

# **I WISH SOMEONE WOULD HAVE TOLD ME EARLIER!!**

What is proper “behaviour” in Church? Here are some gentle reminders about Church etiquette.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF PUNCTUALITY**

The time to arrive at Church is before the service starts. If you arrive after the Divine Liturgy begins, try to enter the Church quietly and observe what is happening. If the Epistle or Gospel is being read or the Little or Great Entrance is taking place, wait until it is finished to quickly find a seat. If Father is giving the sermon, stay in the back until he has concluded. Try not to interrupt the Liturgy by your entrance. The best way to avoid this situation is to arrive on time.

## **ENTERING THE CHURCH**

There are certain times during the Liturgy when you should not enter the Church. You may enter the Church at most times except when the Priest has left the Altar and is facing either the congregation or the Altar. You should also not enter the Church during the reading of Epistle or the Gospel.

## **VENERATING ICONS**

Newcomers are often confused or perplexed about venerating icons. When you enter the Church it is customary to venerate the holy icons. In our Church, there are icons in the narthex (by the candles) and an icon stand (analogion) in front of the iconostasion (either in the centre or in front of Christ) as well. In our Church, there is an icon on a stand at the entrance or in the centre of the nave; this icon is venerated first. It is customary when venerating an icon, especially the principal icons, to make two reverences (sign of the cross followed by a bow), sign of the cross a third time followed by kissing the icon, then a final reverence (sign of the cross followed by a bow).

When venerating (kissing) an icon, pay attention to where you kiss. It is not proper to kiss an icon on the face; after all, you wouldn't go up and kiss the Lord or His Mother on the lips, would you? Rather, you would kiss their hand. Pay attention to what you are doing. When you approach an icon to venerate it, kiss the Gospel, scroll, or hand cross in the hand of the person depicted, or kiss the hand or foot. In

fact, the hands and feet on some icons are covered with metal for just this purpose and so as not to damage the icon itself. As you venerate an icon, show the proper respect due to the person depicted; the same respect you would show them in person. Remember blot off that lipstick first!

### **LIGHTING CANDLES**

Lighting candles is an important part of Orthodox worship. We light them as we pray, making an offering to accompany our prayers. Orthodox typically light candles when coming into the Church. There are times, though, when candles should not be lit. It is not proper to light candles during the Epistle and Gospel readings, during the Little or Great Entrances, the sermon and most of the times when the faithful are standing.

### **DURING CHURCH SERVICES COMMUNICATE WITH GOD...ONLY**

Wait until coffee hour to say "Hi" to friends and family members. It is not appropriate to greet people and have conversations during the services. Talk to God while in church through your prayers, hymns and thanksgiving. He is waiting to hear from you.

### **LEAVING BEFORE DISMISSAL**

Leaving church before dismissal deprives us of a blessing. Worship has a beginning "Blessed is the Kingdom..." and an end "Let us depart in peace..." To leave immediately after Communion is to treat the church like a restaurant where we come and go as we please.

### **ATTIRE - USING GOOD JUDGMENT**

Remember the time when people put on their "Sunday best" to go to church? In fact, dress clothes were often referred to as "Sunday clothes." This is not all that common today; in fact all too often the dress in our temples has become too casual. In all the areas of our lives, we should offer Christ our best; and the same is true of our dress. We should offer Christ our "Sunday best," not our everyday or common wear. And we should dress modestly, not in a flashy way that would bring attention to ourselves - and certainly not in a provocative or alluring way. Our dress should always be becoming to a Christian - especially in the temple.

## **TO CROSS OR NOT TO CROSS**

Anyone who has looked around during the services will notice that different people cross themselves at different times (and sometimes even in different ways). To a certain extent, when to cross oneself is according to personal piety, and not an issue of dogma. But there are times when it is specifically proper to cross yourself and times when you should not. Here is a brief list of when to cross and when not to cross.

*To Cross:* When you hear one of the variations of the phrase "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" at the beginning and end of the services and your private prayers; before venerating an icon, the cross, or the Gospel book; upon entering or exiting the temple; when passing in front of the holy Altar Table.

*Not to Cross:* At the chalice before or after taking Communion (you might hit the chalice with your hand); when the bishop or priest blesses saying, Peace be with all (merely bow slightly and receive the blessing).

## **KISS - DON'T SHAKE - THE PRIEST'S HAND...**

Did you know that the proper way to greet a bishop or priest is to ask his blessing and kiss his right hand? How do you do this? Traditionally, one approaches the bishop or priest with the right hand over the left hand and says, "Master (if a bishop, or 'Father' if a priest), bless."

It is not appropriate to merely shake the hand of the bishop or priest, because, after all, they are not "just one of the boys." When you kiss their hands, just as when you kiss an icon, you show reverence and respect for their holy office which is to be an iconographic icon of Christ, the one High Priest. Moreover, they are the ones who bless and sanctify you, and who offer the Holy Gifts on your behalf in the Divine Liturgy. So, the next time you greet your bishop or priest, do not shake his hand, ask for his blessing.