

prostration is still made at the end of the hymn.

Apart from the Anaphora, three more prostrations are made during the Liturgy:

1. At the beginning of the Lord's Prayer.
2. When the Holy Things are brought out to us for Communion and the deacon says *'With fear of God, with faith and with love draw near,'* we all make a full prostration.
3. After the hymn, *We have seen the True Light*, the priest shows the chalice to us as he says *...always, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages*, we make a prostration. Some priests bless the people with the Holy Things at this time. This is the last time that we see the Body and Blood of the Saviour before they are taken away to be consumed, and this reminds us of the Ascension, when the Saviour blessed the disciples as he departed from them, so we make a final prostration. Because they hold the Body and Blood of Christ within them, those who have received Holy Communion never prostrate but instead make a low bow from the waist.

Other times that we prostrate ourselves are during the prayer of St Ephraim the Syrian in Great Lent, and during the "kneeling" prayers for Vespers of the Holy Spirit (the day after the feast of Pentecost).

*(There are ancient canons and patristic writings which direct that we are not to kneel for prayers on Sundays or during Pentecost, but that we ought to stand in honour of the Resurrection. In some places, this came to be understood also to preclude prostrations. However, this interpretation has never been universal practice and both traditions exist within the Church today.)*

### **Kneeling**

Although we do not kneel to pray on Sundays, there are times when it is customary to kneel during regular services. At the Liturgy, in some

places, the people kneel during the procession of the holy gifts at the Great Entrance, and some find comfort in kissing the hem of the priest's vestments, remembering the faith of the woman in Luke 8:43-48. There is also a custom of kneeling for the Passion Gospels at Matins of Holy Friday.

On weekdays, when we prostrate ourselves at the beginning of the Lord's Prayer, we may remain prostrate throughout the prayer. Also, if "Kneeling" Vespers for the Monday of the Holy Spirit is served immediately after the Divine Liturgy on the feast of Pentecost, (which is common in parishes, to save people having to come back to church in the evening), those who have received Communion kneel instead of prostrating themselves.

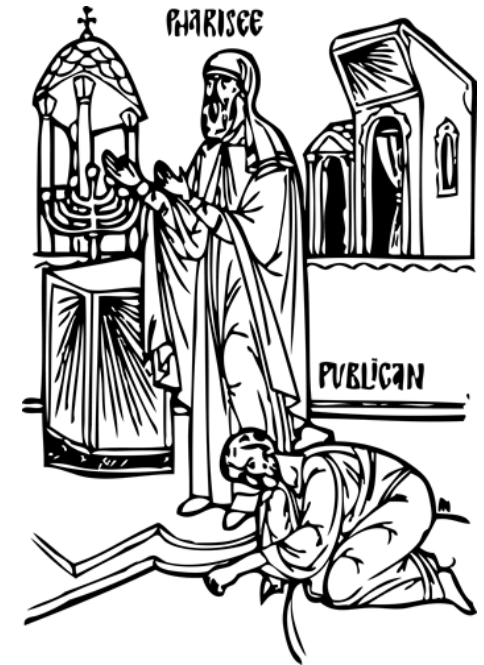
### **Pharisaism?**

It is sometimes with too much ease that faithful Christians are accused of being pharisaical—of falling under the Saviour's condemnation of those who placed the following of the little details over love for their neighbours. Yet, done in a spirit of humility and contrition, these external acts of love elevate our hearts and become an acceptable and worthy offering to God, (Psalm 50:17-21). The Saviour Himself asks us how we can expect to be trusted with great things if we cannot be faithful even in small things (Matthew 25:14-30). So, with the humility of the Publican, let us try to be faithful in these small things, keeping the customs of the Church by which the Saints worshipped God and which our fathers, mothers, sisters, and brothers before us have preserved intact and passed on to us.

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# Taking Part in the Liturgy



*'Imitate the Publican and you will not be condemned with the Pharisee. Choose the meekness of Moses and you will find your heart, which is a rock, changed into a spring of water.'*  
- the Holy Mother Syncretica of Alexandria

3

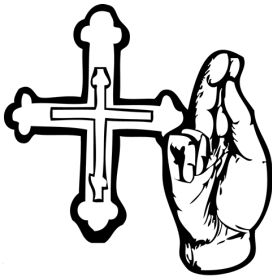
## Acts of Reverence

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*

- John 1:14

In the prologue to his Gospel, St John reminds us that we are physical as well as spiritual beings, and that in order to save us, God took human flesh. We are saved not just through offering spiritual acts of love to God, but also God extends to us his Grace through physical elements of creation; the water of Baptism, the oil of the olive, simple bread and wine. These things are consecrated for divine use in the life of the Church and become tonics and nourishment for our life in Christ. Nowhere is this more so than at the Divine Liturgy, where bread and wine become the Body and Blood of the Saviour.

This is also true in our worship. At our Chrismation, we are anointed all over our bodies, and it is with our whole bodies, not just our minds, that we worship God. So we kiss, we bow, we cross ourselves, we prostrate to the ground, and enter with our whole spiritual **and physical** being into the communal worship of God by his people.



### The Cross

*Hail! life-giving Cross,  
unconquerable trophy of  
godliness, door to Paradise,  
succour of the faithful,  
rampart set about the Church. Through thee every  
corruption is utterly destroyed, the power of death is  
swallowed up, and we are raised from earth to  
heaven: invincible weapon, adversary of devils,  
glory of martyrs, true ornament of Saints, haven of  
salvation, bestowing on the world great mercy!*

- from Vespers for the Elevation of the Cross

From earliest times, Christians have claimed as their own the sign of the Cross. While the exact way of making the Cross has varied from time to time, from

place to place, the method most common in the Orthodox Church today is to place the thumb and first two fingers together, in honour of the Holy and Undivided Trinity. The two remaining fingers are placed together and bent down to the palm, signifying Christ, in his two natures, having lived on earth. We then touch our fingers to our forehead, abdomen, and right then left shoulders.

We make the sign of the Cross:

- at the beginning of the readings from the Apostle and the Gospel, (but not the psalms at the Hours or Vespers).
- at each of the four affirmations in the Creed:
  - ◊ *in one God, the Father...*
  - ◊ *in one Lord, Jesus Christ...*
  - ◊ *in the Holy Spirit, the Lord...*
  - ◊ *in one, holy, Catholic...*
- at the dismissal, *May Christ our True God...*

### Bows

Sometimes, after we cross ourselves, we add a low bow from the waist, touching the floor with our right hand. We do this:

- during the Hours, at:
  - ◊ *Come, let us worship...*
  - ◊ *Alleluia* at the end of the psalms.
- whenever the Holy Trinity is invoked in prayer.
- at the end of each petition of a litany.
- during the Anaphora. We do not cross ourselves at the words "This is my Body/Blood". This comes from Roman Catholic superstition concerning these words. Instead, we Orthodox wait until the words "for the remission of sins", when we trace upon our bodies the sign of the Cross of Christ, calling down divine grace and reminding ourselves of the remission of sins that we receive from his Body and Blood, through the Cross.
- whenever the priest blesses us with a holy object, including the Cross, the chalice, the Holy Things, and the Gospel Book. If he blesses with his hand, (or if the bishop blesses with his

hands or candles), or if we are asking our brothers and sisters to pray for us, such as before Confession or after venerating the icons before Communion, or when asking the priest's blessing, we simply bow low. We never make the sign of the Cross before another person in this way, for this belongs to the act of veneration of holy things, and is not proper to lowering ourselves humbly to beg the prayers of another person.

### Prostrations

To prostrate ourselves is one of the deepest acts of physical worship that we can offer, and it is reserved for specific times in the Liturgy.



A prostration is made by crossing ourselves then falling upon our hands and knees and touching our head to the floor. Many people find it easier to allow their hands to touch the floor slightly before their knees. Then the hands are used to push the body back into the upright position. (Be careful not to trip over long skirts, dresses, or cassocks as you get back up).

Prostrations are made at the Divine Liturgy at the following times during the Anaphora:

1. *At It is meet and right to worship...*
2. While we sing *We praise Thee, we bless Thee*, the priest prays to the Father to send the Holy Spirit to change the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. We should bow in reverence during this. After the triple *Amen*, said by the deacon, we all make a prostration.
3. A prostration is made at the end of the hymn to the Mother of God, *It is truly meet to bless thee*, at the words *...we magnify thee*. On certain feasts and during certain seasons, we sing different hymns to the Mother of God. A