

CHAPTER 2

Orthodox Church Life

A. Church Etiquette

The Church is the earthly heaven in which the heavenly God dwells and moves.⁴²

An Orthodox Church is that part of God's creation which has been set apart and "reclaimed" for the Kingdom of God. Within its walls, the heavenly and earthly realms meet, outside time, in the acts of worship and Sacrifice offered there to God. Angels assist the Priest during the Divine Liturgy, and Saints and members of the Church Triumphant participate in the Services. The Blessed *Theotokos*, the Mother of God, is also present and, of course, our Lord Jesus Christ is invisibly present wherever two or three gather in His Name,⁴³ just as He is always present in the reserved Eucharist preserved on the Holy Table of most Orthodox Churches.

Given these very significant spiritual realities, we should always approach an Orthodox Church with the deepest attitude of reverence. Even when passing an Orthodox Church on foot or in a car, we always cross ourselves out of respect for the presence of God therein. It is, indeed, unthinkable that we should ever pass in front of an Orthodox Church without showing such reverence. Therefore, it is obvious that we must approach our meeting with the heavenly realm during Divine Services with careful and proper preparation.

When preparing for Church, we should always dress as we would for a visit to an important dignitary. After all, we are about to enter into the very presence of God. Therefore, casual apparel is not appropriate. For example, shorts should never be

⁴² St. Germanos of Constantinople, *Ecclesiastical History and Mystical Contemplation*.

⁴³ St. Matthew 18:20.

worn in an Orthodox Church by either sex, under any circumstances. Men should normally wear a suit and tie. Women should wear dresses or skirts and should always cover their heads. The style and color of clothes worn by Orthodox Christians should be subdued and modest, especially when attending Church. Men's shirts should be buttoned to the neck. Tight clothing, sleeveless tops, and garish T-shirts should be avoided, since they are wholly inappropriate for Christians. In fact, the rule of thumb for proper dress both in and out of the Church building is this: Avoid wearing anything which would draw attention to oneself. This includes jewelry, make-up, the ostentatious use of perfume (or cologne for men), and large or gaudy hats. When we enter a Church, we should always strive to develop an attitude like that of the humble publican. Thus, anything in our appearance which would conflict with an attitude of humble piety should be considered inappropriate.

When arriving at the Church for Services, we should seek to arrive a few minutes before the Service begins, in order to prepare ourselves and clear our minds. In some Churches, and especially in Old Believer communities, one removes his shoes before entering the Church. This is, of course, impractical in larger Churches, and thus, unfortunately, the custom—one still followed by Moslems and inherited from their Christian ancestors—has almost died out in Orthodox countries. But the symbolic meaning of removing our shoes, in an attempt to keep the dirt of the world from the Church, reminds us that, even more importantly, we must not carry the worldly dirt of our minds into the Divine Services. On entering the Church proper, having crossed ourselves when approaching the building, we normally reverence the central Icon in the Narthex with three prostrations. This is done by making the Sign of the Cross twice with a bow (bending and touching the ground with the right hand) or, if one wishes, a prostration (falling to the knees and bending the head almost to the ground). (With regard to prostrations, it should be remembered, here, that because Sunday is the Day of Resurrection, we do not make prostrations or kneel in Church

after Saturday Vespers. This proscription holds not only for Sundays, but also for the entire festal period from Pascha to Pentecost. In some monasteries, this rule is applied to the whole of Saturday as well.) We then kiss the Icon (preferably on the Saint's right hand, if the Saint is blessing or holding a Cross) and cross ourselves a third time, making a final bow or prostration. Because we should not smudge or otherwise deface an Icon, women should avoid wearing lipstick to Church—if not altogether. (We might point out that Saint John of Shanghai and San Francisco even issued an *ukase* concerning the inadmissibility of venerating Icons when wearing lipstick.⁴⁴)

Orthodox Churches always have candles available at the back of the Church. One should normally light one of these before an Icon as he enters the Church. If you have a special need or wish to remember someone prayerfully, you can make this known to God by lighting a candle as a pious offering to God. Saint John of Kronstadt tells us:

The candles burning on the altar represent the non-created light of the Trinity, for the Lord dwells in an unapproachable light. They also represent the fire of Divinity which destroys our ungodliness and sins. The candles lit before the icons of the Saviour signify that He is the True Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world (John 1:9); at the same time, He is a Fire which engulfs and revives our souls and bodies.

The candles lit before the icons of the Theotokos are a symbol of the fact that she is the Mother of the Unapproachable Light, and also of her most pure and burning love for God and her love for mankind.

The candles lit before icons of saints reflect their ardent love for God for Whose sake they gave up everything that man prizes in life, including their very lives, as did the holy Apostles, martyrs, and others. These candles also mean that these saints are lamps burning for us and providing light for us by their own saintly living, their virtues and their ardent intercession for us before God

⁴⁴ *Man of God: Saint John of Shanghai & San Francisco*, trans. and ed. Archpriest Peter Perekrestov (Redding, ca: Nikodemos Orthodox Publication Society, 1994), p. 241.

through their constant prayers day and night. The burning candles also stand for our ardent zeal and the sincere sacrifice we make out of reverence and gratitude to them for their solicitude on our behalf before God.⁴⁵

After having revered the Icon in the center of the Church and having lit a candle, we then assume our places in the Church: men on the right, women on the left (as we face the Altar). (The habit of kissing the Icons on the *Templon*—the Altar screen in front of the Church, often improperly called the *iconostasion*—, which can be seen in the most traditional of Churches and monasteries, is not technically correct. These Icons should actually be revered by the Bishop or the serving clergy, not the Faithful or others in attendance at the Services.) A traditional Church will have no pews, but only several benches or “choir stalls” (*stasidia*, in Greek) around the periphery of the Church, for the infirm or aged. Therefore, the Faithful stand through most of the Services. It is impious, arrogant, and improper to sit before God during Divine Services. Pews and sitting during services are a Protestant innovation, the natural consequences of services that entail, not a meeting of the heavenly with the earthly, but the recitation of a sermon accompanied by hymns. The separation of worship from a sense of participation in the Mysteries of God and its reduction to viewing and listening to a performance by a preacher and choir is incompatible with an Orthodox understanding of worship. So is sitting during Services.

With regard to pews and standing during prayer, we should note that the modernist or reformed (New Calendarist) Orthodox Churches did not start using pews until late in this century, and then primarily in the West. The ancient worship of the Christian Church has always involved standing. Even Western cathedrals like Notre Dame in Paris and Il Duomo in Florence, never had pews. It was unthinkable to the Fathers of the Church that one should sit in the presence of the King of Glory. As well,

⁴⁵ Quoted in *Orthodox America*, June 1984, p. 11.

Orthodox worship is active. The Faithful are called upon to be participants in the Liturgy and not to be mere spectators. First, this requires attention, and that attention is most complete in the standing position. This ancient practice has been validated by a researcher at the University of Southern California, who has determined that “people literally think faster on their feet” and process information up to twenty percent faster when standing.⁴⁶ Second, proper participation in the Liturgy involves bowing, the making of the Sign of the Cross, and sometimes prostrations. These active forms of worship are lost in Churches which have pews.

As we stand attentively, our hands should be at our sides. It is improper and disrespectful for one to put his hands behind his back, which signals an arrogant stand of defiance, or in his pockets, which is a sign of casual relaxation—hardly something appropriate for worship. We worship God with our whole bodies, and thus even our posture should show reverence and humility. We must never lean against the walls of the Church, which are sacred and which are often covered with Icons, and we should not stand in an inattentive way. Since soldiers can stand at attention for long periods of time, since children can stand in line for several hours to see a movie, and since cheerleaders at sports events can assume a certain pose for extended lengths of time, anyone who says that proper posture and standing in Church are impossible is simply being irrational. While standing in worship, the Sign of the Cross should normally be made at the end of each petition chanted by the Deacon or Priest, accompanied by a slight bow. (In some monasteries, where silence is assiduously maintained, this practice does not hold, since movement can be distracting.)

We make the Sign of the Cross:

1. When the Name of God, Christ, or the Trinity is mentioned.
2. When the *Theotokos* or any Saint’s name is mentioned.

⁴⁶ “News of Science,” *Reader’s Digest*, October 1989, p. 149.

3. When we say the *Trisagion* (“Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us”), “Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, both now and ever, and unto the ages of ages,” the Lord’s Prayer (“Our Father...”), and any other similar prayers.

4. At the end of each petition in a litany, as we noted above.

5. Whenever the Deacon or Priest says, “Let us beseech the Lord.”

6. Whenever the curtain to the Altar is opened or closed.

7. At any time that you wish to pray for or remember any person during the course of the Service (for instance, when the Deacon or Priest commemorates the Bishop or the sick or those traveling).

There are also circumstances when we do *not* normally make the Sign of the Cross. Two such instances are:

1. When a Priest or Bishop blesses with his hand. We should, properly, simply bow slightly in acknowledgment of this blessing. This is also true when one approaches a Priest or Bishop for a blessing. He should not cross himself, but receive the blessing of the clergyman in question.

2. During the reading of the Six Psalms during Matins (see below).

There are also times during the Services, as we have noted, when the Faithful make a bow (bowing slightly or touching the ground with the right hand) or a prostration (*metanoia* in Greek, or *poklon* in Russian), crossing ourselves, falling to the knees, and bending the head down to the ground. We bow:

1. When we venerate an Icon, especially on Saturday or Sunday, when we are not to make prostrations.

2. At the beginning of any Service and each time that the Reader says, “O come, let us worship....”

3. At several specific times during the Liturgy (see below).

4. When the Deacon, Priest, or Bishop censens in our direction.

5. When the Priest or Bishop makes an entrance into the Altar during Vespers or Liturgy.

6. Towards the Bishop, if present in the Church, when he is commemorated during the petitions.

We make prostrations:

1. As described above, when entering the Church and venerating the central Icon, as long as we are outside Paschaltide and it is not a Sunday. Some people only bow in this instance. This, too, is proper.

2. When anyone enters the Altar outside Paschaltide and on days other than Sunday, even if he is only going in to clean. After prostrating or bowing, a Bishop, Priest, or Deacon kisses the Holy Table. (No one else should, incidentally, ever touch the Holy Table under any circumstances.)

3. At certain points in the Divine Liturgy during the week, outside Paschaltide.

At the end of any Service, the Priest will come out, facing us, and commemorate a list of various Saints. We should cross ourselves at each name mentioned. This may seem artificial and repetitive at first, but if we work through our initial resistance, this corporate action of the believers with the Priest facing one another is really quite beautiful and very beneficial for the community. Of course, this is only possible if we strive to maintain an attitude of humble reverence. All of these acts of piety and attempts to participate in the Services are empty and vain if they are done with the slightest hint of pride or showiness. This is easily avoided when we focus all of our concentration on the Altar and the prayers, participating in the Service from a sense of awe and gratitude for God's infinite mercy. This attitude will not come easily or quickly. There will be days when we simply have other things on our mind. What we must remember is that nothing which seems important in our daily lives and which distracts us from worship will be of any consequence fifty or a hundred years from now. Our prayers, on the other hand, are heard eternally.

We properly begin the weekend cycle of Divine Services with attendance at Vespers (or the Vespers–Matins Vigil) on Saturday afternoon or evening (or on the afternoon or evening

before a Feast Day). In order to understand what Feast or Saint is being commemorated at the Liturgy, it is necessary to attend the Vespers Service and hear the hymnody which both praises and often describes the meaning of the Feast or the life of the Saint. Since, over the Church Year, all of the great doctrines of the Fathers about Christ and the Saints can be found in this hymnody, the Vespers and Matins Services are indispensable to a correct knowledge of our Faith. To miss the Vespers Service as a matter of convenience is to deny ourselves the opportunity of learning the basic tenets of our Faith. Moreover, the Vespers Service prayerfully prepares us for the coming of Christ into our midst during the Divine Liturgy. Our lives are often so hectic and crammed with activity during the week that it becomes necessary to slow down and contemplate our relationship to our Creator with Services of preparation for the Liturgy. "Be still, and know that I am God,"⁴⁷ the Lord tells us through the Prophet-King David. This is almost impossible to achieve if our only contact with the Church is on Sunday morning.

The second Service in the cycle of Orthodox worship is Matins, which is celebrated Sunday morning before the Divine Liturgy. In the Slavic Churches, Vespers and Matins are often combined into one Service called the "All-Night Vigil." If we are attending a Vigil, the end of Vespers is immediately followed by the Six Psalms. These Six Psalms constitute the most solemn set of prayers read in any Service, for they are believed to be the prayers that will be heard at the beginning of the Dread Judgment, when Christ appears at the end of the world. For this reason, we stand perfectly still, in absolute concentration, as we will when confronted by His Judgment at the end of time. If Matins is performed separately, then some opening prayers and Psalms and a short litany are read before beginning the Six Psalms. During these readings, as we noted above, we do not cross ourselves, but remain absolutely still.

While the Matins Gospel is being read, we look humbly to

⁴⁷ Psalm 45 [46]:10.

the ground and listen attentively. Afterwards, the Priest will bring out the Holy Gospel (an ornate book containing the Gospel Readings for the Church Year) for us to venerate. We first venerate the Icon in the center of the Church, as we did when we entered. We then proceed to the Priest and make two bows, reverently kissing the Gospel and *not*, according to Greek custom, the hand of the Priest (who holds the Gospel in his hands, both hands being covered by the end of his *Phelonion*), and then make a third bow. We venerate the Gospel as we would an Icon of Christ. Saint John of Damascus made it quite clear that the written Word is a form of Icon:

The sixth kind of image [Icon] is made for the remembrance of past events, such as miracles or good deeds, in order that glory, honor, and eternal memory may be given to those who have struggled valiantly. They assist the increase of virtue, that evil men might be put to shame and overthrown, and they benefit generations to come, that by gazing upon such images we may be encouraged to flee evil and desire good. These images are of two kinds: either they are words written in books, in which case the written word is the image..., or else they are material images, such as the jar of manna or Aaron's staff...⁴⁸

Since the Gospel contains the very words of Christ, it is also considered the most sacred of images.

After having attended Vespers and Matins, we attend the Divine Liturgy. We should fast from midnight the night before this Service, in order to be attentive during the celebration and in order to prepare ourselves for receiving Holy Communion or *Antidoron*, the blessed bread which is distributed at the end of the Liturgy. (If the Divine Liturgy is being held at midnight, then we would fast six to eight hours prior to the start of the Liturgy. This is a strict fast which excludes all food and liquids.) Even if we do not commune during the Liturgy, the *Antidoron* at the end affords us a kind of participation in the Eucharist. This is because it has been in the very presence of the Holy

⁴⁸ St. John Damascene, *Images*, pp. 77–78.

Mysteries, remaining bread and not becoming the Body of Christ, but taking on the blessing of the Eucharist. For this blessing we, again, prepare ourselves by fasting.

If we are communing, then we should, as a minimum, have kept the Wednesday and Friday fast. We should also fast from meat on Saturday. But since Saturday is not a day of fasting (except for Great and Holy Saturday), we should eat olive oil and drink wine and, if our spiritual Father allows it, eggs and dairy products at midday. From midday on Saturday we should normally fast as on any Wednesday or Friday. Married couples should, of course, fast from the flesh before communing. During a regular fasting period, such as Great Lent, the preparation for Communion is already accomplished. For this reason, Priests usually counsel their people to commune more frequently during an appointed Fast. Before coming to Church, we should also say our Communion Prayers in the Icon Corner of our home. These prayers prepare us mentally and spiritually for partaking of the Divine Eucharist. We must also confess our sins to the Priest before communing, in order to make our preparation complete. Saint Paul was very clear about the grave necessity of this preparation:

Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep [die].⁴⁹

Having made the necessary preparations, we should go to the Church for the Divine Liturgy a bit early. Thus we give ourselves time to venerate the Icons, light a candle, and present the names of those living or dead Orthodox Christians whom we wish to have commemorated by the Priest during the Service of Preparation. In the Slavic Churches, small loaves of *prosphoron* (bread) are available to accompany the list. In both Greek and

⁴⁹ 1 Corinthians 11:27-30.

Slavic Churches, the Faithful usually have a commemoration book which contains a listing of both the living and the dead Orthodox Christians whom they wish to have commemorated at the Service. Usually an Altar Server will carry these back to the Priest while he is doing the Service of Preparation. It should be noted that only Orthodox Christians are commemorated in the Liturgy, since it is the common worship of all those joined together in right belief. (The heterodox, for whom we can and must pray, should be remembered only in our private prayers and *never by name* in the public worship of the Church. This includes political leaders, too. The Divine Liturgy has prayers for all people, but those whom we mention by name are those who belong to the fullness of Orthodoxy, who share our Baptism and beliefs, and who are loyal to Orthodox teachings. Even an Orthodox Patriarch who is not of right belief—*i.e.*, who has fallen to wrong doctrine—cannot be mentioned by name in the Liturgy. Thus, the more zealous Fathers on Mount Athos will not even utter the name of the Patriarch of Constantinople, a modernist and ecumenist who has compromised the Faith, though the See of Constantinople has always been the protector of the Athonite communities.)

During the Service of Preparation, the Hours are usually read. These are short Services of Psalms and prayers which the early Christians read throughout the day as part of their efforts to pray unceasingly. This time is sometimes used for the hearing of confessions, especially if more than one Priest is present, though this practice is not a good one and detracts from the Services. After the Matins Service or the reading of the Hours, the Divine Liturgy begins. During the most solemn parts of this Service, we are called upon to participate in the following ways:

1. At the time of the Great Entrance, we should bow slightly as the Gifts are brought out from the Altar. We should never bow down so far, during liturgical entrances, that we do not see what is happening. Entrances and processions in the Church call our attention to something (the Gospel, the Offerings for the

Eucharist, an Icon, *etc.*) and we should not be looking at the floor when they take place. Otherwise, they lose their meaning. When the Priest passes we may gently touch or kiss the edge of his *Phelonion*. We should stand upright just before the Priest enters the Beautiful Gates.

2. When the Priest says, “Take, eat...,” we should make a bow and then stand upright. The modern practice of kneeling at this point is rooted in the incorrect idea that these words constitute the “consecration” of the Eucharistic Elements. The Orthodox Church has never held to that understanding.

3. When the Priest says, “Take, drink...,” we once again make a slight bow and then stand upright.

4. When the Priest says, “Thine Own of Thine Own...,” we bow (or make a prostration, on days when this is permitted) and remain bowed down (or prostrate) until the Priest says: “Especially for our most holy...” It is during this time that the Priest reads the prayers of “consecration” inside the Altar.

5. After the “Our Father...,” when the Priest exclaims, “Holy Things are for the Holy,” we bow (or make a prostration, on days when this is permitted) and then remain bowed down (or prostrate) until the choir finishes “One is Holy...”

6. When the Deacon or Priest presents the Chalice and chants, “With fear of God...,” we either bow or make a quick prostration (when allowed), and then stand upright again.

If we are to commune, we go to the central Icon in the Church and venerate it as we did when we entered the Church. We then move to form a line to the right of the *Ambon*. Our arms are crossed over our chest with the right arm over the left. As we go forward, we should humbly allow men to commune first, in order of rank within the Church and by age (eldest first). Then the women should commune by rank (usually the Priest’s wife, or Presbytera, first) and by age. Finally, the children should come forward, boys first, by age. We do this in keeping with Saint Paul’s admonition, “Let all things be done decently and in order.”⁵⁰ We must always approach the Mysteries with the

⁵⁰ i Corinthians 14:40.

greatest reverence. Thus, if someone should push ahead, allow him to do so. It serves no purpose for us to start an argument and to distract the other Faithful as they receive the Mysteries.

When we receive the Mysteries, we should still have our arms folded on our chests. Making sure that the communion cloth is held carefully under our chin, we should open our mouth well enough in advance for the Priest to place the Spoon in it easily. We should close our lips on the Spoon as the Priest communes us, and then allow him to draw the Spoon out, with our lips closed, thus wiping the Spoon clean. We should not attempt to kiss the Chalice—despite the fact that this is a common practice in the Slavic Churches—, but quietly withdraw from the cloth and move over to take some *Antidoron*, dipping a piece lightly in the wine provided. The most critical concern for us when we commune is to make certain that we do nothing that might accidentally tip or knock the Chalice from the Priest's hand. As we partake of the *Antidoron*, we should be very careful not to let any crumbs drop to the floor.

If we did not commune, but have fasted from midnight, then at the end of the Service we should come forward, after venerating the center Icon, and approach the Priest, cupping our hands, right hand over left. As the Priest places the *Antidoron* in our hands, we should kiss his hand. It is a pious custom to take some of the *Antidoron* home to consume during the week. A resealable plastic bag should be brought to Church to keep the *Antidoron* for the journey home. Those who have communed and who have taken the *Antidoron* that should be provided immediately after Holy Communion should not take *Antidoron* again at the end of the Divine Liturgy.

After the final blessing, the Communion Prayers of Thanksgiving are read quietly by the Reader. During this time we should all contemplate the Mysteries of God and His mercy, as the prayers exhort us to do. After these prayers are finished, we should venerate the Icons as we did when we came into the Church and quietly leave in the same order that we communed.

We should refrain from greeting friends and acquaintances until after we have left the porch of the Church. The Deacon or Priest is probably still consuming the Mysteries which remained and is cleaning the Chalice. Our Lord is still present in the Altar. An atmosphere of quiet reverence, therefore, should always be maintained in the direct vicinity of the Church.

Keep in mind that these guidelines for Church attendance are structured for the communities within our own jurisdiction. There will be some variation in practice in Slavic Churches, since our emphasis is on Greek practice. But these differences will be very minor. In modernist Churches, which have lost many of the traditions of the Orthodox Church, perhaps only some of these traditions are followed. In any case, if you find any deviation from them in your community, always manifest an attitude of humility towards what you see. We have not cited these traditions for the purpose of creating tension and hostility. Our purpose is to educate and instruct, not to condemn or judge. Concentrate on doing those things which you can do in a spirit of reverence and gentleness, and avoid criticizing others. Such a witness over a period of time could very well inspire those around you to seek a more traditional life as well.

B. The Mystery of Confession¹

And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds.⁵²

⁵¹ We have used the proper word, here, to refer to the “sacraments” of the Orthodox Church. Though the word “sacraments” is used in English by almost all Orthodox writers, the Greek and Slavonic words for the Church’s vivifying ministrations are correctly rendered “Mysteries.” Not only is the word “sacraments” borrowed from the lexicon of the Western church, but it reflects theological ideas that do not accurately correspond to Orthodox thinking. Just as the Orthodox Church does not have “seven sacraments” (a formula used in Orthodox confessions that were meant to address Western theological concerns), but rather a vast array of Grace–bestowing Mysteries, so it does not technically have “sacraments” as the heterodox Christians understand and define them. She has Her Own unique traditions and Her Own unique vocabulary to describe those traditions.

The popular perceptions of the Mystery of Confession held by a vast majority of Orthodox lay people tend to fall into two basic attitudes. Either they totally ignore Confession as irrelevant, or else they live in dire fear of it. Both points of view keep people from experiencing the true cleansing power of this important Mystery. Confession provides us a means by which to return to the original state of purity which we had immediately after Baptism.

If we wipe away the socially learned responses to our bodies and to our passions, protecting ourselves against demonic temptation by frequent Confession and by moral living, we can return to the innocence of our youth. We can remain mature in body, yet remain unadulterated by the sin and pollution which the world so stupidly calls 'adult.'⁵³

The modern world tries to pretend that sin is a myth and that personal accountability for one's actions before a just God is merely a quaint superstition. As Orthodox Christians, we are called to a different standard than that of the world. This has been true of Christians in all ages and is especially important in our times. We are called to be the "light of the world"⁵⁴ and the "salt of the earth."⁵⁵ This means that we must not only be vigilant in how we live, but we must be honest with ourselves and respond immediately to God's call to repentance when we fall short of the mark. When we approach God in a spirit of humility and repentance, Confession can bring us face-to-face with ourselves. We can learn more from our weaknesses than we ever will from our strengths, because acknowledgment of weakness is the shortest path to humility. As Abba Sarmatias said: "I prefer a sinful man, who recognizes his fault and humbles himself, to a self-complacent man of virtue."⁵⁶ The most absurd

⁵² Acts 19:18.

⁵³ Bishop [Archbishop] Chrysostomos, *Repentance* (Etna, ca: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1986), p. 49.

⁵⁴ St. Matthew 5:14.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, v. 13.

notion that many people cling to in these times is the idea that no matter how selfish, vain, egotistical, and immoral they may be, they really are quite “good.” This is a destructive delusion. Let us see how we might better examine our lives to see what the real truth about ourselves usually is.

Proper Preparation for Confession. One of the easiest ways to examine our conscience is to call to mind each of the Ten Commandments listed in the Book of Exodus⁵⁷ and again in the Book of Deuteronomy,⁵⁸ keeping in mind that our Lord emphasized and expanded the meaning of these in His Sermon on the Mount.⁵⁹

- i. I am the Lord thy God. ...Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.
- ii. ...Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image. ...Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them....⁶⁰

People think that these commandments have no relevance to the modern world. After all, most of our ancestors stopped bowing down to stone idols centuries ago. But what these commandments are really saying is that for a Christian, nothing in the world should stand between him and his relationship with God. This means that we should honestly look at our priorities in life. For most people, God and the Church fall in about fifth or sixth place in order of importance. Money, career, power and influence among people, personal prestige (or ego), and self-gratification are the most powerful motivating forces and priorities in this materialistic society. The goals of Christianity run contrary to these forces and goals. In fact, living an Orthodox Christian life is ultimately incompatible with our attainment of worldly status and possessions. If we worship the needs and goals of the

⁵⁶ Archimandrite [Archbishop] Chrysostomos, *Humility* (Etna, ca: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1982), p. 61.

⁵⁷ Exodus 20:1-17.

⁵⁸ Deuteronomy 5:6-21.

⁵⁹ St. Matthew 5:1-7:29.

⁶⁰ Exodus 20:2-5; Deuteronomy 5:6-9.

self, we have placed false gods before the True God, whom we reach only through self-denial and other-worldliness.

iii. Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain....⁶¹

The sin of blasphemy is generally overlooked in these times. Blasphemy and foul language are so commonly heard on television and in movies that small children often use language in kindergarten which was once used only by sailors. Interestingly enough, although most people are less offended by blasphemy than by openly crude sexual language, blasphemy is a sin against God, and is therefore the more serious offense. The whims of fashion and the decline of civilization do not exempt Orthodox Christians from their responsibilities to God and their families. They must, therefore, guard against the sin of blasphemy, which the Church has always recognized as a grievous sin. Let us heed, in this respect, a story told by Saint Gregory the Dialogist:

In this city, there lives a certain man who is known to all; three years ago, this man had a son who, if I recall, would then have been about five years old, for whom he had such human love that he did not even try to discipline him.

For this reason, the boy, when someone prevented him from getting his way, used to blaspheme the magnificence of God—and let me emphasize that this is something dangerous.

When, three years ago, a deadly plague fell upon the region where he lived, this young boy succumbed to it and was near death. As eyewitnesses recounted, while the father took the child into his arms, the boy himself saw evil spirits coming for him. The boy began to tremble, to blink his eyes in fear, and to cry out in despair to his father: 'Father, save me, protect me.' Simultaneously, as he cried, he turned his face towards his father's chest, as though wanting to be hidden.

When the father saw his son trembling, in agony he asked him what he had seen. The son answered: 'Black creatures came to me and wanted to take me away with them.' No sooner had he finished this phrase, than he immediately blasphemed the name of

⁶¹ Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 5:11.

the Divine Magnificence and, with this blasphemy, expired.

Thus, God, the All-Powerful, in order to show by what sin the boy was given over to these evil servants, allowed him to die with this sin which his father, while the boy was alive, did nothing to prevent. And this boy whom God allowed, by His mercy, to live as a blasphemer, by His righteous judgement was also permitted to blaspheme at his death, so that his careless father might know well his sin. For this father, being indifferent to the soul of his young son, reared for the Gehenna of fire not an insignificant sinner, but a great sinner.⁶²

The use of blasphemous and foul language is obviously not a light matter. In particular, we must be sure that we never approach the Holy Mysteries with this sin on our souls.

iv. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.⁶³

For Orthodox Christians, this means regular attendance at Vespers on Saturday evening and Matins and Divine Liturgy on Sunday. This also involves arranging our lives to attend Services on the Great Feasts of the Church. In addition, we should reserve Sundays for family and Church activities. We should not do chores or actively seek to work on this day. Of course, certain situations may occur infrequently which require us to work on Sunday, but we should order our lives as Orthodox Christians in such a way that this is the exception and not the rule. This is one area which will readily reveal to us our true priorities. What we do with our time outside of normal work schedules shows us the depth of our spiritual life.

v. Honour thy father and thy mother....⁶⁴

This is an area which requires a balanced approach. Too much concern for the opinion and approval of parents can be just as damaging to our spiritual life as it would be for us to neglect them. This commandment does not require blind obedi-

⁶² *Evergetinos*, Vol. 2, pp. 45-46.

⁶³ Exodus 20:8; Deuteronomy 5:12.

⁶⁴ Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16.

ence, for it is possible (and often sadly common in these times) for one or both parents to demand children to behave in ways contrary to the Law of God. Saint John Chrysostomos acknowledged this problem when he said:

‘What if my parents command me to do things that are wrong?’ you might ask. Well, even when a parent does wicked things himself, he usually doesn’t force his children to imitate him. However, St. Paul has left us a provision in this case, by saying, ‘Obey your parents in the Lord,’ that is, whenever they tell you to do what is pleasing to God. So if your father is an unbeliever, or a heretic, and demands that you follow him, you ought not to obey, because what he commands is not in the Lord.⁶⁵

We are, then, primarily responsible to look after our parents as they grow older and to give them respect. Even in cases where our parents may have abused us in some way, we are still responsible for their welfare. Selfish neglect or disrespect for our parents is also a sin which should not be ignored if we plan to commune.

vi. Thou shalt not kill.⁶⁶

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment....⁶⁷

Here we see the difference between what God expects of people in the world and the standard He holds up for Christians. It is relatively simple to refrain from actually killing another person, but it requires years of personal struggle in prayer and fasting to acquire such meekness that we never become angry with our neighbor “without a cause.” The Holy Fathers have always considered anger to be one of the chief pas-

⁶⁵ St. John Chrysostom, *On Marriage and Family Life*, trans. Catherine P. Roth and David Anderson (Crestwood, ny: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1986), p. 66.

⁶⁶ Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17.

⁶⁷ St. Matthew 5:21–22.

sions afflicting mankind and standing in the way of salvation. We should always honestly look into our hearts to see if we harbor any bitterness or bad feelings towards any other person. Have we left any quarrel or confrontation unresolved? If so, we should follow the wise counsel of Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky) of Kiev:

The most effective medicine against anger and irritability, although it is also the most bitter at the first draught, is to ask forgiveness after a quarrel. It is bitter for human pride but, if it is bitter, hasten even more to make use of it, for it is bitter only for the proud, and if it seems so intolerable to you, then know that you have within you yet another serious disease, pride. Sit down and think over your own soul, and pray that the Lord help you to master yourself and to ask forgiveness and peace from the person you have offended, even if he is more to blame than you.⁶⁸

We must never approach the Holy Mysteries if we harbor unresolved anger for any other person.

vii. Thou shalt not commit adultery.⁶⁹

As Orthodox Christians, we are called to lives of complete chastity before marriage and complete fidelity within marriage. Even within the bond of marriage we are expected to abstain from marital relations on all fast days and prior to receiving Communion. We do not seek to emulate the world, but seek to “come out from among them, [and] be...separate,”⁷⁰ as Saint Paul said. Moral purity was one of the distinctive traits of the early Christians, one that set them apart from pagan society. Now the West has come full circle and has reverted to a completely pagan attitude towards sexual matters. This fact renders our struggles in this area all the more important, simply because we will appear so different to the rest of society, should we suc-

⁶⁸ Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky, *Confession* (Jordanville, ny: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1983), p. 51.

⁶⁹ Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18.

⁷⁰ ii Corinthians 6:17.

ceed. We can also give many of those around us hope for a better way of life, free from disease and emotional distress, if we attend to our moral lives. Those who preach promiscuity simply choose to ignore the explosion of sexually transmitted diseases and the fact that the human organism was never designed to accommodate a promiscuous way of life. We ultimately become ill, weaken, and often die as a result of sins of the flesh. Many women become barren, often at a tragically young age. In the life of sexual morality, these things are washed away.

The only way to maintain a pure life is to be very careful and discerning about influences in the home. We must control the images that enter our minds, whether they are gleaned from television programs, videos, movies, music, books, or magazines. This is the only way we can have any hope of meeting our Lord's command that we control our thoughts as well as our bodies.⁷¹ There is no justification for having any form of pornography in the home at all. Let us heed the words of Metropolitan Anthony:

Let them also stop believing in worldly stories and novels, according to which illicit love for another person's wife, for example, or another person's husband or a close relative is represented as a kind of involuntary possession with which it is supposedly impossible to struggle. All this is a lie, and all these 'love-affairs' are the fruit of a corrupted or idle imagination which was unknown to our ancestors, who were not educated from novels, but from sacred books. It is necessary to fill one's soul with different, better things, to love Christ, the homeland, studies, school, and how much more, to love the Church, one's parents and one's companions in the work to which one's life is dedicated, and to choose as a companion for one's life a woman with whom one can form a marital union and bring up children.⁷²

Even if we sincerely work to lead a life of moral purity, we must never consider ourselves above temptation. Most of us will carry the struggle against the flesh to the grave. We must be sure,

⁷¹ St. Matthew 5:28.

⁷² Metropolitan Anthony, *Confession*, p. 68.

therefore, that when we approach the Mysteries we have carefully examined our thoughts and temptations and that we have confessed even the smallest infractions. For, if the flesh is weak, this is because the flesh is also strong.

viii. Thou shalt not steal.⁷³

In this area, people usually engage in a certain amount of self-justification. Most people manage to keep from robbing convenience stores or embezzling thousands of dollars from a major corporation. But the world offers us many other opportunities to take something that does not belong to us without asking permission from the owner. This often begins with taking small things, such as office supplies at work, or with not actively seeking to locate the owner of something we have found. We forget that this commandment applies to such things and that we are not free to justify ourselves for sins of this kind. The commandment also refers to the buying or selling of stolen goods or conspiring to cheat or defraud people out of their money. If we work in the area of sales, are we truly honest with our customers when we describe the product or service that we sell? If someone entrusts us with his possessions, even if they are small or insignificant, do we take diligent care for these items? All of these issues are covered by this commandment.

ix. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.⁷⁴

Actually, this commandment is more concerned with slander and gossip than simply telling the truth. Slander destroys, through innuendo or outright lies, the reputation of an innocent person. It is usually employed by cowardly people who are either eaten up with envy or who believe that the only way they can prevail against some person whom they perceive as a threat is by destroying his reputation. This is a very serious sin which is, sadly enough, rampant in the Orthodox Church today. We par-

⁷³ Exodus 20:15; Deuteronomy 5:19.

⁷⁴ Exodus 20:16; Deuteronomy 5:20.

ticipate in slander when we choose to believe negative stories or incidents related to us about people whom we have never met and do not personally know. As Orthodox Christians, we have an obligation to believe the best about people until we have had clear personal evidence to the contrary. Slander, then, should be foreign to us.

Gossip is a lesser form of slander, but is just as destructive and sinful. We should thus be careful about what we repeat to other people regarding the behavior or character of others. If we pass on a story, we should remind ourselves that we might be passing on false information about that person. We thus become the source of a lie. This is a sin even if we have no malicious intent. Do you have a tendency to pass on information, just to appear to be “in the know”? Do you seek to inflate yourself at the expense of others? If so, you are guilty of gossip and are on the verge of slander. And if so, you should avoid Holy Communion until you have corrected this fault.

With regard to lying, which is also covered by this commandment, one must be very cautious. The essence of a sinful lie is the result that we are seeking from the lie. Are we lying for our own selfish interests? Even when there is no direct harm caused to another person, a selfish lie is still a sin, for it focuses on the ego, which in turn impedes communion with God. And this is harmful. It is also possible, however, to do great harm by going out of our way to tell someone the truth. Many people have been harmed by neighbors who chose to be “honest” in the name of truth, when the intent of their heart was quite malicious. This kind of “truth” is a lie and is a form of false witness. Telling the “truth,” then, is a complex thing. At times, the “truth” is a lie and, strangely enough, what appears to be deceitful can be in the very spirit of “truth,” if this “deceit” is undertaken for the sake of the greater good. Saint John Chrysostomos once gave some interesting examples of this:

A timely deception used with a right purpose is such an advantage that a lot of men have been called to account on many

occasions for failing to deceive.

If you consider famous generals from the beginning of history, you will find that most of their successes are triumphs of deceit, and that men like this can earn more praise than others who conquer by more straightforward methods. For the others are successful in their wars at a greater expense of money and men. ...When the plans of doctors are hindered by the whims of their patients and the obstinacy of the complaint itself, then it is necessary to put on the mask of deception. ...Great is the power of deceit; only it must not be applied with treacherous intention. Or rather, it is not right to call such action deceit, but good management and tact and skill enough to find many ways through an impasse. ...The straightforward man does great harm to those he will not deceive.⁷⁵

As Orthodox Christians, we must seek to live in the spirit of truth, which demands that we do all things that are good for our neighbor, bearing a “true” witness before them.

x. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s.⁷⁶

Envy is a passion which feeds off the other passions. It can lead people to irrational and reckless acts, including slander or even murder. Pontius Pilate knew, for example, that the chief priests who sought to crucify Christ, “had delivered Him for envy.”⁷⁷ These are the depths to which envious people can sink. When we allow ourselves to feel envious of our brother’s blessings, it means that we have completely forgotten our own. All that we are and all that we have belong to God. All of our scheming and ambition, our desire to have more than God has given us, simply get in the way of true spiritual progress. Ambition for material gain is, indeed, a very short-sighted attitude

⁷⁵ St. John Chrysostom, *Six Books on the Priesthood*, trans. Graham Neville (Crestwood, ny: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), pp. 48–51.

⁷⁶ Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21.

⁷⁷ St. Mark 15:10.

which can ultimately lead us to envy of those who possess what we do not. Metropolitan Anthony says this about envy:

Envy is joined to the yet more repulsive feeling of gloating over the misfortunes of others, and is linked with some other sinful passion—vainglory, self-interest, or ambitiousness and so is directed against one's adversary in a way corresponding to this passion. In order to vanquish envy, not only must the actual envy be opposed, but also those fundamental self-loving passions of the soul from which it is born. ...If you do not love money, you will not envy your neighbor when he gets rich.⁷⁸

We must remember that it was through the envy of the devil that sin entered the world. This is a very serious sin which cannot only destroy our own life, but the lives of those around us as well. The sin of envy can start as a small irritation of our spirit that can fester into a gaping wound. Do we find fault with others, particularly those who are promoted ahead of us or shown some special honor? As Saint Paul said, "Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another."⁷⁹ Otherwise, we will bring sure condemnation upon ourselves should we choose to partake of the Blessed Cup with envy in our hearts.

The Order of Confession. The Mystery of Confession entails a very simple procedure. We merely arrange a time with the Priest, usually on a regular schedule (every week, if possible), and meet with him. This can be in the Church or at home. The actual place is not important. What is important is that we have properly prepared for Confession by examining our conscience. If we are meeting in a more informal setting, we should say the prayers appointed in the service books for the order of Confession. This is not always done, if the Confession occurs during or immediately following a Service. A good Priest will prompt us if we seem hesitant. But it is far better for us to be prepared ahead of time and give him a concise and honest account of our sins.

⁷⁸ Metropolitan Anthony, *Confession*, p. 79.

⁷⁹ Galatians 5:26.

The Priest will ask questions and give advice on how to avoid various problems, as he deems appropriate. The Priest is there as a witness before God and is subject to suspension or deposition should he ever betray (misuse) what he has heard. After we are finished, we should bow to allow the Priest to hold his *Epitrichion* over our heads as he recites the following prayer (or one similar to it):

O Lord God...the salvation of thy servants, gracious, bountiful and long-suffering, who repentest thee concerning our evil deeds, and desirest not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live: Show thy mercy now upon Thy servant, N., and grant unto him (*her*) an image of repentance, forgiveness of sins, and deliverance, pardoning his (*her*) every transgression, whether voluntary or involuntary. Reconcile and unite him (*her*) unto thy holy Church, through Jesus Christ our Lord, with whom also are due unto thee dominion and majesty, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.⁸⁰

There is a second prayer which has come into use in recent times which is wholly inappropriate for use by an Orthodox Priest. It entered into the Russian Church from the West and contains the Roman Catholic formula, recited by the Priest, "I absolve thee from all thy sins." The Orthodox Church does not deny that the Grace of the Holy Spirit, which resides in the Priesthood, is salvific and washes away sin. But for a Priest to consider this a personal prerogative and to proclaim forgiveness speak of an arrogance, indeed, an abuse of the Priesthood unknown in any Patristic witness and in the humble examples of the best clergy. About this abusive and wholly un-Orthodox formula, Metropolitan Anthony says the following, in his advice about Confession:

Unfailingly read over each of them the most important prayer 'Lord God, the salvation of Thy servants...', and stop thinking

⁸⁰ *Service Book of the Holy Orthodox-Catholic Apostolic Church*, trans. Isabel Florence Hapgood, 6th ed. (Englewood, nj: Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese, 1983), pp. 289-290.

that the essential prayer of the Mystery—which is the only one read by virtually the majority of the Priests—is the following: ‘The Lord and God Jesus Christ [...forgive thee, my child...all thy transgressions. And I, his unworthy Priest, through the power given unto me by him, do forgive and absolve thee from all thy sins....⁸¹]’ This prayer was introduced into our order of confession quite recently, less than three hundred years ago; neither the Greeks nor the Edinoversti⁸² have it, but it came to us from the Roman Catholics.⁸³

Finding a Confessor. We should always first seek spiritual guidance from our local parish Priest. But occasionally situations arise when the Priest is too busy or is in some other way unable to give us serious spiritual guidance. He may also have not been given a blessing by his Bishop to hear Confessions. (According to proper and traditional Orthodox practice, a Priest is allowed to hear Confessions only after he has gained some experience in his clerical rank. Sadly enough, especially in America and in the Slavic Churches, this important custom is largely ignored in contemporary Orthodoxy.) In this case, we should seek, again with the parish Priest’s aid, the help of a spiritual guide, whether at another Church or at a monastery. We should seek to establish a stable relationship which will continue over a period of years. We should also confess regularly, and to the same person. Constantly changing confessors never allows us to find real solutions to our spiritual problems. Many situations require much time and effort to resolve. A spiritual relationship with a confessor is not an easy thing to establish, and much caution is advised:

First, one must distinguish between an elder and a spiritual Father.... There are few elders left on the face of the earth today, and those who claim to be elders or allow their followers to call them by that title—especially here in America, where Orthodoxy

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

⁸² Old Ritualists (Old Believers) who re-united with the Russian Orthodox Church, but were allowed to maintain their pre-Nikonian customs.

⁸³ Metropolitan Anthony, *Confession*, pp. 25–26.

is so immature—, do no service to the cause of Orthodoxy. ...It is a fact that the average layman often confuses the functions of the elder and the spiritual Father.

Secondly, obedience to a spiritual Father is not so much a question of commanding and obeying as of leading and following. ...The spiritual Father does not coerce, he does not give orders; rather, he takes the spiritual child by the hand and leads the way, gently but firmly....

One of the signs by which a layman can recognize his spiritual Father is this: a spiritual guide is not 'longing' to give anyone advice; on the contrary, he knows that of himself he is empty and incapable. ...Bishop Ignatios [Brianchaninov] says that 'the Fathers forbid us to give advice to our neighbor of our own accord, without our neighbor's asking us to do so. The voluntary giving of advice is a sign that we regard ourselves as possessed of spiritual knowledge and worth, which is a clear sign of pride and self-deception.' ...True spiritual guides give advice with fear of God and only because it was asked of them; knowing their own grievous inadequacies, they do not expect instant obedience, but leave it to the judgment of their spiritual child. In this way they protect both themselves and their spiritual children.⁸⁴

The relationship described above is meant for those living a pious Orthodox life of prayer, fasting, and regular attendance at Divine Services. Until we have established these routines in our daily lives, there is little that a spiritual Father can do for us, aside from praying for our conversion to serious spiritual life.

C. Holy Communion

Then Jesus said unto them [the Jews], Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. Whosoever eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live

⁸⁴ Archimandrite [Archbishop] Chrysostomos *et al.*, *Obedience* (Brookline, ma: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1984), pp. 44-47.

by the Father: so he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.⁸⁵

These words, so often profoundly misunderstood, reveal one of the great Mysteries of Christendom. In fact, what is accomplished on the Holy Table during the Divine Liturgy is referred to as a “Holy Mystery” precisely because what occurs is beyond our comprehension. The Orthodox Church has always believed and understood that Jesus Christ is actually present in the Bread and Wine which are offered on the Altar. These become the Body and Blood of Christ, the Body and Blood of the same Christ Who commanded us to “eat My flesh and drink My blood.” This is an awesome mystery which must never become routine or automatic, so that we lose sight of the fact that *God is present* in the Chalice in a form which fulfills our highest hope for spiritual transformation. These Mysteries, the Body and Blood of Christ, provide us with a way to remove the stain of the ancestral curse of Adam, which we all share. This Mystery is not a magic “pill” to help us make our way through the mundane trials of the week; nor is it something symbolic and secondary. These Mysteries bring us into a true and vivifying relationship with Jesus Christ. This relationship cleanses and purifies our souls for our inevitable face-to-face meeting with Christ after death.

Holy Communion is an occasion that demands of us a certain level of preparation. While it is true that 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. Suppose someone were to invite an auto mechanic to dinner in his home. Is it not likely that the hostess would expect her guest to wash his hands and change his greasy clothes before sitting at table? The auto mechanic might argue that it is in the nature of his job for him

⁸⁵ St. John 6:53–58.

to be greasy and dirty; but that would not spare him from the wrath of the hostess, were he to soil her furniture or linens—and rightly so. How much more, then, should we strive, out of love, to avoid the wrath of God by properly preparing to receive Holy Communion. How much more should we strive to be clean, both physically and spiritually, as we partake of the Great Banquet of the Holy Eucharist?

Proper Preparation for Holy Communion. We have already discussed fasting and Confession as they relate to preparation for Holy Communion. A few additional points, however, should be made:

1. Though we fast strictly for a number of hours before communing, it may happen that, while brushing our teeth in the morning, we accidentally swallow a small amount of water. This is not a violation of the fast and should not keep us from communing.

2. The evening before we commune should generally be spent quietly at home, preferably reading or discussing spiritually profitable material. We should also not be taking part in dances (which are, in any case, inappropriate for Orthodox Christians), parties, concerts, or other worldly forms of entertainment the evening before we commune.

3. We should say the Preparatory Prayers for Holy Communion, which are contained in any good collection of Orthodox prayers for daily use. These prayers should be said in our Icon Corner at home, before going to Liturgy. Saying these prayers piously and attentively prepares us to receive the Mysteries to our spiritual benefit, rather than to our perdition.

4. Women should abstain from communing during their period. Men should abstain from communing if the evening before they had a nocturnal emission. This rule is summarized in the Second Canon of Saint Dionysios, which clearly states that all must approach Holy Communion “wholly clean both in soul and body.” The instances of bodily pollution in question involve natural functions in men and women and are not sinful in and of themselves. But they are manifestations of the fallen nature of

human beings and are a sign of our unclean state. As Archbishop Chrysostomos has observed:

Natural physiological processes need not be sinful to fall short of the spiritual ideal. Basic theology tells us this. We are lifted above our physiological natures, above even the goodness which remains in our fallen natures, when we join ourselves to Christ. We fast, approach the Chalice with the greatest possible purity, and prepare ourselves internally for communion with Christ, so that the best that we are may be joined to His perfection.⁸⁶

5. If a Priest should happen to have a nocturnal emission the night before celebrating the Divine Liturgy and must Liturgize, he should, on awakening, immediately recite Psalm 50 (51) and read the “Rule Against Defilement,” a service appointed by the Church for such circumstances.

6. Generally, we should not commune if we are bleeding, for the very Blood of Christ enters into our bodies after we have received the Holy Mysteries. If we should happen to cut ourselves immediately after Holy Communion (within a few hours), we should bury any blood that we have shed, along with any bandages or material on which the blood has collected. This pious custom helps us to remember what an awesome thing Holy Communion really is.

The one exception to the rules of preparation for receiving the Holy Mysteries involves those who are ill or injured and in danger of dying. The dying should always receive Holy Communion, even if they have recently eaten or are bleeding. Whenever possible, of course, blood lost in such circumstances should be disposed of properly.

The Proper Attitude Towards Holy Communion. Many people, particularly in America, seem to have difficulty developing a proper attitude towards Holy Communion. They have at times been openly encouraged by their modernist Hierarchs and by self-styled “experts” to look upon receiving the Mysteries as a

⁸⁶ Bishop [Archbishop] Chrysostomos, “Women in the Church,” *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (1991), p. 1.

privilege or even a right. They are lulled into carelessness by glib statements about how Christ loves us as we are and how we are all sinners before God. (Both of these things are, of course, true, but neither has any application to the reception of Holy Communion.) Thus, men and women are no longer being encouraged to bring their best before God, but rather are led to believe that they are doing God a service by sauntering up to the Chalice.

Other modernist leaders use the example of Saint John of Kronstadt as an excuse to commune without proper preparation. It is true that Father John exhorted his people to commune often, and to this end he conducted “mass” confessions in his Church. What these same modernists fail to acknowledge is the fact that Saint John was a charismatic leader who led a completely pure life (he and his Matushka, or wife, lived as brother and sister) and was in constant prayer to God. We know of no person living in America or Western Europe who is presently living a life that even approaches that of Saint John of Kronstadt. Only such a person would have the spiritual authority to ask people who are living in the world to commune daily or even weekly and to know whether or not this would harm them. Today’s modernist leaders also fail to tell believers that, if they wish to follow a man like Saint John, they must also be ready and willing to shout their sins aloud in the Church, as his followers did, and to keep the fasts and say the Preparatory Prayers for Communion. The spiritual discernment of Saint John of Kronstadt and the deep piety of his spiritual children are extremely rare commodities in our modern world. Using their example, then, to justify present-day lax practices is simply dishonest.

What should our attitude towards Holy Communion be? Let us seek the guidance of Saint John Chrysostomos:

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 tintured 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 soul naked and mind pure 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?⁸⁷

The Divine Liturgy 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. Thus, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem once told his catechumens:

Contemplate therefore the Bread and Wine not as bare elements, for they are, according to the Lord's declaration, the Body and Blood of Christ; for though sense suggests this to thee, let faith stablish thee. Judge not the matter from taste, but from faith be fully assured without misgiving, that thou hast been vouchsafed the Body and Blood of Christ.⁸⁸

Once we come to a more profound understanding of what the Liturgy is and what is being accomplished on the Holy Table, our mundane and petty concerns about personal rights and the inconvenience caused by proper preparation for the Mysteries will naturally fade. In fact, this is what makes the Preparatory Prayers for Holy Communion so necessary. If we regularly say these prayers with piety and attention when we commune, the thoughts and concepts of deep repentance and humility contained within them will effectively eliminate any wrong attitudes we may have developed. A few of the ideas expressed in these

⁸⁷ St. John Chrysostom, *Priesthood*, pp. 70–71.

⁸⁸ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Lectures on the Christian Sacraments*, ed. F. L. Cross (Crestwood, ny: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977), p. 50.

prayers are listed below:

Accept...even me, O Lord, Lover of mankind, as Thou didst accept the sinful woman, the thief, the publican, and the prodigal; and take away the heavy burden of my sins, Thou that takest away the sin of the world, and healest the infirmities of mankind; Who callest the weary and heavy-laden unto Thyself and givest them rest, Who camest not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance [First Prayer of Saint Basil the Great].⁸⁹

O Lord my God, I know that I am not worthy nor sufficient that Thou shouldest enter beneath the roof of the temple of my soul, for all is empty and fallen, and Thou hast not in me a place worthy to lay Thy head; but as from on high Thou didst humble Thyself for our sake, do Thou now also conform Thyself to my lowliness; and as Thou didst consent to lie in a cave and a manger of dumb beasts, so consent also to lie in the manger of mine irrational soul, and to enter into my defiled body [First Prayer of Saint John Chrysostomos].⁹⁰

Thou Who by Thy burial didst lead captive the kingdom of hades, bury with good thoughts mine evil schemes, and destroy the spirits of evil. Thou Who by Thy life-bearing Resurrection on the third day didst raise up our fallen first forefather, raise me up who have slipped down into sin, setting before me the ways of repentance [Prayer of Saint Symeon the Translator].⁹¹

O Master Lord Jesus Christ our God, Who alone hast authority to remit the sins of men: Do Thou, as the Good One and Lover of mankind, overlook all mine offences, whether committed with knowledge or in ignorance. And vouchsafe me to partake without condemnation Thy Divine, glorious, immaculate, and life-creating Mysteries... [First Prayer of Saint John of Damascus].⁹²

But this again I know, that neither the magnitude of mine offenses nor the multitude of my sins surpasseth the abundant

⁸⁹ *Prayer Book*, 4th ed. (Jordanville, ny: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1986), pp. 355-356.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 357-358.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 361.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 362-363.

long-suffering of my God and His exceeding love for mankind; but with sympathetic mercy Thou dost purify and illumine them that fervently repent, and makest them partakers of the light, sharers of Thy divinity without stint [Prayer of Saint Symeon the New Theologian].⁹³

Behold, I approach the Divine Communion.
O Creator, let me not be burnt by communicating,
For Thou art Fire, consuming the unworthy.
But, rather, purify me of all impurity
[Prayer of Saint Symeon the Translator].⁹⁴

If we approach the Chalice with these thoughts in our mind, we will reap all of the spiritual blessings which Christ bestows upon His faithful servants.

After we commune, we should be careful about putting anything in our mouth that we do not intend to swallow. It is possible for some of the Mysteries still to be on our teeth or in our mouth, so we should always be careful, after communing:

1. Not to smoke (an unhealthy and unclean practice which Christians must avoid anyway⁹⁵) or chew gum at any time for the next few hours.

2. To train small children not to put their fingers in their mouths.

3. Not to spit for any reason. If you are ill and are coughing or vomiting, you should not commune unless you have a life-threatening illness. If you suddenly become ill after communing, carefully clean up the *vomit* and bury it in a safe place that will not be stepped on.

4. Not to brush one's teeth or to gargle—both of which involve spitting—before evening, or at least until several hours have passed and one has eaten a meal.

All of these guidelines are based on the idea that we have

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 368–369.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 375.

⁹⁵ See Constantine Cavarnos, *Smoking and the Orthodox Christian*, trans. Bishop [Archbishop] Chrysostomos of Etna (Etna, ca: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1992).

just received God into ourselves. Therefore, we act in ways which show respect and consideration for the magnificent Gift that God has just bestowed upon us. There is a remarkable anecdote in the life of Saint Paisios the Great that will be helpful to those doubting that piety or impiety are reflected in such minutiae as spitting and oral hygiene. The anecdote concerns a fallen monk who had abandoned his calling and even his Faith through the beguilement of a certain Jewess:

This thrice–accursed woman fell into such an unfathomable chasm of destruction and arrived at such a profound state of shamelessness, that oftentimes she would take the head of this miserable one into her arms and, opening his mouth, would scrape his teeth with a thin piece of wood, in the event that some Pearl of the Holy Communion of the Immaculate Mysteries remained there.⁹⁶

If, indeed, we truly believe this Gift to be the precious Body and Blood of Christ, how could we ever discard it or throw it aside as though it were an everyday thing? If we lose sight of Holy Communion as a Gift from God, we should think twice about communing. Unfortunately, those who have the most glib attitudes about the Mysteries are often those who commune most frequently. There is very little to be gained spiritually from such behavior.

There is another extreme which is equally destructive to spiritual life, and that is the habit of receiving the Mysteries only once or twice a year, rising out of the attitude that Holy Communion is so sacred that it should play no rôle in our everyday lives. Such people are starving themselves spiritually and will never experience the meaningful spiritual growth which comes from Holy Communion. It is true that there were hermits in the desert who went years without communing. Saint Mary of Egypt spent over thirty years in the desert without receiving the Mysteries. But she was not living in the world. She spent seven-

⁹⁶ St. John the Dwarf, *Saint Paisios the Great*, trans. Leonidas Papadopoulos and Georgia Lizardos (Jordanville, ny: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1983), p. 42.

teen years in agonizing struggle with her flesh and another seventeen years in deep noetic prayer. Nobody living in the world in these times has a prayer life which even remotely resembles that of Saint Mary of Egypt. And even she, having become an Angel on earth, nonetheless, at the end of her life, sought out, above all else, a Priest to give her Holy Communion.

God has provided us with the Mysteries as a means to salvation. This is the thing which must be foremost in our minds. We are being seriously negligent of our souls if we refuse this help from God. Blessed Philotheos (Zervakos, †1980), the spiritual Father of Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Fili, lamented the deplorable attitudes of many people towards Holy Communion when he said:

Of this heavenly bread some people out of disbelief and impiety do not partake at all, while others out of ignorance, poverty of faith [Matt. 17:20], negligence and lack of true and pure love towards God, partake of it once, twice, or four times a year. Yet even during these few times they commune out of habit, because most of them draw near without fear, faith and love ['With the fear of God and with faith and love draw near,' Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom]. It is sorrowful and worthy of many lamentations that the Priest often comes out to the beautiful gate, to invite the Christians to commune, and no one comes to commune.... Where have we ended up! At least a few of the God-fearing Christians ought to commune at each liturgy.... May the all-good God enlighten, awaken and arouse everyone from the sleep of sloth and negligence. Then, when we have repented and been cleansed by repentance and confession, let us draw near with fear, faith and love to our pure God and become worthy heirs of His eternal and unending life and kingdom. Let no one who is unrepentant like Judas dare to approach the mystical table so that he may not be burnt up and handed over to the eternal fire....⁹⁷

D. Clergy Etiquette

⁹⁷ Elder Philotheos Zervakos, *Paternal Counsels*, trans. Father Nicholas Palis, Vol. 1 (Lancaster, pa: St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite Publication Society, 1991), pp. 41-42.

The following is a guide for properly addressing Orthodox clergy. Most of the titles do not exactly correspond to the terms used in Greek, Russian, or the other native languages of the national Orthodox Churches, but they have been widely accepted as standard English usages.

Greeting Clergy in Person. When we address Deacons or Priests, we should use the title “Father.” Bishops we should address as “Your Grace.” Though all Bishops (including Patriarchs) are equal in the Orthodox Church, they do have different administrative duties and honors that accrue to their rank in this sense. Thus, “Your Eminence” is the proper title for Bishops with suffragans or assistant Bishops, Metropolitans, and most Archbishops (among the exceptions to this rule is the Archbishop of Athens, who is addressed as “Your Beatitude”). “Your Beatitude” is the proper title for Patriarchs (except for the Œcumenical Patriarch in Constantinople, who is addressed as “Your All-Holiness”). When we approach an Orthodox Presbyter or Bishop (but not a Deacon), we make a bow by reaching down and touching the floor with our right hand, place our right hand over the left (palms upward), and say: “Bless, Father” (or “Bless, Your Grace,” or “Bless, Your Eminence,” *etc.*). The Priest or Bishop then answers, “May the Lord bless you,” blesses us with the Sign of the Cross, and places his right hand in our hands. We kiss then his hand.

We should understand that when the Priest or Bishop blesses us, he forms his fingers to represent the Christogram “IC XC,” a traditional abbreviation of the Greek words for “Jesus Christ” (*i.e.*, the first and last letters of each of the words “IHCOYC XPICTOC”). Thus, the Priest’s blessing is in the Name of Christ, as he emphasizes in his response to the believer’s request for a blessing. Other responses to this request are used by many clergy, but the antiquity and symbolism of the tradition which we have presented are compelling arguments for its use. We should also note that the reason that a lay person kisses the hand of a Priest or Bishop is to show respect to his Apostolic

office. More importantly, however, since both hold the Holy Mysteries in their hands during the Divine Liturgy, we show respect to the Holy Eucharist when we kiss their hands. In fact, Saint John Chrysostomos once said that if one were to meet an Orthodox Priest walking along with an Angel, that he should greet the Priest first and kiss his hand, since that hand has touched the Body and Blood of our Lord. For this latter reason, we do not normally kiss the hand of a Deacon.⁹⁸ While a Deacon in the Orthodox Church holds the first level of the Priesthood (Deacon, Presbyter, Bishop), his service does not entail blessing the Mysteries. When we take leave of a Priest or Bishop, we should again ask for a blessing, just as we did when we first greeted him.

In the case of married clergy, the wife of a Priest or Deacon is also informally addressed with a title. Since the Mystery of Marriage binds a Priest and his wife together as “one flesh,”⁹⁹ the wife shares in a sense her husband’s Priesthood. This does not, of course, mean that she has the very Grace of the Priesthood or its office, but the dignity of her husband’s service certainly accrues to her.¹⁰⁰ The various titles used by the national Churches are listed below. The Greek titles, since they have English correspondents, are perhaps the easiest to use in the West:

Greek: Presbyteria (Pres-vee-té-ra)

Russian: Matushka (Má-toosh-ka)

Serbian: Papadiya (Pa-pá-dee-ya)

Ukrainian: Panimatushka (Pa-nee-má-toosh-ka), or Pani-matka (Pa-nee-mát-ka)

The wife of a Deacon is called “*Diakonissa* [Thee-a-kó-nees-sa]” in Greek. The Slavic Churches commonly use the same

⁹⁸ It is, however, permissible to kiss the hand of a Deacon, just as we do that of an Abbot (even if not a Priest) or Abbess of a monastery or a revered monastic, out of respect or as a sign of dedication.

⁹⁹ Genesis 2:24; St. Matthew 19:6; St. Mark 10:8.

¹⁰⁰ See Presbyteria Juliana Cownie, “A ‘Share’ in the Priesthood,” *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (1996), pp. 7-9.

title for the wife of a Deacon as they do for the wife of a Priest. In any case, the wife of a Priest should normally be addressed with both her title and her name in informal situations (*e.g.*, “Presbytera Mary,” “Diakonissa Sophia,” *etc.*).

Greeting Clergy on the Telephone. Whenever you speak to Orthodox clergy of Priestly rank on the telephone, you should always begin your conversation by asking for a blessing: “Father, bless.” When speaking with a Bishop, you should say “Bless, Despota [Thés-po-ta]” (or “Vladika [Vlá-dee-ka]” in Slavonic, “Master” in English). It is also appropriate to say, “Bless, Your Grace” (or “Your Eminence,” *etc.*). You should end your conversation by asking for a blessing again.

Addressing Clergy in a Letter. When we write to a clergyman (and, by custom, monastics), we should open our letter with the greeting, “Bless, Father.” At the end of the letter, it is customary to close with the following line: “Kissing your right hand....” It is not appropriate to invoke a blessing on a clergyman, as many do: “May God bless you.” Not only does this show a certain spiritual arrogance before the image of the cleric, but laymen do not have the Grace of the Priesthood and the prerogative to bless in their stead. Even a Priest properly introduces his letters with the words, “The blessing of the Lord” or “May God bless you,” rather than offering his own blessing. Though he can do the latter, humility prevails in his behavior, too. Needless to say, when a clergyman writes to his ecclesiastical superior, he should ask for a blessing and not bestow one.

Formal Address. Deacons in the Orthodox Church are addressed as “The Reverend Deacon,” if they are married Deacons. If they are Deacons who are also monks, they are addressed as “The Reverend Hierodeacon.” If a Deacon holds the honor of Archdeacon or Protodeacon, he is addressed as “The Reverend Archdeacon” or “The Reverend Protodeacon.” Deacons hold a rank in the Priesthood and are, therefore, not laymen. This is an important point to remember, since so many Orthodox here in America have come to think of the Deacon as a kind of “quasi-Priest.” This is the result of Latin influence and poor teaching.

As members of the Priesthood, Deacons must be addressed, as we noted above, as “Father” (or “Deacon Father”).

Orthodox Priests are addressed as “The Reverend Father,” if they are married Priests. If they are Hieromonks (monks who are also Priests), they are addressed as “The Reverend Hieromonk.” Priests with special honors are addressed in this manner: an Archimandrite (the highest monastic rank below that of Bishop), “The Very Reverend Archimandrite” (or, in the Slavic jurisdictions, “The Right Reverend Archimandrite”); and Protobishops, “The Very Reverend Protobishop.” In personal address, as we noted above, all Priests are called “Father,” usually followed by their first names (*e.g.*, “Father John”).

Bishops in the Orthodox Church are addressed as “The Right Reverend Bishop,” followed by their first name (*e.g.*, “The Right Reverend Bishop John”). Archbishops, Metropolitans, and Patriarchs are addressed as “The Most Reverend Archbishop” (“Metropolitan,” or “Patriarch”). Because they are also monastics, all ranks of Archpastors (Bishops, Archbishops, Metropolitans, or Patriarchs) are addressed by their first names or first names and sees (*e.g.*, “Bishop John of San Francisco”). It is not correct to use the family name of a Bishop—or any monastic for that matter. Though many monastics and Bishops use their family names, even in Orthodox countries like Russia and Greece, this is absolutely improper and a violation of an ancient Church custom.

All male monastics in the Orthodox Church are called “Father,” whether they hold the Priesthood or not, and are formally addressed as “Monk (*name*),” if they do not have a Priestly rank. If they are of Priestly rank, they are formally addressed as “Hieromonk” or “Hierodeacon” (see above). Monastics are sometimes addressed according to their monastic rank; for example, “Rasophore-monk (*name*),” “Stavrophore-monk (*name*),” or “Schemamonk (*name*).” The Abbot of a monastery is addressed as “The Very Reverend Abbot,” whether he holds Priestly rank or not and whether or not he is an Archimandrite by rank. Un-

der no circumstances whatsoever is an Orthodox monk addressed by laymen as “Brother.” This is a Latin custom. The term “Brother” is used in Orthodox monasteries in two instances only: first, to designate beginners in the monastic life (novices or, in Greek, *dokimoi* [“those being tested”]), who are given a blessing, in the strictest tradition, to wear only the inner cassock and a monastic cap; and second, as an occasional, informal form of address between monastics themselves (including Bishops). Again, as we noted above, a monk should never use his last name. This reflects the Orthodox understanding of monasticism, in which the monastic dies to his former self and abandons all that identified him in the world. Lay people are also called to respect a monk’s death to his past. (In Greek practice, a monk sometimes forms a new last name from the name of his monastery. Thus a monk from the Saint Gregory Palamas Monastery [*Mone Agiou Gregoriou Palama*, in Greek] might take the name *Agiogregorites*.)

The titles which we have used for male monastics also apply to female monastics. In fact, a community of female monastics is often called a “monastery” rather than a convent (though there is nothing improper, as some wrongly claim, in calling a monastery for women a “convent”), just as the word “convent,” in its strictest meaning, can apply to a monastic community of males, too. Women monastics are formally addressed as “Nun (*name*)” or “Rasophore–nun (*name*),” *etc.*, and the Abbess of a convent is addressed as “The Very Reverend Abbess.” Though traditions for informal address vary, in most places, Rasophore nuns are called “Sister,” while any monastic above the rank of Rasophore is called “Mother.” Novices are addressed as “Sister.”

There are, as we have noted, some differences in the way that Orthodox religious are addressed. What we have given above corresponds to a reasonably standardized vocabulary as one would find it in more traditional English–language Orthodox writings and among English–speaking Orthodox monastics. The influx of Latin converts into Orthodox monasticism and the phenomenon of “monasticism by convenient rule, instant

tradition, and fabrication,” as Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna has called it, are things that have also led to great confusion in the use of English terminology that corresponds more correctly to the vocabulary of traditional Orthodox monastics.

E. Monastery and Convent Etiquette

Monastics are people who have been called out from the world to live the Angelic life. For this reason, lay people have always been encouraged to visit monasteries regularly, so as to form their own spiritual lives around those who represent the standard of spiritual dedication. Serious monastics who truly dedicate themselves to a life of prayer represent the true purpose of our being on this earth: to love God and our neighbor. After a short time in such an atmosphere, a lay person is able to detach himself from the hectic pace of daily living and to regain a more balanced perspective on life. Since most Orthodox monasteries are traditionally quite small—and especially in these times—, monastics often find it difficult to balance their life of prayer with the needs and distractions introduced by their guests. In order to preserve this delicate balance, the following guidelines have been developed over the centuries to ensure that visitors do not interrupt the spiritual lives of the monastics whom they visit. These rules apply equally to monasteries and to convents.

1. When arriving at the monastery, the Abbot (or Abbess) is always greeted in the same way that a Priest would be greeted. The Abbot is not always necessarily a Hieromonk, but he is always accorded the same respect.

2. You may greet the Brothers (or Sisters) of the monastery when you see them, but you should not press them for conversation. You should especially not converse with novices. Conversation and questions should be directed to the Abbot (or Abbess), if he (or she) is present, or to someone appointed to look after guests. Other monastics must have a specific blessing to speak with visitors. This is a very important part of a monastic’s training in obedience, and his or her silence should not be construed as coldness towards a visitor.

3. Normally, visitors are taken to the Church to venerate the Icons before doing anything else in the monastery. Many monastery Chapels have areas reserved for monastics. Lay people should respect these divisions and should not enter into such reserved areas.

4. The entire monastery grounds should be treated with the same piety as the inside of a Church. Children should not be allowed to run freely about, but should be quiet and stay close to their parents.

5. There are private areas in monasteries where lay people should not go unless invited. Depending on whether it is a monastery or a convent, certain areas will remain off-limits to visitors of either sex. Under no circumstances should men enter the private quarters of nuns or women the private quarters of monks.

6. When invited to dine in the refectory, visitors should refrain from all conversation during the meal, unless addressed by the Abbot (or Abbess). In most monasteries, women are not allowed to eat with the monks, but eat in a separate place. This applies to men who visit convents, as well. During the meal in the refectory, visitors should follow the lead of the Abbot throughout the entire meal. This includes standing behind your seat during the blessing; waiting for the Abbot to sit before taking your seat; waiting for the Abbot to eat before starting to eat; and waiting for the Abbot to take a drink (usually signaled by the ringing of a bell and a short blessing) before drinking anything. At the end of the meal, you should rise when the Abbot rises, whether you have finished your meal or not, and only continue eating if invited to do so. Normally, when the Abbot rises the meal is ended and the after-meal prayers begin.

7. Most monasteries have guest houses for visitors, usually away from the monastery proper. Some monasteries discourage overnight visitors. If you are staying at a monastery or its guest house, however, you should attend all of the Services that you are allowed to attend. (Some monastic communities do not

open most daily Services to lay people, since this can occasion distractions for the monks. You must determine from the Abbot or his representative which Services you are expected to attend.) If you are staying at the monastery itself and wish to leave the grounds for any reason, such as to take a walk, you should get a blessing for this. Naturally, cigarettes must not be smoked anywhere in the monastery or guest house. Since Orthodox monastics never eat meat, you should not prepare meals with meat, if you are staying in the guest house. You should, of course, leave your room or the guest house in the same condition that you found it. A monastery is not a motel or a vacation spot, so there are no maids hired to clean up after guests.

8. When visiting a monastery, even for a short time, you should always take a gift. These gifts can include olive oil, candles, sweets, fruit or vegetables, brandy, *etc.*

9. On the Feast Day of a monastery or its superior, one should send greetings or a small gift. The Feast Day of a monastery is an extremely important day in its spiritual life, and great blessings are derived by those who visit a monastery or Church on that day. Because of Protestant influence and a decline in Roman Catholic piety in America, converts from these faiths are often generally lax in their veneration of Saints. They often completely forget Feast Days, both those of their own Patron Saints (which should be celebrated with far greater festivity than birthdays) and those of monastic and Church communities. The Orthodox Church has never lost sight of the tremendous interaction between our physical world of the senses and the spiritual world of the Saints. Thus, pious believers who make sacrificial journeys to visit a monastery or Church on its Feast Day, according to Church Tradition, receive great blessings.

10. One major spiritual objective of any visitor to a monastery should be to seek to confess at the monastery. Women may in some instances confess to and seek the spiritual aid of a spiritual Mother in a monastic setting (though the Prayer of Confession itself, of course, must be said by a Priest). In fact, in Greece it is not unheard of even for men to seek out the counsel of a

particularly pious or spiritually gifted nun or Abbess. Our own Metropolitan Cyprian was deeply influenced by the advice of a spiritual Mother who foresaw his service to the Church. Saint Seraphim of Sarov also received a blessing to pursue the Angelic life from an Eldress.

When confessing at a monastery, make sure that you keep in mind that, while you have been quietly praying and collecting your thoughts during your visit, the monks or nuns have been attending a full cycle of Services, attending to their own Canons (private rule of prayer), preparing meals, often working at the tasks by which they support their communities, and looking after other important matters. Your Confession should, therefore, not present an occasion for idle gossip, extended talk, or curious prattle. Make your Confession short, concise, and contrite. And follow the advice that you are given to the letter. As well, a visitor should accommodate his schedule to that of the monastics and not insist on this or that time for Confession.

11. When leaving the monastery, the visitor should be sure to leave a donation for the hospitality received. The amount should be determined by the length of stay (and stays at monasteries should—unless you are traveling a long distance for a rare and infrequent visit—be limited to three days, under normal circumstances) and the number of meals taken (if you did not prepare them, as you normally should when staying in the guest house) and amount of utilities used. People often forget the cost of such things, particularly in the winter, when heating is very expensive. Whenever possible, one should leave an amount equivalent to at least half of the cost of a modest motel room for the same period. You will not be asked for anything, as that would violate the monastic rule of hospitality. Nonetheless, you should leave your donation with the Abbot (or Abbess), even if he (or she) protests. If all efforts fail, you can leave the offering anonymously in a candle box at the back of the Church. Remember the admonition of Saint Paul: “If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we reap your carnal

things?”¹⁰¹

When visiting a monastery or convent, do not be surprised or dismayed if you feel some initial trepidation or uneasiness. Often people come under some spiritual oppression when they first arrive at a monastery, particularly if it is the first such visit. One reason for this uneasiness is that as lay people we are humbled by the example true monastics set. This humility can assault our proud self-images and even cause us to be uncomfortable with monastics. If, however, we honestly and deeply recognize and acknowledge their sacrifices, their devotion, their obedience, and their humility, we can no longer be very impressed with our own efforts. This is the greatest blessing of visiting a monastery. Once we can admit our spiritual weaknesses and overcome them, we can begin to receive and appreciate the beneficial instruction available by the very presence of good monastics. This is not a comfortable process, either. One's first impulse may be to leave, in fact. But this will pass. Do not be discouraged by such feelings. They only mean that you will receive a greater blessing at the end of your visit.

Finally, do not become an ecclesiastical gadfly. Do not visit different monasteries and convents and then compare one with the other. Though a good Orthodox monastery must, of course, adhere to certain universal traditions, every community has its own style and its own customs. Find places that are beneficial to you and make them your spiritual retreats. If you do visit more than one community in finding a place which is suited to you, do not then constantly babble about what you saw at another place. You can become a source of temptation and scandal to the monastics who hear this. It is your place to draw on what is before you and to thank God for it. It is not your place to “comparison shop” or to compare one community with another or to carry gossip from one place to another. If you do so, your monastic pilgrimage will be harmful to yourself and to others.

¹⁰¹ 1 Corinthians 9:11.