



Eastern Christianity? The Orthodox Church? The Oldest Church(es) on Earth?!

In continuity and communion with the historic apostolic Churches of Jerusalem, Antioch, Greece, etc. Did you know that it is the Orthodox Fathers who wrote the basic Creed (in 325/381 AD) that many Christians recite every Sunday and who confirmed the canon (list) of the 27 books of the New Testament?

Eastern Orthodoxy is a worldwide communion of more than 200 million Christians that welcomes thousands of new members every month — from Uganda to the shores of California!

Please allow us to introduce ourselves...

"We Orthodox Christians often remind people that Christianity is much older than America, that it is an oriental and a mystical faith..."

Indeed, our parish represents the historical and organic continuation of the ancient apostolic Churches, notably those of the East (Jerusalem, Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, the Churches in Greece, etc.)

A good summary of our identity is "Apostolic Roots, Apostolic Worship, Apostolic Faith."

Happily, there is a growing interest in the history of early Christianity and its significance for us today. This has led thousands to find their spiritual home in the ancient Eastern Church. Indeed, the majority of American (Orthodox) clergy and seminarians are converts to the faith!

Such notable figures as Frank Schaeffer, (the son of famed evangelical Francis Schaeffer), and historian Jaroslav Pelikan, (arguably the world's foremost scholar on doctrinal development), have made headlines by knocking at the door of the Orthodox Church.

Today, America's best-kept spiritual secret is now easy to discover and experience.

Continuity and connectedness are the adjectives that best define Eastern Orthodoxy. The worship services have hardly changed since the fourth century, as Christianity emerged victorious from decades of persecutions and began to spread to "the ends of the earth."

Changelessness is generally a good thing when it comes to faith! After all, the New Testament tells us that the

"faith has been handed down once and for all to the saints" (Jude 3). Likewise, the Apostle Paul exhorted his disciples to "keep the traditions that I have handed down to you, either by letter or by word of mouth" (2 Thess. 2:15).

This is exactly what Orthodoxy has done for 2000 years! As an institution, Orthodoxy does not claim to be perfect in every place and in every era: it is a witness to the Truth of Jesus Christ. Yet, Orthodoxy is also aware of its responsibility as the historical and organic continuation of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

Called to become partakers of the Divine Nature...

Orthodox Christians often reflect on these words of the Apostle Peter: "You have been called to become partakers of the divine nature!" (2 Peter 1:4) The Greek term for this grand vision of our human destiny is "theosis" - an eternal participation in the very life of God.

Orthodoxy's message is not so much centered on interpreting a book (however sacred) as on a transformative encounter with a divine person: Jesus Christ.

For us, the Truth is not a something - it is a someone! Likewise, the 'Word of God' is not only a book, it is first of all the One in whom "the fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Colossians 2:9). "We see ourselves as witnesses to this glorious truth," says parish priest Fr. Laurence, "not only that a divine person became a human being, but also that we too are able and called to share in the life of the Trinity." The fact that God is

always with his Word and Spirit is ever present in the life of Orthodox Christianity. "We believe that "God is not an isolated and lonely being - the very essence is the love and communion that flows from the Father."

But why do you worship in such a different way?!

American Christians are not used to vestments, candles, incense, etc. Indeed, modern American worship services often boil down to "a concert, followed by a speech". Christians are told that things have to be 'relevant', in touch with the culture and tastes of the age. But *what is Apostolic, Divine worship?*

By contrast, Eastern Orthodox worship (and architecture) finds its roots in early Christian and Jewish worship, all the way to Solomon's Temple! In fact, Orthodox worship is based on the heavenly prototypes that inspired the Old Testament patterns of worship (Heb. 8:5). The visions of heavenly worship found in both Old and New Testament (Isaiah 6, Ezek. 1, Rev. 4) all mention candles, incense, vestments, bowing down, etc. The Orthodox often say: "We worship God on earth as he is worshipped in heaven! We who ascend in Spirit and Truth to join the worship of angels and enter with awe into the heavenly realm".

Are you Russian Orthodox or Greek Orthodox?

If people do not first associate "Orthodox" with "Jewish", the next question will always be: "What kind of Orthodox are you - Russian or Greek?" This is exactly like asking a Roman Catholic: "What kind of Catholic are you - Irish or Polish?" Irish, Russian or Romanian simply refers to the dominant ethnicity of a particular parish or national Church. We might say every Orthodox is "Greek Orthodox" in the sense that the language and culture that shaped early Christianity and Eastern Orthodoxy is Greek. A better question would be: "Are you in full communion with the worldwide family of Orthodox Churches?"

What we call today 'the Orthodox Church' is, to an extent, like a federal state. It is a communion of 16 regions which are in full sacramental communion with each other and who recognize as their primate or "first-among-equals" the Patriarch of Constantinople (now Istanbul).

The Russian Orthodox Church - or more correctly, the Patriarchate of Moscow - is the largest member of the family, but there are about 250,000,000 Orthodox

Christians worldwide, with 2-4 million living in the United States!

What and where is the Church?

Our Lord came to establish "his Church" (Matthew 16:18) which God purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28). The Church is eternal and able to conquer destruction because Christ is the Eternal King (Heb. 1:10-12). But what is the Church, and where is it?

Remember that properly speaking, the Church is either 'the full body of Christ', an organism that transcends space and time, or the visible local manifestation of this eternal reality. When the eternal Church intersects with our world, what we have is "the whole Church" or "the catholic Church". As the early bishop and martyr Ignatius (+115) explained, in order to find the "assured" manifestation of the eternal Church, we must look for the local Church that has:

- the apostolic faith, unchanged and unchanging (Jude 3)
- the apostolic structure and succession: the bishop, presbyters ("priests" or "elders") and deacons (Matthew 16:18-20)
- the apostolic tradition (2 Thess. 2:15) or biblical worship with the Eucharist on the Lord's Day.

Our parish, Saint Innocent's, is under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Bishop Benjamin of San Francisco and the West (Orthodox Church in America). People from all kinds of backgrounds have made it their spiritual home because it is... the Church.

And who is "St. Innocent"?

St. Innocent was the first Christian missionary (and later bishop) of Alaska and the great Northwest. He traveled as far south as Fort Ross and Monterey in the early 1800s! (see illustration on front page)

How can I learn more about ancient Christianity and your community?

Feel free to contact us by phone (707) 443-2099 or email eureka@orthodox-church.info — the pastor's office is open Tues. 12-5 and Sat. 1—5. Just knock!

All services are in English, and visitors are always welcome to attend! Booklets are available inside.