



## **ORTHODOX TRADITIONS and CHURCH ETIQUETTE**

In the Orthodox Church, there are many customs and traditions that are an important part of our worship. Some are cultural and some are pious customs. Some are essential and some are not. From time-to-time, we need to address some of these various etiquette issues to better inform the faithful.

### **LIGHTING CANDLES**

Lighting candles is an important part of Orthodox worship. We light them as we pray, making an offering to accompany our prayers. Orthodox typically light candles when coming into the Church. There are times, though, when candles should not be lit. It is not proper to light candles during the Epistle and Gospel readings, during the Little or Great Entrances, the sermon and most of the time when the faithful are standing. If in doubt, a church usher is available to guide you.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF PUNCTUALITY**

The time to arrive at Church is before the service starts. If you arrive after the Divine Liturgy begins, try to enter the Church quietly and observe what is happening. If the Epistle or Gospel is being read or the Little or Great Entrance is taking place, wait until it is finished to quickly find a seat. If Father is giving the sermon, stay in the back until he has concluded. Try not to interrupt the Liturgy by your entrance. The best way to avoid this situation is to arrive on time.

### **"LET US ATTEND"**

In some Orthodox cultures, crossing one's legs is taboo and considered to be very disrespectful. In our North American culture, while there are no real taboos, we tend to cross our legs to get comfortable when sitting. Crossing one's legs in church is not permitted, not because it is "wrong," but rather because it is too casual and relaxed for being in church. Remember, sitting in church is a concession, not the normative way of prayer. You surely do not want to get too relaxed and let your minds drift off. In fact, when you do sit in church, you should sit attentively. Keep both feet on the floor, ready to stand at attention, which is what "let us attend" means.

### **EXCESSIVE COSMETICS**

Women who wear lipstick to church should blot their lips well before venerating an icon, receiving Communion, or kissing the cross or the priest's or bishop's hand.

### **DURING CHURCH SERVICES COMMUNICATE WITH GOD... ONLY**

Wait until fellowship hour to say "Hi" to friends and family members. It is not appropriate to greet people and have conversations during the services. Talk to God while in church through your prayers, hymns and thanksgiving. He is waiting to hear from you.

### **LEAVING BEFORE DISMISSAL**

Leaving church before dismissal deprives us of a blessing. Worship has a beginning "Blessed is the Kingdom..." and an end "Let us depart in peace..." To leave immediately after Communion is to treat the church like a restaurant where we come and go as we please.

## **VENERATING ICONS**

When you enter the church, it is traditional to venerate the icons. Usually, there are icons at the entrance to the church and many churches have icon stands in the front as well. When venerating (kissing) the icon, please beware that it is improper to kiss an icon on the face.

## **HANDLING THE HOLY BREAD (ANTIDORON)**

After receiving Holy Communion and at the end of the Divine Liturgy, it is customary to receive a piece of holy bread or antidoron - the bread that was left over after Holy Communion was prepared. While antidoron is not Holy Communion, it is blessed bread, and as such should be eaten carefully so that crumbs do not fall. Both adults and children should always remember to treat and consume the antidoron with respect.

## **ATTIRE: USING GOOD JUDGMENT**

When attending services, there are those who feel that God will accept us regardless of our attire. Yes, God does accept us as we are, but what are we doing to prepare ourselves for Him? This is why we must take proper care in what we wear. We need not be dressed "fancy" so as to impress others.

We need to only be dressed "respectfully" so as to present ourselves to God. Preferably, the women should wear dresses and the men wear suits, or semi-formal attire during the summer season. From time to time, medical or other reasons arise which may prohibit the wearing of certain clothing. You should use your good judgment when these situations arise. Speaking with your priest will help also.

Source: [http://www.stconstantinehelen.org/orthodox\\_traditions.html](http://www.stconstantinehelen.org/orthodox_traditions.html)