



*Our Liturgy is called **DIVINE** because it is of God and not about Him. It is the experience of God with us, giving Himself to us through word, hymn, action, rite, etc. All of which are of God because they are inspired by the Holy Spirit. In order for us to participate in this divine action, we do not merely stand in church... We Cross, we venerate Icons, we stand, we light candles, etc. There is a continuing dynamism!*

To Cross or Not To Cross - Anyone who has looked around on a Sunday morning will notice that different people cross themselves at different times (and sometimes 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 liturgical service or your private prayers; entering or exiting the church, or when passing in front of the Holy Altar; before venerating in icon, the cross, or Gospel book.

Not to Cross: At the chalice before or after taking Communion (you might hit the chalice with your hand); when the priest or bishop blesses saying, "Peace be to all of you" - bow slightly and receive the blessing; when receiving a blessing from a bishop or a priest (kissing the right hand of the bishop or priest is appropriate, but not making the sign of the cross).

Venerating Icons - When you enter the church, it is traditional to venerate the icons. Usually there are icons at the entrance to the church and many churches have icon stands in the front as well. When venerating (kissing) an icon, pay attention to where you kiss. It is not proper to kiss an icon in the face. You wouldn't go up and kiss the Lord or His mother on the lips, would you? You would kiss their hand, and only if invited you would even dare to kiss them on the cheek. 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 in the icon, or kiss the hand or foot of the person depicted. As you venerate an icon, show proper respect to the person depicted in the icon - the same respect you would show the person by venerating him or her in an appropriate place. And remember, blot off your lipstick before kissing.



Lighting Candles - Lighting candles is an important part of Divine Worship. We light them as we pray, making an offering to accompany our prayers. We typically light candles upon entering the church, after venerating the icons. If a service is already in progress, and the candle-stands are up front, it is a good idea to wait until after the service to light candles so as to not distract others from prayer, nor draw undue attention to oneself.

Pew Blocking - Never heard of pew blocking? It's that practice of sitting right next to the aisle so that no one else can get by to sit in the middle of the pew. Everyone has seen it. In fact, the best pew blockers come early so they can get their coveted aisle seats and then be sure that no one can get past them. The most effective form of pew blocking takes place when two people take their places at opposite ends of the pew, occupying both the center and aisle seats. This effectively eliminates anyone else from sitting on that row. There are two solutions to pew blocking. The first is to move towards the middle of the pew, leaving the aisle seats for those coming later. And for those of you who just can't handle sitting in the middle of the pew, take the outside aisle spot and graciously allow those coming after you to go past (by moving out for them so they can get by). Remember, pew blocking isn't hospitable - nor is it an efficient method of seating. So don't be selfish. Move on over towards the middle. Don't be a pew blocker.



Standing vs. Sitting - The traditional posture for prayer and worship in the Eastern Church has been to stand. In the old countries (Ukraine, Russia, Bulgaria), there are usually no pews in the churches. Chairs or benches on the side walls are usually reserved for the elderly and infirm. In North America, we have tended to build our churches with pews, and since we have them, we need to figure out when we

may sit and when we should stand. First of all, it is fully acceptable (**even preferable**) to stand for the entire service. If you prefer this, it would be better to find a place closer to the back or side of the church so as not to stand out or block someone's view. When should you definitely stand? Always during the Gospel reading, the Little and Great Entrances, the Anaphora (Consecration), the distribution of Holy Communion, whenever the priest gives a blessing, and the Dismissal. When in doubt, stand. **It is never wrong to stand in church.**

Many parishes also follow the practice of kneeling on Sundays during the Cherubic Hymn, consecration, and the "Our Father". Strictly speaking, this is not correct, because every Sunday is a "little Pascha" in which the Resurrection is remembered - hence, no kneeling. The "kneeling prayers" said five weeks after Pascha are said after the Sunday Liturgy, "reinstating" kneeling for Vespers, Matins, and weekday Liturgies only. If the tradition of the parish you are visiting is to kneel, and everyone kneels, it's better to do so than to stick out like a sore thumb. If there is a mixture of standing and kneeling, then stand.



Entering the Church (Late) - The time to arrive at church is before the service starts, but for some unknown reason, it has become the custom or rather the bad habit for some to come to church late. 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 with your entrance. By the way, the best way to avoid this problem is to arrive on time then you don't have to wonder if it's okay to come in or not. People who come late to the Liturgy should not partake of the Eucharist!

In and Out - On some Sundays, it almost seems like we have a revolving door in the back of the church and it is used by both children and adults. Use the restroom before coming to church. You shouldn't need to get a drink of water during the service (especially if you are taking Communion!). Don't come to church to go to the fellowship hall, or to hang out in the church vestibule **come to pray**. Taking restless little ones out is a different matter. If a child is disruptive, take him/her quietly out of church, just long enough to settle him/her down, then return to Liturgy. Follow the rules for entering late: not during readings, sermons, or Entrances.



Talking During Church - Isn't it great to come to church and see friends and family members? But wait until coffee hour to say 'Hi' to them. It just isn't appropriate to greet people and have a conversation with them during the services. Besides being disrespectful towards God, it is rude towards the other people in the church who are trying to worship. Talk to God while in church through your prayers, hymns, and thanksgiving, and to your friends in the hall afterwards.

Leaving Before Dismissal - Leaving church before the Dismissal - besides being rude - 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 church like a fast food restaurant where we come and go as we please. We live in a fast-paced world where we seem to be hurrying from place to place. But in God's presence, we need to make every attempt to fight this pressure to move on to the next thing on the day's agenda. We deprive ourselves of blessings by not being still and participating in God's holiness. Eat and run at McDonald's but stay in church and thank God for his precious gifts.



Snacks for Children - Parents often bring snacks and a cup of fruit juice along for children during church. And for young children (0 - 3 years old), this is fine. But by the time children are 4 - 5 years old, they should be able to make it through Liturgy without eating anything, and by the time they reach seven (the age of their first confession), they should begin fasting on Sunday morning for Communion (or at least make an attempt at fasting by cutting back on the amount of breakfast and eating ðfastingö-type foods ð talk to your priest about this). For those children who get snacks, please don't feed them while in the line for Holy Communion (this applies to holy bread as well). They need to come to Communion without food in their mouths. And one last note: try to keep the snack mess down to a minimum. The floor shouldn't be covered with Cheerios! Chewing gum during Liturgy is a No-No for everyone!

A Final Thought - Our American culture and society is rather casual in its approach to life. Don't allow this prevailing attitude to enter into your Christian piety. There are surely a lot of other areas that could be covered here. Much of church etiquette is based on common sense and showing respect for God and others. Always remember that you are in church to worship God, the Holy Trinity. The priest says, ðApproach with fear of God and with faith.ö Let this be the way you approach all of worship. If you do, you will probably have good church etiquette. AMEN.

