

Catechism



of the Orthodox Church VOLUME I

Holy Ascension Orthodox Mission
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**HOLY ASCENSION
ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN MISSION**

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Lesson 1A

Sources of Christian Doctrine

What does "Sources of Christian Doctrine" mean?

God – Divine Revelation. God is the Lord and has revealed Himself to us (Psalm 117, verses 27 and 26).

Holy Tradition (Includes Scripture)

The ongoing life of God's People is called Holy Tradition. St John the Theologian writes, "There are many other things that Jesus did, which, if they were all written down in detail, I do not suppose that the world itself could hold the books that would have to be written" (John 21: 25). But what about those things Jesus said and did that were not recorded for us? These became Holy Tradition, passed on orally from one generation of Christians to another. The Church has been and remains the guardian, the judge, and the touchstone upon which was decided the integrity and genuineness of that which has become known as the Holy Tradition of the Orthodox Church.

Not everything in the Church belongs to its Holy Tradition for not everything in the Church is done by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and not everything in the Church pertains essentially and necessarily to the Kingdom of God. Some things in the Church are just temporal and temporary things, merely human customs and traditions of no eternal and everlasting value. Such things in themselves are not sinful or wrong. On the contrary, they may be very positive and very helpful to the life of the Church as long as they are not taken to be what they

are not. Thus, it is very important in the Church to make the distinction between traditions which are merely earthly and human and passing away and the genuine Holy Tradition which pertains to the heavenly and eternal Kingdom of God. (examples: Christmas Trees, Decorating homes and churches in greenery for Pentecost, taking the “Paschal Light” home on Pascha and marking our lintels with a Cross...etc).

Among the elements which make up the Holy Tradition of the Church, the Bible holds the first place. Next comes the Church’s liturgical life and its prayer, then its dogmatic decisions and the acts of its approved churchly councils, the writings of the church fathers, the lives of the saints, the canon laws, and finally the iconographic tradition together with the other inspired forms of creative artistic expression such as music and architecture.

Bible

At a council of Orthodox bishops in Carthage in 318 (Canon 30) the books which make up what we now call the New Testament were determined. And at the Council of Laodicea in 343 (Canon 59) the books of both the Old and New Testaments were determined.

The Masoretic text was not an accurate rendition of the original Old Testament Scripture. While translating the text into Hebrew the Masoretic scholars omitted several books, including Tobit, Judah, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, Baruch, and the Prayer of Manasses. Also, in the Masoretic text, parts of Daniel and Esther were omitted and the Psalms were renumbered (from Psalm 9 to 142 in the Masoretic text, psalms are one number higher).

The Divine Services & Hymnology of the Church

Our prayers and hymns are not cute jingles and pretty poems we sing just for fun. They expound upon the Scriptures, they describe the God we worship, the saints that we venerate, the feasts and commemorations that we observe and explain theology in poetic form.

Councils

Gatherings of bishops as equal brothers in Christ.

Types of Councils:

- Ecumenical (Universal, General)
- Local
- Definitions, Acts, Canons.

Councils are one of the most authoritative organs of the Church. The Church is guided by the Holy Spirit (Infallibility of the Church, rather than “infallibility” of any one single bishop). “It seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us.” (Acts 15:28)

The Fathers & Mothers of the Church

Saints, theologians, teachers, spiritual fathers and mothers who defended and explained the Orthodox Christian Faith. Their works are universally received by the Church. Not all their works and sayings are considered official doctrine/teaching. Theologoumena = personal/private opinion, not official teaching or doctrine of the Church.

(The Lives of the) **Saints (Hagiography/Hagiology)**

Iconography/Iconology

Not idolatry (we keep photos of loved ones that we venerate)

Lesson 1B

The Holy Bible

A Prayer Before Reading the Holy Scriptures

O Master, Lover of mankind, shine in our hearts the pure light of Your divine knowledge.

Open the eyes of our mind to the understanding of Your Gospel.

Instill in us also a sense of awe for Your blessed commandments.

So that, trampling down all lusts of the flesh, we may lead a spiritual way of life, being mindful of You and doing all that is well-pleasing to You.

For You are the enlightenment of our souls and bodies, O Christ God, and to You we send up glory, together with Your Father who is without beginning, and Your all-holy, good and life-creating Spirit, now and ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Bible = Greek: Book. “Bible” is a Greek word (Βιβλος = Vivlos), which means, a book. It is not “the word of God” as the heterodox define it. The Greek <<Λογος του Θεου>> (Logos tou Theou = Word of God) implies that the Word/Logos is someone, somebody, a person; not something, i.e., like a book for example.

Compilation of Books into one volume

One of the sources of revelation in the Church (others being: Writings of the Church Fathers, Canons of Councils, Divine Services, Lives of Saints...).

Different religious groups include different books in their biblical canons, in varying orders, and sometimes divide or combine books. Christian Bibles range from the 66 books of the Protestant canon to the 81 books of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church canon.

Eastern Orthodox Canon = 76 (according to OSB reckoning).

Author = Various. Men and Women. “Written over 4000 years.” forty individuals, spanning about 1500 years and representing a variety of cultures, historical periods, and occupations. They wrote in three languages: Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic. Yet the Holy Bible is a well-organized unity with one great theme and central figure, Jesus Christ. All of this would be impossible if it weren’t for the fact that the Bible ultimately had one Divine Author: God, who inspired its human authors (2 Timothy 3: 16).

Divided into 2 main sections = Old and New Testaments/Covenants.

We should note, however, that the word testament is not totally appropriate to designate the character of these two books, but rather the designations New Covenant and Old Covenant.

Who put the Bible together? Why these books specifically?

The Orthodox Church. At a council of Orthodox bishops in Carthage in 418 (Canon 32) the books which make up what we now call the New Testament were determined. There is also the 3rd Canonical Epistle of St Athanasius the Great written in 367.

Old Testament

The Old Testament is an account of God's early agreement or covenant with the Hebrews prior to the coming of Jesus Christ. The first five books of the Old Testament are called the Pentateuch, or the "five writings." They deal with salvation history from creation through the entrance of the Hebrews into the Promised Land. The next 12 books are historical, having been written about 1100—600 BC. They describe God's ongoing dealings with the Hebrews.

The remainder of the Old Testament is composed of poetical books, as well as the writings of the major and minor prophets. Throughout the Old Testament, a common theme emerges: this book is a history of God acting in history, that is,

Salvation History. It is a history of a people chosen by God out of whom would come the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Mary and the Son of God, the Word, the Second Person of the Trinity.

New Testament

More than 500 years before the birth of Christ, the Prophet Jeremiah predicted that the covenant relation of God with His people, instituted on Mount Sinai, would give place in the future to a more inward and personal one (Jeremiah 31:31-34). With this in mind, St. Paul regarded the Christian Dispensation as being based on a new covenant, which he contrasted with the old covenant of the books of Moses (2 Corinthians 3:6-15). By His sacrificial death, Christ became the mediator of a new covenant (Hebrews 9:15-20).

The books of the New Testament, of which there are twenty-seven, fall into four categories: 1) Gospels, from Evangelion, or Good News, because they tell the Good News of Jesus Christ, Ss. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; 2) Church History, The Acts of the Apostles; 3) Epistles (or Letters) of which there are twenty-one, written by Ss. Paul, James, Peter, John and Jude; and 4) an Apocalypse, that is, a Revelation or disclosure of God's will for the future, hence the title: The Revelation to St John. All these books were written in the koine or common Greek of the time, which was in common use throughout the Roman Empire at the beginning of the Christian era.

The New Testament, God's present agreement with His people, reveals Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the One who comes to save mankind from sin and death. In it we find

the accounts of the life and sayings of Jesus, instructions in Christian living, and God's plan for the future.

The first five books of the New Testament are historical.

- The Gospel of Saint Matthew records the life of Jesus written especially for the Jews. It reveals Jesus Christ as their long-awaited Savior and King.
- The Gospel of Saint Mark describes Jesus Christ as the obedient Servant of God.
- The Gospel of Saint Luke emphasizes Jesus Christ as human and divine.
- The Gospel of Saint John reveals Jesus as the Son of God, the eternal and divine Word of God the Father.
- The Acts of the Apostles relates the history of the early Church following the Ascension of Jesus Christ.

The remaining books of the New Testament, consisting of letters or epistles written by the apostles to the early Christian communities, deal with virtually every aspect of Christian faith and life.

The last book of the New Testament, the book of Revelation, is highly symbolic language of the life of Jesus Christ's eternal Kingdom and the blessings which await those who remain faithful to God.

Bible Synopsis

The entire Bible is structured so that everything after the Fall – the history of Israel, the prophets, the coming of Christ – is presented as a remedy for that Fall, a way out of evil. The beginning of conscious history with the creation of Adam and Eve, the rise of the state of the people of Israel and all their pathologies of pride and rigidity, but the emergence of great moral and prophetic figures who try to set things right, culminating in the Messiah Himself – that is all part of humanity's attempt, with God's help, to set itself aright. To freely choose to set ourselves aright by turning to God, healing our broken relationship with Him and each other, and then existing in unbroken unity with Him.

What does the Church say about the Bible? Sola Scriptura?

The Bible is sacred and holy to Orthodox Christians, but it is not the primary or sole source of revelation for the Church. It is the result and product of the Church. The Scriptures were never intended to be the basis of sole and complete containment of divine revelation. As the apostle and evangelist St John the Theologian stated, "... There are so many other things which Jesus said and did which were not written [John 21: 25]."

In the year 787, the Fathers of the 7th Ecumenical Council, more than 1200 years ago, dealt with the heresy of Sola Scriptura and condemned it, pronouncing,

Anathema to those who spurn the teachings of the holy Fathers and the tradition of the Universal Orthodox Church ... Making their own arguments ...

That unless we were evidently taught by the Old and New Testaments, we should not follow the teachings of the holy Fathers and the holy Ecumenical Councils, and the tradition of the Orthodox Church.

-- Definition from the 7th Ecumenical Council

The Church existed for over 300 years practising the fullness of the mystical life (the Divine Services and Divine Sacraments = the liturgical-sacramental life) without what is known as the Bible. The individual Fathers during these early centuries did not dare trust themselves to determine on their own what was Scripture. They waited for the conscience of the Church to declare with its universal voice what was truly Scripture, rather than relying on their own opinion.

Why does the Orthodox Church use the Septuagint rather than the Masoretic text for the Old Testament? Isn't the Hebrew Masoretic much older and more accurate?

No. The Hebrew Masoretic text is not the oldest version nor is it more accurate than the Septuagint. This is important to clarify because of the common misconception of the historic significance of the Masoretic and how the Scriptures came into existence.

In 250BC, Ptolemy Philadelphus issued a decree in Alexandria for scholars to translate the Hebraic Old Testament of the Temple in Jerusalem into Greek. 72

scholars undertook the task, thus the name “Septuagint” (from Seventy).

In the 1st century AD, most Jews in the Middle East spoke Greek; this included Christ Himself, His disciples (the apostles and others), and the early Church. Consequently, the Scriptures used by Christ Himself, and His followers was the Septuagint.

Several Church Fathers and hierarchs such as St John Chrysostom, Jerome, Eusebius of Caesarea, Lucian of Antioch and Eustathius of Berea used the Hebraic Old Testament merely for scholarly purposes. The Fathers were no fools. When expounding on matters of doctrine and explanation of Scripture, as well as compiling hymnody for the Divine Services, they would always refer to the Septuagint, which is the only version of Old Testament Scripture to be found in Orthodox churches.

After the fall of Jerusalem in 70AD, the remaining Jewish leaders gathered at Jamnia (near Joppa, south of modern Tel Aviv). At this meeting the decision was made to construct a Hebrew translation of the Old Testament using the Septuagint. However, the process of translating Old Testament Scripture back into Hebrew did not begin until about the 6th century and was not completed until around the 10th century.

It is this text of the Old Testament that is referred to as the Masoretic text. Used by Judaism until this day, and unfortunately highly respected and used in Protestant

seminaries and churches. Why is this version of the Old Testament called the Masoretic Text? Because the Masoretes were groups of Jewish scribe-scholars who worked between the 6th and 10th centuries AD, based primarily in early medieval Palestine in the cities of Tiberias and Jerusalem, as well as in Iraq (Babylonia).

The Masoretic text was not an accurate rendition of the original Old Testament Scripture. While translating the text into Hebrew the Masoretic scholars omitted several books, including Tobit, Judah, 1 Macabees, 2 Macabees, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, Baruch, and the Prayer of Manasses. Also, in the Masoretic text, parts of Daniel and Esther were omitted, and the Psalms were renumbered (from Psalm 9 to 142 in the Masoretic text, psalms are one number higher).

The Masoretic text being a biased revision of the complete Septuagint Old Testament deliberately obscures any prophecies, meanings and references regarding:

- (1) the divinity and messiahship of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God,
 - (2) the Ever-Virginity of the Mother of God
- and
- (3) the Incarnation.

At the beginning of the 16th century Protestant Reformation there were 3 versions of Scripture:

(1) the Septuagint, which was the original Hebraic Old Testament translated in its entirety into Greek around 200BC,

(2) the Vulgate, a translation of the complete Septuagint text into Latin around 410AD by Jerome,

and

(3) the Masoretic text, a 10th century abbreviated translation of the Septuagint into Hebrew (of which one of the earliest copies can be found at the St Catherine's Orthodox Monastery at Mt Sinai, Egypt).

Once the Protestant Reformers permanently turned away from Roman Catholicism, in their printing frenzy, they did not return to Orthodoxy or continue the use of the Septuagint, but rather adopted the Masoretic text.

Modern day Protestant seminaries insist that the Masoretic text is the "most ancient" and "complete" canon of Scripture. The Masoretic text was not finished until the 10th century and removed several books while discarding parts of others. Any claim to authenticity or wholeness is simply wrong.

History bears out the fact that the Septuagint exists as a faithful and accurate compilation of Old Testament books and the abbreviated Masoretic text is inaccurate and discrepant.

Carthage 418: CANON XXXII (32)

It has pleased the Synod to prohibit the reading of anything besides the canonical Scriptures in church under color of divine Scriptures. The canonical Scriptures are the following, to wit: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua the son of Nun, Judges, Chronicles 4, Wisdom (Sirach/Baruch) 2 books, Job, the Psalter, the 4 books of Solomon, the 12 books of the Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Tobit, Judith, Esther, the 2 books of Ezra; of the New Testament, the 4 Gospels, Acts of the Apostles (one book), the 14 Epistles of Paul, the 2 of Peter the Apostle, the 3 of John the Apostle, the 1 of James the Apostle, the letter of Jude the Apostle, the Revelation of John (1 book).

Canonical Epistle of St Athanasius the Great

In order and by name each of them stands as follows. First comes Genesis, then Exodus, then Leviticus, and after this Numbers, and thereupon Deuteronomy. The rest of them are: Joshua of Nun, and Judges, and after this Ruth. And again the next are Kingdoms, four books; of which the first and the second are counted together as one, and the third and the fourth, like wise as one. After these come Paralipomena (or Chronicles, first and second, likewise counted as one book. The Esdras, first and second, likewise counted as one. After these comes the Book of Psalms, and thereupon Proverbs. Then Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs. In addition. to these there is the book of Job. This followed by the Prophets, the twelve of which are counted as one book. Then come

Isaiah and Jeremiah, and together with the latter are Baruch, Lamentations, and the Epistle, and with them are also Ezekiel and Daniel. Up to this point those enumerated have been, books of the Old Testament. Those of the New Testament, again, must not be left out of the reckoning. They are: Four Gospels, according to Matthew, according to Mark, according to Luke, according to John, and after these come the Acts of the Apostles and the seven so-called catholic (or general) Epistles of the Apostles, these being as follows: of James, one; of Peter, two; then of John, three; and of Jude, one. In addition to all these there are also fourteen Epistles of St. Paul the Apostle, which are found written in the following order: the first one to the Romans; then to the Corinthians, two; and after these the one to the Galatians and one to the Ephesians, then, one to the Philippians, and one to the Colossians, and two to the Thessalonians; after which comes the Epistle to the Hebrews, and thereupon come two Epistles to Timothy, one to Titus, and lastly one to Philemon and, again, the Revelation of John. These are all sources of salvation, so that anyone thirsting should take pains to fill himself with the sayings and facts recorded therein. In these alone it is that one may find a teaching ground on which to proclaim the good tidings of the Gospel, and to acquire the religion of piety. Let no one superimpose anything thereon, nor delete anything from there. Concerning these the Lord rebuked the Sadducees by saying: "You are deceived, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God" (Matthew 22:29; Mark 2:24, John 5:31).

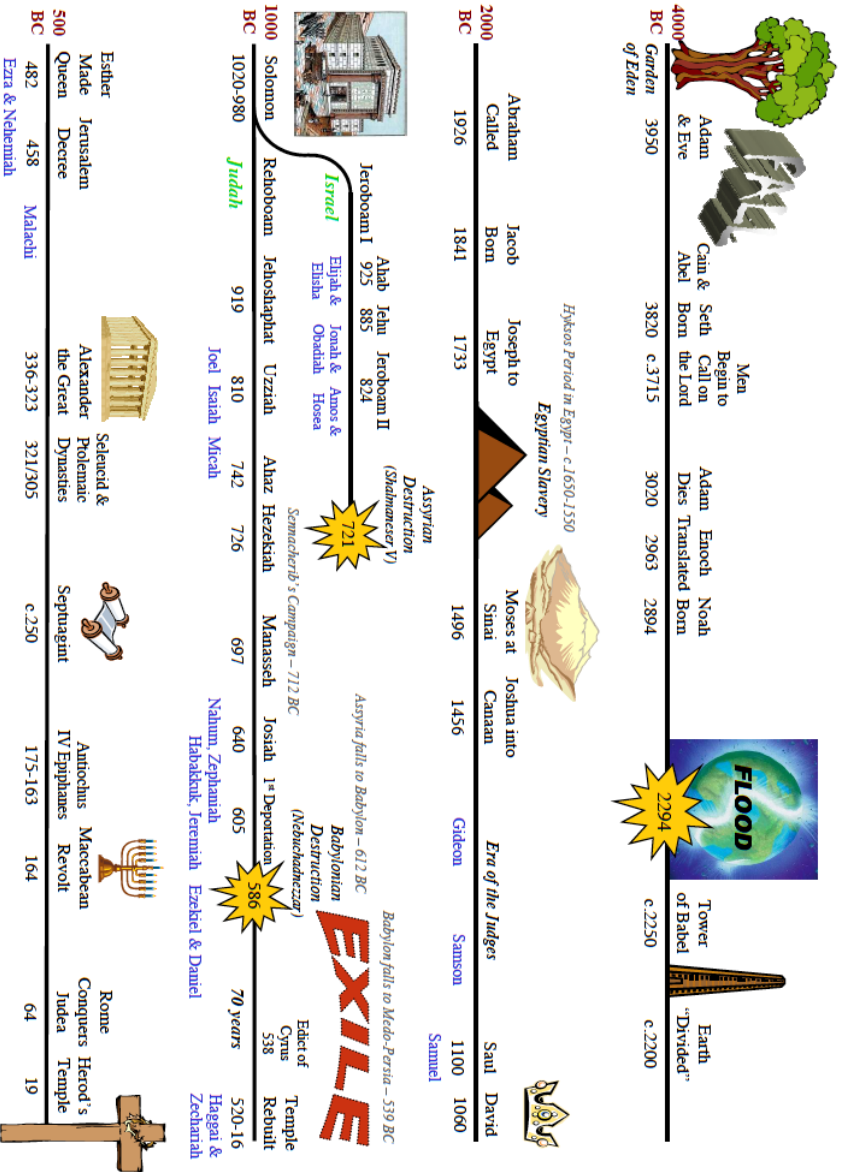
Nevertheless, for the sake of greater exactness, I add also this, writing as I do the fact as a matter of necessity, that there are also other books than these outside of the list herein given, which, though not canonically sanctioned, are to be found formally prescribed by the Fathers to be read to those who have just joined and are willing to be catechized with respect to the word of piety, namely: the Wisdom of Solomon; the Wisdom of Sirach; and Esther, and Judith, and Tobias; and the so-called Didache (salutary teaching of the Apostles, and the Shepherd. And yet dear readers, both with those canonically sanctioned and these recommended to be read, there is no mention of the Apocrypha; but, on the contrary, the latter are an invention of heretics who were writing them as they pleased, assigning and adding to them dates and years, in order that, by offering them as ancient documents, they might have a pretext for deceiving honest persons as a consequence thereof.

St Vincent of Lerins, Commonitory 2: 5 & 6

[5] But here someone perhaps will ask, Since the canon of Scripture is complete, and sufficient of itself for everything, and more than sufficient, what need is there to join with it the authority of the Church's interpretation? For this reason: because, owing to the depth of Holy Scripture, all do not accept it in one and the same sense, but one understands its words in one way, another in another; so that it seems to be capable of as many interpretations as there are interpreters. For Novatian expounds it one way, Sabellius another, Donatus another, Arius, Eunomius, Macedonius, another, Photinus, Apollinaris, Priscillian, another, Iovinian, Pelagius, Celestius, another, lastly, Nestorius another. Therefore, it is

very necessary, on account of so great intricacies of such various error, that the rule for the right understanding of the prophets and apostles should be framed in accordance with the standard of Ecclesiastical and Catholic interpretation.

[6] Moreover, in the Catholic Church itself, all possible care must be taken, that we hold that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all. For that is truly and in the strictest sense Catholic, which, as the name itself and the reason of the thing declare, comprehends all universally. This rule we shall observe if we follow universality, antiquity, consent. We shall follow universality if we confess that one faith to be true, which the whole Church throughout the world confesses; antiquity, if we in no wise depart from those interpretations which it is manifest were notoriously held by our holy ancestors and fathers; consent, in like manner, if in antiquity itself we adhere to the consentient definitions and determinations of all, or at the least of almost all priests and doctors.



Lesson 2

God the Holy Trinity

3 persons in 1 nature/essence. Not 3 gods but 1 God in 3 persons: Father, Son & Holy Spirit.

Unique Personal Characteristics

Father = Fatherhood, Unbegottenness, Source.

Son = Sonship, Pre-eternal Begottenness (Because if there is a Father, he has to exist in relation to a Son).

Holy Spirit = Procession. Eternally proceeds from the Father.

The Trinity is three divine persons (*hypostases*) who share one essence. It is paradoxical to believe thus, but that is how God has revealed himself. All three persons are consubstantial with each other, that is, they are of one essence and coeternal. There never was a time when any of the persons of the Trinity did not exist.

Explanation of the Trinity

The source and unity of the Holy Trinity is the Father, from whom the Son is begotten and also from whom the Spirit proceeds. Thus, the Father is both the ground of unity of the Trinity and also of distinction. To try to comprehend unbegottenness (Father), begottenness (Son), or procession (Holy Spirit) leads to insanity, says St Gregory the Theologian, and so the Church approaches God in divine mystery, approaching God apophatically, being content to

encounter God personally and yet realize the inadequacy of the human mind to comprehend Him.

The Trinity Explained in the Creed

The primary statement of what the Church believes about God is to be found in the Creed.

Trinity in the Old Testament

The Old Testament further specifies the nature of divine plurality by identifying the three persons of the Godhead.

These three persons are all distinguished from each other, and yet, in various ways, are identified as **God: the Father** (e.g. Deuteronomy 32: 6; Isaiah 63: 16, 64: 8, Malachi 2: 10);

the person variously designated as the Angel or Messenger of the LORD, Word, or **Son of God** (e.g. Genesis 16: 7 - 14, 21: 17 - 18, 22: 9 - 18, 28: 10 - 22 (cf. Genesis 31: 11 - 13), 32: 22 - 32 (cf. Hosea 12: 3 - 4); Exodus 3, 13: 21 (cf. 14: 19), 23: 20 - 22; Numbers 22: 21 - 41; Judges 2: 1 - 5, 6: 7 - 24, 13: 3 - 22, 2 Samuel 24: 16; Psalm 2, 109: 1, Isaiah 7: 14, 9: 6, 63: 9; Jeremiah 23: 5 - 6; Proverbs 30: 4; Zechariah 1: 10 - 11, 12: 8; Malachi 3: 1);

and the **Holy Spirit** or Spirit of God (e.g. Nehemiah 9: 20; Job 26: 13, 33: 4; Psalm 103: 30, 105: 32 - 33, 138: 1 - 24, 142: 10; 2 Samuel 23: 1 - 3; Isaiah 11: 2, 40: 13; Ezekiel 11: 5; Micah 2: 7).

Finally, in addition to the above passages that separately speak of one or another person of the Godhead, assigning to them the names, attributes, and prerogatives of God, **there are many passages which mention all three persons**

together, assigning to each a role in the divine works of creation, providence, and redemption. For example: 1) Genesis 1: 1 - 3 mentions God creating all things by His Word and Spirit; 2) the same thing is reiterated in Psalm 32: 6; 3) Isaiah 42: 1 speaks of God, His Servant/Chosen One, and His Spirit, by which He will bring justice or righteousness to the world; 4) Isaiah 48: 12 - 16 has the First and the Last, i.e. the eternal God, speaking of a time when He is sent by the LORD God and His Spirit; 5) in Isaiah 61: 1, the person who is sent with the good news, i.e. the Gospel, says the LORD has anointed Him with His Holy Spirit, Who is upon Him; and 6) Isaiah 63 tells of the LORD, the Angel or Messenger of His Presence, and the Holy Spirit bringing about salvation.

Trinity in the New Testament

Jesus says just before His Ascension:

“Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”– Matthew 28: 19

Each member of the Trinity is God:

The Father is God: John 6: 27; Romans 1: 7; 1 Peter 1: 2.

The Son is God: John 1: 1, 14; Romans 9: 5; Colossians 2: 9; Hebrews 1: 8; 1 John 5: 20.

The Holy Spirit is God: Acts 5: 3 - 4; 1 Corinthians 3: 16

Trinity revealed in the Baptism of Christ (Theophany. Matthew 3: 13 - 17; Mark 1: 9 - 11; Luke 3: 21 - 22), and Transfiguration (Matthew 17: 1 - 8, Mark 9: 2 - 9, Luke 9: 28 - 36, and 2 Peter 1: 16 - 19).

Christ alludes to the Trinity at His Ascension (Mark 16: 19; Luke 24: 50 – 51; Apostles 1: 9 - 12), and when the Holy Spirit

comes to the Apostles at Pentecost John 7: 37 – 52, 8: 12; Acts 2: 1 – 11).

Trinity in the Divine Services

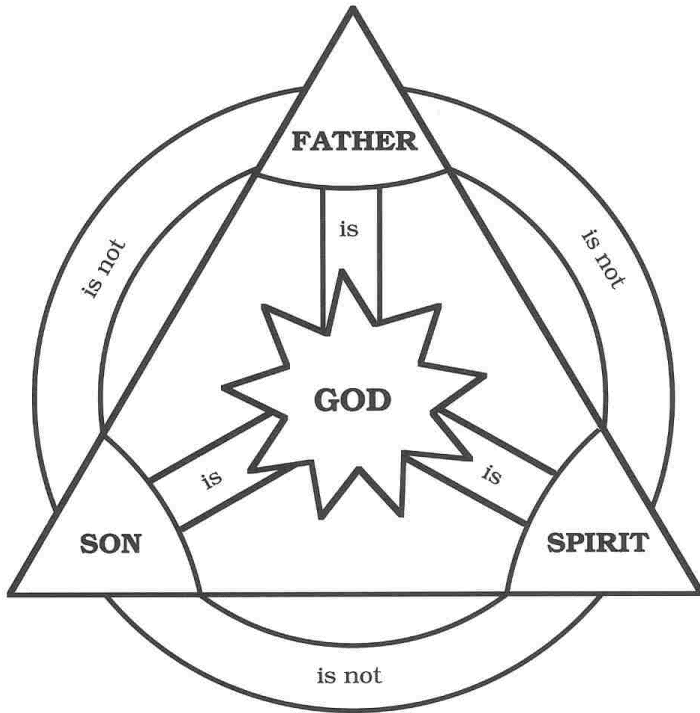
Other than in the Feasts mentioned above:

Canons to the Holy Trinity in the Midnight Office (8 tones).

Conclusion

God's actual nature, however, is forever and completely unknowable by us. This lies completely beyond all human ideas, thoughts and language in mystery, (Isaiah 55: 11). We do not, therefore, *think* about the Trinity, we worship the Trinity and it is in worship that we know and understand in a language deeper than the words that are used. Our language about the Trinity is, therefore, measured and humble before the great mystery that is the God of love.

Finally, we should remark that the Trinity is a communion of persons (hypostases) not a solitary being. This communion is one of relational love, not a monolithic 'block' of unyielding divinity. The insistence that "God is Love" (1 John 4: 7 – 8) shows that God Himself is the *perfect* expression of Love and Love is of essence and action, relational. What He is in Himself, He is also toward us, an open communion of relational covenant love. Truly, there is no Christianity without the Trinity.



Lesson 3

Jesus Christ

Who do you say that I am?

Mark 8: 27 – 31 (See also Matthew 16: 13 – 20 & Luke 9: 18 – 21)

Jesus went out with His disciples into the villages of Caesarea Philippi. On the way, He asked His disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” They answered, “John the Baptizer, and others say Elijah, but others yet say that You are one of the prophets.” Jesus said to them, “But you, who do you say that I am?” And Peter answered, “You are the Christ!” Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone who He was.

Jesus = O Lord, save.

Matthew 1: 21

She will give birth to a son and you shall give Him the name Jesus because He will be the One to save His people from their sins.

Christ = Anointed One. Chosen One. The Messiah.

Jesus is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, eternally born of the Father. He became man, and therefore He is at the same time fully God and fully man. His coming to earth was foretold in the Old Testament by the prophets.

In reciting the Nicene Creed, Orthodox Christians regularly affirm the historic faith concerning Jesus.

Jesus is a real person. A historical figure (A real person in history). Not a myth.

Creed

And in one Lord Jesus Christ... Through Whom all things were made... For our salvation... And His Kingdom will have no end.

From the Hymns of Nativity (Christmas)

The Feast of the Incarnation – God becomes Man.

Nativity Canon

The Creator, seeing man perishing, whom He had made with His own hands, bowed heaven and descended; and from the godly and pure Virgin, He took all of man's nature, being truly incarnate; therefore, God has been glorified.

Let us cry aloud to Christ God, the Son who was begotten of the Father without change before the ages, and in these last times incarnate of the Virgin without seed: You have raised up our power. Holy are you, O Lord!

The Incarnation

"The Word became flesh" (John 1: 14).

Christ is the God-man (Theanthropos). He is perfect God (Theos) and perfect man. At the same time, He is one person; that is, one person in two natures, the divine (God = Theos) and the human (Man = Anthropos).

These two natures are unconfusedly united, so that they form one person but at the same time are not confused.

Jesus was born as perfect man, and behaved as a man. He had the natural needs of man (except He never sinned. Tempted, but never fell into sin). The divine nature did not overwhelm the human nature, nor did the human nature overwhelm the divine. He condescended to humble Himself, to become man, to put on human flesh, just as we in baptism put on Christ. As Christ descended, man ascended. As God was incarnate, man was able to become God-like.

God and man were united in the person of Christ and became the divine and extraordinary person of the God-man. Never before has another such person existed, nor will again, in the history of the world and of humanity. In Christ the God-man, two natures have been united: the divine and the human, without confusion, distinct, separate, and independent, each unchanged by the other. Christ, the Son of God, is also the Son of Man. Perfect God and perfect Man. He is truly the God-man in the full sense of the word. As God, He is born of God the Father "before all ages." As human, He was born "of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary," in Bethlehem in Judea, 2000 years ago.

The event of the Incarnation of the Son and Word of God and His retaining both His divine and human natures have made a profound impression, resulting inevitably in much debate. The Third, Fourth, and Sixth Ecumenical Councils dealt with this matter.

The purpose of the Incarnation of the Son and Word of God.

Why did Christ have to come? Why did He have to die?

With the disobedience of Adam and Eve, mankind fell and lost Grace. Mankind was alienated from God. Humanity was expelled from Paradise. Therefore, for fallen human nature to be restored, the Son and Word of God had to assume the whole of human nature completely, to restore it to Heaven through His Resurrection and Ascension.

Hymn from Ascension

"Carrying deceived human nature upon Your shoulders, O Christ, through Your Ascension You brought it before God the Father."

This was the purpose of the Incarnation of the Son of God.

Theosis - Deification

As St Athanasios writes, "God became man for us to become godly."

No one should think that we humans can become gods and be given a divine nature. No. We can become godly in the moral sense: our essence remains the same human nature, but we strive to become more like God (godly, god-like) ontologically in our being as humans.

Lesson 4

Creation & Salvation

The Creation of the World

Our Orthodox Christian Faith teaches us, "I believe in one God, Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth and of all things visible and invisible."

God is the Creator of all of the visible and invisible world. That is to say, He is the Creator of the spiritual world (angels); the material world (the sun, the earth, the stars, and whatever exists in them); and also the world of spirit-matter (man).

Everything has been created "by The Father, through The Son, in the Holy Spirit."

Holy Scriptures tells us: "I made earth and man upon it, with My hand I founded the firmament of the Heavens, I order the course of the stars" (Isaiah 44:24). The Psalmist St David and St Paul repeat, "You, O Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth; and the Heavens are the work of Your hands" (Psalms 102:25; Hebrews 1:10).

Why did God create the world?

He created it out of love. He created it to make it a participant in His glory, joy, and bliss. God is not selfish. He wants His creation to have and to enjoy whatever He has. We can say that the cause of the creation of the world is God's Love. The same God Who is Perfect Love.

The purpose of creation is participation in the joy, the glory, and the bliss of God. Naturally, the creation of the world bears witness and gives praise to the Power and the Glory of God. We can even say that this is the purpose of creation; that is to say, the praising of God by His creatures. The one who benefits from it is not God, but we ourselves.

Spiritual World & Angelic Realm

The angels, demons, and the souls of men constitute the known spiritual world that God has created. We do not know whether there exist other creatures in the spiritual world. God also belongs to the spiritual world, as the Holy Scriptures say: "God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24), but God is not part of creation. He is above creation and He is Himself the Creator.

Angels are beings: spiritual, immortal, and self-governed. They serve God and protect mankind. They are divided into nine ranks:

Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones
Dominions, Powers, Authorities
Principalities, Archangels, Angels

They were created before the creation of the material world, but we do not know exactly when. We infer this from what God said to Job, "When the stars appeared, all My angels praised Me with a great voice" (Job 38:7).

Although angels are spiritual beings and constantly in motion, they are not present everywhere. The same angel cannot be in two places at the same time. Only God is present

everywhere. Angels are sent by God, in accordance with His Will.

Angels in Relation to Mankind

In their relationship to men, angels bring to them God's messages. So the Holy Scriptures tell us: the Angel Raphael brought messages to Tobias; Archangel Michael, to Joshua, the son of Nun; Archangel Gabriel, to Zacharias and to the Virgin Mary. No one knows the numbers of the angels. There are, however, many. This is seen by the fact that on the night of the birth of Christ, "Suddenly there was with the angel a great multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:12-14). The teaching of our Church is firm in that we have "an angel of Peace, a faithful guide, a guardian (protector) of our souls and bodies." And so, our angels protect us, guide us, rejoice when we repent, bring us, as messengers, God's messages. Each one of us has a personal angel.

Fallen Angels

Angels were created free.

But one angel, Lucifer, abusing his freedom, said, "I will ascend to Heaven, above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will make myself like the Most-High" (Isaiah 14:13-14). He said this and attempted it. "I will ascend to Heaven. I will set my throne above the clouds. I will become the same as God." Many other angels followed him in his attempt. We do not know how many. God punished them. From the righteous spirits that they had been, they became evil. That is to say, they became demons. They became entrenched in this condition. They will be forever miserable as demons.

They are unable to change. However, as we shall see later on in another section, although God punished the man who disobeyed Him, and gave him a second opportunity to be saved by sending Christ to save mankind, He did not offer the demons a second chance. Why not? Perhaps because the demons had decided on their own to oppose the Will of God. Man himself also exercised his free will, but he had been tempted by Satan in the form of a snake. Maybe that is why God gave mankind a second chance to be saved, but not the fallen angels, the demons.

St John of Damascus writes that angelic beings have free will but are incapable of repentance. It is only through weakness of the body that Man is capable of repentance. One speculation is that angels have a more perfect understanding and direct experience of spiritual reality due to being totally noetic (nous), so a rejection of God by an angel is a perfect/complete turning away from God.

Demons in Relation to Mankind

The demons work to tempt people. They feel guilty and seek others to share their guilt. They cannot tempt God. Nor can they tempt the angels, because angels are eternally entrenched as righteous spirits. Therefore, they turn to mankind. They tempt them. They lure them. They want to lead them into eternal Hell. But if people have faith in God, the demons cannot succeed in their attempts. God does not permit this.

Man

God created Mankind last. Mankind is both spiritual and material. Soul and Body.

God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit said, "Let Us create man. And the Lord God formed man from the dust of the earth, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of Life. And man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7). God gave man soul and body and made him sovereign upon earth, to have authority over all earthly things.

The soul of man, as the spiritual component, is of great value, so much so that Christ tells us, "What profit is there to a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36-37). And the body, too, has great worth, because the soul acts together with it. The body is the temple of the spirit that dwells in it. "Do you not know that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit within you that you have from God?" (I Corinthians 6:19) St Paul asks. And the body, which is material, is not destined to be lost. It is sanctified by the Spirit of God that dwells within it. It receives the Body and Blood of Christ at the time of Holy Communion. With death it will return to the earth, but at the Second Coming of Christ and the Resurrection of all, it will be resurrected. Reunited with the soul. Incorruptible and immaterial, to live forever with the soul near God. The two, body and the soul, will comprise for all of eternity each man's personal identity.

Man Created in the Image & Likeness of God

When God created man, He said. "Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). But what does that mean, "image and likeness?" "Image" does not mean the body of man. As totally spirit, God is not related to a material body. "Image" means that which is sovereign, and independent. It is the freedom and the power of man to choose and do what he wishes. Man's basic element is his

freedom and his power of choice. Without this freedom and power, man would not have been created whole and with the potential to strive for perfection.

"Likeness" is the image in action. It is the good use of man's free will to improve himself spiritually and morally so as to come closer and closer to the Divine, to God. This movement toward holiness and perfection of the first created man and woman was not a steady and irrevocable condition. It depended on man's free will and his own authority, which was designed to have a tendency towards goodness. Man had the possibility of being perfected. With their fall, the first man and woman "blackened" the "image" and distorted the "likeness" to such a degree that they could no longer walk towards justice, holiness and perfection by themselves. They needed a savior and redeemer.

The Fall of Mankind

God creates Adam and Eve, sets them in Paradise to live and rule. He gave them a commandment, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat" (Genesis 2:15-16). Why did God do this? What exactly does "the tree of knowledge" mean? What kind of tree was it? We do not know. Nor do we know why God gave this command and the punishment of death. God said, "for in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (Genesis 2:17).

Importance of Fasting from the Beginning of Mankind

It seems that this command was the first form of fasting, to strengthen the character of mankind. Therefore we can see that God created mankind to strive for perfection. Mankind was not already perfected.

On the way to perfection, but not perfect.

Mankind was created with the potential to strive for perfection and therefore as a sovereign being, created in the image and likeness of God, had Free Will. To choose and judge between right and wrong, good and evil...etc.

This is a major difference compared to other Christian traditions. Orthodox Christianity has always taught that mankind was created with the potential to strive for perfection. Other denominations teach that mankind was created already perfect.

Ancestral Sin

The cause for the expulsion from Paradise was not the fruit of the tree of knowledge. The real cause was that they disobeyed and rejected the commandment of God. The attempt of man to disenthroned God and to enthrone himself in His place, to become God in the place of God. It is not merely that he ate fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

This then is the Original Sin. The Orthodox Church does not accept the doctrine of original sin as espoused in the West. Orthodox Christians believe that we inherit only the results of Adam's sin, not his guilt. What are these results or consequences? The inclination towards sin, sickness, and death (mortality). But we ourselves, are not guilty of the Original Sin of Adam and Eve. But as their descendants, we too are born fallen and mortal now. That includes the Theotokos who was also in need of the salvation of her Son and God.

Salvation

Mankind was able to be saved because God gave him a second chance, since he had not sinned on his own initiative. He was influenced by Satan. The salvation of fallen mankind was promised by God when He said to the Devil inside Paradise, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15). The essential phrase here is "He shall bruise your head." He will crush your head. Who is *He*? Jesus Christ, the second person of the Holy Trinity, the only-begotten Son of God, the seed (descendant) of woman.

God kept His promise. He did not fulfil it immediately. He had to prepare things for our sake, not because He needed time. God prepared the world to accept the "salvation to come." He prepared the nations by the teaching of many wise men for the expected coming from Heaven and the salvation from on high, and by the Old Testament, which "was our custodian until Christ came" (Galatians 3:24). And "when the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:4-5).

The salvation of mankind through Jesus Christ is a basic doctrine of our Church. It is expressed beautifully in the Creed: "I believe . . . in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God... Who **for us men and for our salvation** came down from Heaven and was Incarnate by the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary and became man."

Could not another man save mankind? No. Because every man was and is sinful and cannot save himself. How could a

sinful man save all humanity? Impossible. Only someone who was without sin was able to save mankind. And that was and is Christ. **Could not an angel have saved humanity?** Perhaps so, if God wanted it that way. But God decided differently.

Christ's death on the Cross has its power, not merely in an atonement sacrifice, but in the conquering of the power of death. Death is trampled down by the death of Christ, and the permanency of death is destroyed by Christ's resurrection. It is by Christ's resurrection that a way was made for us to be transformed by contact with the Living God, and made His children by adoption.

For this purpose, however, the initiative and effort of Christ is not enough. Man must cooperate as well. God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4): "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked might turn from his way and live" (Ezekiel 33:11). At the same time, Christ says that "if anyone wants to follow Me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me" (Mark 8:34). This means that although with the incarnation of Christ, His crucifixion, His descent into Hades, His resurrection, His ascension, and the sending of the Holy Spirit, the salvation of man is now accessible, **but in order for it to be appropriated by man it must be sought and pursued by man himself. God respects the freedom of man and does not compel, pressure or force anyone, but rather calls.** He asks, if you will. He waits. He waits for man to open his heart and receive divine grace, redemption, sanctification, and glory.

- Man alone cannot accomplish anything regarding his salvation.

- With the cooperation of the devil he accomplishes his condemnation.
- With the cooperation of God he accomplishes his salvation.

Christ Himself said that "apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Then what can man do? What can he offer? St John Chrysostom says that man can only offer a good disposition. It is only this that man can offer: the disposition to open our souls and to accept the grace of God.

How are we saved?

We are saved not by doing good works alone, nor are we saved by faith alone, nor are we saved even by God's grace alone.

We are saved by God's grace through ascetic struggle. God won't save anyone who doesn't want to be saved in other words. It is not grace alone that saves us, but also man's willingness to repent.

Why do we need to be saved?

We need to be saved because of our fallen state. We became separated from God. Our purpose is to be reunited with Him. The only way that can be done is by God Himself saving us. No one else can do it because they are also in the same fallen condition. So God became one of us. He united divinity and humanity. He reunited mankind, bridging the gap between fallen humanity and divinity, Himself.

That is our purpose in life. To unite ourselves to God. Theosis or Deification. The process of coming ever closer to God, and in that process becoming god-like at the same time. Not gods

by nature but restoring our fallen image and likeness in God.

We are in need of healing, but this healing requires synergy (the co-operation of man's will with divine grace).

Theodoret of Antioch: "There is need of both our efforts and divine aid. The grace of the Spirit is not granted to those who make no effort, and without grace our efforts cannot collect the prize of virtue = salvation."

2 Peter 1: 3 – 4, "His divine power has granted us all that we need to live in godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue. Through these things, He has granted to us His precious and tremendous promises, so that having escaped from the corruption that is in the world by lust, you may become partakers of the divine nature."

There is God's action in and upon us, and there is response and corresponding effort on our part. God works in us, and we cooperate with His grace.

All this is possible because God became one of us, human. He united in one person divinity and humanity. We can now become what He is by grace, since He became one of us, we can become like Him. The culmination of all this is Ascension: Christ sitting at the right hand of God as both God and man. We get to sit at the right hand of God because our humanity is united with His divinity.

Lesson 5

Sacraments

Introduction

The sacraments constitute our life in Christ. We cannot be truly Christian if we treat them merely as mechanical rituals or as optional extras of the Faith.

Purpose of Sacraments

The main purpose of the sacraments is to impart to the believer the life of Christ. Through the sacraments, God shares His life with us, frees us from sin and death and bestows on us immortality. As the Paschal troparion says, “and to those in the tombs bestowing life.”

The Kingdom of God now becomes accessible to us through the sacraments.

How Many?

Customarily, in the Orthodox Church we speak of Seven Sacraments, although we must note that this is not fixed but an influence from Roman Catholicism via the Russian Orthodox Church in the 17th Century. The Fathers never bothered to define the sacraments, much less to offer comprehensive lists of them, for the most part. Why? The reality of a sacrament (like the reality of the Church, the Faith, Salvation...etc) was too rich and overwhelming. It could be described (and they often did describe it), but never defined. The Orthodox Church Fathers themselves disagreed as to the

actual number. Some said two, some six, some ten, and there were even those who said seven, but differed among themselves as to what constituted that seven. Many other sacramental acts, such as the Blessing of Waters at Theophany, the Monastic Tonsure, the Burial Service, and the Blessing of Any Object, for example, possess the same criteria as the earlier definition of sacrament. In any case, the number seven has no absolute dogmatic significance in our Orthodox Theology, but is used only for teaching convenience.

Definition

A Sacrament is an outward, public/corporate act in which the grace of the Holy Spirit is mysteriously and inwardly present, transfiguring the material world.

The word “Sacrament” comes from the Latin “Sacramentum.” It means: something holy, a consecrated thing or act.

When talking about the Sacraments, it is probably more accurate to talk about the Church’s rituals and corporate actions. This is why we can’t really limit them to just 7. Rather than using the word “Sacrament” exclusively, the Orthodox Church speaks about the “Mysteries” of the Church and the Mystical Life in the Church, or as is otherwise known as the Liturgical-Sacramental Life in the Church. The term “Mysteries” is from the Greek word “mysterion.” A “mystery” of the Church is not so-called because it is mysterious in the sense of being incomprehensible and hard to understand.

A “mystery” as the Church uses the word is not about something which Christians cannot understand, but about something that Christians do understand, at least

experientially. The element of mystification is for the world, not for Christians. A Mystery is therefore a truth revealed only to the initiated, or in Christian terms, to the baptized. The outsiders don't "get it." We insiders do.

The reason why sacraments/mysteries are essentially congregational in their performance is that they are acts of the risen Christ. He is the one who bestows rebirth in baptism, and pours out His Holy Spirit through the blessed oil in Chrismation. He is the one who feeds us with His Body and Blood and offers forgiveness in the Eucharist. He is the one who by His Spirit gives men the ability to function as bishops, presbyters, and deacons when prayerful episcopal hands are laid on the candidate. All sacramental life comes solely from Him. And He has pledged His Presence to the Church when they gather together in His Name, even if the gathering is as small as two or three (Matthew 18: 20).

This is not to deny that He remains with His faithful people even when they are alone, but He promises a special kind of Presence when they gather together in obedience to His command. It is when Christ is present in this way that He acts to save and to transform. Thus all the Church's sacraments are corporate in nature.

This is why you cannot find sacramental healing by placing your hand on the television set (when people watch televangelists), nor have Holy Communion when alone in your house, even if you do have bread and wine (or more likely, bread and grape juice) on hand. We need to gather together in a single assembly to have Church and to experience the Church's sacraments. After all, "assembly" is what the word "church" (Greek: *ekklesia*) really means.

Who Can Receive?

Only Orthodox Christians may receive the sacraments (except for Baptism obviously as an initiation rite). This is sometimes misinterpreted as an exclusion of non-Orthodox. However, the tradition and practice stems from the deep conviction that sharing in the sacraments is essentially connected with membership of the Church.

What are the Sacraments of the Orthodox Church?

The Sacraments, as they are traditionally numbered, are:

1. Baptism
2. Chrismation
3. The Holy Eucharist
4. Repentance (Confession & Absolution)
5. Ordination
6. Matrimony
7. Anointing of the Sick

Baptism

First place among the Sacraments of the Orthodox Church is occupied by Holy Baptism, by which a person, who has come to believe in Christ, by being immersed three times in holy water in the Name of the Holy Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), is cleansed through Divine Grace of all sins and is reborn into a new holy, and spiritual life. This Baptism serves as the door through which we enter into the Body of Christ, the Church. Without it, we cannot be united completely with the Savior, become a member of His Church, receive the other Sacraments, and be the heir to Eternal Life. As the Lord Himself said, in His conversation with Nicodemus, "Truly,

truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God (John 3:5).”

The Sacrament of Holy Baptism was instituted by Our Lord after His resurrection, when He appeared to His disciples and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20).” The necessity of this baptism was further stressed by the Savior when He said to them, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:16).” The Lord Himself also submitted to baptism by St John the Baptist. Not that He needed to be baptized, but to provide the example for us and also so that He could sanctify the waters and all creation Himself.

Chrismation

was established in apostolic times. In the early Church every newly-baptized Christian received a blessing and the gift of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands by an apostle or a bishop. The *Book of Acts* relates how Peter and John laid hands on women from Samaria so that they could receive the Holy Spirit, ‘for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 8:16).’ In apostolic times, the descent of the Holy Spirit was occasionally accompanied by visible and tangible manifestations of grace: like the apostles at Pentecost, people

would begin to speak in unfamiliar tongues, to prophesy and work miracles.

The laying on of hands was a continuation of Pentecost in that it communicated the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In later times, by virtue of the increased number of Christians, it was impossible for everyone to meet a bishop; so the laying on of hands was substituted by Chrismation. In the Orthodox Church Chrismation is administered by a priest, yet the myrrh is prepared by a bishop. Myrrh is boiled from various elements. In contemporary practice only the head of an autocephalous Church (the Patriarch, Metropolitan or Archbishop) has the right to consecrate myrrh, thus conveying the episcopal blessing to all those who become members of the Church.

Through anointing we receive the 'seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit.' As Fr Alexander Schmemmann explains, this is not the same as the various 'gifts' of the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit Himself, Who is communicated to the person as a gift. Christ spoke of this gift to the disciples at the Last Supper: 'And I will pray to the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, to be with you forever: the Spirit of truth (John 14:16-17).' Through Chrismation we become children of God, for the Holy Spirit is the 'grace of adoption as children.'

Communion – Holy Eucharist

Holy Communion takes place during the Divine Liturgy. The Divine Liturgy ought to be also known as The Sacrament of Holy Communion. We attend the Divine Liturgy to receive Holy Communion. It is the central Mystery of the Church. It was established by Christ at the Last Supper in the upper room with His disciples before He was arrested (Matthew 26: 26 – 28; Mark 14: 22 – 26; Luke 22: 15 – 20; John 12 & 13).

Holy Communion consists of bread and wine which were and still are the basic food and drink produced by manual labour in the Mediterranean region. Jesus used these because they were readily available and suitable symbols of His Body and Blood.

When praying during the Divine Liturgy, the priest with the people pray that the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ while outwardly they remain unchanged.

Receiving Holy Communion is the most holy event and important event in the life of an Orthodox Christian. It is not intended to be an emotional experience, but a realistic acceptance of Christ's words, "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood lives in Me and I in him (John 6: 56)." In this way there is a deep sense of unity with Christ.

Confession

is the sacrament of repentance: a change of heart and mind leading to forgiveness and healing. It is based on Christ's promise to His disciples: "If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven (John 20: 22)."

True repentance means a movement towards healing. The penitent turns away from 'having missed the mark' (the definition of 'sin' in Greek: *harmatia*) and towards the goal of the Kingdom of God.

The sacrament involves examining relationships with God and with other people, and seeking ways to improve. It is more than a dialogue between priest and penitent: the Holy Spirit is present in a mysterious way.

Marriage

One of Christ's first miracles that He performed took place while He was invited at a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. When He turned the water into wine.

Through the sacrament of marriage two persons, a man and a woman, "become one flesh (Ephesians 5: 31)" yet also keep their individuality. They offer their coming together to be blessed by the Body of Christ, the Church, and taken into the Kingdom, because through Christ, love can become complete.

The blessing of the marriage is only the beginning of the sacrament, which the couple continues to develop during their entire life together.

The husband and wife are king and queen of their household and of their house-church. This is one of the symbolisms of wearing crowns during the sacrament. The crowns are also reminders that marriage involves denying oneself for the other. So the crowns are also crowns of the martyrs and show that the couple are to be witnesses (martyrs) to Christ.

Unction – Anointing with Oil

"Are any of you sick? Let them call for the presbyters (elders, priests) of the Church and let them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord (James 5: 14)."

Oil has always been a symbol of healing and reconciliation. Anointing with oil is an act of spiritual healing which prepares the way for physical, bodily healing.

Non-recovery is not viewed as a 'failure.' The primary purpose of this sacrament is reconciliation with God and therefore spiritual healing. Our life is in God's hands, not our own.

Unction may be administered any time, not just on one's death-bed as a "last rites."

Seven Epistles and Gospels are read during the service (sometimes with a bishop and six priests), after which the person is anointed on the forehead, face, chest, and hands. Afterwards the open Gospel book is placed on the penitents head and a prayer of absolution is read.

Ordination

is the putting on of Christ, taking on a task for which some are specially chosen: "You did not choose Me, but I chose you (John 15: 16)." In the Orthodox Church, ordination takes place within the apostolic succession (ordinations can be traced back in spiritual-ancestral lineage all the way back to the apostles themselves), and within the living continuity of a worshipping community (the Orthodox Church).

All ordinations are conducted by a bishop, though the spiritual gift of ordination comes through the Holy Spirit.

The highest degrees of priesthood are bishop, priest, and deacon.

Deacon

The name comes from the Greek 'diakonos' which means servant, and the deacon is there to serve the clergy and the people. He does not perform the sacraments independently, but acts as the assistant and as a go-between of the main

part of the church (the nave) and the sanctuary. Deacons in the early Church, and today, have a ministry to the people, serving especially those unable to come to church such as the sick, the elderly and the needy.

Priest

A priest is ordained by a single bishop to look after a parish or a monastery, since a single bishop is unable to oversee and manage all parishes and monasteries. The priest also celebrates the Divine Liturgy (in place of the bishop, and with the bishop's blessing) and other sacraments except ordination. Only bishops can perform ordinations.

Bishop

The highest degree of priesthood. A bishop oversees the affairs of the diocese and is the shepherd of its priests and people. A bishop is ordained by 3 other bishops and in exceptional circumstances by 2. A bishop is never ordained by a single bishop alone.

Other Sacraments not officially included in the list of Seven

Funerals

Monastic Tonsure

Consecration of Churches

Consecration of Myrrh

House Blessings

Making the Sign of the Cross

Venerating Icons (Making Icons)

The Blessing of Water, Oil, Cars, Planes, Boats, Farm Animals, Bee Hives...

Consecration of Emperors, Kings...etc

Prayer (before and after meals, upon rising from sleep or before sleeping...)

Everything that we do in our lives which are supposed to be for the Glory of God and for our salvation. Breathing!

Lesson 6

Holy Communion in the Orthodox Church

What is Holy Communion?

It is the sacrament of sacraments and the center of the Church's life. Everything in the life of the Church and of the Orthodox Christian leads to the Eucharist or Holy Communion and all things flow from it.

It's called the Eucharist meaning "thanks." We give thanks through this Heavenly Feast to Our Lord for everything that He has done in making, saving and glorifying the world.

The sacrament is also called Holy Communion since it is the mystical communion of people with God, with each other, and with everyone and everything through Christ.

Holy Communion is always given only to members of the Orthodox Church, including baptized infants. It's always given in both forms of bread and wine.

It is strictly understood as being the real presence of Christ, His true Body and Blood mystically present in the bread and wine.

At the Last Supper, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to His followers and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' And He took a cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you; for this is My

blood of the New Testament, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins' (Matthew 26: 26 - 28; cf. Mark 14: 12 - 16; Luke 22: 7 - 13; 1 Corinthians 11: 23 - 30).

Why do we have Holy Communion?

Because Christ taught us and told us to receive His Body & Blood so we may have life. Christ Himself said, "Do this in memory of Me." Theosis.

Just after the miracle of the feeding of the 5000, people were following Jesus everywhere and always looking for Him.

Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I tell you; you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were satisfied. Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which remains to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For the Father has sealed Him!" As a result, they asked Him, "What must we do, that we may accomplish the works of God?" Jesus replied, "This is the work of God, that you believe in the One whom He has sent!" So they replied, "What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see and believe You? What work do You accomplish? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness! As it is written, 'He gave them bread out of Heaven to eat.'" Jesus therefore said to them, "Truly, truly, I tell you; it was not Moses who gave you the bread out of Heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread out of Heaven. For the bread of God is what comes down out of Heaven, and it gives life to the world."

Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread!" Jesus told them, "I am the bread of life! The one who comes to Me will not be hungry, and whoever believes in Me

will never be thirsty. But I told you that you have seen Me, and yet, you do not believe. All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who is coming to Me I will in no way reject. For I have come down from Heaven, not to do My own will, but to do the will of the one who sent Me. This is the will of My Father who sent Me: that of all He has given Me, I should lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. And this is the will of the One who sent Me: that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life; and this one I will raise up on the last day.”

At this, the Jews began to murmur concerning Him, because He had said, “I am the bread which came down out of Heaven.” They said, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How then does He say, ‘I have come down out of Heaven?’” Therefore, Jesus answered them, “Do not murmur among yourselves. No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws Him, and this one I will raise up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Therefore, everyone who hears from the Father and has learned comes to Me. Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God. He has seen the Father! Truly, truly, I tell you; the one who believes in Me has eternal life. I am the bread of life! Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down out of Heaven. Its purpose is that anyone may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down out of Heaven. Anyone who eats of this bread will live forever! Yes, the bread which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.”

At this, the Jews disputed with one another, saying, “How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?” Jesus therefore said to

them, “Truly, truly, I tell you; unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you do not have life in yourselves. The one who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For truly My flesh is food, and My blood is truly drink. The one who eats My flesh and drinks My blood dwells in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and as I live because of the Father, whoever eats Me will also live because of Me. This is the bread which came down out of Heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate the manna and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever!” He said these things in the synagogue, as He taught in Capernaum.

Therefore, many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, “This is a hard saying! Who can listen to it?” But knowing in Himself that His disciples grumbled at this, Jesus said to them, “Does this cause you to stumble? What then if you would see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before? It is the spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray Him. He said, “For this reason, I have told you that no one can come to Me, unless it is given to him by My Father.” At this, many of His followers left and no longer walked with Him. Then Jesus said to the Twelve, “Do you also want to leave?” Then Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life! We have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” John 6: 26 – 69

So, this is why we receive Communion. To have life. To be united to Christ and in Christ and with each other. For salvation and eternal life.

St Paul says, the goal of every Christian is to grow up in every way into Him Who is the head, into Christ, from Whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied... makes bodily growth and builds itself up in love (Ephesians 4: 15 - 16). This is so since Christ is the head of the Church, His body, and is Himself its Savior (Ephesians 5: 23). We become part of the Mystical Body of Christ by our communion of the Holy Eucharist. As St Paul says: The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread (1 Cor 10: 16 - 17).

How Do We Prepare to Receive Holy Communion?

Holy Communion is an occasion which demands of us a certain level of preparation. While it is true we are all sinners and will always remain sinners in this life, that does not excuse us from our responsibilities to prepare ourselves, to the best of our ability, to be clean before the face of God.

This preparation can include Confession, Prayer, Fasting and other acts of purification and charity.

How Often Do We Receive/Should We Receive Holy Communion?

- Worthiness & Readiness

How Do We Receive Holy Communion?

Concerning the Communion itself, in the Orthodox Church both laity and clergy always receive Communion of both the Body and Blood of Christ. The Communion is given to the laity in a spoon containing a small piece of the Holy Bread together with a portion of the wine, and it is received standing. A strict fast is observed, usually from the night before, and nothing can be eaten or drunk after waking in the morning before Communion. As a theologian of the Church has well put it, "You know that those who invite the Emperor to their house, first clean their home. So you, if you want to bring God into your bodily home for the illumination of your life, you must first sanctify your body by fasting [Gennadius, Hundred Chapters]."

Let all things be done decently and in order – St Paul (1 Corinthians 14: 40)

Antidoron

After the final blessing of the Liturgy, the faithful come up to kiss the Hand Cross held by the Priest and those who have not communed receive a small piece of bread, called the Antidoron, which, although blessed, was not consecrated, having been taken from the same bread(s) from which the Lamb was taken in the Proskomedia. This bread is given out as an expression of Christian fellowship and love (agape).

What should our attitude be towards Holy Communion?

St John the Golden-Mouth gives this guidance for us:

When you see the Lord sacrificed and lying before you, and the High Priest standing over the sacrifice and praying, and all who partake being marked with that precious blood, can you think that you are still among men and still standing on earth?

Are you not at once transported to Heaven, and, having driven out of your soul every carnal thought, do you not with naked soul and pure mind look round upon heavenly things? Oh, the wonder of it! Oh, the loving-kindness of God to men! He who sits above with the Father... gives Himself to those who wish to clasp and embrace Him – which they do, all of them, with their eyes. Do you think this could be despised? Or that it is the kind of thing anyone can be superior about? (On the Priesthood pp70 – 71)

The Divine Liturgy or the Sacrament of Holy Communion (it's the same thing), actually unites the heavenly realm with the earthly. The Angels and Saints are present, as witnessed by hundreds of written accounts from Saints and holy people throughout the centuries. We are brought into the presence of the King of Kings, and He condescends out of inexpressible love, to allow us to partake in a mystical, yet very real, way of His Body and Blood.

Lesson 6 Appendix I

What Does the Orthodox Church Mean by Communion: Sacramental Communion & Ecclesiological Communion?

Who can receive Holy Communion? Why Closed Communion?

What is Closed Communion?

Closed communion is the practice of restricting the serving of the elements of communion to those who are members of a particular church. This means that a church limits participation only to members of their own church.

It makes sense really that only full members of the Church, ie, those who are baptized and chrismated and who are in good standing with the Church, only receive Holy Communion. Otherwise, why have baptism at

all? Anyone can then come in and receive Communion. Communion then would be the "initiation rite," instead of baptism.

The Orthodox concept of "Communion" is totally holistic, and radically different from that of most other Christian groups. We do not separate the idea of "Holy Communion" from "Being in Communion," "Full Communion," and total "Communion in the Faith."

In the Orthodox Church therefore, to receive Holy Communion, or any other Sacrament (Mystery), is taken to be a declaration of total commitment to the Orthodox Faith. While we warmly welcome visitors to our Divine Services, it is understood that only those communicant members of the Orthodox Church who are prepared by confession and fasting will approach the Holy Mysteries.

This may seem unfair to someone who is a sincere, faithful, upright member of a non-Orthodox confession. They may feel that they are even being "judged." In their own confession, "communion," may be distributed freely, no questions asked, to all comers – sometimes even to those who are not of their confession.

This is because of the different understanding of the Orthodox Church and heterodox confessions of the concept and nature of the Church and also a different understanding of the sacrament of Holy Communion.

There must be unity of expression in worship, theology, obedience and morality. Those who do personally share Orthodox belief in the Eucharist are permitted to receive the sacrament in accordance with norms established by the Church.

To begin to understand how the Orthodox Church views Holy Communion, we must first set aside any notion that participation in the Holy Eucharist is a means for "inter-denominational" or "ecumenistic" communion and union. The Orthodox Church is not a denomination. It is the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. Holy Eucharist is the visible and tangible sign of true communion between the Lord and us, his servants, as well as between us and our fellow (Orthodox) brothers and sisters in Christ. This means that the vehicle for uniting separate groups (denominations) of

Heterodox should never and can never be the Eucharist. The Eucharist, however, is the symbol that Orthodox Christians are united in their belief.

The Orthodox Church places great emphasis on the importance of unity in belief in Holy Communion being the actual Body and Blood.

According to Orthodox Christian Faith and worship, Holy Communion is not symbolic. It is real. Just as Jesus Christ is a real person in history and not a myth.

The Orthodox Church re-presents (presents again) the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ at every Divine Liturgy, otherwise known as (The Divine Service of the) Sacrament of Holy Communion.

After the consecration of the bread and wine in the Divine Liturgy, they are then called the Body and Blood of Christ.

Statements of faith are then made in the Divine Liturgy, taken from Scripture and other sources, stating that the Orthodox Church is the one Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. It understands the Eucharist to be literally and actually the Body and Blood of Christ.

“Take, eat, this is my Body,” and, “Drink from this, all of you, this is my Blood. (Luke 22: 19, 20 & 1 Corinthians 11: 24, 25)” and, “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. (John 6: 53)”

If Communion is literally the actual Body and Blood of Christ, it makes sense that it should be approached with a certain fear and trembling. And it makes sense that it should not be shared with someone who believes the sacrament to be only symbolic. If as we see in 1 Corinthians 11: 23 – 30 the fact that those who received Communion unworthily became sick and even died, is a strong indication that the consecrated bread and wine were more than merely symbolic.

Only by belonging to the Church, or in other words, being in communion with the very essence of Christ through the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, can one attain salvation for eternal life, thus we can answer the question, Who can be regarded as a member of the Church of Christ? by

saying, All those who have been properly baptized in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the true Son of God come in the flesh (1 John 4:2-3), and are united by the grace of the Sacraments in particular the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist administered by the Priesthood of Apostolic Succession.

An account of the Divine Liturgy and the Sacrament of Holy Communion from the 2nd Century Orthodox Church
By St Justin the Philosopher (AD 166)

No one may share the Eucharist with us unless they believe that what we teach is true, unless they are washed in the regenerating waters of Baptism for the remission of their sins, and unless they live in accordance with the principles given to us by Christ.

These powerful words were written over 1800 years ago. Today the Orthodox Church still makes the same statement: Holy Communion is reserved only for those who are baptized and chrismated Orthodox Christians. They must be in good standing and hold to the teachings and traditions of the Orthodox Church.

St. Ambrose of Milan (fourth century):

He gave [the Eucharist] to the Apostles to distribute to a believing people, and today He gives it to us, for He, as a priest, daily consecrates it with His own words. Therefore, this bread has become the food of the saints.
—*On the Patriarchs* 9, 38

As the late-first century document the Didache or Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, says:

Let no one eat or drink from your Eucharist except those who are baptized in the Lord's Name; for concerning this also the Lord hath said: '*Give not that which is holy to the dogs.*'

This reality can raise questions concerning those who are baptized in non-Orthodox traditions, At the end of the day, the Orthodox Church maintains that there are no sacraments outside of the Church, and so the first step towards receiving holy communion is being baptized into the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

Christ desires all to draw near and receive of His holy and life-creating mysteries. But let us not be deceived by an erroneous, yet popular, belief in the sovereignty of the individual. Grace is freely-given, not demanded and seized.

It wasn't up to the individual to demand that the sacred Body and Blood were due to him, rather it was (and is) the responsibility of the priest to guard the sacred mysteries of Christ on behalf of the entire Church.

This wasn't solely because participation in the Eucharist is a visible declaration of the unity of—and true participation in—Christ and his Body (making it an impossibility for those outside His Body to be 'in communion'), but also out of love for both the non-Orthodox and the unprepared. For such, partaking of the Eucharist would be "eating and drinking damnation" (1 Corinthians 11:29), and so the ministers of the sacraments blithely distributing it to any who ask for it would be both irresponsible and unloving.

This was the consistent belief and practice of all Christianity up to, and even including, the Reformers. Article XXIV of the Lutheran *Augsburg Confession* states that "Chrysostom reports how the priest stood every day, inviting some to Communion and forbidding others to approach," as a justification of the continued practice of 'closed communion.' This remained the norm in Protestant denominations until the last century.

Lesson 6 Appendix II

Is Confession a prerequisite for Communion?

- Weepers, Hearers, Co-Standers, Communicants
- Fasting & Communion
- So that your prayers may have power and be answered
- Not what goes in your mouth (Matthew 15: 11 – 20)

In the works of St Basil the Great and other Fathers we see that there were four stages of Christians. The first were the Weepers, who sat outside the temple and asked forgiveness from the Christians who were entering. Second were the Hearers, who waited until the readings of the Divine Liturgy and then exited with the catechumens. Third were the Co-Standers, who remained within the temple until the end of the Divine

Liturgy without receiving Communion. The fourth were those who communed of the Immaculate Mysteries. So, when someone committed a sin, they had to go through a period of repentance, and repentance meant for a person to pass through purification to the illumination of the nous, to change their darkened nous and make it bright. Afterwards the Bishop reads a prayer and the person could commune.

Lesson 7A

The One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church

When we say: One, Holy, Catholic & Apostolic Church, we mean the Orthodox Church and no other. Where do we get this from? From the Fathers of the 1st Ecumenical Council, from the Creed, and from the Divine Liturgy.

At every Liturgy and at the morning services we chant the Creed, in which we confess that we believe in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

Unity, One

There is one Church. We speak of the Communion of the Saints. The Saints are One. They are united in the one body of Christ which is the Church. We also speak of the Unity of God the Holy Trinity: Three persons in one nature. *The Church similarly is a multitude of persons, but a unity of the grace of God.* Thus, the Symbol of Faith confesses that the Church is one: It is one as viewed from within itself, not divided; It is one as viewed from without, that is, not having any other beside itself. "There is one body and one spirit, even as you are called, in one hope of your, calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Ephesians 4:4-6)." The Church is one not only inwardly, but also outwardly. Outwardly its unity is manifested in the harmonious confession of faith, in the oneness of Divine services and Mysteries, in the oneness of the grace-giving hierarchy, which

comes in succession from the Apostles, in the oneness of canonical order.

The Church on earth has a visible side and an invisible side. The invisible side is that its Head is Christ; that it is animated by the Holy Spirit; that in it is performed the mystical life in sanctity, i.e., the services and sacraments. However, the Church, by the nature of its members, is visible, since it is composed of people; it has a visible hierarchy; it performs prayers and sacred actions visibly; it confesses openly by means of words, the faith of Christ. More than any other aspect of the Church, the close bond between the Church of Christ on earth and the Church of Christ in heaven distinguishes the Orthodox Church from all other Christian confessions. For how can one speak of a single body if its members are not in harmony one with another? -- Not only with those present bodily in the Church today, but with those who have gone before and who now belong to the Church triumphant. The Apostle Paul instructs those who have come to believe in Christ and have been joined to the Church as follows: "*You have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant* (Hebrews 12:22-24)." We are not separated from our dead brothers and sisters in the faith by the impassable abyss of death: they are close to us in God, *for all live in Him* (Luke 20:38).

The Church sings this relationship in the kontakion of the feast of the Ascension of the Lord:

O Christ our God, when you completed Your mission for our salvation and united the earthly with the heavenly, then You ascended in glory, not being parted from us but remaining with us, and crying to those who love You: 'I am with you, and no one shall be against you.'

Depicting the Church in parables, the Saviour speaks of one flock of one sheepfold, of one grapevine, of one foundation stone of the Church. He gave a single teaching, a single baptism, and a single communion. The unity of the faithful in Christ is the main subject of His High-Priestly Prayer before His sufferings on the Cross when the Lord prayed *that they all may be one* (John 17:21).

Unity in God the Holy Trinity is unity in Truth, for God is Truth. The unity of the Christian Church must be unity in the Truth of God. Christ is the divine Word of the Father. He is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life." (John 14: 6) He is "the Light of the world." (John 8: 12) Christ sends the Holy Spirit, who is also "the Truth," to men. (I John 5: 6) The Holy Spirit is the "Spirit of Truth, who proceeds from the Father" (John 15: 26), who comes to guide men "into all truth." (John 16: 13) The Church of Christ is "the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth." (I Timothy 3: 15) The Church is the "chosen generation, the royal priesthood, the holy nation, the peculiar people" whom God "has called...out of darkness into His marvellous light." (I Peter 2: 9) The Church is the vessel of divine truth in and for the world. There is no Christian unity outside of the truth, for outside of the truth there is no Church, no salvation, no eternal life. God the Father is He "Who wants

all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (I Tim 2: 4) and has sent His Son into the world to make Himself known. The truth of God is unchanging and eternal. God is eternal and in Him is “no variableness, neither shadow nor turning.” (James 1: 17) He is the “King eternal.” (I Timothy 1: 17) Jesus Christ is the “true God and eternal life.” (I John 5: 20) He is “the same yesterday, and today, and forever.” (Hebrews 13: 8) The Lord Jesus Christ has said that His teachings will never change. “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.” (Mark 13: 31)

Catholic & Apostolic

The Holy Spirit came to the apostles of Christ, so that they could make disciples of all nations and teach all that which Jesus Himself had taught them. “Go therefore and teach all nations...teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you...” (Matthew 28: 19 – 20) The teaching of the apostles is the teaching of Christ, which is the teaching of God. The apostles did not make their own doctrines, but proclaimed “that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of Life...” (I John 1: 1) The Apostle Paul witnesses in the same way, when he says, “the gospel which was preached by me is not from man, for I neither received it from man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Galatians 1: 11 – 12) The apostles urged all Christians to “teach no other doctrine” (I Timothy 1: 3) and to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the saints.” (Jude 1: 3) No apostle, no saint, no father of the Church, no martyr, confessor, or inspired Church council ever claimed to have another teaching than that of Christ Himself. The doctrinal truth of the apostolic Church is the eternal and

unchanging Truth of God Himself, made known in Christ and the Holy Spirit. This truth is always the same. It never changes. It abides in the Church in every age and generation, handed down from time to time and from place to place in the Holy Tradition of the Church (Holiness).

The task of Christians always and everywhere is to receive, to express, to explain, and to pass on the true Christian Gospel, changing nothing in it, adding nothing to it, and taking nothing from it (Catholic). For the Orthodox Church, therefore, the only possible unity for Christians and for the Christian Church is the unity of faith to which the apostles, saints and councils of the Church have witnessed, the faith to which they call all for the sake of their salvation. The meaning of Holy Tradition in the Church is that the entire spiritual treasury given to us by God in Christ and the Spirit is given over wholly and perfectly to all believers in all times and places. The apostles severely condemned any form of Christianity other than that which they received from the Lord. The Apostle Paul said *anathema* to any man-made religion, claiming that those who distorted the Gospel and fashioned their own doctrines are “self-condemned.” (Galatians 1: 9 and Titus 3: 11) The apostles forbade communion with those who distorted the Gospel and removed them from the Church. Such serious action was taken because in every case the mutations of the Christian Faith threaten humanity’s salvation and destroy unity, since they are merely “human doctrines” having only “an appearance of wisdom.” (Colossians 2: 22 – 23) Holy Scripture tells us that the Church will always suffer from false prophets and false teachers, but that the faithful Church will exist to the end of the world, until the glorious coming of Christ. For Christians, therefore, there is no greater sin than the betrayal of the Gospel of Christ and the distortion of the

apostolic teaching. To be guilty of this sin is to be guilty of betraying God Himself and the entire life of the Church. Christian unity and the unity of the Christian Church can be only in the perfect unity of those doctrines which our fathers in the faith have called *divine*. Woe to us if we betray Christ, who is our Truth!

The Church is obviously holy as the body of Christ.

The Church is Catholic. This word does not mean Roman Catholic. We mean 'Catholic' in the original sense of the word. 'Catholic' means that which is always believed and practiced the same in all places, and, Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever. Likewise, His Body, the Church, proclaims the same faith, adheres to the same dogmas, and performs the same Mysteries as those instituted by the Apostles and preserved by God's grace through the members of the Church to the present day.

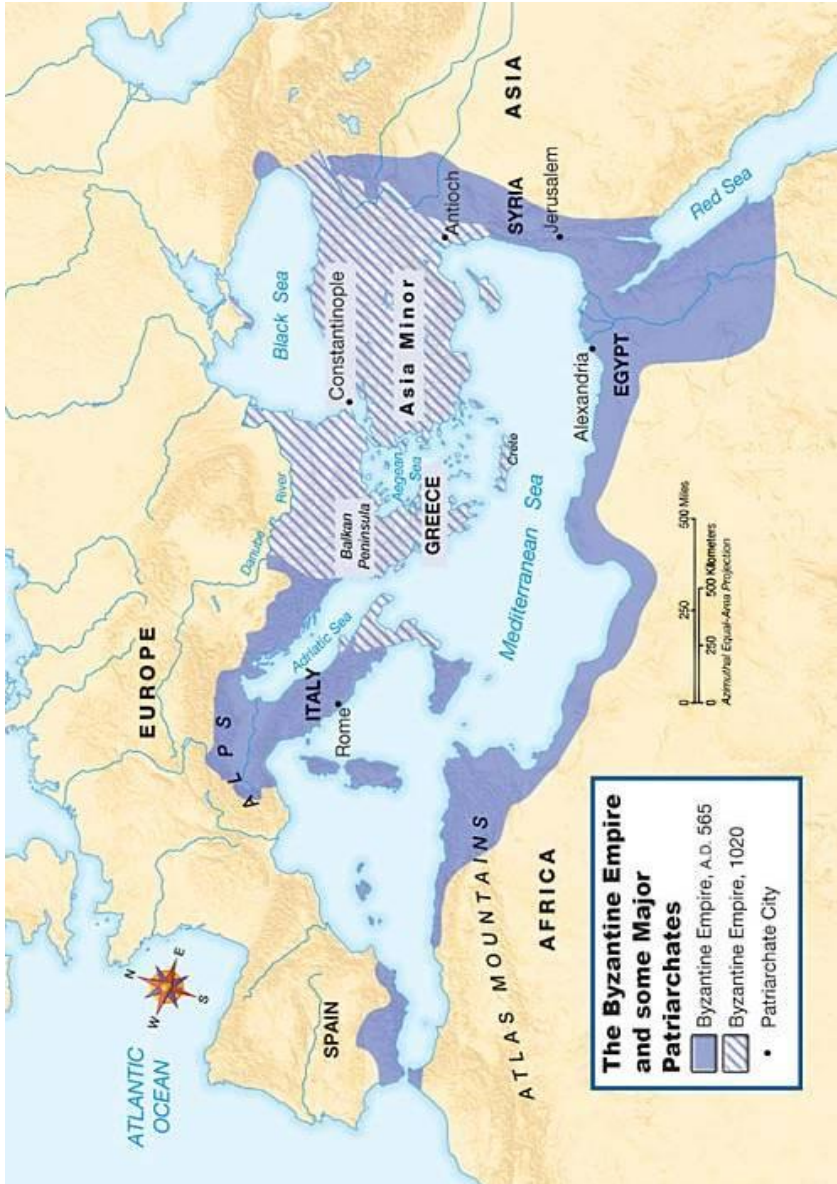
The Church is Apostolic, because it is founded upon the apostles, and we share in the same Faith and Tradition as the Apostles.

Apostolic Sees & Jurisdictions

To the group of Churches founded by the Apostles themselves belong the five Patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Rome. The Church of Constantinople was founded by St Andrew, the Church of Alexandria by St Mark, the Church of Antioch by St Paul, the Church of Jerusalem by St Peter and St James, and the Church of Rome by St Peter and St Paul. Those founded in later years through missionary activity of the first Churches

were the Churches of Sinai, Russia, Greece, the former Yugoslavia, Rumania and many more.

All of these churches are independent in their administration, yet they are in full communion with one another with the exception of the Church of Rome which separated in the year 1054. In faith, doctrine, Apostolic tradition, sacraments, liturgies and services they are exactly alike. Regardless of the language of each, they exist in fellowship and together constitute and call themselves the Orthodox Church.



Map: The Pentarchy

