

Orthodox Catechism

Session 6 – Orthodox Practices

- Chapter 1** Making the Sign of the Cross
- Chapter 2** Intercessory Prayers
- Chapter 3** Byzantine Chant
- Chapter 4** Orthodox Liturgical Musical Terms
- Chapter 5** Purpose of Candles
- Chapter 6** Prostrations
- Chapter 6** Fasting

The Sign of the Cross

What is the Significance of Making the Sign of the Cross

The sign of the cross is an ancient Christian practice of marking the shape of the cross of Christ upon one's self or upon another person or object. The Sign of the Cross is itself a prayer, a blessing, and can be thus seen as a sacramental act. The sign of the cross may be made by laity upon themselves as a form of prayer, and by clergy upon others or objects as an act of blessing. Orthodox begin their day with prayers and the Sign of the Cross. In this way a person dedicates the day to God and calls on Him for grace and for strength in the temptations and difficulties of life. The sign of the cross is made throughout the Divine Liturgy, most commonly when the priest or bishop says, "Peace be with you." Or during the Consecration of the Holy Gifts. When a deacon is serving the Divine Liturgy, the bishop or priest makes the sign of the cross over him before they proclaim the Gospel.

Background

Making the sign of the cross was originally made by Christians with the right-hand thumb across the forehead only. In the late 2nd century, Tertullian wrote,

"In all our travels and movements, in all our coming in and going out, in putting on our shoes, at the bath, at the table, in lighting our candles, in lying down, in sitting down, whatever employment occupies us, we mark our foreheads with the sign of the cross." And in the 4th century, John Chrysostom encouraged Christians to "never leave home without making the sign of the cross."

St Cyril of Jerusalem (350 AD) wrote of the reason and power of the making of the sign of the cross;

"Be the Cross our seal made with boldness by our fingers on our brow, and on everything; over the bread we eat, and the cups we drink; in our comings in, and goings out; before our sleep, when we lie down and when we rise up; when we are in the way, and when we are still. ... It is the Sign of the faithful, and the dread of devils... for when they see the Cross they are reminded of the Crucified; they are afraid of Him, who bruised the heads of the dragon."

By the 4th century, the sign of the cross expanded to include the whole body: beginning with the forehead, symbolizing the Father in heaven; then to the stomach or chest, symbolizing the incarnate Son who came to the earth; then to each shoulder, symbolizing the Holy Spirit who fills all creation.

Early on, the cross was made on the shoulders from right to left, as is the current practice of the Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Rite Catholic Churches. From the writings of Pope Leo IV who reposed in 855 AD, we know that, the practice of using three fingers brought together was prevalent in most churches of the East and West well into the 9th century and just prior to the Great Schism.

By the 12th century, most churches in the East (with the exception of the Russian Church, which accepted the practice in the 1600s) adopted the practice of making the sign of the cross with three fingers and by the 15th or 16th century Roman Catholic, Oriental Orthodox, Anglican, and some Lutheran Churches adopted the practice of crossing on the shoulders left to right.

What does it mean to cross yourself?

In many Protestant churches, particularly Evangelical and Non-denominational, there is a resistance to make the sign of the cross. This is typically based on two arguments,

- a) making the sign of the cross is an unnecessary ritual and reduces prayer to something rote and therefore meaningless.
- b) Making the sign of the cross is perceived as a magical or superstitious gesture.

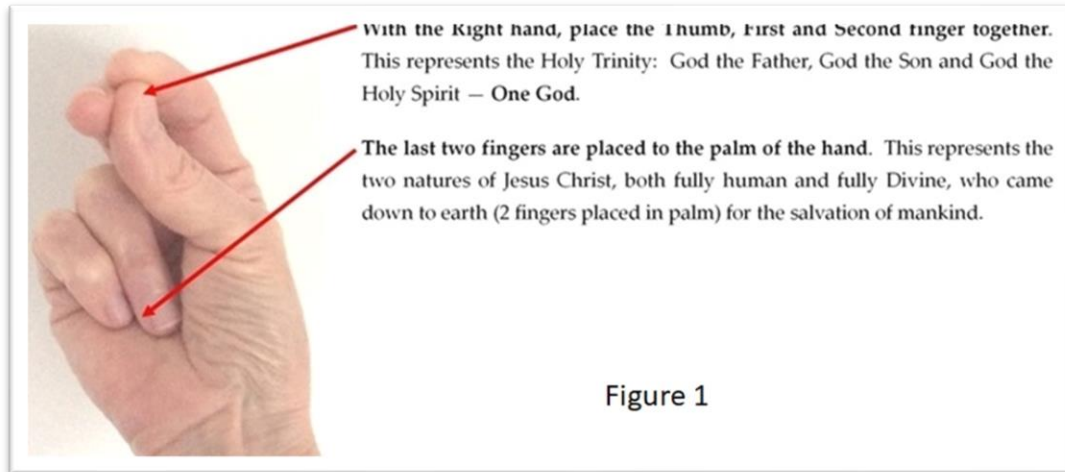
The Orthodox however reject these ideas and see making the sign of the cross as a tangible way to mark ourselves as belonging to the Body of Christ. Crossing yourself is a physical reminder that you are set apart as holy for Christ. Because it is often done when the name of the Trinity ("Father, Son, and Holy Spirit") is invoked, the sign of the cross is also a physical reminder of belief in the Triune God.

The Sign of the Cross

How does an Orthodox Christian make the sign of the cross?

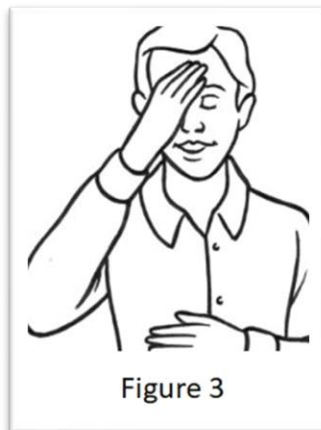
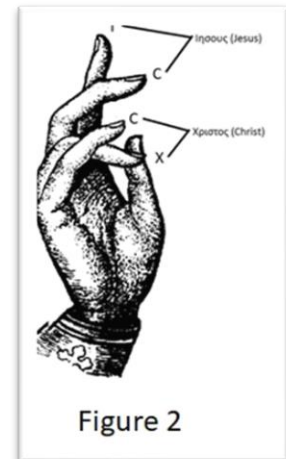
To “cross yourself,” take your right hand and put your thumb, index, and middle finger together and the last two (the “ring” and little fingers) are pressed against the palm. The first three fingers express our faith in the Trinity, while the remaining two fingers represent the two natures of Jesus, divine and human. (see figure 1)

Then touch your forehead, the center of your chest followed by touching your right shoulder and then your left shoulder. Some people like to end the making of the Sign of the Cross by placing their hand on their heart to remind them of where Christ resides. **The sign of the cross should be made with purpose and precision, not hastily or carelessly.** (see our video on how to make the Sign of the Cross)



When an Orthodox or Byzantine Rite Catholic bishop or priest blesses with the sign of the cross, he holds the fingers of his right hand as shown in figure 2 so that they form the Greek abbreviation for Jesus Christ "IC XC". While the Bishop will offer this blessing with both hands, the priest may only bless with the one (right) hand.

Roman Catholics cross themselves in a similar fashion with two exceptions, a) they use all five fingers to cross themselves. This practice follows a decree set forth by Pope Pius V in 1569 A.D, and b) they cross their shoulders left to right. (see figure 3)



The Sign of the Cross

VIDEOS



Intercessory Prayer in Orthodoxy

Prayer, of any type, at its root is loving communion with God, a personal dialogue with God. One expression of prayer, as is practiced by the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, is *intercessory prayer* which has several forms;

- a) Asking someone living to pray with you or on your behalf
- b) Asking for the intercessory prayers of a saint to add to your prayers
- c) Asking for the prayers of someone deceased, like a family member, to add their prayers to yours

Christ as the One True Mediator

The beginning of a discussion of intercessory prayer must be that, in accordance with the words of Jesus who prayed to God the Father for His people, He is the only true intercessor for Men before God. (Jn 17) St Paul also supports this when he tells Timothy that *"there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus who gave Himself as a ransom for all."* (1Tim 2–3)

Background of Intercessory Prayer

In Judaism¹, the intercessor, whether prophet, priest, king, or national leader, does not point to the need for an intermediary in worship: "The Lord is near to all who call upon Him in truth" (Ps. 145:18). The intercessor is one who, by his innate spiritual attributes, lends weight to the entreaty. And there were occasions when intercession was forbidden (Jer. 7:16; 11:14) However, the ultimate criterion still remains not the worthiness of the pleader but of those for whom he is pleading (Ezek. 14:14, 20). One of the earliest examples we have of intercessory prayer is the Patriarch Abraham to whom God gave a chance to intercede on behalf of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. (Gen 18:20-33)

In Greek word for intercession *ἐντευξις* can be translated as "petition" or "intercession." (1 Timothy 2:1) The word literally means to hit the bulls-eye and thus is the direct opposite of *αμαρτια* (sin) - "to miss the mark." Biblical intercession refers to the petitions (intercessions) of believers so as to "fall in line with" *God's will*, i.e. hitting His "mark."

The English word *intercession* is derived from the Latin for "to come between," which means either to "obstruct" or "to interpose on behalf of" someone.

a) Asking someone living to pray with you or on your behalf.

All Christian faiths would agree that a) is certainly a well-established practice and has much support in the Bible. Additionally, Christian Churches agree that the "Church" is comprised of both the "**church militant**" those who are alive and struggling for their salvation, and the "**church triumphant**" those who have run their course in life and now rest in the Lord. New Testament Scripture has many examples of this type of intercessory prayer such as, Acts 12:5, Romans 15:30 and Colossians 4:2-3. The idea of the prayer chain is an example of a contemporary version of intercessory prayer. The difference however between Orthodoxy/Catholicism, and Protestantism lies in the belief in the effectivity of the prayers of the "**church triumphant**."

b) Asking for the intercessory prayers of a saint to add to your prayers.

The practice of asking for the intercession of the "**church triumphant**", specifically the saints, is present in Christian writings from the 3rd century onward. The Apostles' Creed states belief in "the communion

¹ Source: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*

Intercessory Prayer in Orthodoxy

of saints", which the Orthodox view as one of the justifications in support of intercessory prayer of saints.

Protestantism denies the use of intercessory prayers of the deceased as indicated in Article XXI of the Augsburg Confession of Faith which states,

"Scripture does not teach calling on the saints or pleading for help from them. For it sets before us Christ alone as mediator, atoning sacrifice, high priest, and intercessor. Saints can be honored by thanking God for them as examples of his mercy, and that the saints serve to strengthen the believers' faith, and we should imitate their faith and other virtues, however, we strongly reject invoking the saints to ask for their help. Christ is the only mediator between God and man, and He is the one to whom Christians ought to pray."

The most often heard argument against intercessory prayer is that we pray TO the saints. For the Orthodox intercessory prayers are NOT prayers TO the saints, but rather pray THROUGH the saints. The saints of the Orthodox faith, as part of the church triumphant, are connected with various aspects of our lives. Examples include St. Nicholas as the Patron Saint of travelers, St. Nektarios as the Patron Saint of cancer patients, and St. Euphrosynos the Cook as the patron saint of cooks and chefs.

A second argument is why ask for intercessions of the saints when we can go to Christ directly? A simple answer to this is that we ask for the intercessions of the saints for the same reason we ask the living to pray for us. There is strength in asking others to pray for us, and for us to pray for one another. The Orthodox truly believes that God the Father receives much joy in hearing the choir of voices of His creation, and His creation includes those who reside in His heavenly kingdom.

The Catholic doctrine of intercession, as set forth by the Council of Trent, states well the efficaciousness of intercessory prayer while recognizing Christ as sole Redeemer,

"...the saints who reign together with Christ offer up their own prayers to God for men. It is good and useful suppliantly to invoke them, and to have recourse to their prayers, aid, and help for obtaining benefits from God, through His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, Who alone is our Redeemer and Savior."

Protestant Theologian Karl Rahner in his treatise "Why and How Can We Venerate the Saints?" supports the intercession of the saints stating that *"in the invocation of a saint we take refuge in faith in the all-enfolding community of all the redeemed. They are "creative models of holiness"*.

c) Asking for the prayers of someone deceased to add their prayers to yours

While Orthodox doctrine does not outright extend to support the intercessions of the deceased, other than the saints, although the Orthodox Theologian Bishop Kallistos Ware states,

"In private, an Orthodox Christian is free to ask for the prayers of any member of the Church, whether canonized or not. It would be perfectly normal for an Orthodox child, if orphaned, to end his evening prayers by asking for the intercessions, not only of the Mother of God and the saints, but his own mother and father. In its public worship, however, the church usually prays only to those whom it has officially proclaimed as saints."

If we ask others to pray for us who are still alive and who are subject to sin as we are, certainly we should also ask for the prayers of those who finished their course and are living in Christ? Have they lost their favor after departing from earth to heaven?

Byzantine Chanting

Overview

Byzantine music is the sacred chant of all Eastern Orthodox churches. This tradition, principally encompassing the Greek-speaking world, developed in Byzantium from the establishment of its capital, Constantinople, in 330 until its conquest in 1453. It draws on the artistic and technical productions of the classical age and on Jewish music, and was inspired by the singing that evolved in the early Christian cities of Alexandria, Antioch, and Ephesus. Byzantine music is purely vocal tradition and in the strictest application is the only form of musicality that can be used during any Orthodox service. The tradition of Orthodoxy does not allow any musical instrumentation other than the human voice to be used during any Church service.

Later, with the development of monasticism, at first in Palestine and then in Constantinople, and with the evolution of rites and ceremonies in new and magnificent churches (such as Hagia Sophia), trained choirs, each with its own leader (the *protopsáltes* for the right choir; the *lampadários* for the left) assumed full musical responsibilities. Consequently after ca. 850 there began a tendency to elaborate and to ornament the music which produced a new "byzantine" style.

2. The Pre-Byzantium Era

In the centuries before Constantine there is fair agreement that the style of chanting in the Orthodox Church can be traced to Jewish ceremonies with a large degree of continuity between the worship of the Jewish and Christian communities. There is even evidence that cantors of Jewish origin were often appointed, even attracted to teach Christian communities in chanting methods.

A marked feature of liturgical ceremony was the active part taken by the laity in its celebration of the Liturgy or other service, particularly in the saying aloud of hymns, responses, and psalms. The terms *choir*, *community* and *church* were used synonymously in the early Church. In Psalms 149 and 150, the Septuagint translated the Hebrew word מַחֹל (*machol*) meaning dance or festival with the Greek word Χορός (*chorós*). As a result, the early Church borrowed this word from classical antiquity as a designation for the worship and song both in heaven and on earth. The Synod of Laodicea, however put an end to congregational singing when it permitted only the Psalti (chantor) to sing at the services stating in Canon 15,

No others shall sing in the Church, save only the canonical singers, who go up into the ambo and sing from a book.

The word *chorós* then came to refer to the priest function in the liturgy while the choir became a reserved area near the sanctuary.

3. The Origins of Byzantine Music

Byzantine liturgical music has its origins in the early Egyptian and Palestinian desert communities that arose in the 4th to 6th centuries desert and in urban centers with their cathedral liturgies full of music and ceremony. It is this mixed musical tradition that we have inherited today, and both traditions, the desert and the city, it was the Old Testament Book of Psalms (the Psalter) that first regulated the musical flow of the services.

However throughout the Early Church there were many questions, some which we still wrestle with today: Was music in the liturgy to be tolerated at all? If so, what kind of music? Was singing to be done by the congregants? And what about women chanters?

Byzantine Chanting

Musically speaking, Orthodox Ecclesiastical Chant, in its present form, is based on a system of eight Tones or Modes. This system is a result of the serious work of interpreting the ancient notation and is termed the "New Method" devised in 1814 by the three great teachers of Byzantine Music, namely, Gregory the Protopsaltis, Hourmouzios the Hartophylax, and Metropolitan Chrysanthos of Prousa.

Singing versus Chanting

The words "sing" and "chant" in English can both be used in reference to executing liturgical music. Orthodoxy prefers to use the word "chant" instead of "sing" in order to preserve the same distinction that exists between the corresponding words in Greek, τραγουδῶ (sing) and ψάλλω (chant)."

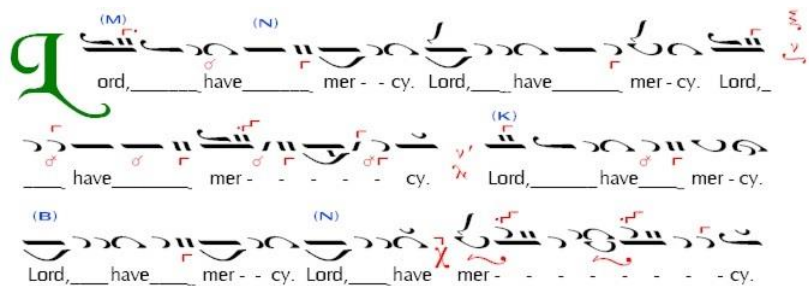
Photios Kontoglou of blessed memory explained that the distinction between these two terms in Greek lies in the spiritual differences between secular and ecclesiastical music writing,

"Spiritual feelings are expressed only by ecclesiastical music. Only ecclesiastical music can express the secret movements of the heart, which are completely different than what worldly music expresses. For this reason, the two kinds of music [European and Byzantine] are totally different."

Comparing Byzantine and Western Music

Western notation is based on a staff, where the pitch is determined by the **location** of the note with regard to the staff, regardless of the previous note. Byzantine notation, on the other hand, is **relational**; the note is dependent on the previous note and the symbol itself, which specifies the interval from the previous note.

Western notation has key signatures for music only in the major and minor keys. Byzantine music, however, consists of many modes that are neither major nor minor (e.g., the hard chromatic modal genre, the diatonic grave mode, etc.). Therefore, to write such melodies in Western notation, one must either devise a non-standard key signature or burden the score with repeated key signatures.



Example of Byzantine Notation

The musical scale of Byzantine music is formed by the seven sounds/pitches (ἑθόγγου) which are Νη, Πα, Βου, Γα, Δι, Κε, Ζω and roughly correspond in Western music to Do, Re Mi, Fa, Sol, La, Ti.

A significant drawback to Byzantine notation is that it is somewhat harder to learn than Western notation and there are far fewer knowledgeable teachers as Byzantine Chant is becoming a lost artform. There are about twenty (20) symbols in Western notation that one needs to know in order to read simple vocal music, while Byzantine notation, on the other hand, has about one hundred (100) symbols and combinations of symbols.

The Place of Byzantine Chant in the Modern World – See article entitled Becoming Byzantine: Modernization and Tradition in the Liturgical Music of the Greek Orthodox Church, by Emily Laliotis for an in-depth treatment of this topic.

Orthodox Liturgical Musical Terms

The Orthodox Church certainly has a rich musical tradition and with that tradition comes terms specific to a particular purpose for the various hymns of the Church¹. The most commonly used terms are:

Troparion	Prokeimenon
Apolytikion	Antiphon
Kontakion	Stichera
Theotokion	Megalinarion

Troparion (Greek, Τροπάριο; plural *troparia*) is a general name for hymns in Orthodox Byzantine music. They could be hymns of one or more series of stanzas. The term is believed to have its origin in the Greek word τρόπος of which one of the definitions is to *turn* or *repeat*.

The term troparion can apply to many types of hymns chanted in almost all of the Orthodox services, liturgies and sacraments alike. Examples include

- short refrains chanted between verses of biblical psalms that precede the Antiphons
- commemoration hymn for the saint or feast of the day
- apolytikion sung during Liturgies or at Vespers as the Dismissal Hymn
- canons which are chanted at the Matin (Orthros) services
- Holy Unction, Funerals and Weddings

Troparia are also sometimes used as refrains for chanted psalm verses, though stichera more often serve this function.

Apolytikion (Greek Απολυτίκιο, plural apolytikia) This is a composite word, από + λυω + τικος (to release from or dismiss), and translates to *dismissal hymn*. Apolytikion is a specific type of troparion which summarizes the accomplishments and/or purpose of the saint or the feast being celebrated on a particular day. Also referred to as the “troparion of the feast” or the “troparion of the day.” On Great Feasts it is sung at the end of Vespers and immediately after the Great Doxology.

A model of faith and the image of gentleness, the example of your life has shown you forth to your flock to be a master of temperance. You obtained thus through your humility, gifts from on high, and riches through poverty. Nicholas, our father and priest of priests, intercede with Christ our God that He may save our souls.

Apolytikion of St. Nicholas

Apolytikion are also chanted after the Small Entrance. In Protestant terms this most closely resembles the term Daily Collect.

¹ For more information see

1. Website [ΑΞΙΟ ΛΕΙΤΟΥΡΓΙΚΗΣ](#)
2. A Concise Glossary of Hymnography Terms by Elena Kolyada, Journal of International Society for Orthodox Church Music, Vol 4 Section 3

Orthodox Liturgical Musical Terms

Kontakion (Greek Κοντάκιο, *plural* kontakia) The word means “rod” or “pole,” (indicating the rod the scroll was rolled onto) and originally referred to a rather long poetic sermon on a given theme, consisting of some 24 or more stanzas or poetry. Today these stanzas are much reduced and typically only the opening stanzas are chanted. A kontakion tends to have more theological content as opposed to other types of troparia that are simpler in nature.

St. Romanos the great Melodist of the Orthodox Church was known for the long poetic forms of kontakia. The Akathist Hymn to the Mother of God is an example of a kontakion where the more lengthy stanzas have been preserved. One of the more well-known kontakia is *Τη υπερμάχῳ στρατηγῷ...* or *O Champion General*, which comes out of the Akathist Hymn.

Saintly One, (St. Nicholas) in Myra you proved yourself a priest; for in fulfilling the Gospel of Christ, venerable One, you laid down your life for your people and saved the innocent from death. For this you were sanctified as One learned in divine grace.

Kontakion of St. Nicholas

Theotokion (Greek Θεοτόκιο) As the name implies the Theotokion is a troparion specifically dedicated to the Theotokos. While the hymns contain supplications to the Virgin Mary, they also contain Christological statements about the unity of the two natures of Christ, His birth and His incarnation. For this reason they are sometimes referred to as Θεοτοκία Δογματικά (Dogmatic Theotokia)

O Mary, as the Lord's hallowed vessel, we pray you to raise us up, for we have fallen into the chasm of awful despondency, and transgressions and suffering. For you have indeed become the sinners' salvation, and their help in need and their prevailing protection; and you save your servants.

Theotokion from the Matins of St. Nicholas

Prokeimenon (Greek Προκείμενο, *plural* prokeimena) This is a composite word (προ + κείμενο), that is “before” and “text” or “reading.” A Prokeimenon is a verse(s) from the Psalms and is intoned just prior to a Bible reading, either from the Old Testament, such as in Vespers or before the Epistle such as in the Divine Liturgy. For common services the Prokeimenon is specific for each day of the week and the Sunday Prokeimena alternate for each of the eight tones of the day. There are three (3) types of Prokeimena

1. Liturgical – specific for the Great feasts of the Lord and the Theotokos and common liturgies
2. Vespers for common services – intoned on weekday and Sunday evening Vesper services
3. Vespers for Great Feasts

Antiphon

This is also a composite word (αντι + φωνη), that is “opposing” and “voices.” Antiphons are chanted or sung between alternating or “opposing” right-left choirs or chanters. Although this type of chanting is the historical style and is the method common in most monasteries, it is not so often practiced in the parishes.

The most well-known antiphons are those sung during the first part of the Divine Liturgy, *Ταῖς πρεσβείαις τῆς Θεοτόκου, Σώτερ, σῶσον ημᾶς»* (*Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, save us*)

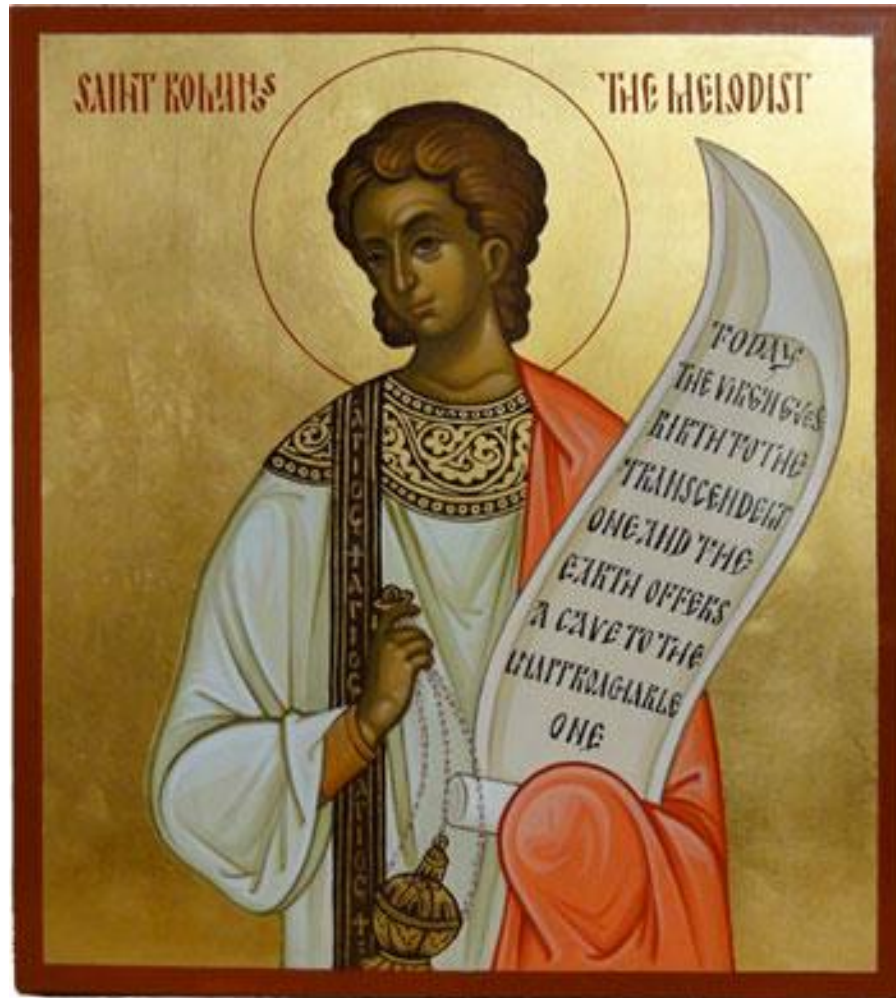
Orthodox Liturgical Musical Terms

and «Σώσον ημάς, Υιέ Θεού, ο αναστάς εκ νεκρών, ψάλλοντάς Σοι Αλληλούϊα» (*Save us O Son of God, who is risen from the dead, Alleluia*).

Antiphons are also sung in the Matins after the Resurrectional Eulogitaria (Ευλογητάρια) and the Hypakoe (Υπακοή) when the Antiphons of the Anavathmoi are chanted.

Stichera (Greek Στιχηρά) is the name for short troparia sung during the Matin services and most often come out of the Octoechos. Examples would be Resurrectional Stichera towards the end of Matins.

Megalinarion (Greek Μεγαλυναριον) The term means μεγαλύνω or to magnify hence the English word "Magnificat." The use of Megalynaria in Orthodox liturgical practice dates back to the 8th century with St. Cosmas the Melodist who wrote the megalynarion to the Theotokos that is sung in the Divine Liturgy up to today, "*More honorable than the Cherubim...*" Other megalynaria magnify various other Orthodox saints.



The Practice of Prostrations in the Orthodox Church

Among the many practices of the Orthodox faith, the practice of prostrations seems to be one which seems very strange, and possibly unnecessary, to those not raised in the Orthodox tradition.

Biblical References to the Practice of Prostrations

Even though the Bible does not identify any particular gestures or prostrations in connection with prayer or other religious activities, Scripture does speak of certain postures which lend emphasis to the act of prayer,

1. kneeling ([Dan. 6:11](#); [Ezra 9:5](#))
2. prostration ([Josh. 7:6](#))
3. bowing of the head ([Gen. 24:26](#); [Neh. 8:6](#))
4. hands stretched out or uplifted ([I Kings 8:22](#); [Ps. 28:2](#))
5. face between knees ([I Kings 18:42](#))

These postures are still followed in the Orthodox Church today with different applications depending upon the country and ethnicity of the parish. The frequency and times when prostrations are done also vary greatly between parishes. The strictest adherence to the types and performance of prostrations is in the monastic communities.

The Importance of Prostrations

The act of prostrating ourselves during prayer has both a spiritual and physical aspect. In the article, *Why Orthodox Men Love Church*, Presvytera Frederica Mathewes-Green speaks of the attraction of the **physical** aspect of Orthodoxy,

"The sheer physicality of Orthodox worship is part of the appeal. Regular days of fasting from meat and dairy, "standing for hours on end, performing prostrations, going without food and water [before communion]... When you get to the end you feel that you've faced down a challenge. Orthodoxy appeals to a man's desire for self-mastery through discipline."

From a **spiritual** perspective in prostrating ourselves we assume an attitude of humility before the God to whom all worship and prayer is due. Kneeling, then touching our forehead to the ground, we acknowledge our sinfulness and literally create a living image of our fall into sin. Prostrating both in body and in spirit, we confess "...the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Bishop Theoliptos of Philadelphia (14th century) exhorts the faithful to practice the art of prostration with repentance saying, *"Do not neglect prostration for it provides an image of man's fall into sin and expresses the confession of our sinfulness. Getting up, on the other hand, signifies repentance and the promise to lead a life of virtue. Let each prostration be accompanied by a noetic invocation of Christ, so that by falling before the Lord in soul and body you may gain the grace of the God of souls and bodies."*

For Orthodox nothing in our person operates in isolation, body, mind, senses, heart, and soul are each simultaneously engaged in the act of worship and repentance. Prostrations are the body's participation in the transformative act of worship and repentance.

Purpose of Candles

VIDEO



The Practice of Prostrations in the Orthodox Church

Types of Prostrations in the Orthodox Church

1. **Head-only bow.** This type of bow is used in situations, such as when a person cannot make a lower bow because of too many people, in the church, pews, or health issues. The congregation should keep this position during reading of Gospels to create a more contemplative mood which focuses on the Word of God and avoids distractions from looking around.
2. **Ordinary bow or “Low Bow.** This is the most widespread type of bow and entails touching the ground or the tips of your shoes. This action is indicative of what was stated earlier about “humility before the God” and the “image of our fall into sin.” This type of bow would be made before receiving Holy Communion, when greeting a bishop or priest, or during prayers of repentance.
3. **Kneeling.** As the name implies, the practice of kneeling on either one or both knees and is typically used by the penitent during the reading of the *prayer of absolution* or when reverencing the Holy Cross during Lent and Holy Week. Often times you will see priests kneeling during specific parts of the Divine Liturgy. Kneeling is also done during the Epiklisis (Calling down of the Holy Spirit) which is why pew kneelers are installed in most American Orthodox churches.
4. **Earth Low Bow** is a full prostration of the entire body to the ground and is reserved for Lenten services. This is more commonly performed in the Russian and Antiochian traditions but can be seen in the Greek tradition during the Pre-Sanctified Liturgies when the Prayer of St Ephraim is read.

Each of these bows would always be performed while simultaneously doing the sign of the cross.

A Guide to Fasting During Great Lent

The question of how to fast in the Orthodox parish generates quite a bit of discussion and confusion, especially since there are so many different opinions from different priests on the rules of fasting. Additionally, the rigorous fasting schedule was meant more for those living a monastic life and like exercise the monks build themselves up to this level of endurance. When practiced with this level of rigor, and without proper preparation, those of us living and working in today's world can experience significant health issues which defeats the purpose of fasting.

Since life in today's world can make keeping the fast difficult, I offer the following 3 levels of fasting that hopefully will provide each of us with a way to use the Lenten period to prepare for the joyous Resurrection of our Lord and Savior in a manner which matches our abilities. The other important point to remember is that fasting is a very personal affair and you should not despair when others tell you that "you are not keeping the fast correctly" or "I see that you are eating meat"

These 3 levels are based on the 3 pillars of a proper approach to Great Lent: *Prayer, Fasting, and Giving Alms*.

LEVEL 1 – This is most strict and reflects a strict adherence to the established rules of fasting and requires preparation and training as does any athletic event.

- No partaking of any animal products (animals being defined as having blood), so this includes most fish.
- No partaking of any food derived from animals, such as eggs, cheese, milk, etc.
- No partaking of alcoholic beverages and olive oil; however, olive oil and wine ARE allowed on Saturday and Sunday.

This type of fast is advisable only for those whose lifestyle allows for such a rigid restriction of food. Additionally, just as one cannot immediately participate in a 20 mile marathon without adequate training, this type of fast also requires "training" to be able to endure this level of strictness. This type of fasting is inadvisable for those with demanding jobs, those undergoing stressful situations, the elderly or those taking life-saving medications. This type of fasting must be coupled with a rigorous prayer regiment and a concerted effort to help those less fortunate.

LEVEL 2 – Not as strict as level one, this level focuses more on portion control rather than adherence to strict fasting rules. During Lent the Holy Fathers tell us to limit our intake of food in an effort to practice the discipline of the body and avoid the vice of gluttony. By leaving the table a bit hungry we have a constant and very real reminder of where our focus should be – on God. This was the primary reason for the institution of the Pre-Sanctified Liturgy, which was to offer the faithful the sustenance of Holy Communion to help them keep up their strength and perseverance during the Lenten period. So, for example, instead of having two or three pieces of large chicken breasts, have just one. This type of fast is more appropriate for those with demanding jobs or stressful situations since it offers them the nutrition they need but are still able to observe the essence of the Lenten fast. As with Level one this type of fasting must be coupled with a prayer regiment and a concerted effort to help those less fortunate.

LEVEL 3 – Not everyone's situation is conducive to keeping a strict fast. This includes not only those with demanding situations but also those new to the practice of fasting. At this level the focus is primarily on the other two aspects of Lent: prayer and the giving of alms or charity. To the extent possible, try to keep the fast on Wednesday and Friday at either a level 1 or level 2, but put increased effort on prayer and diligently explore ways to donate your time and talent to works of charity. This could include volunteering at activities such as a soup kitchen, food pantry or lending closet.

All of us are capable of keeping the intent of Great Lent through one of these levels and I encourage us all to devote ourselves to this most important time of the Church year, the preparation to meet our Lord at the culmination of our salvation – His glorious Resurrection. Please don't hesitate to call me or email me with any questions to help guide you in achieving the most out of Lent and Holy Week.

A Guide to Fasting During Great Lent

The question of how to fast in the Orthodox Church generates quite a bit of discussion and confusion, especially since there seems that so many people have different opinions on the rules of fasting. The practice of fasting is certainly Scripturally based and is present in the Old Testament through to the Apostles.

Old Testament	"Even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning."	Joel 2:12
New Testament	"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry."	Matthew 4:4
The Apostles	"Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust."	Acts 14:23

The importance of fasting was emphasized first by Jesus Christ Himself (Matt. 6:16), the Apostles and by the Holy Fathers of the Church who said that fasting is not abstaining from food only; it is first of all, abstaining from sin. Fasting is in our Church theology and in our hymnology is described as the mother of chastity and prudence, as the accuser of sin and as the advocate of repentance, the life worthy of angels and the salvation of humans (The Lenten Triodion). For these reasons fasting becomes a primary mean of spiritual growth through humility and discipline.

Since at its core, fasting is abstinence from food it detaches us from earthly goods and realities, and has a liberating effect on us both physically and spiritually. Recall that Adam and Eve's sin was in disobedience to God's commandment to fast, thus, fasting is on the path to salvation, where salvation is living a life in accordance with His Divine will and remaining in communion with God. Fasting is also practice in avoiding bad habits and allows us to establish the proper priority between the material and spiritual, giving priority to the spiritual.

In one of the prayers of the Lenten Pre-Sanctified Liturgy it says, *"to fight the good fight, to walk the way of fasting, to crush the heads of the invisible dragons, to prove ourselves victorious over sin, and without condemnation to reach our goal of worshiping the Holy Resurrection."*

However, the rigorous fasting schedule of the Orthodox Church was meant more for those living a monastic life, and like exercise the monks build themselves up to this level of endurance. When practiced with this level of rigor, and without proper preparation, those of us living and working in today's world can experience significant health issues or fall into depression since we feel inadequate to the task in front of us. All of these are demonic weapons to deter us from our goal and leads to defeat.

Since life in today's world can make keeping the fast difficult, the following are 3 levels of fasting that hopefully will provide each of us with a way to use the Lenten period to prepare for the joyous Resurrection of our Lord and Savior in a manner which matches our abilities and allows us to train like athletes, as St Paul says. Throughout your fasting regiment remember that fasting is a very personal affair between you, God, and your priest. And don't despair when others tell you that "you are not keeping the fast correctly" or "I see that you are eating meat."

These 3 levels are based on the 3 pillars of a proper approach to Great Lent: *Prayer, Fasting, and Giving Alms*.

LEVEL 1 – This is most strict and reflects a strict adherence to the established rules of fasting and requires preparation and training as does any athletic event.

- No partaking of any animal products (animals being defined as having blood), so this includes most fish.
- No partaking of any food derived from animals, such as eggs, cheese, milk, etc.

A Guide to Fasting During Great Lent

- No partaking of alcoholic beverages and olive oil; however, olive oil and wine ARE allowed on Saturday and Sunday.

This type of fast is advisable only for those whose lifestyle allows for such a rigid restriction of food. Additionally, just as one cannot immediately participate in a 20 mile marathon without adequate training, this type of fast also requires “training” to be able to endure this level of strictness. This type of fasting is inadvisable for those with demanding jobs, those undergoing stressful situations, the elderly or those taking life-saving medications. This type of fasting must be coupled with a rigorous prayer regiment and a concerted effort to help those less fortunate.

LEVEL 2 – Not as strict as level one, this level focuses more on portion control rather than adherence to strict fasting rules. During Lent the Holy Fathers tell us to limit our intake of food in an effort to practice the discipline of the body and avoid the vice of gluttony. By leaving the table a bit hungry we have a constant and very real reminder of where our focus should be – on God. This was the primary reason for the institution of the Pre-Sanctified Liturgy, which was to offer the faithful the sustenance of Holy Communion to help them keep up their strength and perseverance during the Lenten period. So, for example, instead of having two or three pieces of large chicken breasts, have just one. This type of fast is more appropriate for those with demanding jobs or stressful situations since it offers them the nutrition they need but are still able to observe the essence of the Lenten fast. As with Level 1, this type of fasting must be coupled with a prayer regiment and a concerted effort to help those less fortunate.

LEVEL 3 – Not everyone’s situation is conducive to keeping a strict fast. This includes not only those with demanding situations but also those new to the practice of fasting. At this level the focus is primarily on the other two aspects of Lent: prayer and the giving of alms or charity. To the extent possible, try to keep the fast on Wednesday and Friday at either a level 1 or level 2, but put increased effort on prayer and diligently explore ways to donate your time and talent to works of charity. This could include volunteering at activities such as a soup kitchen, food pantry or lending closet.

All of us are capable of keeping the intent of Great Lent through one of these levels so let us all devote ourselves to this most important practice of the Orthodox Church. And don’t hesitate to contact your priest or Spiritual father with any questions to help guide you in developing and maintaining a fast schedule which is suited to your particular situation.

