being the Entrance of Our Lord into Jerusalem – 1998) it has been our express desire to live our life as Orthodox Christians to the fullest, without compromise. Each day we desire to serve God, and live according to the teachings of Our Lord Jesus Christ. It is why we are here, this is the reason for the foundation of our parish.

As members of The Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia we have a tremendous inheritance which has been passed on to us. We are people of many ethnic backgrounds yet we are children of the Russian Church and all its glory. We seek to preserve the Faith, Piety and Holy Traditions which have been passed on to us, and this book is a feeble attempt to meet these needs.

This is in no way and end to our educational process, nor does this little volume answer all the questions. This is a simple endeavor which attempts to begin the process of self-edification and should be used to keep us on the right path.

I express my thanks to the pastors who have allowed me to reprint their sermons, talks, and articles which you see here. I pray that this will become a regular reference guide toward increasing our spiritual lives, and that this will lead each of us to a greater service of God and His Holy Church. With love in Christ,

Archpriest Basil Grisel

On Pious Behavior in Church

From time to time, new parishioners ask us to explain how one should behave during church services. First of all, one must come to the realization that everything externally taking place in church is an expression of our internal feelings, and must be consonant with them. Thus, for example, a prostration is a sign of humility. Accordingly, as we bow, we should humble our hearts. Otherwise, our prostrations are but an empty formality. The sign of the Cross is an expression of our faith in the crucified Lord. Accordingly, the movement of our hand when making the sign of the Cross should both unite our feelings and thoughts as directed to the Cross of Christ Whose sign we place upon ourselves. Otherwise, it is what is some characterized as "waving of the hand" or, as what used to be called in olden times "polishing buttons." The words of our prayer should never be merely words. Rather they should always be filled with meaning. Our heart should speak in and through them. Otherwise, prayer is an empty gesture, bereft of any content.

In our spiritual lives, what is external, i.e. everything known as ritual, is secondary. The Gospels teach us to prefer the spiritual over the physical. "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath." (Mark 2: 27). Christ says

to the scribes and Pharisees: "Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you saying: This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honoureth mMe with their lips; but their heart is far from me." (Matthew 15: 7-8). "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!. For ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleans first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also..." (Matthew 23: 25-26). We see in the Gospels that nothing so raised the Lord to indignation as did hypocrisy and overt displays of legalism. Religious piety in which a man's heart does not participate is but an empty worship of ritual and formalism.

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We should come to public services on time, and make an effort not to leave until their completion, unless there are extremely compelling circumstances requiring us to leave early. Even in secular society, this is an elementary rule of good upbringing and a sign of respect for the others who have assembled.

According to long-standing practice, women enter the church with heads covered. For women to be in church wearing slacks or wearing dresses with hemlines above the knee is impermissible. When going to church, we should remember the words of the Gosepl: "Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." (Matthew. 5: 23-24).

Pious Russian custom called for not eating before the Divine Liturgy. That such a custom was actually observed in Russia is demonstrated by the following: When antidoron or prospora would be brought to someone who, for whatever reason, had not been at the Liturgy, he would not consume it if he had already eaten breakfast. Rather, he would leave it "for the next morning," so that he might consume it on an empty stomach. From this one would conclude that if all those present at the conclusion of the Liturgy eat the prospora given to them, they are doing so on an empty stomach.

An Orthodox Christian should not miss either Sunday or Festal church services. The Sixth Ecumenical Council says the following in this regard: "In case any Bishop, or Presbyter, or Deacon, or anyone else on the list of the Clergy, or any layman, without any graver necessity or any particular difficulty compelling him to absent himself from his own church for a very long time, fails to attend church on Sundays for three consecutive weeks, while living in the city, if he be a Cleric, let him be deposed from office; but if he be a layman, let him be removed from Communion." (Canon LXXX of the Sixth Ecumenical Council).

Upon entering the church, we should make the sign of the cross, accompanied by a bow to the waist, three times. After bowing toward the Altar, and venerating the Festal Icon and the other Icons, we should bow to our brothers and sisters also present in the church. If we so desire, we may light candles before the Icons, and if a Liturgy is taking place, we may offer prospora for commemoration.

We should avoid walking around the church unless absolutely necessary, especially at the most important points in the Liturgy, e.g. during the Small Entrance (i.e. when the Holy Gospels are brought out of the Altar); during the reading of the

Word of God, during the Cherubic Hymn; of course, during the Eucharistic Canon (beginning with the clergyman's statement "Let us stand well, let us stand with fear [of God]..." and ending with the singing of "Meet it is..." and the prayerful commemoration "Among the first remember..."); during the Lord's Prayer; and during Holy Communion.

It is best to offer prosphora for the health and for the repose before the public part of the Liturgy begins, i.e. while the Proskomedia is still in progress. They should not be offered immediately before the singing of the Cherubic Hymn, for that is the point in the Liturgy at which the Great Entrance is about to take place. By offering prosphora at that time, we force the priest to interrupt the Service so that he can read the lists of names offered and complete the Proskomedia commemorations; this inevitably results in a delay.

In the iconostasis, the Icon of Christ stands to the right of the Royal Doors, while the Icon of the Mother of God stands to the left. Analogously, men should stand in church on the right side, while women should stand on the left. Everyone is supposed to stand during Divine Services in the Orthodox Church. Of course, that requirement does not apply to the sick, the aged, or to children, who may sit without harboring any doubts or false feeling of shame.

The church, where the bloodless Sacrifice is offered, where the Powers of Heaven invisibly serve alongside us, is no place for idle conversation. That understanding would seem to be so elemental, that no comment should be required. On reverencing an Icon of the Savior, we should kiss Christ's feet. On reverencing Icons of the Mother of God or the Saints of God, we should kiss the hands. On reverencing the Icon of the Savior Not-Made-By-Hands, or of the Head of St. John the Baptist, we should kiss the hair.

Before discussing the matter of prostrations, I would like to underscore once again the fact that one's external [gestures] have a meaning of secondary importance, or perhaps it would be better to say, have a derived meaning. The external is of no value unless it corresponds to an internal meaning. Thus, the internal is greater than the external. For example, before making the sign of the Cross, one must direct one's heart and mind toward the Crucified Lord. Before making a prostration, one must feel one's submission and obedience to God. Before kissing an Icon or placing a candle before it, one must have love and reverence for the one depicted on the Icon. It is only under those conditions that the Church permits the use of external rituals and symbols.

The physical movements of the body associated with prayer are useful, for they permit the entire body to participate in prayer and to be blessed by it. Physical movements help us to focus our thoughts, as it were to give life to the gesture, to render it not abstract, but real. Small prostrations, or bows to the waist, are done in church during petitions (ektenias), after each individual petition. By the way, one should not "break/interrupt the Cross," i.e. one should not bow until after completing the act of making the sign of the Cross. We should perform a small prostration in response to our being censed, and in response to the priest's blessing. By the way, in these cases, as the priest makes the sign of the Cross with his hand or with the censer, we should bow toward him without making the sign of the Cross. Those who are seated should stand up during censing and during the priestly blessing. We bow

to the waist at the Small Entrance during the Liturgy and during Vespers, and each time the Gospel, an Icon or the Cross is brought out of the Altar.

We make prostrations when venerating the Cross, an Icon, the Gospel, or Holy Relics. The following order is to be observed: Make two small prostrations, kiss the Holy Object, and then make an additional small prostration. At the Great Entrance during the Liturgy we stand with bowed heads, for the Great Entrance symbolizes the Lord's Entry into Jerusalem in anticipation of His passion. It is an important part of the Liturgy. We also stand with heads bowed during the reading of the Holy Gospel. Such a posture helps us concentrate, and helps us avoid looking about during such an important part of the Service. We bow our heads each time the priest says "Bow your heads (or 'let us bow our heads') unto the Lord," for during these times the priest reads a so-called "private" prayer on behalf of all. We should make the sign of the Cross with all due care and attention. It is better not to make the sign of the Cross at all than to make it carelessly.

Our prayer in church is communal prayer, in which both clergy and laity participate. All of us, the clergy and the laity, comprise the visible, earthly Church. In the church building, we see before us icons of those who are invisibly present: the Mother of God, Queen of Heaven and the earth, along with those others whom the Church has glorified. And the Head of the Church, our High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, himself sits on the Throne in the Altar, in the form of His Body and Blood.

With what reverence and trembling ought we to stand before such a most sublime assembly! The Church of God is the House of God, and in it a particularly prayerful atmosphere ought to reign. Not only do the clergy and the singers bear responsibility for this, but so does each individual person praying. Loud conversations in church, very much disturb those who are trying to delve into the words of the divine service and those who are attempting to "collect their soul" for confession. It is not only loud conversations that disturb the peace of the church. Not infrequently one cannot help but notice that even during the most important points in the Divine Services, some people (especially young people) are standing in church with their hands in their pockets, or are crossing - in front of the reader or the priest - from one side of the church to the other, or are sitting on a bench with their legs crossed. This is absolutely impermissible. Parents will sometimes give an entire prosphora even to quite small children, who then drop crumbs all over the floor; people walk on these crumbs and thereby involuntarily trample the sanctified bread. Would it not be better for parents themselves to give their children prosphora a piece at a time, and see to it that they do not drop crumbs? Sometimes children come to church with chewing gum in their mouths. We ask parents to instill in their children the understanding that this is completely impermissible.

To preserve decorum in the church, we remind everyone of a few of the rules of outward prayerful behavior:

- 1) One should come to church in time for the beginning of the divine service.
- 2) On entering the church, one should sign oneself thrice with the sign of the cross.
- 3) One should not linger at the entrance to the church, since this makes it difficult for other people to enter. Those desiring to pay membership dues or to conduct any

other monetary transactions (other than buying candles) should do so either before or after, but under no circumstances during, divine services; such action disturbs the order and decorum of God's House.

4) Ancient church custom establishes that men are to stand on the right side and women on the left.

5) No conversations are permitted in the Temple of God, either during the divine service or after its conclusion.

6) In church, handshakes are superfluous unnecessary, and kissing of women's hands is completely impermissible.

7) The faithful are to come to church in attire appropriate to their gender. Some attire that may be permissible to wear on the street or at the beach is completely unacceptable in church, and one may under no circumstances come to divine services so attired: Immodest clothing violates the decorum of the church's setting. It is impermissible for women to be at services dressed in short dresses (i.e. hemline above the knee), in trousers or in apparel with shoulders and arms uncovered. We remind our young people and their parents, that one may not come to church in a T-shirt (especially with blatant slogans or with depictions of idols of pop culture etc.), or in sneakers or beach sandals. Boys over seven years of age may not come to church in shorts.

8) Those who have come to the divine service late should move forward quietly, without pushing those who are praying.

One should not move about, buy or place candles, or venerate icons during the following most important points in the divine services:

At the All-Night Vigil:

1. During the entrance of the priest or deacon with the censor at Vespers.
2. During the reading of the Six Psalms. During the reading it is forbidden to place candles (when all the lights in the church are turned off).
3. When the priest comes out with the Holy Gospel and during the reading of the Gospel at Matins.
4. During the singing of "More honorable than the Cherubim" and the Great Doxology ("Glory to God in the highest").

At the Liturgy:

1. During the Little [with the Gospel] and the Great [with the Chalice] Entrances.
2. During the reading of the "Prayer for the Salvation of Russia".
3. During the reading of the Epistles and the Gospels.

4. During the singing of the Cherubic Hymn [from the words: "Let us who mystically represent the Cherubim" until the final three-fold singing of "Alleluia."]

5. During the Eucharistic Canon [from the exclamation: "The doors! The doors! In wisdom, let us attend!"; throughout the singing of the Symbol of Faith: "I believe in one God..."; throughout the whole Canon, when "A mercy of peace" is sung, until the conclusion of the hymn to the Theotokos: "It is truly meet...", or if it is a feast, until the conclusion of the hymn (zadostoinik) sung in its stead]. This is the part of the Liturgy at which to show greatest reverence; throughout this whole time there is to be no walking about the church or extinguishing of candles.

6. During the singing of "Our Father".

On prostrations, and what kind are to be done during the Liturgy.

According to the rules of the Holy Orthodox Church, full prostrations (head to the ground) - symbolizing extreme humility before God - are not done on Sundays, for on those days we celebrate a little Pascha. On the day of His Glorious Resurrection from the dead, Christ the Savior reconciled us to God.

Full prostrations are, however, called for during Liturgies served on weekdays. The first full prostration in the Liturgy is done after the Creed, as the priest says "Let us give thanks unto the Lord!" and the choir responds by singing "It is meet and right to worship the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit..." At that point the priest reads a prayer in which he thanks the Lord for bringing us from non-being into being, for once again restoring those who had fallen away from Him. He thanks the Lord for all of His blessings, both those we know of and those unknown to us, and for the peaceful sacrifice ("a mercy of peace"), that we are about to offer. Thanks to this prayer of thanksgiving, the entire impending church service is known as the "Eucharist," from the Greek word meaning "thanksgiving." All of the faithful perform the first full prostration at this point as a sign of their thanks to God for their entire lives.

Everyone makes a second full prostration at the singing of "To Thee we sing...", i.e.. during the Mystery of the changing of the Holy Gifts, at the priest's words "changing them by Thy Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen!"

Christ Himself is present in the Holy Gifts. Everyone makes a third full prostration to the Mother of God at the words "Especially for our Most holy, Most pure, Most-blessed, Most-blessed Lady Theotokos and Ever virgin Mary." At this time, the Choir sings "It is truly meet to bless thee, the Theotokos..." We revere the Mother of God as "more honorable than the Cherubim and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim." By her was the Incarnation of God accomplished. She gave birth to God our Savior.

The ustav calls for a fourth full prostration at the singing of the "Our Father," the Lord's Prayer, for us is of absolutely unique importance. It is the greatest of prayers, for it was given to us by the Lord Himself (see Matthew 6: 9-13). As we pronounce the words "give us this day our daily bread," let us think not only of ordinary bread, but about the eucharistic Bread of which many soon are to partake. Let us pray that the Lord might give us "this day" His divine Bread, unto the healing of soul and body.

We make the fifth full prostration when the Holy Gifts are brought out for Communion of the laity, as the priest or deacon says "With fear of God, with faith and love draw nigh!" According to the Orthodox Faith, in the Mystery of the Eucharist bread and wine changes into the Body and Blood of Christ. We bow down before the Holy Gifts as before Christ Himself, for He is mystically present in them.

The sixth full prostration is done at the end of the Liturgy, after the singing of "We have seen the True Light..." At this point, the priest secretly prays: "Be Thou exalted above the heavens, O God, and Thy glory above all the earth!" In the Liturgy, this final appearance of the Holy Gifts to the people, and their subsequent transfer deep into the Altar, to the Table of Prothesis, depicts the Ascension of Jesus Christ into Heaven. The Gospel states that while Christ was ascending, the Apostles bowed down before Him (Luke 24: 52); likewise, at the final appearance of the Holy Gifts we make a full prostration. Those who have communed do not make this last prostration, for they not only observe and contemplate on Christ as the other faithful do, but they also have Him within themselves!

Regarding Commemoration of the Dead

Often, parishioners pose questions regarding the eternal fate of the deceased, how and when they should commemorate the souls of the deceased, what affect our commemorations have upon them, and the symbolism behind specific days of commemoration. Below, we present an article on these matters. The information is drawn from a number of sources, including Divine Scripture, Tradition, the works of the Holy Fathers of the Church, the lives of saints, etc.

Orthodox Christians live in anticipation of the hour of their death, their birth into a new life and their meeting of the Lord, to Whom they pray: "Grant unto me to remember death." The time "about which day and night I fell down and fervently prayed" approaches. The soul quakes and suffers as it leaves the body and moves through the realm of the "princes of the air." The prayers of one's loved ones and of the Church ease the soul's journey. With lighted candles, and with a lampada burning before the icons, pious Christians read the "Canon for the departure of the soul from the body" over the dying person. Over the body of the deceased, they read prayers from the "Rite following the departure of the soul from the body."

Private prayer at home, commemoration at the Liturgy, and alms on behalf of the deceased all lessen the suffering of the sinful soul, and can even free it from the bonds of hell. In the writings of St. John the Merciful, we read the story of a certain imprisoned youth whose parents thought he was dead. On the days on which his parents offered fervent prayers for him, he was freed from his shackles. Such is the power of prayers of commemoration.

The third, ninth and fortieth days are days of special prayers for the dead.

The Third Day

Commemoration of the dead on the third day after death is an ancient, Apostolic tradition. It is appointed first of all because the reposed had been Baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the One God in Trinity. It is our hope that he maintained intact the Faith he accepted at Holy Baptism. Because throughout his

life he prayed for remission of sins to God, One in Trinity, he is commemorated on the third day. Second, he strove to preserve three Gospel virtues – faith, hope, and love – which form the basis for our salvation. Third, his being consisted of three parts: spirit, soul and body, all three sin together; and after man's translation to the world beyond the grave, all three need to be cleansed of sin.

In addition to such a theological significance, commemoration of the reposed on the third day has a mystical significance touching on the state of the soul beyond the grave. When St. Makary of Alexandria asked the Angel accompanying him in the desert to explain the meaning of church commemoration on the third day, the Angel answered: "When on the third day there is an offering in the church, the guardian angel lessens the sorrow the soul of the deceased experiences upon separation from the body. This is the result of the petitions and praise offered in the Church of God on its behalf. As the soul, accompanied by Angels, is permitted to travel for two days about the earth where it will, this engenders in it blessed hope. Sometimes, the soul, which loves its body, hides near the house in which the body rests, and thus spends two days, like a bird searching for its nest. A virtuous soul goes to those places in which it used to perform its righteous acts. On the third day, the One Who rose from the dead on the third day directs that, in imitation of His Resurrection, the Christian soul ascend in order to bow down before God.

The Ninth Day

On the ninth day, also in accordance with Apostolic Tradition, the Holy Church offers prayers and the Bloodless Sacrifice for the reposed. It prays to the Lord that the soul of the reposed be made worthy to be joined to the host of the saints by the prayers and intercession of the nine ranks of Angels.

Reporting what had been revealed to him by the Angels, St. Makary of Alexandria, states that after bowing down before God on the third day, the soul is directed to view the various pleasant abodes of the saints and the beauty of Paradise. The soul in wonder examines all of this for six days, and praises God, the Creator of all. Contemplating all of this, the soul changes, forgetting the sorrow it felt while in the body. However, if it is guilty of sins, then witnessing the saints' enjoyment causes it to grieve and accuse itself "O woe is me! How much I fussed vainly in that world!. Distracted by my enjoyment of lust, I spent most of my life carelessly, not serving God as I ought, so that I might be worthy of such grace and glory. Woe is poor me!" After six days of viewing the joys of the righteous, it again is taken up by the Angels to bow down before God.

The Fortieth Day

In ancient times, the deceased were mourned for forty days. The number forty is a remarkable one, often encountered in Divine Scripture. The Hebrew people fed upon manna in the desert for forty years. The prophet Moses fasted for forty days and nights in his travels to Mt. Horeb. After Baptism, the Lord Jesus Christ spent forty days and nights in the desert, and after His Resurrection likewise spent forty days teaching the Apostles the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Following the Apostolic tradition that adopted the ancient Jewish custom of the Old Testament Church to mourn the deceased for forty days, the Holy Church has since

its early days properly and piously established the rule of commemorating the reposed over the course of forty days (the "soroko-ust") and especially on the fortieth day ("sorochiny"). As the Lord Jesus Christ, spending forty days in fasting and prayer, conquered the devil, so the Holy Church, offering prayers, alms and the Bloodless Sacrifice over the course of forty days, asks God's grace for the reposed, that our enemy, the prince of darkness of the air, the devil, might be defeated, and that the deceased might inherit the Heavenly Kingdom,

Considering the state of the soul after the death of the body, St. Makary of Alexandria adds: "After the second prostration, the Lord of all commands that the soul be taken to hell to be shown its various parts and the various ignominious tortures that cause the souls of sinners incessant wailing and gnashing of teeth. The soul travels throughout these various places of torment for thirty days, in fear and trepidation that it might be imprisoned in one of them. On the fortieth day, it again is taken up to prostrate itself before the Lord God, and then, based on its actions, Judge determines where the soul should be closeted."

St. Symeon of Thessalonika writes: "The forty days of prayer are done in memory of the Ascension of the Lord, forty days after His Resurrection, [in hopes] that likewise, the deceased, rising from the tomb and ascending to meet the Lord, might be taken up in the clouds, and thus ever be with the Lord." (Novaya Skryzhal' , Part 4, Chapter 472).

The Anniversaries

A Christian's date of death is his birthday into a new, better life. This is why we celebrate the memory of our brothers and sisters one year after the day of their death. Celebrating their second birth, into Heaven, we beg God's mercy, that the Lord have mercy upon their souls, that He grant that the homeland prepared for eternal enjoyment, and that he make them once again residents of Paradise.

As love, according to the Apostle, never ceases (1 Corinthians 13:8), so death does not sever the union of love between us and our departed brothers and sisters. They live in spirit with us, who remain on earth; we keep our memory of them alive in our hearts. We especially rekindle that memory on the days of their death, anniversaries on which we hurry to prayer, faith and love, to the most efficacious means by which to satisfy the demands of a heart burning with love, and to bring joy and ease to the souls of those who have moved away from us and into the world upon high.

The godiny, commemorations on the first anniversary of a person's death, and godovschiny, commemorations on subsequent anniversaries, should be done without fail, guided by that living faith that in light of the obedience of the Lord Himself to the human conditions of time following his Incarnation, our repetition of anniversary commemorations, or rather our repetition of the day on which the deceased departed to a new life, have an active purpose, affecting his soul and his fate.

In the Orthodox Church, there are festive days on which all the reposed are commemorated: Ancestral Saturdays - Meat-fare Saturday – 8 days before the first day of Great Lent; the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Saturdays of Great Lent; Trinity Saturday – the Saturday before the Feast of Pentecost; and St Dimitry Saturday –the Saturday

preceding 26 (Old Style) October, the feast day of St. Dimitry Donskoy, and Radonitsa, the Tuesday following St. Thomas Sunday.

On all forty days from the date of death, and on all special days of commemoration appointed by the Church, one should offer lists of names to be commemorated at the Liturgy and at the Panikhida. People order the performance of the soroko-ust as soon as a death has occurred. There is a pious custom calling for the Psalter to be read for the deceased over the course of the first forty days. At each "Glory," the deceased is commemorated and the prayer "Remember, O Lord our God..." from the "Rite following the departure of the soul from the body" is read. At home, we read the 17th kathisma of the Psalter.

On venerating the Holy Gospels, the Cross, Holy Relics and Icons

When coming to venerate (kiss) the Holy Gospels, the Cross, honorable Relics and Icons, approach in proper order, without hurrying or crowding one another. Make two prostrations before, and one prostration after, kissing the holy items. The type of prostration, i.e. full prostration (kneeling and touching one's forehead to the ground) versus a small prostration (a deep bow, touching your hand to the ground), depends upon the day of the week. When venerating icons of the Savior, one should kiss His feet; or, if He is depicted to the waist, His hand. When venerating Icons of the Mother of God and of the Saints, kiss the hand. On Icons of the Savior Not-Made-by-Hands or of the Beheading of St. John the Baptist, kiss the hair.

Although an Icon may bear the images of several Saints, when a number of the faithful are approaching to venerate the Icon, one should kiss the Icon only once, so as not to delay the others, and to maintain proper order in the church.

Before the Icon of the Savior, one may say the Jesus Prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me a sinner," or the prayer "I have sinned immeasurably, O Savior, have mercy upon me."

Before an Icon of the Most-holy Theotokos one may say the prayer, "O Most-holy Theotokos, save us."

Before the Honorable and Life-giving Cross of Christ, we say the prayer "Before Thy Cross, we bow down, O Master, and Thy Holy Resurrection we glorify." We follow the prayer with a prostration.

Proper Confession

Before confession, each person must attempt to recall all of his sins, voluntary and involuntary, must attentively go over his life in order, to the extent possible, to recall all of his sins, not only those committed since his last confession, but also those past sins which through forgetfulness have not been confessed. Then, with compunction and with a contrite heart, approach the Cross and the Gospel, and begin to confess your sins.

1. Confess your sins honestly, remembering that you are disclosing them not to a man but to God Himself, Who already knows your sins, but wishes you to admit to them. **There is no reason to feel shame before your spiritual father.** He is a person just like you. Because he knows human weakness and man's propensity to sin he cannot be your judge. Are you embarrassed before your spiritual father because you are afraid to lose his good opinion of you? To the contrary, your spiritual father will love you all the more, seeing your sincere confession. Moreover, if you are ashamed to disclose your sins to a single spiritual father, then how will you be able to bear the shame if you have not cleansed yourself of your sins through true confession, and those sins are laid open before God Himself, before the angels and before everyone, acquaintance and stranger alike?

2. Confess all of your sins in full, each sin separately. St. John Chrysostom states, "One must not only say: I have sinned, or I am a sinner, but one must declare each form of sin." I.e., one must list each sin. St. Basil the Great states, "Revelation of sins is subject to the same law as the relating of physical ills..." The sinner is spiritually ill, and the spiritual father is a physician or healer. It follows that you must confess or relate your sins to your spiritual father in the same way that a physically ill person relates his symptoms to a physician, thereby hoping to be healed.

3. Do not mention others during confession. Do not complain about anyone, for what kind of confession would that be? Instead of confession, it would be a condemnation, and thus, yet another sin.

4. In confession, do not attempt to justify yourself in any way, blaming weakness, habit, etc. The more you justify yourself during confession, the less you will be justified by God, while the more you denounce, condemn and accuse yourself, the more you will be justified by God.

5. When questioned by your spiritual father, do not say "**I do not remember, perhaps I am not guilty of that.**" God directed us to always be mindful of our sins. In order not to justify ourselves by forgetfulness, **we must confess as often as possible.** Those who out of carelessness confess infrequently, and as a result forget some of their sins, are themselves to blame, and therefore cannot hope to be absolved of the sins not confessed. Thus it is imperative that we strive to remember all of our sins. If someone is in our debt, we are sure to keep it in mind. Yet we forget our own debt before God! Does this not betray on our part a lack of concern for our soul?

6. Unless asked by the spiritual father, **do not talk about sins you have not committed,** or about what you have not done. That is to say, do not emulate the Pharisee in the Gospel, who only praised himself, and did not confess his sins; thereby he only caused his condemnation to be greater.

7. We must confess with sorrow and a contrite heart the sins by which we have grieved our Lord God. It is not good that many relate their sins matter-of-factly, without any remorse. They speak as if engaged in some casual conversation. Even worse, some allow themselves to laugh during confession. These are all signs of a lack of repentance. By confessing in this manner, we are not cleansed of sins, but only increase them.

8. Finally, confess your sins with faith in Jesus Christ and with hope in His mercy. Only with faith and hope in Jesus Christ can we receive forgiveness of sins. Without faith, we can in no wise be forgiven. Note the example of Judas the betrayer.

This, then is how we must confess in order to receive from our Lord God remission of sins. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness...." (1 John 1:9)

Prayerful preparation for communion

Of all the days in the life of a Christian, the happiest is the day when we **worthily, with complete attentiveness and preparation** receive Holy Communion. At Confession, we washed away all our sins, we opened up our whole soul to the Lord and we received into the house of our soul the Holy, Heavenly Guest - Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who said, He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh by blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. It is extremely important on the day of Communion to be conscious of what we are doing and, while participating in the dread Mystery, to understand what a responsibility we are taking upon ourselves. To receive the Divine Guest carelessly, without due attention, means that we condemn ourselves. Let it not be so! Here is the minimum that it is essential to do in order to receive spiritual benefit:

1) Confess on the eve of the Liturgy, in order to give oneself and the confessor time for the correct performance of the confession. Those preparing for Communion should pray at the evening divine service on the eve of the day of Communion. At the analogion where the priests listen to the penitents, one may obtain the leaflet "A Brief Confession before the Confessor". Take a copy for yourself and keep it at home. Before Confession, read over the leaflet at home in order to recall the sins committed, or bring it to Confession.

2) Read the Prayer Rule before Holy Communion. In the Jordanville Prayer Book, one may find it on pages 332-378. The Rule consists of a number of psalms, canons and prayers before Communion. For the especially zealous, one may add to this Rule the Canon to Sweetest Jesus, the Canon and Akathist to the Most Holy Theotokos and the Canon to the Guardian Angel. One may find these prayers in the same Jordanville Prayer Book.

3) On the day of Communion, it is imperative **to come to church at the beginning of the Liturgy and on an empty stomach, that is, to refrain from food and drink, and also from smoking, from the preceding midnight.** Those who arrive late to church may not approach the Holy Chalice.

4) We ask female parishioners to see to it that they **do not commune with an uncovered head or while wearing lipstick.**

5) The Church exhorts those approaching for Communion to fold their arms cross-wise on their breast and to draw near, confessing Christ with their mouths and having an ardent love and thankfulness toward Him in their heart. In 961, at the

Sixth Ecumenical Council, a canon was promulgated: "If anyone wants to commune, let him fold his arms in the form of a cross and thus approach and receive the communion of grace" (Canon 101). Saint John of Damascus teaches: "Let us come to the Lord with flaming desire and, having folded our arms cross-wise, let us receive the body of Him Who was crucified on the Cross. Lowering our eyes and mouth and brow, let us commune of the Divine Coal, so that the fire of our love, kindled from this Coal, would burn up our sins and we, by the communion of the Divine Fire, would become inflamed and deified."

6) Let those who have received the body and blood of Christ, it says in the Church's service book, swallow with reverence and, after the wiping of their mouth, kiss the side of the chalice, as Christ's very side, from which flowed blood and water.

7) Read the Thanksgiving Prayers after Communion. These prayers are always read by us in Church, during the kissing of the Holy Cross. The communicants gather on the left side of the church and listen to the prayers together, and only at the conclusion of the prayers do they themselves come up to the Cross.

The Food of the Mystical Supper is the Heavenly Food of our restoration, of the New Covenant between God and mankind. Whoever partakes of this Food unworthily and without due preparation commits the opposite - destruction. Let this not be!

Sanctified Bread

Prayer Before Consuming Prosphora and Holy Water

Bread occupies a special place in our lives. It symbolizes all food as well as the labor necessary to obtain it. As God once told Adam, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" (Genesis 3:19).

In bread there is religious symbolism. The Lord Jesus Christ called Himself the "bread of life" (John 6:51), and said "if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever..." (John 6:51). Finally, He allowed bread, which [in being of organic composition] is related to human flesh, to be transubstantiated in the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist into His Body. "Jesus took bread, and blessed it and brake it, and gave it to the disciples and said "Take, eat; this is my body..." (Matthew 26:26). Bread, composed of many grains, personifies the Church. The plurality of its members notwithstanding, it is One. Besides the Bread of the Eucharist, the Orthodox Church has several forms of sanctified bread.

The *prosphoron* (*offering*, Greek). This is a baked white yeast-raised bread made of wheat flour with which holy water has been mixed. Its name stems from the early Christian custom of bringing bread from home for use in the Eucharist. It consists of two round parts, representing the two natures of Christ. A representation of the Cross is stamped on the upper part. Prosphora may also bear images of the Mother of God or the saints.

During the Divine Liturgy, the Lamb, the portion of bread which later will be transubstantiated into the Body of Christ, is removed in a special rite from one of the

prosphora, known as the "lamb" prosphoron. Pieces are removed from other, smaller prosphora, in commemoration of the members of the Earthly and Heavenly Church. At the close of the Liturgy, these particles are placed into [the Chalice with] the Blood of Christ. Small prosphora are for those who have offered lists of commemorations to be read in the Altar. Pieces of the prosphoron from which the Lamb was taken are called *antidoron* (*instead of the Gifts*, Greek). According to the *ustav*, they are to be consumed by those who have not communed of the Holy Mysteries.

Artos (*yeast-risen bread*, Greek) is bread which is blessed on the night of Pascha. Throughout Bright Week, the artos, a symbol of the Risen Christ, remains on an analogion before the Royal Doors of the Altar, and is carried in the daily Paschal Processions of the Cross. On Bright Saturday, following the reading of a special prayer, it is broken into pieces and distributed to the faithful. In pious folk custom, the Artos and the Holy Water blessed on Theophany have been held to be, for those who are dying without the possibility of Communion, a possible substitute for the Holy Gifts.

Prosphora, artos, and antidoron are to be eaten on an empty stomach, and with prayer. Sanctified bread must be kept in a clean container, apart from other food products. According to tradition, the artos is divided into little pieces, to be consumed over the course of the year, from Pascha to Pascha.

Another form of sanctified bread is that which is distributed to the faithful during the Vigil on the eves of great feasts. In times past, evening services were quite lengthy, and during the services Christians would consume bread in order to keep up their strength. Now, although the duration of services has been shortened, this custom has been retained.

From the book *Fundamentals of Orthodoxy*

Prayer Before Consuming Prosphora and Holy Water

O Lord my God, may Thy holy gift and Thy holy water be unto the enlightenment of my mind, unto the strengthening of my spiritual and physical powers, unto the health of my soul and body, unto the taming of my passions and weaknesses, according to Thy limitless mercy, through the prayers of Thy Most-pure Mother and of all Thy Saints. Amen.

The Julian Calendar

During September 22-24, 1988 in New Valaam in Finland there was an international conference devoted to the 1000th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus. Local and invited clergy and scholars were present: A paper was presented on "The Julian Calendar -- the 1000-Year-Old Icon of Time in Rus" by Lyudmila Perepelkina (from Finland), an expert on the subject. The following is an excerpt from the printed text of the paper, taken from the unofficial Leningrad journal, Nevskiy Dukhovnyy Vestnik (no. 1, 1989).

". . . The modern ecumenical movement is looking for a solution to the issue of the church calendar. Among the various proposals there were two which are discussed most frequently: (1) To celebrate Easter on a specific date of the Gregorian calendar (the first or second Sunday of April). This proposal, which is totally at odds with the determination of the Council of Nicaea, was supported by the Second Vatican Council. (2) To set the date of Easter by taking literally the astronomical terms 'equinox' and 'full moon'.

According to A. Zelinsky (see his excellent study in *Kontekst, Moscow, 1978*), both of these proposals are unacceptable. The first is unacceptable because of the astronomical and canonical deficiencies of the Gregorian Calendar and its modified version- the second is unacceptable because "astronomical accuracy", taken literally, would make the Church constantly dependent on the progress of astronomical science. In addition, this decision ' would not be canonical, since it would permit simultaneous occurrence of Easter and Jewish Passover, i.e. would go completely against Church tradition.

"If the Christian faiths are ever to unite," writes Zelinsky 'this unification, from the point of view of the liturgical Church calendar, must be based on a firm, unshakable foundation. This foundation can only be the sacred calendar-cosmological system of the Great Circle of Creation-the brilliant compilation of the works of unknown laborers of science and faith.'

The Russian Church did not deviate from the instructions of the Holy Fathers. The Julian calendar remains unaltered in the life of the Russian Orthodox Church. The Julian calendar was supported in Russia by many famous scholars, including professors V. V. Bolotov, and E. A. Predtechensk_ the great Russian theologian professor N. G. Glubokovsky, the reverend D. A. Lebedev . . . and the entire devout Russian nation. Because of the decisive resistance of the people it became impossible to adopt the 'corrected Julian calendar' in Russia in 1923, despite the resolution which had been adopted concerning this.

"...The Gregorian reform of the calendar is a truly 'new' approach, a witness to the new, rationalistic approach of man to the category of Time. Beginning with the Renaissance, man wants to become the ruler of Time. Time loses its mystical dimension for him, ceases to be the Time of hope and becomes the Time of progress. But 'progress . . . noticeable accelerated progress, is always a symptom of the end.' And, perhaps, then, there will be no more Time... for repentance."

'Time is God's creation. As with all creatures, after the Fall, Time lost its original perfection and now, together with all creatures, hopes for its salvation. God sanctifies creation, which partakes of His life in Heaven. Time is sanctified in the same way. For this reason one can speak of the Church calendar as of an icon of this sanctified Time. Obviously, there is also unsanctified Time which has no place in this icon. Cosmic Time, with all its rhythms, is not of itself a subject for iconography and is sanctified only through communion with sacred history. From this flows the incomparability of sanctified and unsanctified Time, of the feasts of the Church and the feast, of the unholy. The profanation of the Church calendar is a sacriligious attempt to desecrate that which is holy, an attempt to cast the sanctified from the Kingdom of Heaven into the kingdom of the unholy.

In coming out against the Julian calendar and the Alexandrian Paschalia, which had been sanctified by the ages, the primary aim of the creators of the Gregorian calendar was to strengthen the authority of the papacy and of Rome, which had been weakened after the Reformation. The Gregorian reform, which permitted the 'elimination' of ten real days, reflected the general state of soul and mind in the West, in accordance with which Time became dependent on the will of man. Rationalism, having conquered the minds of men, began to mechanize the universe and wished to control the laws of nature and Time. 'The flowers of evil' sown in those times yielded their bitter harvest in our age.

At the end of the twentieth century people began to look more skeptically at the 'achievements' of the Renaissance. A contemporary thinking person, looking at that which followed the Renaissance--secularization, dechristianization, together with the total decline in human society--begins to look at the Renaissance anew. In studying the genealogy of the degradation of contemporary man, one can note that its roots can be found in the time of the Renaissance time of an uncontrollable urge in man to rise up and to establish himself above everything: above nature, above those like him, and finally, above the Lord God Himself.

What will the Time of the future, the Time of the Eighth Day, be like? We know only that it will be sanctified and not that Time which is calculated according to the sun and moon. One probably cannot categorically juxtapose Eternity and Time. Perhaps sanctified Time is already Eternity.

The Church of Christ unites the temporal and the eternal. This takes place, first of all, in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Existing in time, the Church, through the real presence of Christ, transforms time, as she transforms the world. The time of prayer is the entry into eternity, into the Kingdom of God where 'Christ is in everything and everyone.' Those who live in prayer know from experience that in church services or prayers in monks cells, during the reading of the Gospel or the Book of Psalms, the boundaries of time seem to vanish. This occurs when one feels united with God, when the merciful Lord seems to visit us in a special way. Then the heart replies to this divine call of Love and forgets everything and finds itself outside of time. We find this mystical experience of the Church in the works of the Holy Fathers; it is especially clearly expressed by St. Simeon the New Theologian in his Sermons and Hymns.

With regard to the differences of opinion about the Julian calendar, it seems to us that the main argument in its favor is the annual descent of the holy flame on the Tomb of the Lord--a miracle which occurs in the presence of thousands of pilgrims during Holy Saturday according to the Julian calendar. This shows the mystical sanctification of this thousand-year old icon of Time.

In conclusion, we cite the words of an Orthodox monk: "Time is a great mystery and one can approach a mystery only through symbols. The Julian calendar is an Icon of Time. If we want to naturalize the concept of Time as icons were naturalized, to turn it into a portrait, then why do we need the Gregorian calendar? There are even more precise calendars. There is the calendar of the Incas, the calendar of Omar Khayam, which is mathematically brilliant, and perhaps tomorrow a new calendar will appear which is even more precise from the astronomical point of view. We should not stand with hands outstretched to the observatories. We, the Church, possess those mysteries of Time which are written in the Bible and in the works of

the Holy Fathers. We are the bearers of these mysteries and must reveal them to the world."

The Conflict in Dates for Celebration of Pascha

How did it come about that there is a difference in dates for celebration of this most important of Christian holidays?

The celebration of Pascha was instituted by the first generation of Christians, by the Church of the Holy Apostles. Their Epistles, found in the New Testament, bear witness to this. However, during the earliest centuries of the Christian era, there was not yet absolute unity of practice as to the day upon which Pascha, the Resurrection of Christ, should be celebrated. In the Christian churches of Asia Minor, where there were many Jews who had come to believe in Christ, the feast of Pascha was celebrated on the Jewish Passover, i.e. on the 14th day of Nisan, the first month of Spring. Western Christians, for whom Rome, capital of the Empire, was already a spiritual center in apostolic times, were largely converted pagans. It seemed to them inappropriate to celebrate Christian Pascha together with the Jewish Passover, since Christ's Resurrection occurred after the Jewish Passover. Thus, in Western Churches there had already developed the tradition of celebrating Pascha on the first day after the first full moon of Spring. The two variant observances of Pascha, Eastern and Western, existed until the First Ecumenical Council, held in the city of Nicaea in Asia Minor in 325 AD, and attended by representatives of all of the local Christian churches, both East and West, decided on the day of celebration for Pascha. According to the decision of the Council, Christian Pascha must be celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon of the Spring, but always after the Passover of the Jews. The Eastern Church to this day strictly observes these rules set down by the first Ecumenical Council. The Western Church in its historical development has retained only the first part of this decision - to celebrate Pascha on the first Sunday after the first full moon of Spring; it no longer accords significance to whether Pascha is celebrated during or after the Passover of the Jews.

The Old and New Calendars

On one of the Internet discussion groups, these questions were posed:

- 1. What is the distinction between Old and New Calendars?**
- 2. Why is the division so prominent?**

We are indebted to Fr. Alexander Lebedeff for his response.

At the risk of rattling up some acrimonious discussion, I will go ahead and wade into this one with both feet. The opinions I express are my own, and do not necessarily represent the official position of the ROCOR (Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia), in which I have been a priest for twenty-five years.

In my honest opinion, world Orthodoxy is now experiencing a polarization into two camps: for lack of a better term one can think of them as "traditionalists" and "modernists."

As we all know, the 19th century saw the development of liberal ideas that ultimately led to the revolution in Russia. A number of the clergy in the Russian Orthodox church had become involved in the liberal movement and wished to "liberalize" the Church. Their proposals included: a change to the New Calendar (the Gregorian Calendar, introduced by Pope Gregory XIII at the end of the 16th century and rejected by all the Orthodox churches at that time, who continued to use the traditional Julian Calendar); married bishops; permission for priests to marry a second time; shortening of services; reduction of fasting periods and the strictness of the fasts; use of non-clerical garb by clergy outside of the church; eliminating the traditional requirement of beards and long hair for clergy; and many other innovations.

These priests became the kernel of the so-called "renovationist" movement in early post-revolutionary Soviet Russia, which cooperated with them, since they expressed complete support for the Communist regime. Most of the church buildings in the Soviet Union were transferred to the renovationists, and those who didn't cooperate (the followers of Patriarch Tikhon) were persecuted and often killed.

At the same time, a rather interesting figure had had himself elected to the office of Patriarch of Constantinople, Meletios Metaxakis. This individual had previously been Archbishop of Athens, then Patriarch of Alexandria. It is not exactly clear how he had been able to be the head of three independent local Orthodox Churches in succession. Suffice it to say, it is known that he was a Freemason and had "connections."

He was extremely modernist in his views. He supported all of the above-mentioned innovations of the renovationists, and shocked the Orthodox world by appearing in a civilian suit. In 1923 he instituted an official change to the new calendar, although the other innovations he proposed did not go through. He also recognized the Renovationists in Soviet Russia as the true Church of Russia and joined in their condemnation and deposition of Patriarch Tikhon.

To make a long story short, as a result of the calendar innovation, the Orthodox world was divided. Some of the Orthodox churches remained Old Calendar, some accepted the New, and the liturgical unity of the Church was shattered. In Greece, the introduction of the new calendar caused extraordinary upheaval and physical persecution of the old-calendarists was widespread.

The calendar question is one of extraordinary significance to "traditionalist" Orthodox, although it is presented as a matter of little importance by the new-calendarists ("This is not an issue of **dogma**, Father, just custom," one hears). The answer, of course, is that the Pope's calendar innovation had been condemned many times by pan-Orthodox Councils, so it is not a matter of "taste."

So how has this affected Orthodoxy in the United States? Today one can see the following: New-calendar churches, typically, have accepted many of the "trappings" of Roman Catholic and Protestant churches. They, for the most part, have pews in their churches, some have organs (!) and electronic carillons instead of bells, their

priests, and in some cases even bishops, most often wear "clerical collars" and suits (outside of the services), almost all clergy have short hair and trimmed or no beards, and like to be called "Father Tom," or "Father Al." The services are typically shortened, frequently even Saturday-night Vigil services are eliminated. The new-calendarists have relatively few monasteries and monastic clergy. Many churches thrive on Bingo, and almost all have lay "presidents" of the congregation, who, together with a parish council, direct the affairs of the church. Being a Freemason is not considered to be in conflict with Orthodoxy.

On the other hand, traditionalist Orthodox parishes will never have pews, organs and the like; their clergy will never be seen without a rason (they wouldn't be caught dead wearing a "dog collar" and "clergy shirt!"); no one would dream of addressing them as "Father Tom"; they typically do not cut their hair or beards (unless required by outside employment); the services follow a much fuller Typicon; the priests are rectors of their parishes and they are themselves the "presidents" of the parish corporations, with the parish council acting in a more advisory role; there are far more monastic clergy and many monasteries and convents. Freemasonry is soundly condemned as incompatible with Orthodoxy.

Another significant area dividing traditional Orthodox from their "modernist" brethren is the area of Ecumenism. To a traditionalist Orthodox, ecumenism is an outright heresy, condemned by innumerable Councils who clearly forbid praying with heretics.

The new-calendarists, on the other hand, are very active participants in the "ecumenical movement," in the WCC and the NCC, notwithstanding the incredible mixture of paganism, new-world thinking, radical feminism, and other weird stuff that goes on at WCC assemblies.

Unfortunately, the last three Patriarchs of Constantinople (Athenagoras, Demetrius, and, now, Bartholemew, have been rabid ecumenists. Patriarch Bartholemew, at least at the time he was Metropolitan) had frequently been photographed in a civilian business suit (with tie, not even an ecclesiastical collar), and studied at the Papal Institute in Rome. His recent meetings with the Pope underscore his desire to reunite with Rome by the year 2000. He, and other ecumenically-oriented Eastern Patriarchs have virtually accepted the Monophysite heretics as valid Orthodox, without making them renounce their views or accept the Orthodox position regarding the Divine and human natures of Christ.

All this is appalling to traditionalist Orthodox, who wish to preserve the faith of the Apostles and the Fathers without any change.

As a Roman Catholic, some of this may be familiar to you. You may remember the upheaval that was caused in the RC church when wholesale modernization took place.

The traditional Orthodox will struggle to keep this from happening within Orthodoxy. Although a relatively small part of the contemporary Orthodox population, the traditionalists (comprising the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, which has 400 clergy outside of Russia; the old calendarist churches of Greece, Bulgaria, Roumania, and like-minded Orthodox throughout the world) will continue to witness for the purity of Orthodoxy and against the heresies of

modernism and ecumenism that have, so unfortunately, infected so much of World Orthodoxy.

While there are some fanatical fringe groups within the traditionalist movement (who aver that everyone else is devoid of grace), the majority of traditionalists do not agree. They consider the other (modernist) Orthodox to still be Orthodox, although in grave error, and pray for their return to the path of traditional Orthodoxy, as preserved by the Church for 2000 years. Among the "modernists" there is also a fanatic fringe, who consider the traditionalist Orthodox to be "schismatics" and outside the Church.

I think we should let the two fanatic fringes shout themselves out, while the more rationally-minded traditionalist and new-calendar Orthodox Christians should engage in peaceful and constructive dialogue in non-confrontational places such as this forum, and of course, pray for each other as brothers and sisters in Christ.

How To Set Up a Home Prayer Corner

Parishioners often ask how one should set up a home chapel/prayer corner. We offer for your consideration the article by [Serge Alexeev](#), and hope that in it our readers will find answers to the questions most frequently posed. The article has been abridged.

- **Where to place icons at home?**
- **Which icons should you have at home?**
- **How and in what order should you arrange your icons?**
- **Are there strict rules in that regard?**
- **What should be our attitude toward holy things? What should you do if an icon's condition has rendered it unfit for use and it cannot be restored?**

Quantity and quality are two different categories. It would be naïve to assume that the more holy images there are in an Orthodox Christian's house, the more pious his life is. A disorganized collection of icons, prints, religious wall calendars covering a significant amount of living space, can often have a directly opposite effect on a person's spiritual life.

...Poorly thought out assembling of a collection of icons can turn into simple, meaningless collecting, something in which the prayerful purpose of the icon has no role whatsoever.

Nonetheless, it is essential to have icons in one's home - in sufficient numbers, but within reasonable limits.

In the past, whether on the farm or in the city, any Orthodox family's home would always have a shelf with icons, or an entire home icon screen, located in the most visible place. The place where the icons were installed was known as the front corner, the bright corner, the holy corner, God's place, or the shrine.

For the Orthodox Christian, the icon is not just a depiction of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Mother of God, the Saints or of events in the history of the Church. The Icon is a sacred depiction, i.e. it rests outside the realm of ordinary reality; it is not to be confused with ordinary daily life, and is intended only for communion with God. Thus, the primary purpose of icons is for prayer. The Icon is the window from the world above into our world, the earthly world; it is God's revelation, made in delineated form and color. In this way, the Icon is not simply a family relic to be passed on from generation to generation, but a holy thing - a holy thing that unites all of the members of the family during communal prayer, for prayer in common can take place only if those standing before the Icon have mutually forgiven one another's offenses, and have achieved complete unity.

Of course, to a great extent today, when the place of the icons in the home has been taken by the television set, itself a kind of a window into the motley world of human passions, the purpose of the family icon, the tradition of common prayer at home, and the consciousness of the family as the "little Church" has been lost.

Therefore, the Orthodox Christian living in a city apartment today may ask: What icons must I have in my home? What is the proper arrangement for them? Can I use reproductions of icons? What do I do with old dilapidated icons?

Some of these questions merit an unequivocal answer, while others do not demand any kind of strict recommendations.

Where to place icons at home?

In an available and accessible place.

The terse nature of such an answer is evoked by the realities of life, rather than by the absence of canonical requirements.

Of course, it is preferable to place icons on the eastern wall of the room, because the East as a theological concept has special significance in Orthodoxy.

And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. (Genesis 2: 8)

O Jerusalem, look about thee toward the east, and behold the joy that cometh unto thee from God. (Baruch 4: 36)

Moreover the spirit lifted me up, and brought me unto the east gate of the Lord's house, which looketh eastward. (Ezekiel 11: 1)

For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. (Matthew 24: 27)

But what do you do if the house is so oriented that there are windows or doors on the eastern side? In that case, use the Southern, Northern, or Western walls of the home.

One must not combine icons with decorative objects of a secular nature such as statuettes, various types of panels, etc.

It is inappropriate to put icons onto a bookshelf next to books having nothing in common with Orthodox Truth, or books conflicting with the Christian teaching on love and charity.

It is absolutely impermissible to have icons next to signs or wall calendars on which there are photographs of rock musicians, athletes, or politicians - the idols of the current age. This not only diminishes the significance of reverence for holy images to an unacceptable level, but also puts holy icons on a par with idols of the contemporary world.

The home iconostasis can be decorated with live flowers. Traditionally, larger icons are often framed with towels. This tradition dates back to antiquity and has a theological basis. According to Tradition, an image of the Savior miraculously appeared during His life on earth in order to help a suffering man. After washing His Face, Christ wiped His Face with a clean towel, and an image of His Face appeared upon it; the towel was sent to the city of Edessa, in Asia Minor, to King Abgar, who was afflicted with leprosy. Upon being healed, the ruler and his subjects adopted Christianity, and the Image-Not-Made-By-Hands of Jesus Christ was affixed to a "permanent plaque" and raised above the city gates.

In times past, 29 August (new style calendar), the day the Church commemorates the translation of the Image Not-Made-By-Hands of our Lord Jesus Christ from Edessa to Constantinople in 944, was known among the people as the feast of the "canvas" or "linen Savior," and in some places fabric and towels made of homespun yarn were blessed.

These towels were richly embroidered and were reserved for use in the Bozhnitsa. Likewise, icons were framed by towels used during weddings and during Molebens with the Blessing of the Waters. Thus, for example, after the service for the Blessing of the Waters, when the priest would sprinkle [the icons] abundantly with Holy Water, people would wipe the icons with special towels and would incorporate them into the Bright Corner.

There is a tradition that, after the celebration of the Lord's Entry into Jerusalem, or Palm Sunday, pussy willow branches that had been blessed in church are to be kept near the icons until the next Palm Sunday.

It is the custom that on Pentecost, the Day of the Holy Trinity, the dwelling and icons should be decorated with birch branches as a symbol of the thriving Church, bearing the grace-filled power of the Holy Spirit.

Which icons should you have at home?

It is essential to have icons of the Savior and of the Mother of God. The Image of the Lord Jesus Christ - bearing witness to the Divine Incarnation and Salvation of humankind, and that of the Theotokos, the most perfect of those living on earth, the one made worthy of complete deification, the one revered as more honorable than the Cherubim and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim (Hymn of

praise to the Most-holy Theotokos) - are an essential part of the Orthodox Christian home. The icon of Christ ordinarily selected for prayer at home, is that of the Lord Pantokrator, a waist-length depiction of the Savior. (...)

Those with room for a greater number of icons in the home may supplement their iconostasis with depictions of revered local saints and, of course, of the great saints of Russia.

Russian Orthodoxy has a strong tradition of special veneration for Holy Hierarch Nicholas the Wonderworker; almost every Orthodox family has an icon of St. Nicholas. One should note that together with the icons of the Savior and the Mother of God, the image of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker has always occupied a central place in the Orthodox Christian home. The people revere Holy Hierarch Nicholas as a saint endowed with special grace. This in large part stems from the fact that according to the Church rubric, each Thursday, when the Church offers up prayers to the Holy Apostles, it also offers up prayers to St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia.

Among the icons of the Holy Prophets of God, that of the Prophet Elias holds a prominent place; prominent among the icons of the Holy Apostles, is that of the Pre-eminent Apostles Sts. Peter and Paul.

Among the images of martyrs for the Faith in Christ most often encountered are icons of Holy Great Martyr and Trophy-bearer St. George, and the Holy Great Martyr and Healer St. Panteleimon.

It is recommended to have depictions of the Holy Evangelists, of St. John the Baptist, of the Holy Archangels Gabriel and Michael, as well as icons of the Feasts, to make a home iconostasis complete.

The selection of icons for the home is always an individual matter. The best person to help one make those choices is the priest, the family spiritual director, and it is to him, or to another clergyman, that one should turn for advice.

As for icon reproductions and color photographs, sometimes it makes more sense to have a good reproduction than a painted icon of poor quality.

The iconographer must maintain a very demanding attitude toward his work. Just as the priest has no right to serve the Liturgy without the necessary preparation, the iconographer must approach his service with all due, full, awareness of responsibility [he bears for his work]. Unfortunately, both in the past and today, one often encounters vulgar examples of [icons that are] things bearing no resemblance to icons. Thus, if a given depiction does not evoke a sense of piety and a sense of contact with the holy, if its exposition is theologically questionable and its technical execution is unprofessional, it would be best not to purchase such an item.

However, reproductions of canonical icons, mounted on a firm backing, and blessed in the Church, can occupy a place of honor in the home iconostasis.

**How and in what order should you arrange your icons?
Are there strict rules in that regard?**

In church, yes. As to the home prayer corner, we may limit [discussion] to but a few principal rules.

For example, an assemblage of icons hung without a sense of symmetry, without a well thought-out arrangement, evokes a constant sense of dissatisfaction with the arrangement, a desire to change everything, something that often distracts from prayer.

It is likewise essential to remember the principle of hierarchy: for example, do not put an icon of a locally venerated saint above the icon of the Holy Trinity, the Savior, the Mother of God, or the Apostles.

Just as in a classic iconostasis, the Icon of the Savior must be to the right, and the Mother of God to the left [of the center of the prayer corner].

What should be our attitude toward holy things?

As one of the attributes of God (*Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord Sabaoth!* (Isaiah 6: 3) holiness is also reflected in the worthy ones of God and in physical objects. Therefore, reverence for holy people and sacred objects and images, and likewise a personal striving toward authentic Communion with God are manifestations of a single order.

And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the Lord am holy... (Leviticus 20: 26).

A patronal icon has always been held in particular reverence. Following baptism, an infant would be brought before the icon and the priest or the master of the house would read prayers. Parents would bless their children with the icon to pursue studies, to go on extended journeys, and to engage in public service. As a sign of their approval of a wedding, the parents would likewise bless the newlyweds with an icon. Moreover, a person's departure from this life would take place in the presence of icons.

The well-known expression "you were divorced; at least bring out the saints" bears witness to people's conscientious attitude toward icons. It would be impermissible to have arguments, or engage in rowdy or otherwise improper behavior before the images of the saints.

One should instill proper reverence for holy images [in children] from a very early age.

What should you do if an icon's condition has rendered it unfit for use and it cannot be restored?

Under no circumstance can such an icon, even one that has not been blessed, be simply thrown away. A holy item, even if it has lost its original appearance, should always be treated with reverence.

If the condition of the icon has deteriorated with age, it should be taken to the church, to be burned in the church furnace. If that should be impossible, you should

burn the icon yourself, and bury the ashes in a place that will not be sullied or disturbed, e.g. in a cemetery or under a tree in the garden.

The faces that look out at us from the icons belong to eternity. Gazing upon them, raise up your prayers to them, asking for their intercession. We, the inhabitants of the earthly world must never forget our Creator and Savior, His eternal call to repentance, His call to constantly perfect ourselves, and his call for the deification of each human soul.

To the Members of Holy New Martyrs Church

This, dear ones, is only an attempt to answer some of the most frequently asked questions. This booklet is a first step in clarifying and strengthening our personal and corporal lives as Orthodox Christians.

Please be aware that there are variations in some pious practices according to ethnic ties. This is our feeble attempt to explain Holy Tradition according to our lives as members of the Russian Church. There is a great deal left to the personal education of each individual. It is the responsibility of each person to continue and enrich their spiritual lives through reading of Holy Scripture, through the many books available of the lives of the saints, through prayer and corporate worship.

May Our Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on us !

May the Most Holy Mother of God, revealed in the miraculous ikon "She who reigns", save us !

And may our holy intercessors the New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia pray continually on our behalf before the throne of God !

Asking for your prayers,

Archpriest Basil Grisel

The Feast of Our Lord's Ascension + 2006