

There are many books by leading Orthodox theologians and scholars on all aspects of the Orthodox Church and this leaflet series provides some basic information in the hope that it might prompt further enquiry.

# LEAFLETS IN THIS INTRODUCTION TO ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY SERIES:

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WORLDWIDE FAMILY

All text in these leaflets is mine except where indicated, therefore any errors of fact or in grammar are mine. I should be grateful to have those errors pointed out so that corrections can be made.

Fr.Nikitas - frnikitas@hotmail.com

**"The Orthodox Church.....**has preserved unadulterated the first and most ancient ecclesiastical tradition and teaching, has avoided innovations and personal interpretations of the Holy Scriptures and dogmas of the faith, and is administered according to the ancient synodical system under local bishops in collaboration with the faithful and successive groups of both local and broader episcopal synods, of which the highest is the Ecumenical Synod, that of the Orthodox worldwide. The basic administrative canons, the details of which are regulated according to local needs, have been determined by the seven ecumenical synods. The Church is not managed by regional states in which it resides, although it collaborates in good works when asked to do so.

Within the entire Orthodox Church there is absolute cooperation in goodwill and mutual respect. Perchance minor human problems are addressed successfully through the application of the evangelical spirit."

*Bartholomew, Patriarch of Constantinople, from  
"Encountering the Mystery."  
ISBN 978-0-385-51813-0*

Orthodox Community of Archangel Michael  
and Holy Piran, Cornwall.  
[www.orthodoxincornwall.org.uk](http://www.orthodoxincornwall.org.uk)

In the Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain.  
Exarchate of Western Europe and Ireland.  
[www.thyateira.org.uk](http://www.thyateira.org.uk)

Ecumenical Patriarchate.  
Οἰκουµενικὸν Πατριαρχεῖον.  
[www.ec-patr.org](http://www.ec-patr.org)



Agia Sophia (Holy Wisdom) Constantinople.

Fr.N.05.15

# Introduction to Orthodox Christianity: Prayer and Worship



**"Worship the Lord in the splendour of  
holiness....."** Psalm 96.

**"And they continued steadfastly in the  
apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the  
breaking of bread, and in the prayers."**

Acts 2:42

Orthodox Christians do not usually follow services in books although books are available and there is order in the services. With all their senses they need to be free to participate and respond.

**"The Church is first of all a worshipping community. Worship comes first, doctrine and discipline second."**

George Florovsky.

**"Dogma with them (the Byzantines) is not only an intellectual system apprehended by the clergy and expounded to the laity, but a field of vision wherein all things on earth are seen in their relation to things in heaven, first and foremost through liturgical celebration."**

George Every.

The Orthodox day of prayer and worship is divided into periods called "hours". This daily round is followed fully in monasteries but not in parish churches.

Depending on local circumstances, in addition to the all important Lord's Day (Sunday), parish churches and communities will if possible observe the Twelve Great Feasts of Orthodoxy and other major feast days. There is no custom of a "daily mass" as found in the Roman Catholic Church.

In the course of services bishops, priests and deacons have a central role as do the chanters (singers or choir) with the congregation encouraged to join harmoniously in the singers' lead. Visitors to Orthodox services will notice that no musical instruments of any kind are used except the human voice and standing is the general posture with seating provided for those who need it.

Orthodox prayer and worship draw heavily for their content on the Holy Scriptures (Bible) especially the Psalms to which is added the poetic hymnody of the early and later Church Fathers.

Whilst private, individual and family prayer each has an independent element these are nevertheless through the common Orthodox hymns and prayers used, aided by available prayer books and manuals, united with Orthodoxy at the wider and community level.

**"The two aspects of Christian existence – personal and corporate are linked together inseparably. One is saved only in the Community, and yet salvation is mediated always through personal faith and obedience. This basic duality of Christian experience is conspicuously reflected in the realm of worship. Christian worship is at once personal and corporate, although these two aspects may be at times in tension."**

George Florovsky – Community and Retreat – from the Worshipping Church, in the introduction to the Festal Menaion (a book of services).

Leaving aside the full round of services, instead looking at what is familiar on Sundays (and feast days), the Orthodox Christian day begins at sunset therefore the first service of Sunday will be Great Vespers (evening prayer) taking place on the Saturday evening.

On Sunday morning the first service will be Orthros (Greek=dawn) which comprises psalms, litanies, hymns and a reading from one of the Gospel post resurrection passages. The concluding hymn of Orthros known as the Doxology leads to the Divine Liturgy. In some traditions the services of Vespers and Orthros are combined on the Saturday evening in what is called the All Night Vigil.

The Divine Liturgy – Eucharist – for most of the year that of Saint John Chrysostom (c349-407), Patriarch of Constantinople, is at the day's centre, with celebrants, readers, servers, singers and the gathered congregation, all engaged in the offering:

**"Remembering therefore this our Saviour's command and all that has been done for us: the Cross, the Tomb, the Resurrection on the third day, the Ascension into heaven, the Sitting at the right hand, the second and glorious Coming again,...."**

From the Divine Liturgy.



**"The Church and its services function like a theological school where the truths of faith and the ways of piety are learned. Merely by listening attentively to the songs and readings, writes a renowned Russian theologian, anybody who comes to church – even without special training – can learn all he needs for the salvation of his soul. Such a school is the Church with its Divine Services. And the doctrine taught at Divine Service can be grasped all the more easily because the lesson is repeated again and again throughout our lives. Moreover, Divine Services constitute practical lessons that instill the truths of faith and morality, not in some abstract form but in the very words and phrases of the prayers. By glorifying the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the supplicant can readily comprehend the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, By venerating the Cross and glorifying the Resurrection, he learns the meaning of Redemption, while grasping the dogma of the veneration of the saints by actually praying to them and praising their names. So too the remembrance of the dead is understood once the acts of commemoration have been performed."**

Extract from an article by Bishop Seraphim of Zurich.