

The Orthodox Christian Faith

Site Visit Guide

Introduction

The main service held in the church is called the Divine Liturgy. On most Sundays, a liturgy first composed in the fourth century by the bishop of Constantinople called the “Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom” is held. The goal of the service is bring the congregation on a journey from earth to heaven through common prayer, hymns, and eventually partaking of the Eucharist, often called communion in the West. The service is rich in symbolism and meaning. It stresses that worship must include all five senses, so you will see icons and rich vestments, smell fragrant incense, taste bread and wine, hear ancient chants, and feel bodily movement.

Arrivals

Dress: Conservative. Semi-casual is appropriate wear; for example - dress pants or knee-length skirts with shoulders covered.

Time to arrive: 5 minutes before the service begins. The liturgy typically begins at 10AM, but call before you attend. It is common for people to enter the church after the service has begun.

Where/how to enter: Orthodox typically make the sign of the cross when they enter, kiss the icons in the narthex, and then light a candle in remembrance of a loved one. You will be welcome to light a candle or proceed directly to the pews or nave area.

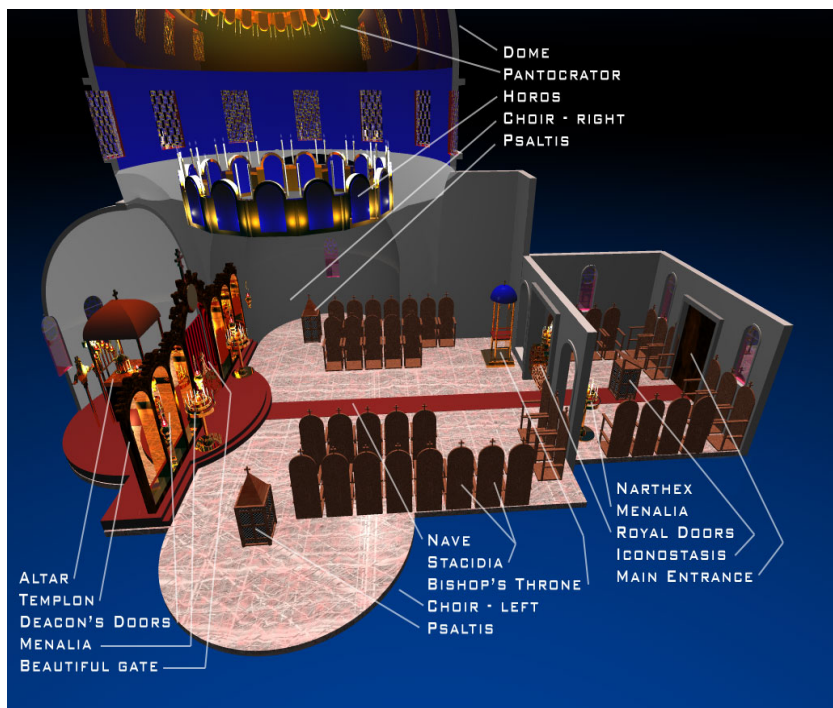
Architecture:

External: Churches vary in style. Many orthodox churches have domes and bell towers. Russian orthodox churches often have unique ‘onion’ style domes.

Internal: The church is divided into three parts: the narthex, nave, and sanctuary.

Narthex: Entrance area.

Nave: Icons will decorate the walls and in most American churches there are pews. In the dome is usually an image of Christ. At the front of the nave is the *solea* which usually has a special chair for the bishop when he is in attendance.



A panel of icons called the Iconostasis separates the sanctuary from the nave. Inside the sanctuary is an altar which holds relics from a saint. On top of the altar is an eternal light and the liturgical items for the performance of the services. Throughout the church, you will notice many icons, holy images that depict Christ, Mary the Mother of God, saints, and angels. They are ‘windows’ into the divine world.

What to expect during the service:

A prayer book titled “Divine Liturgy Hymnal” is a guide to the service. In many Orthodox churches (and in SLO), the service is performed part in Greek (or Russian or Arabic) and part in English. Books are usually bilingual, with English on the left page and Greek on the right, allowing you to follow along. You are welcome to sing along, though you are not required. Throughout the service, there will be periods of standing, sitting, and kneeling that are usually indicated in the book. In any case, follow the example of others. If you find yourself lost in the Hymnal, just ask the person next to you. The service usually lasts about an hour and a half.

You will often see Orthodox make the “sign of the cross”. This can be done at any time, though is usually universally done whenever the Holy Spirit is mentioned and when the Theotokos (Mary, the Mother of God) is mentioned. Do not feel obligated to cross yourself, sing or say the prayers. You are an observer - listen, watch and participate at your own will.

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Structure of the Service

1. Matins or Orthos

Matins is a preparation service that begins usually an hour before the Divine Liturgy. Most likely, it will be going on when you arrive. At the end of Matins will be a “Great Doxology” that is usually sung by the choir or chanter. The divine liturgy begins with the Priest saying from the altar: “Blessed be the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit now and for ever more.”

2. The Divine Liturgy

The Liturgy of the Word + The Liturgy of the Eucharist = The Divine Liturgy

The Liturgy of the Word

- a. **The Great Litany**—Prayers for the community, nation, and world
- b. **Little Entrance**—The Priest carries the book of the Gospels out from the altar, symbolically bringing the gospel into the world.
- c. **Hymns of the Day** for the saints of the day and the patron saint of the church.
- d. **Thrice-Holy Hymn**—begins “Holy, Holy, Holy”...
- e. **The Epistle and Gospel Reading**—Epistle is read (people can sit) and the Gospel is read (people stand).
- f. **Homily**—The priest reflects upon the gospel; often this is moved to the end of the service in many churches.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

- a. **Great Entrance**—After prayers and incensing the church, the Priest enters into the church with the bread and wine, surrounded by altar boys holding candles, cross, and seraphim. There is a procession around the church.
- b. **Petitions for the Faithful**
- c. **The Nicene Creed**—Begins with, “I believe in one God...”
- d. **Epiklesis**—This is the holiest time in the service and usually people kneel. The priest asks the Holy Spirit to come down and mystically transform the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ.
- e. **Petitions for the Faithful**—Begins, “Remember...”
- f. **The Lords Prayer**—Often in Greek (or Russian, Arabic) and in English, without the final “For thou art holy...”
- g. **Prayers before communion**—usually recited as a community.
- h. **Eucharist**. Individuals go up to take the Eucharistic. Only Orthodox Christians who are baptized and members in good standing may receive the Eucharist. It is usually appropriate to sit during this time.
- i. **Dismissal and Announcements**
- j. **Passing out of the bread**—All people are encouraged to come and receive the blessed bread from the priest at the end of the service. The priest often asks if visitors can stand and introduce themselves; if you feel comfortable, please do so. Usually, there is a community coffee hour and fellowship afterwards.

Observation Tips/Participation

- As an observer, you are not expected or required to participate during any part of the service.
- The service is supposed to be a mystical experience. Try to experience the service fully. It may become distracting if you find yourself trying to figure out exactly where we are in the service.
- During the prayer, observe the focused & unified worship of the congregation.

Afterwards

When the service ends, you can introduce yourself to the attendees at the coffee hour. Feel free to ask anyone about the structure of the service, prayer, dress, Greece, or any other questions unrelated to the service.

Additional Resources

For more information on the Divine Liturgy and the Orthodox Faith please visit:

<http://www.goarch.org/en/ourfaith/>

<http://stjrusianorthodox.com/stjrusorthodoxy.htm>

Written for the Religious Studies Program at Cal Poly by Cal Poly's Orthodox Christian Fellowship through the support of the Minker Endowment.