

The Compact Orthodox Catechism: Part 7

The Orthodox Church

Who/what is the Church?

Surprise! The Church is not just those human beings who have been baptized and Chrismated into the Orthodox Church and sincerely live the Orthodox faith; it also includes all the angels who have been faithful to God. Remember that the angels, too, were created with free will.

The Church also includes the faithful from the Old Covenant and even before. The Church is both the old and new Israel.

What is the Orthodox Church?

The Orthodox Church is the Body of Christ comprised of men and angels who hold to Orthodox Christian faith in belief and practice. It is both divine and human and is, therefore, not perfect. It includes faithful human beings from all ages who heeded God's call to them and responded throughout their lives with faith, humility, obedience and love toward God and fellow man.

Who is not in the Church?

Obviously, those who do not believe in Jesus Christ as the God-man and Savior and in God as Trinity are not part of the Church.

However, there are also Christian sects who believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and God, and in the Trinity, but are still not considered part of the Church.

This may be the result of a difference in doctrine and related practice that the Orthodox Church believes is critical to salvation. For instance, believing that faith in Jesus is sufficient for salvation without regard to repentance and obedience would be considered seriously deficient by the Orthodox Church and would disqualify a person from being considered as part of the Church.

It is also possible that a person might fully ascribe to Orthodox doctrine, tradition and practices, but has not entered the Church through Baptism and Chrismation. Such a person would generally not be considered as in the Orthodox Church.

It is important to add that, though we believe that salvation is found in the Orthodox Church, we do not hold that no one is saved outside the Church. Salvation belongs to God, and He knows who are His. Furthermore, the prayers of the faithful are effectual in behalf of those not in the Church. The Orthodox Church is happy that this matter of who will be saved is in the hands of the Lord.

Relationship with other Christian Churches

The Orthodox Church is actively and continuously engaged in dialogue with other Christian faiths, but stands very firm in its doctrine, traditions and practices.

The Orthodox Church, as a policy, does not concelebrate the Eucharist with other Christian faiths but may participate in other non-Eucharistic, interdenominational observances with the understanding that such participation does not represent

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acceptance of the doctrine or apostolic legitimacy of other denominations who may also be participating.

This participation in dialogue over the past fifty years has been quite effective in correcting and completing the understanding of the Orthodox Church among dialogue participants from other Christian denominations. It is fair to say that the regard for, and place of, the Orthodox Church has grown markedly through participation in such interdenominational dialogue.

The Organization of the Holy Orthodox Church

In general terms, the Church is organized geographically and, within each geographic subdivision, hierarchically.

Patriarchate: The highest division of the Church. Each patriarchate is governed independently from the others but all patriarchates are bound together by doctrine and canons of the Church. Historically, there were five patriarchates: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. In 1054, the Patriarchate of Rome broke off and became the Roman Catholic Church which over time strayed a considerable distance in terms of doctrine and practices from the Orthodox Church.

Later, national churches arose which also had their own patriarchs. This included Russia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Georgia and Romania. Other national churches were formed as Autocephalous Archbishoprics rather than Patriarchates. These include Greece, Cyprus, Albania, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Archdiocese or Archbishopric: These are major divisions within a patriarchate that are geographically defined and ruled by a metropolitan or archbishop with a synod. These are basically self-ruled entities but maintain a parental relationship with the patriarchate and, in certain matters, are subject to the patriarchate in decision processes. An archdiocese is typically either autocephalous or autonomous. An archdiocese that is self-ruling and chooses its own head is said to be autocephalous. An archdiocese that is self-ruling except that the patriarchate chooses its head is said to be autonomous. There are archdioceses that are not self-ruling, as was the case with North America until just a few years ago. An archdiocese that is not self-ruling can ordain priests and deacons but cannot ordain new bishops without approval of the patriarchate.

Diocese: This is a division of an archdiocese and is also defined geographically. It is usually headed by a bishop or archbishop who generally rules independently of the archdiocese in most matters, but not in ordaining new bishops. However, there are some dioceses that the metropolitan or archbishop who heads the archdiocese also heads the diocese and usually appoints a bishop to handle the day to day management of the diocese on his behalf.

Parish: This is the local expression of the Orthodox Church. In order to be called an Orthodox church and to celebrate the Eucharist, a parish must be recognized as such by

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the diocese or archdiocese, and must have an antimins for the parish signed by the governing metropolitan or archbishop. (The antimins is a rectangular piece of cloth, either linen or silk, typically decorated with representations of the Descent of Christ from the Cross, the four Evangelists, and inscriptions related to the Passion. Often, and if available, a small relic of a martyr is sewn into it.) A parish is governed by a priest with management of temporal issues handled by a parish council made up of lay persons and which is guided and overseen by the governing priest. There is variance among jurisdictions in North America regarding the authority of the parish council in relation to the governing priest.

The Conciliar Process of the Orthodox Church

While the Church is organized and ruled hierarchically, it does so through a conciliar process that emphasizes, even requires, reaching unity of mind in its governance and related decision-making. This unity of mind includes not only the current generation of hierarchs, but also all previous generations. This process spans geographic, political, economic and cultural boundaries, as well. All meaningful issues before the Church are handled through this process.

Obedience along hierarchical lines is clearly required, but so is the pre-eminence of love from hierarch to subservient and to the Church as a whole. This is how the great councils of the Church were executed and its doctrines and canons determined.

The Clergy and the Laity

The Clergy are comprised of the following:

Patriarch: The highest office of the Church, who generally rules a patriarchate.

Metropolitan: This is an archbishop who rules an archdiocese. In some cases, the ruling archbishop is simply called an archbishop rather than metropolitan.

Archbishop: A bishop who has been elevated by the Patriarch to the office of archbishop. This elevation may be attended with greater responsibility or anticipation of greater responsibility or simply in recognition of his current responsibility and contribution to the Church.

Bishop: A priest or deacon who has been elevated by an archbishop, metropolitan or patriarch to rule a collection of churches normally defined geographically. A bishop is not married (though they may have been married to woman who has died) and lives a celibate life.

Priest: A man ordained and authorized to prepare the Eucharist, perform the liturgy and hear confessions of the faithful. A priest may pastor a single parish or be attached to a parish to assist its pastor. The primary priest has authority over liturgical matters in the parish and plays an important role in governing the practical life of his parish.

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Deacon: A man ordained assist the priest in performing the liturgy including serving the Eucharist. The deacon has a very specific role in the Liturgy and other services. In times past, the deacon played a primary role in the practical life of the parish including the handling of finances. When required by circumstances, a woman may be made a deaconess and serve essentially the same role as would a deacon.

Subdeacons and Readers are men (and occasionally women) tonsured to serve limited roles liturgically. They are not members of the clergy and cannot serve the Eucharist.

The Laity

These are the people of the church who do not hold any of the offices briefly defined above. Subdeacons and readers are considered laity.

The laity has an important place and voice in the Orthodox Church:

No person can be ordained or elevated to any office of the Church except in the context of the Eucharist (Divine Liturgy) with laity present. In this context, the laity is asked to join in the recognition of the candidate's worthiness for the office.

Furthermore, the laity may, where sound reasons exist, ask that a priest or deacon be stripped of his office or be reassigned. This does not happen often, but it has happened many times during the life of the Church.

The laity has had a major role in acceptance of particular changes to doctrine and practice at key junctures in the history of the Church. Most famous was the rejection by the laity of the agreements entered into by Orthodox representatives at the Council of Florence (1438-39). Their voice was clearly heard, and these agreements were not accepted by the Orthodox Church.

The Sacraments of the Church

The holy mysteries or sacraments in the Orthodox Church are vessels of the mystical participation in divine grace of mankind. In a general sense, the Orthodox Church considers everything which is in and of the Church as sacramental or mystical.

The sacraments, like the Church, are both visible and invisible. In every sacrament there is a combination of an outward visible sign with an inward spiritual grace. Saint John Chrysostom wrote that they are called mysteries because what we believe is not the same as what we see; instead, we see one thing and believe another.

The sacraments are personal—they are the means whereby God's grace is appropriated to each individual Christian. In most of the sacraments, the priest mentions the Christian name of each person as he administers the sacrament.

There has never been a universal declaration within the Orthodox Church that there are only seven sacraments. Early Orthodox writers varied as to the number of

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sacraments; and some Byzantine theologians who list seven sacraments differ on the items in their list. Nonetheless, the list below represents the most widely accepted:

Baptism: Christian Baptism is the mystery of starting anew, of dying to an old way of life and being born again into a new way of life, in Christ. In the Orthodox Church, baptism is "for the remission of sins" and for entrance into the Church; the person being baptized is cleansed of all sins and is united to Christ; through the waters of baptism he or she is mysteriously crucified and buried with Christ, and is raised with him to newness of life, having "put on" Christ (that is, having been clothed in Christ).

Baptism is a requirement for becoming an Orthodox Christian. However, for converts, the Church usually accepts a previous baptism so long as it was a Trinitarian baptism.

Chrismation: Chrismation is the holy mystery by which a baptized person is granted the gift of the Holy Spirit through anointing with oil. As baptism is a personal participation in the death and Resurrection of Christ, so Chrismation is a personal participation in the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Unlike Western churches, where confirmation is typically reserved to those who have reached "the age of reason," Chrismation in the Orthodox Church is normally administered after baptism and shortly before one's first reception of Holy Communion regardless of age.

Chrismation is practiced by anointing the new Christian with chrism, which is holy oil (Greek. myron). The Christian is anointed with this oil in the sign of the Cross on his forehead, eyes, nostrils, mouth, ears, chest, hands and feet. Each time, the priest administering the sacrament says, "The Seal and Gift of the Holy Spirit."

The sacrament of Chrismation is an extension of the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Apostles. It is by Chrismation that a person becomes a layperson—a member of the laos, the people of God.

Eucharist: (from the Greek εὐχαριστία, or eucharistia, meaning thanksgiving or giving thanks) is a holy mystery that is celebrated during the Divine Liturgy when the consecrated bread and wine, through the power of the Holy Spirit becomes the Precious Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, that is served to Orthodox Christians who have prepared themselves properly. This sacrament was instituted by Jesus Himself with His disciples the night before His crucifixion.

Other names for the Eucharist include: the Holy Gifts, Communion, and the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Orthodox Church teaches that the Real Presence of God (not merely a symbol) is present after the consecration of the Gifts. However, the Orthodox Church does not speculate how this takes place.

Frequency of Communion has not been explicitly defined by the Church. However, the recommended practice throughout Church history is frequent

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communion with proper preparation beforehand. Through ignorance and difficult circumstances, the practice of taking communion only once or twice a year has become commonplace. This is not the teaching of the Church.

Confession: Confession (or repentance) is one of the holy mysteries or sacraments in the Orthodox Church, as well as many other Christian traditions. Through it, the penitent receives the divine forgiveness of Christ for any sins that are confessed. Confession is typically administered by a Spiritual Father (usually a parish priest or monastic). Confession can be individual or general.

The required frequency of confession (as well as whether or not general confession is permissible) can vary from parish to parish, and from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Once every one or two months is recommended, but the Antiochian Orthodox jurisdiction does not have a statutory requirement. However, a priest can refuse the Eucharist to a person he knows has not confessed for an unacceptably long period of time.

Ordination: Ordination is the sacrament (or Holy Mystery) of holy Orders. The Greek words used for ordination are cheirotonia and cheirothesia, both of which mean "the laying on of hands." Members of the major orders of the clergy—bishop, priest, and deacon—are ordained during the Divine Liturgy by the bishop, who is usually assisted by several priests. According to Orthodox teaching, the process of ordination begins with the local congregation; but the bishop alone, who acts in the name of the universal Church, can complete the action. The ordination itself for those entering the major orders takes place within the altar.

Those who are placed into the minor orders (subdeacon, reader, and in some traditions, cantor) are done so by cheirothesia, which also means "laying on of hands," but has come to be a technically distinct term from cheirotonia, which is used only for the major orders. Cheirothesia is not generally regarded as part of the Holy Mystery of ordination. The ordination for those entering the minor orders takes place within the nave of the church.

Marriage: Marriage is one of the holy mysteries or sacraments in the Orthodox Church, as well as many other Christian traditions. It serves to unite a woman and a man in holy union before God with the purpose of following Christ and His Gospel and raising up a faithful, holy family through their holy union. It is referred to extensively in both the Old and New Testaments. Christ declared the essential indissolubility of marriage in the Gospel.

Holy Unction: The mystery of holy unction provides both physical and spiritual healing with holy oil blessed by the Holy Spirit. It is most commonly celebrated during Holy Week on Holy Wednesday evening, but private services are also common. Everyone in the parish in good ecclesiastical standing may be anointed with the holy oil for the healing of spiritual and bodily ills. As this is one of the

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sacraments of the Orthodox Church, it may be administered only to Orthodox Christians.

The oil carries God's grace both to renew the body and to cleanse the spirit. The service follows the apostolic tradition mentioned in the New Testament: "...let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven" (James 5:14-15).

Preparation for the Eucharist

Proper preparation of oneself for participation in the Eucharist is of great importance. Failure to do so may result in spiritual malaise or illness, and may even affect the spiritual life of the parish. Proper preparation includes the following:

Reasonably recent confession; self-examination to determine whether confession is needed even if you have confessed recently;

Forgiving those who have offended you and reconciliation with them; asking forgiveness of anyone you have offended and reconciliation with them;

The prescribed pre-communion prayers of the Church should be thoughtfully read aloud prior to the Divine Liturgy and reading the Compline service of preparation the night before, or at least the Canon of Preparation, is recommended.

Arrival at Divine Liturgy before the Gospel is read is required. Being present for Orthros and Divine Liturgy is strongly encouraged, as well as for Vespers the previous evening.

Worship Services of the Church

In the Orthodox Church, the liturgical day begins in the evening with the Vespers service. So, Saturday night Great Vespers is part of the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist.

Divine Liturgy: This is the primary gathering of the Church where the Eucharist is served. Divine Liturgy is celebrated in the morning. It immediately follows Orthros except in the Russian Church where Orthros is part of the Vigil service the night before. The format of Divine Liturgy is slightly different for Sundays and Great Feasts of the Lord from the format used for week-day Divine Liturgies.

Vesperal Liturgy: This is a form of the Divine Liturgy that elides Vespers with the Divine Liturgy and is celebrated the evening before the appointed morning. This form of liturgy has become more popular for liturgies that fall on a week day because it allows working people to attend.

On most Sundays and feast days, the liturgy celebrated is that of St. John Chrysostom. However, there are ten liturgies each year where the Liturgy of St. Basil

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is celebrated. The Presanctified Liturgy celebrated each Wednesday night of the first six weeks of Lent is attributed to St. Gregory the Dialogist.

Orthros (or Mattins): This is the morning service of the Church. In most cases it is celebrated immediately prior to Divine Liturgy. It contains more music and readings that pertain directly to the day's saints and other commemorations. It also follows a slightly different order of service depending on whether it is Sunday, Saturday, a Great Feast, other special feast day or a normal week day. Most Saturday Orthros services make special commemoration and prayers for the dead.

Vespers: This is the evening service of the Church. Great Vespers is celebrated the evening before a Divine Liturgy, including Saturday nights and feast days. There is also a daily vespers service that is celebrated on evenings before days on which no Divine Liturgy will be celebrated. Like Orthros, Vespers contains more music and readings that pertain directly to the day's saints and other commemorations

Sunday Services: The Sunday services of the Orthodox Church generally include Great Vespers on Saturday evening, and Orthros and Divine Liturgy on Sunday morning.

Daily Services: Orthodox monasteries and a few parishes hold daily services. Typically, monasteries will observe daily Vespers, Compline (night service), Orthros, Divine Liturgy and most, if not all, of the First, Third, Sixth and Ninth Hour services. Many will also observe the midnight service. It would be unusual for any parish to celebrate any regular daily services other than Vespers and Orthros. Very few parishes do even these services as a regular practice.

Festal Services: The church celebrates the key events in the lives of Jesus, Mary and the Apostles in services that usually include Vespers, Orthros and Divine Liturgy where the content is focused on the event being celebrated. In addition, each day the life several saints, holy objects and/or events are celebrated. Generally, the Church celebrates a saint on the day of his or her death. In some cases, some event in the life of a saint, or the translation of his relics, or a miracle he performed, will be celebrated.

Pascha The Resurrection of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
Celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ bodily from the tomb following His crucifixion and three-day entombment. This the greatest feast of the Orthodox Church, and stands alone and above all other celebrations of the Church.

Great Feasts of the Lord: There are twelve feasts that are called the Great Feasts of the Lord. Of these, seven are for the Lord and five are for His mother. These feasts are:

September 8: The Birth of the Most Holy Theotokos
Celebrates the birth of Mary, the mother of God, and her parents, Joachim and Anna.

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- September 14: The Exaltation of the Holy Cross
Celebrates the Cross of the Lord and its being found by Constantine's mother, St. Helen and its recovery by Emperor Heraclius from the Persians. It celebrates the Cross as a weapon of peace and an unconquerable sign of victory.
- November 21: The Entry into the Temple of the Most Holy Theotokos
Celebrates the entrance of the Most Holy Theotokos, Mary, into the Temple at the age of three and her life there until the age of twelve.
- December 25: The Nativity of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
Celebrates the nativity in the flesh of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the events surrounding His birth.
- January 6: The Theophany of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
Celebrates the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan by John the Baptist and the manifestation of the Trinity in this event, the Father's voice heard from Heaven and the Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove.
- February 2: The Meeting of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
Celebrates the Christ child entering the Temple at the time of ritual purification for Mary, and so meeting with His people in the persons of Simeon the Elder and Anna the Prophetess.
- March 25: The Annunciation of the Most Holy Theotokos
Celebrates the visit of the Archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary to announce to her that she has been chosen by God to be His mother and the conception of Jesus that occurs upon her acceptance.
- Palm Sunday Palm Sunday
Celebrates the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem after raising Lazarus from the Dead and one week before His resurrection.
- Ascension The Ascension of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
Celebrates the bodily ascension into Heaven of Jesus forty days after His resurrection.

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Pentecost	Pentecost Celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles with power, marking the beginning of the Church and the accessibility of salvation in Jesus Christ to the nations. Pentecost is celebrated fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
August 6	The Transfiguration of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ Celebrates the transfiguration of Jesus in the presence of Peter, James and John on Mount Tabor before Jesus' passion.
August 15	The Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos Celebrates the falling asleep of Mary, the mother of God, in the flesh and the assumption of her body to Heaven following her burial.

Patronal and Other Feasts:

Each parish typically holds a patronal feast on the feast day of the saint or event for which the Parish is named. Monasteries and a few parishes may also celebrate other saints, events or holy objects on the appointed feast day for each. There are feast days other than Great Feasts of the Lord that are generally considered especially significant either based on geographic region or jurisdiction, or the importance of the saint(s) themselves. For instance, September 1 is often celebrated because it is the start of new Church year, and June 29 because it is the combined feast of Sts. Peter and Paul.

Church calendars are usually available showing the major saint, event or holy object celebrated each day of the year. There are also books such as the Prologue of Ochrid that provides a short summary of the life of each saint celebrated each day of the year. Nowadays, there are also web sites with this information.

Church Calendars:

There are two major calendars of the Church, one called Old Calendar and the other called New Calendar. The Old Calendar runs about two weeks behind the New Calendar. For example, in the New Calendar, Nativity falls on December 25, but for the Old Calendar, it falls on January 6. In general, the New Calendar is used by the eastern Mediterranean jurisdictions and Old Calendar is used by the Slavic jurisdictions, although some of the Slavic jurisdictions are themselves split in the use of Old and New Calendars.

Music of the Church:

While the doctrine of the Church is uniform across jurisdictions, the music is not. Byzantine music and modality is used by the Greek and Antiochian jurisdictions. More western music, in terms of modality, is used by Serbian and Russian

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jurisdictions. In North America, it is common to find Antiochian parishes that use Byzantine, Serbian, Kievan and Russian music. While many Antiochian parishes use Byzantine music and modality, they do not adhere accurately to the modality simply because it is very challenging for chanters and choirs raised and trained in western music to master Byzantine intervals.

Worship Cycles in the Church (Sanctification of Time)

There are several cycles followed in the worship of the Church. The Church calls this the sanctification of time since each day, week and period during the year has special observances that shape the content and some of the music of the services.

Annual: The annual cycle is the most dominant cycle. The calendar of the Church defines which saints, events or holy objects will be celebrated each day or week of the year. This determines much of the variable content of the services each day. The Menaion is the book, or set of books, that provide the hymns and readings to be used for commemorating the saints, events or holy things for each day of the year. The Great Horologion is another source for some of these hymns and readings.

Gospel: There is an eleven week cycle of Resurrection Gospel readings for Sunday Orthros called the Eothinon. The term, eothinon, derives from the Greek word for dawn because that is time at which the appointed Orthros Gospel is to be read. The eothinon cycle also determines other parts of the Orthros service in terms of the hymnology to be used.

Weekly: There are particular commemorations for Vespers and Orthros that vary based on the day of the week.

Sunday	The glorious Resurrection of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
Monday	The Holy Angels
Tuesday	The Holy Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John
Wednesday	The Precious, Holy, and Life-Creating Cross and the Most Holy Theotokos
Thursday	The Holy Apostles
Friday	The Precious, Holy, and Life-Creating Cross
Saturday	The Faithful Departed

Tone: For Byzantine church music, there are eight tones or modes that under lay all of the music. Each mode, or tone, is a set of musical intervals that governs the melodies in that mode. Each week, there is a tone of the week, which means there is an eight week cycle based on tone (most church calendars actually show the tone of the week). This does not mean that all the music during a given week will be in the tone of the week. It just means that particular pieces of music will be in the tone of

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the week. The Octoechos is the book, or set of books, that provide the hymns that are chanted according to the tone of week.

Church Attendance

The Church expects Orthodox Christians to participate in each Sunday Divine Liturgy, the Great Feasts of the Lord and Patronal Feast at the parish where they are members. If you will be absent, or plan to attend another Orthodox Church, the protocol is to communicate your intention with your priest and ask for a blessing to be absent. In general, attending a non-Orthodox Church is strongly discouraged without a very sound reason for doing so. Frequent attendance to non-Orthodox Churches may result not being permitted to partake of the Eucharist until this practice comes to an end. Such matters should be discussed with your priest.

Veneration of the Saints

The Orthodox Church openly practices veneration of and prayers to its saints. The saints are not worshipped, but are venerated, that is, they are shown very high respect and honor for their life of triumph in Christ. Prayer to a saint is always a request for their prayer to God on our behalf. Many saints of the church have hymns written about them that both honor them and ask for their intercession on our behalf. Beside the efficacy of their prayers for us, the lives of the saints are models for us and encourage us to live victoriously just as they did.

Use of Icons

The Orthodox Church uses icons of Jesus, Mary, the saints and key events in their lives in its worship and teaching. The Seventh Ecumenical Council of the Church re-established the validity and Orthodoxy of icons following 120 years of proscription of their use as idolatry. The theology of icons expressed by St. John of Damascus was effectual in their restoration:

Concerning the charge of idolatry: Icons are not idols but symbols, therefore when an Orthodox venerates an icon, he is not guilty of idolatry. He is not worshipping the symbol, but merely venerating it. Such veneration is not directed toward wood, or paint or stone, but towards the person depicted. Therefore, through icons, relative honor is shown to holy persons, objects and event, but worship is due to God alone.

We do not make obeisance to the nature of wood, but we revere and do obeisance to Him who was crucified on the Cross... When the two beams of the Cross are joined together I adore the figure because of Christ who was crucified on the Cross, but if the beams are separated, I throw them away and burn them.

Relics

The Orthodox Church practices the keeping and use of relics of holy people and holy objects. Countless miracles have taken place in connection with such physical relics. People have been healed, the dead raised, battles won, crucial questions answered,

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natural disasters averted and many other miraculous manifestations have taken place through prayers humbly offered along with the invocation of such relics.