

"Prayer is the most sublime experience of the human soul, and worship is the most profound activity of the people of God."

- *Fr. Alciviadis Calivas*

## **Orthodox Worship**

Prayer is the essence of the Orthodox Christian way of life. It is the means by which one achieves communion with God. Moreover, it is the means by which one experiences the presence of God in his/her life.

Through a disciplined and regimented prayer life one enables him/herself to keep a continuous focus on Christ and His will. One is taught to pray in the morning, in the afternoon, in the evening, before sleep, before meals, simply, throughout the day. The Orthodox Church therefore encourages both private prayer (taking place personally and privately between God and us) and corporate prayer (taking place in the Divine Liturgy, the Holy Mysteries, and other services of the Church) as a means to this end.

Whether corporate or private, prayer is understood in the Orthodox Church as the "lifting of the mind and heart to God." We turn our minds and our hearts toward Him and His will. This is accomplished by either speaking to Him with words or by standing in silence, trusting in God and being open to His will for us.

Saying prayers is not the same as praying. We pray to know God. If our prayers do not assist us to this end, then they may have become simply mechanical exercises for us; our heart and mind have lost sight of both the meaning of the words and the intent of the prayer that we utter.

## **Encountering Christ in Worship**

The goal of our prayer is to encounter Christ. "The Orthodox Christians inhabit and measure time by a calendar itself touched by the incarnate Word of God. The recurring rhythms of the year...constitute the decisive and supreme moments when the Word of God was incarnate and lived among us, when he was born, died, and rose again and ascended into heaven. These acts, upon which our salvation is grounded, occurred once for all. But in the very rhythm and flow of time they are remembered, celebrated and experienced anew" (Fr. A. Calivas).

Daily, our calendar incorporates us into the mystery of Christ. This occurs through both the daily Gospel readings and through the remembrance of the saint(s) commemorated by the Church. Today, for instance, the Church instructs to read 2 Timothy 2:1-10 & Matthew 27:33-54, as we commemorate Saint Lucian (Loukianos). These readings from Scripture keep us centered in God's word and will, while the life of a particular saint like St. Lucian inspires us in our own growth as Orthodox Christians.

## **The Daily Cycle of Prayer**

The daily non-sacramental worship of the Orthodox Church consists of :

### **The Evening Service of Vespers**

In the Orthodox Church the liturgical day begins in the evening with the setting of the sun. This practice follows the biblical account of creation, "And there was evening and there was morning, one day" (Genesis 1:5). The service celebrated

with the setting of the sun is Vespers. It takes us through creation, sin, and salvation in Christ. The service also contains a variety of festal elements that concentrate on particular moments in sacred history, and/or commemorate the lives of saints or memorable events in the life of the Church.

### **The Morning Service of Matins (Orthros)**

Like the Vespers Service, the Orthros Service is centered in thanksgiving for the coming of the true light of Christ and calls all to repentance by uniting the elements of morning psalmody and prayer with meditation on Biblical canticles, the Gospel reading, and the particular theme of the day in the given verses and hymns. The service also contains a variety of festal elements which concentrate on particular moments in sacred history, and/or commemorate the lives of saints or memorable events in the life of the Church.

### **The Four Services of the Hours**

The central prayer of each hour is the Lord's Prayer. In addition each hour has a set of psalms, hymns, and a distinctive prayer for that Hour. Each Hour has a particular theme based upon some aspect of the Christ-event and salvation history. The general themes of the Hours are : the coming of the true light (First); the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (Third); the crucifixion and passion of the Lord (Sixth); and the death and burial of our Lord (Ninth). Each of the Hours is numbered with intervals of the day : the first (our sunrise); the Second (our midmorning, 9:00 AM); the Third (noonday, 12:00 PM) and; the Fourth (midday, 3:00 PM).

### **The Compline Service**

It is a service of psalms and prayers to read following the evening meal before one retires to sleep. It focuses on three things: thanksgiving for the day that has passed; protection for the ensuing night; and forgiveness of wrongs committed during the day.

### **The Midnight service**

This service consists of psalms and prayers that are said in the middle of the night. This service focuses on the significant "middle" of the night events that are found in Scripture, the resurrection of our Lord and His Second Coming.

## **The Weekly Cycle of Prayer**

As the liturgical life of the Church developed and expanded, days of the week took on special meaning. Gradually the Orthodox East developed its weekly cycle, which succinctly celebrates the entire yearly cycle.

**Sunday** - the Lord's Day, a weekly Pascha. As the first day of the week it serves as a witness to the risen Lord.

**Monday** - the second day of the week is dedicated to the angels.

**Tuesday** - the third day of the week honors St. John the Baptist and through him all the prophets.

**Wednesday- \***

**Thursday** - the fifth day of the week is dedicated to the Holy Apostles and St. Nicholas who stands as a model for all the great hierarchs, the successors to the Apostles and the teachers of the Church.

**Friday-\***

**Saturday** - the sixth day of the week the Church commemorates the martyrs. The ascetics, and all those who have fallen asleep in the hope of the resurrection.

\* These days of the week bring into focus the combined mystery of the cross and the person of the Theotokos. Both days proclaim two things :

- ✓ the immeasurable love of God
- ✓ the saving human response to His love through the acceptance of His will and purpose.

**The Yearly Cycle of Prayer**

The festal calendar of the Orthodox Church is a result of continuous development. "Each age adds to it its own significant ecclesiastical events and its own martyrs and witnesses of the faith, who in the purity of their hearts have seen the invisible God as in a mirror, and through whom divine grace has richly flowed to us" (Fr. A. Calivas). It is always in progress.

The Orthodox liturgical year begins on September 1st, in accordance with an ancient custom initiated by Constantine the Great in the early fourth century. The succession of the feasts and fasts of the liturgical year vary in importance and are usually divided into two large categories : "immovable" and "movable." The immovable feasts fall on the same date from year to year while the movable feasts are related to the celebration of Pascha. Each feast is celebrated with the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, because the celebration of the Eucharist constitutes the perpetual festival of the Church (the Eucharist makes the day a true feast, a participation in the joy of the resurrection and the Kingdom, which is to come).

**Liturgical Texts**

- **Typicon (the book of the Ordo)** - regulates the liturgical celebrations of the Orthodox Church.
- **Horologion** - contains the fixed elements of the seven daily liturgical services.
- **Great Octoechos (Book of Eight Tones)** - contains the weekly cycle of feasts.
- **Menaia (Book of the Months)** - the text of the immovable feasts of the Church.
- **Pentecostarion** - contains the services from the Paschal Orthros to the Feast of All Saints, the Sunday after Pentecost.

- **Triodion** - contains the three-week pre-Lenten season; the six-week Lenten season and; the Holy Week.
- **Ieratikon (priest's service book)** - contains the priestly prayers and petitions for the Services of the Vespers, the Orthros, and the Divine Liturgy.
- **Psalter** - the book of psalms.
- **Gospel** - contains the writings of the four evangelists.

### Developing a Prayer Life

"Pray constantly to find God. Love greatly to know God. Partake of His Sacraments to experience God." Father Dean Talagan

Most of us desire a sincere communion with God. Yet, it may seem like an impossible task. In fact, even with a great commitment of time and energy we may never be satisfied with our prayer life. **THAT'S THE IDEA!!! WE SHOULD NEVER BE SATISFIED WITH OUR PRAYER LIFE BECAUSE WE CAN ALWAYS BE CLOSER TO GOD AND MORE COMMITTED TO OUR LIFE IN CHRIST!!!**

First and foremost we should remember that prayer, like any exercise, is a process and a discipline. With this thought in mind, we have a number of decisions to make before we begin :

**When am I going to pray?** *Suggestion* : pick a regular time each day to pray during which you are AWAKE and have few disturbances.

**Where will I pray?** *Suggestion* : find a place that is quiet, comfortable and practical and make it sacred space.

**What do I need to pray?** *Suggestion* : you should have whatever will help you in your efforts i.e., prayer/service book, bible, icons, candles, a Cross.

**What will my posture be when I pray?** *Suggestion* : Is it more comfortable to stand, sit or use a combination of these (you should not lay down as you are in a dialogue with someone, God!). Will you prostrate yourself at any time?

**What will the content of my prayer be?** *Suggestion* : warm-up by reading from Scripture and the Church Fathers or a particular saint. Then begin your prayer with a Doxology (praise) e.g. "blessed is our God, always now and forevermore. Amen." Second, offer thanks to God for all of His blessings. Third, ask God for forgiveness of your sins as you forgive others their trespasses against you. Fourth, petition God for the health and well being of others and then yourself. Finally, end with a doxology e.g. "for you are blessed now and forevermore."

Origen, an early Christian writer tells us to work on prayer by :

1. Pausing and preparing ourselves, so that our prayer may become more intense.
2. Recalling the grandeur and greatness of God.
3. Setting aside everything else from our minds.

4. Turning our soul to Him.
5. Forgiving those who have upset us or hurt us.
6. Kneeling down as a symbol of surrender to God.

There exists no set formula for prayer. One can simply utter the Jesus prayer "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner" if this is an effective means of communion with God. Try various methods of prayer, talk to your spiritual father, follow the life of the Church, and pray about your prayer life! The important thing to do is find something that works for you.

*Contents Copyright ©1998 The Greek Orthodox Church of the Holy Cross. All rights reserved.*

*900 Alameda, Belmont, CA 94002-1604*

*Voice: (650) 591-4447 Fax: (650) 508-9846*

*Email: [office@goholycross.org](mailto:office@goholycross.org)*

*Please address any comments or suggestions to [webmaster@thyra.com](mailto:webmaster@thyra.com). Thank you.*