

It's always a good idea to double check what you hear online with real life folks definitely including but not limited to your own priest, spiritual Father, godparent or even the well versed Orthodox person who told you not to block the icons that one day.

### **6) Relationship status: It's complicated**

Another word about family dynamics here. There is only one "Orthodox Church" really but what has happened over time is that certain family members have taken issue with others. I'll admit I really have no clue about any of it. I married into this family so the dynamics are as much a mystery two years in as ever. Let us say that there are some members who do not wish to break bread with a few other family members. Thankfully, at the root of it all, we're all the same family. Just ask questions if you don't know the family tree issues but if you're like me, be prepared to not understand a word of it.

### **7) Pray**

Most Christian traditions talk about praying without ceasing. In the Orthodox Tradition we really mean it, literally. In addition to the daily and weekly liturgies (which will vary according to the church parish and the time of year) an Orthodox Christian is encouraged to pray just about all the time. We have prayers for everything: before eating, before starting work on something, for our children, for our parents, for the military, for our own well being. You got a need? You can probably find an Orthodox prayer for it.

It's not for overkill but rather to put us into this posture of making prayer like breathing air. It's daunting but I like it. Like fasting though, it's not something you want to jump into all at once or all on your own. And like all of the other things that go with becoming Orthodox it takes time and patience and direction.

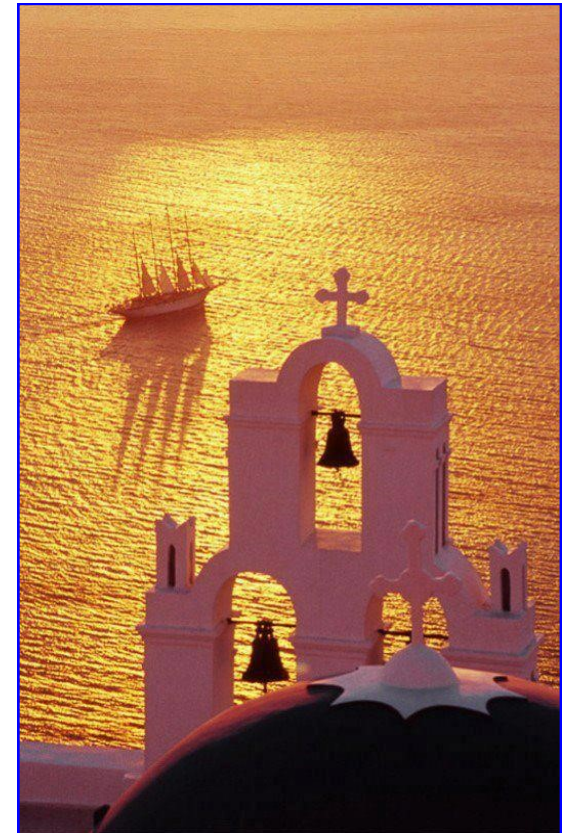
### **8) Get direction**

I always tell my priest that he's like the dentist. He is patient with my (many) questions and offers very sound advice. I just don't always do what he suggests. Though I know he's probably right about it when he tells me to floss (you know, metaphorically and spiritually) it's still up to me to follow through and you know what? I really hate flossing (literally) so sometimes I just don't do it. In any case, meet with your priest. Talk with him about things. In my experience it was good to meet also with the Presbytera (priest's wife) and get her take on things from time to time. Orthodoxy can be overwhelming and you may feel as though you are sitting in a dingy in the middle of the ocean at times. Don't be afraid to send up a flare and get yourself a little help from the coast guard.

There are other things, lots of other things. Consider this your start-up list. :)



## **8 things I wish I'd known about the Orthodox Church**



**Holy Ascension  
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When I was on the long road of the catechumen I had lists in my head, on the computer and in my journals about the Orthodox tradition, on the different services, the times to make the Sign of the Cross, the fasting times, the feasting times, the proper greetings and so on. It was a confusing time and frankly I needed all those methods to keep things straight. It worked, for a little while at least.

I thought it might be helpful, though, for fellow travellers, weary pilgrims on the road or even future inquirers to write a list. Lists are very trendy on the interwebs these days. I blame our culture's ever shortening attention span but there it is.

At any rate, here are 8 things I'd want to tell someone considering Orthodoxy and let's keep in mind that I'm no expert here. These are simply the things I wish I'd known up front.

### 1) It's bigger on the inside

There are a huge number of books, essays and articles written on the Tradition, far too many for any one person to read. You can't really get what it means to be Orthodox just by reading about it. No matter how much you read, you'll have to set foot inside of the Tradition to get a taste of it.



### 2) Liturgy is long

While many churches are speeding up their services these days, punctuating them with audio and video awesomeness, Orthodox liturgies are slow moving, repetitive and yes, I'll say it, sometimes boring to the casual observer. I think as a new attender what was most helpful for me was to imagine it as a long run rather than a quick jog. Find the rhythm of it, the deep soul of it. Over time, it begins to make sense and you begin to find your part in the whole thing. It takes time and Orthodox Liturgy allows for that.

### 3) We fast. A lot!

Apart from the regular weekly fasts on Wednesdays and Fridays, there are longer fasts throughout the year, Lenten Fast before Pascha (Easter) and the Nativity Fast before Christmas, there's the fast for the Theotokos (Mary, the mother of God), not to mention the Apostle's Fast that comes not long after Pascha. My advice if you're going to give this fasting thing a try is to keep to the weekly gig first and then ease into the others as you go. Being over zealous on this is a set up for failure... on the other hand, not trying at all is also a recipe for failure. Get the spirit of the fasting down first. It's not about what you eat or drink, it's about how you approach the thing. No one is keeping score at church, trust me on this.

### 4) Ask questions

Hopefully, you'll have a fellow parishioner (or twenty) who can tell you what is going on. During Liturgy I made a point to identify and hang out with people who were in the know, people who would offer small advices in the moment like,

a) "don't block the icons when the priest comes around to cense them"

or say,

b) "now we're going outside to process around the church."

Later, they were able to give me a better understanding of the "why" on those things but in the moment, it was helpful to know that the priest wasn't coming to cense me

and

b) it wasn't time to go home already.

### 5) Consider the source

If you are like me you might find your way into an online discussion group concerning Orthodoxy. Not all discussion groups are created equal or trustworthy. The internet gives people (myself included) a weird sense of control and sometimes an inflated sense of authority. It can be kind of entertaining once you get the hang of the different approaches to the ancient Tradition and see the family dynamics at work, to be honest. Online Orthodox Facebook groups can be like reality tv.