



Welcome to the Orthodox Church of the Holy Cross

Here are some features of our liturgical life that we hope will help you understand what the Orthodox Church offers in its worship and spiritual life, and how you can participate more comfortably.

1) JESUS – REVEALED IN THE SCRIPTURES AND IN THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD: In entering our church you passed under the iconographic description of the encounter Jesus had after His resurrection with his disciples on the “Way to Emmaus” (Luke 24:13-35). Everything we have to offer you is summarized in this encounter: It is all about Jesus, revealed in the Scriptures, in the breaking of the bread, and how this experience is shared with one another “on the way,” the path of life.

2) VESTIBULE: The vestibule serves as a transitional space before entering the nave or body of the church. Here you can find information on Orthodoxy and purchase candles that can be brought up, lit, and placed in the candlestands in the front of the church. Lighting a candle, first, reminds us each time about Jesus Himself as the “Light of the world” (John 8:12). But it also provides an opportunity to remember in prayer before God one’s particular needs or those of loved ones, living or departed. While you are welcome to purchase a candle yourself, you can also ask the greeter to help you place it in one of the stands up front.

3) THE DIVINE LITURGY BOOK: You will receive from our greeters a copy of our Divine Liturgy. Most of the service is made up of unchanging parts, but each week – depending on the Feast or time of the liturgical year – additional hymns will be added throughout the Liturgy.

4) PARTICULAR LITURGICAL EXPRESSIONS: You'll notice certain words that will continually be repeated, especially at special moments throughout the Liturgy:

Amen – Yes, So be it. This is our affirmation with what is being said and done and also an indication of our support for the “direction “ of the Liturgy. We begin with, “Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages.” And respond: AMEN.

Mercy – Here we mean not just God's juridical mercy, but His “steadfast love” (which endures forever).

Peace/Peace be to all. – Listen to how many ways from the beginning to the end of the Liturgy we will beseech God for this particular gift.

Let us be attentive – This expression will be offered at key moments during the Liturgy when we need to “pay attention” and “put aside all earthly cares.” Particularly:

- before the reading of the Scriptures
- before reciting the Creed
- before the Eucharistic Prayer (the “Anaphora”)
- before the reception of Holy Communion
- at the beginning of the Prayers of Thanksgiving after the reception of Holy Communion

5) ENTERING THE NAVE OF THE CHURCH: Reverence and a focus on worship and prayer are emphasized, so please silence your devices before entering, refrain from socializing, and enter

quietly. We stand for most of the service (especially during the reception of Holy Communion) and sit only at designated times, unless elderly, handicapped, pregnant, or have small children.

6) THE SIGN OF THE CROSS: Orthodox Christians make the sign of the cross by joining together their thumb, index, and middle fingers to symbolize the Holy Trinity, while tucking the remaining two fingers into the palm to represent the two natures of Christ. They touch their forehead, then their chest, and finally their right shoulder, followed by the left shoulder (up – down – right – left). We make the sign of the Cross frequently during our worship: particularly when the name of the Trinity is mentioned, but at other times (you’ll discover that there is a flexibility in this practice and not a set rule.)

7) ICONS: The word, “icon,” means “image,” but we also think of it as more than just a picture. In a sense, every icon is made possible by the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, the reality of His full humanity which could be depicted, united with His full divinity. Icons whether of Jesus, Mary the Theotokos (“Mother of God,” or the “one who gives birth to the One who is God”), saints and angels, and events from the Scriptures signify the presence of that particular person and are like “windows” linking heaven and earth. Icons are not “worshipped” because that is reserved for God alone, but they are “venerated.” We show them deep respect, love, and reverence. As you move towards the center of the church (the nave) you’ll notice an icon on the center table – usually of our parish Feastday, the Elevation of the Cross or of another Feast. In approaching this icon or the one on the right stand of Jesus and that on the left of the Virgin Mary and Jesus as a child, one would make the sign of the cross, then after offering a small bow, kissing the icon (usually on the hands and feet of the person, or the Gospel if one is there).

8) ICONOSTAS: The iconostas is the large wall or frame of icons which separates the sanctuary from the rest of the church and depicts Jesus Christ, the Theotokos, and other saints who are meaningful to our church (some of these icons can vary from

church to church). But perhaps it could be even better understood as the point where the altar (a spiritual image of heaven) interconnects with the nave (an image of the world) and that place depicted in these icons celebrates life which is transfigured and sanctified.

9) INCENSE: Incense, utilized by our pastor, Fr. John, is placed in a censer on top of burning charcoal (this is an ancient Biblical and cultural expression of worship). While it can offer an image of our prayers going up to God (“let my prayer arise in Your sight as incense” (Psalm 141:2), it is also offered at various times throughout the Liturgy and other services as a sign of preparation and respect: in the censuring of the whole church before the beginning of the Liturgy, before the reading of the Scriptures, and at the time when the bread and wine are transferred from a side table to the altar. Fr. John will cense the painted images, the icons, and then cense the “living icons,” all those gathered, the icons of the Holy Spirit.

10) HOLY COMMUNION: Orthodox Christians believe that Holy Communion is not a remembrance, but the “real” Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. Holy Communion can be distributed only to those who are members of the Orthodox Church.

The bread that was used and remains after the preparation of Holy Communion, known as “antidoron” (that “which is not the Eucharistic Gift,”) is often shared by parishioners with visitors at this time. It is not considered consecrated, and you are welcome to partake of this if you feel comfortable.

FINAL VENERATION (DISMISSAL): After the announcements and concluding prayers, everyone is welcome to come towards the front of the church to greet Fr. John, make the sign of the Cross, and venerate the cross that he is holding.

All visitors are then invited to join us for Coffee Hour downstairs in the Social Hall, where you’ll be able to meet more of our members for food and fellowship.