

CHURCH ATTENDANCE

Every Sunday the Orthodox Family observes the day of the Lord commemorating His Resurrection and triumph over death. The usual preparation takes place Saturday night when social affairs are avoided, so that parents and children may go to church together in the morning and worship the Lord in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. They arrive on time, not just at any moment of the Divine Liturgy, Doxology and the opening words of the Liturgy, "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and forever and unto the ages of ages". Upon entering the church, they bow their heads in reverence before God and cross themselves as a sign that they are followers of the Crucified Lord, Jesus Christ. They light candles, venerate the icons of the Saints, and take their seats quietly.

In church, no one talks, for church is the place where God speaks to His children and they listen carefully. God speaks through the service, the readings of the Scriptures, the sermon, the icons, and the Sacrament itself, through which the gift of God is given to all faithful Orthodox Christians who are in attendance. This gift is the saving grace of the Holy Spirit which overshadows all present, united in prayer, in faith, love, and hope.

Those who neglect to attend commit a sin in that they neglect the commitment to Christ implied in being an Orthodox Christian, and hinder the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Only in church is the Gift imparted. Only in togetherness of prayer is the Body of the Church formed mystically and Christ the Head of the Body enlivens the faithful, the members of His body, by the grace of the Holy Spirit. He feeds them with the Sacrament of Holy Communion and strengthens the bond of their unity so that they may be inheritors of His Kingdom. For this reason the Fathers of the Church emphasize the importance of church attendance, and the frequent reception of Holy Communion. "The Divine Liturgy is truly a heavenly service on earth, in which God Himself, in a particular, immediate and most close manner is present and dwells with men, for He Himself is the invisible celebrant of the service; He is both the Offerer and the Offering. There is on earth nothing higher, greater, more holy, than the liturgy; nothing more solemn, nothing more life-giving" (Father John of Kronstadt).

Private prayers and devotions are prayers of enlightenment and guidance and must culminate in common prayer with the other faithful in church at the Divine Liturgy. Therefore, it is a sacred duty and responsibility of the Orthodox family to attend the Divine Liturgy every Sunday avoiding all other engagements and work. Private prayer is necessary, but incomplete without corporate prayer. Those who truly pray regularly in private feel very deeply the need of praying in church with others.