

## **The Importance of Repetition in the Orthodox Church** by Antonio Chinchilla

When driving in your car with your radio on, do you ever sing along to the songs? This is because the more your brain sees or hears something, the more your brain remembers those things. The definition of repetition is the impact an event has on the brain's ability to learn and adapt. As the old saying goes “repetition is the mother of learning.” Why, then, is repetition an important part of the teachings of the Orthodox Church and how does it enhance our spiritual lives and deepen our faith?

Back in the early days of the Church, most of the faithful could not read. The repetition of the hymns and prayers was a way for them to learn the Liturgy without having to read it. The repetition of religious ideology occurs in the numbers three, twelve, and forty throughout Orthodoxy. The repetition of threes is common because it represents the Holy Trinity, which represents the most fundamental example of this pattern. We repeat the sign of the cross three times to symbolize the Holy Trinity and in a cross formation to symbolize the Crucifixion of Christ. Doing the sign of the cross, reciting the “Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal” prayer, or chanting “Lord have mercy” three times, are just a few of the significant ways that repetition is used in our Divine Liturgy, but may go unnoticed by the congregation for its importance. Archpriest George M. Benigsen defends the use of repetition in prayer, which is “present in our hymns, penetrates our consciousness and remains long in our memory...” The idea then, is that we continue to repeat these prayers, even when we are not at church.

Repetition also occurs in twelves, which represents the Twelve Apostles, who followed Jesus and spread his teachings after he died. The Orthodox Church also repeats events by forties, representing major events from the Bible, like when Jesus and Moses fasted for forty days and nights. This is why we as Orthodox Christians fast for 40 days before Christmas and during Lent

## **The Importance of Repetition in the Orthodox Church** by Antonio Chinchilla

or when new parents bring their child to church for the 40-Day blessing. It shows that these traditions have deeper religious meanings than what we might think.

Since our goal as Orthodox Christians is to be closer to God, repetition can help us direct our attention to the path that God wants us to follow. Unfortunately, distractions can be a major issue during a prayer. Saint Issac the Syrian believed that when we are thinking about other things when we should be praying, we are putting our own thoughts before God. By attending the Divine Liturgy every Sunday, we start to remember more of it each time, allowing us to actively take part in the Liturgy, and allowing less time for distractions that could lead us away from God.

Repetition can also be displayed in our churches in a more abstract perspective than we would typically think. We might not notice it at first, but every time we see someone we know at church, we kindly greet them, since we have been taught to respect each other and our Lord. We repeat this behavior every Sunday. We also always repeat the behavior of lighting candles and kissing the icons in the Narthex. When the congregation all joins together to recite the Creed or the Lord's Prayer, we are repeating the same words together as one and expressing our faith in the Lord. We do this again and again, every Sunday. It has now become a habit.

We all know humans are creatures of habit. I, personally, like routines and find that going to Church each Sunday is something that I look forward to, not just to see my friends, but because I know what the expectation is. I know what the priest will say. I know what the choir will sing. Whether I sing along to "Kyrie Eleison" or kneel down to pray, every week, it follows the same routine. And every week, I learn something new and meaningful about my faith.

# **The Importance of Repetition in the Orthodox Church** by Antonio Chinchilla

## **References**

*The Meaning of Ritual, or "Hurry up and get on with it, this ain't no opera!"* Jannakos, A. P. M.

Orthodox Christianity in the World, (March 24, 2011)

*Orthodox Prayer Rope: Why It's Vital to Faith*, by Orthodox Christianity 101 (March 25, 2024)

*The Power of Repetition – Why 'Repetition is the Mother of Learning'*