

Taking Part in the Liturgy

As we prepare our list of names, we may also wish to make a donation for the work of the church. Those of us from western churches may remember a collection plate being passed around and then the bread, wine, and money being carried to the altar by the people in procession. This offertory procession never existed in the east, so there really is no time in our Eastern Orthodox services where it is appropriate to pass around a collection plate, or when it is easy to do so without causing a distraction from worship. Donations for the work and maintenance of the church, and to cover the cost of candles and so forth, may be left in the money box near the door.

Preparation for worship

When we have finished all of the customary devotions upon entering the church, we take our place among our brothers and sisters and stand reverently, listening to the psalms and prayers, inwardly praying them in our hearts. If the Liturgy has already begun, we join in the church singing as appropriate.

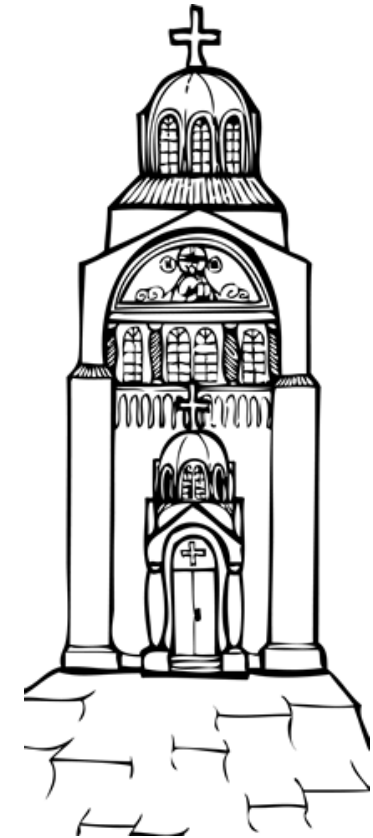


Confession

If confessions are heard before the Liturgy, those who wish to confess form a queue, allowing enough space to honour the privacy of the person confessing. Before approaching the priest, each person turns to the people, bows low from the waist (**without** making the sign of the Cross), and says, 'Pray for me, a sinner', and then goes to confess to the Saviour with all humility and compunction.

The Church of St Elisabeth the New Martyr
Rake Lane Cemetery
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How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.

- Genesis 28:17

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Entering the Church

Coming into church

When we enter the church, we are not entering a common building, but a place set aside for the worship of God. This is where the baptised people of God gather to worship their Creator and to be nourished with the Mysteries of grace, but most of all, this is where heaven meets earth, where the Divine Liturgy is offered, and where the risen, glorified Body and Blood of Christ are made truly present and received into the bodies and hearts of his people.

We enter the church, conscious of our own unworthiness to stand before God. Therefore, upon entering, we turn to the east and we Cross ourselves and bow (or prostrate, during fasts) three times, saying:

1. Thou hast created me, O Lord: have mercy on me.
2. O God, be merciful to me, a sinner.
3. Countless times have I sinned; O Lord, forgive me.

We then bow to our brothers and sisters to the right and to the left, before reverencing the icons. We make the same bows as we leave church.

Venerating the icons

The Holy Apostle Paul reminds us that, in the Saints, we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses to the Apostolic Faith. They appear separated from us only by death, which has been conquered by Christ's glorious Resurrection. In fact, they are alive in Christ and they are our brothers and sisters in the household of God. Therefore, it is proper that, when we come into the church, we greet them and honour them, asking their prayers and strengthening our bonds of communion with them. We begin with the central icon, which commemorates the Saint or Mystery of the day, then we venerate the icon of the Saviour and that of the Mother of God, before reverencing other icons of Saints who are particularly dear to us.

To venerate the icons, we make two reverences from the waist, kiss the image, and make a third reverence. We kiss the image on the hands or feet, but not on the face. Also, we do not wear lipstick so as not to damage the icons. We may also place candles at the images to honour the ones depicted therein, reflective of the glory of the grace of God in which they share.

Offerings

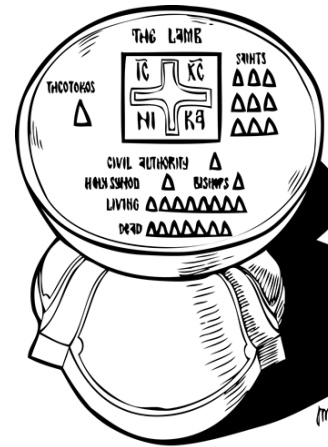
In ancient times, the bread and wine which were to become the Body and Blood of the Saviour were made by the people with prayer and reverence. Before the Liturgy, they would be brought to the deacons, along with monetary and other offerings for the work of the Church, and the clergy would prepare the bread and wine for the Divine Liturgy

One beautiful custom that developed was that, on the loaves of bread (prospora) would be inscribed the names of people, living and departed, in whose honour each loaf had been offered, and the deacons would make a note of the names and commemorate them during the Liturgy.

Things are a little bit different today. Often the task of baking the prospora is assigned to somebody with the necessary skills. However, the custom of symbolically offering them with the names of people to be commemorated has come down to us in the present day.

So, after venerating the icons in church, we take one of the loaves set aside for the purpose, and on one of the slips of paper provided, we write the names of the people for whom we are offering our loaf (prosporon). We only list the Christian name (no surnames) along with any sacramental description, (such as Nun Maria, Priest Gregory, and so forth). It is an act of love to commemorate our brothers and sisters in this way and we are encouraged to do this at every Liturgy.

The other thing to remember is that we only list the names of Orthodox Christians. This is not because of any unwillingness to pray for those who are not Orthodox. Indeed, as the priest says at every Liturgy, the Eucharist is offered to God 'on behalf of all and for all', and we can ask for the priest's prayers for anybody during the Liturgy, whether Orthodox or not.



However, the commemoration at the preparation of the gifts (Proskomede) is more than simply praying for those named. Here's how it works. The priest cuts a large square portion from one loaf. This is called the Lamb, and will be consecrated as the Body of Christ. Around this, he places various small portions as he commemorates the

Mother of God, the various ranks of Angels and the different orders of Saints, and the bishop. This symbolises the whole communion of the Orthodox Church gathered around Christ the Head in Holy Communion. It is to this that the priest adds the portions for the living and the departed, which he cuts from the loaves offered by the people, for they, too, are among the Orthodox Faithful gathering around Christ in Communion. It would not be appropriate to add the names of those who are not united with us in this way.

After the communion of the people at the Liturgy, the deacon empties these commemoration particles into the chalice, saying, 'Wash away, O Lord, by thy Blood, the sins of thy servants herein commemorated, through the intercession of the Mother of God and of all thy Saints.'