

Taking Part in the Liturgy

Apart from the Anaphora, three more prostrations are made during the Liturgy:

1. A prostration is made at the beginning of the Lord's Prayer, after the priest's words, *...we may dare to call upon Thee, the heavenly God, as Father, and to say...*
2. When the Holy Things are brought out to us for Communion and the deacon says *'With fear of God, with faith and with love draw near,'* we all make a full prostration.
3. After the hymn, *We have seen the True Light,* the priest shows the chalice to us as he says *...always, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages.* Some priests bless the people with the Holy Things at this time. This is the last time that we see the Body and Blood of the Saviour before they are taken away to be consumed, and this reminds us of the Ascension, when the Saviour blessed the disciples as he departed from them, so we make a final prostration. Because they hold the Body and Blood of Christ within them, those who have received Holy Communion never prostrate but instead make a low bow from the waist.

Other times that we prostrate ourselves are during the prayer of St Ephraim the Syrian in Great Lent, during the "kneeling" prayers for Vespers of the Holy Spirit (the day after the feast of Pentecost), and also, during fasting seasons, when we enter and leave church, when we make three prostrations instead of the usual three bows.

(There are ancient canons and patristic writings which direct that we are not to kneel for prayers on Sundays or during Pentecost, but that we ought to stand in honour of the Resurrection. In some places, this is extended to also preclude prostrations. However, this is not universal practice and appears to be a later interpretation. There is room for such variety in the Church—therefore, our focus ought to be on our own heart and not the piety of others.)

Kneeling

Although kneeling has not been the general practice in Eastern Orthodox worship for many centuries, there are local customs where some people do kneel during the procession of the holy gifts at the Great Entrance, (though not on Sundays or during Pentecost), and some find comfort in kissing the hem of the priest's vestments, remembering the faith of the woman in Luke 8:43-48.

Also, if "Kneeling" Vespers for the Monday of the Holy Spirit is served immediately after the Divine Liturgy on the feast of Pentecost, (which is common in parishes, to save people having to come back to church in the evening), those who have received Communion kneel for the prayers instead of making a prostration.

Pharisaism?

It is sometimes with too much ease that faithful Christians are accused of being pharisaical—of falling under the Saviour's condemnation of those who placed the following of the little details over love for their neighbours. Yet, done in a spirit of humility and contrition, these external acts of love elevate our hearts and become an acceptable and worthy offering to God, (Psalm 50:17-21). The Saviour Himself asks us how we can expect to be trusted with great things if we cannot be faithful even in small things (Matthew 25:14-30). So, with the humility of the Publican, let us try to be faithful in these small things, keeping the customs of the Church by which the Saints worshipped God and which our fathers, mothers, sisters, and brothers before us have preserved intact and passed on to us.



'Imitate the Publican and you will not be condemned with the Pharisee. Choose the meekness of Moses and you will find your heart, which is a rock, changed into a spring of water.'
- the Holy Mother Syncretica of Alexandria

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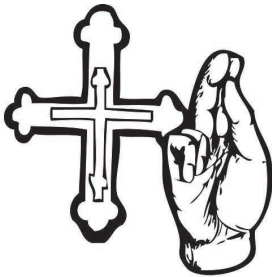
Acts of Reverence

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

- John 1:14

In the prologue to his Gospel, St John reminds us that we are physical as well as spiritual beings, and that in order to save us, God took human flesh. We are saved not just through offering spiritual acts of love to God, but also God extends to us his Grace through physical elements of creation; the water of Baptism, the oil of the olive, simple bread and wine. These things are consecrated for divine use in the life of the Church and become tonics and nourishment for our life in Christ. Nowhere is this more so than at the Divine Liturgy, where bread and wine become the Body and Blood of the Saviour.

This is also true in our worship. At our Chrismation, we are anointed all over our bodies, and it is with our whole bodies, not just our minds, that we worship God. So we kiss, we bow, we cross ourselves, we prostrate to the ground, and enter with our whole spiritual and physical being into the communal worship of God by his people.



The Cross

*Hail! life-giving Cross,
unconquerable trophy of
godliness, door to Paradise,
succour of the faithful, rampart set about the Church.
Through thee every corruption is utterly destroyed,
the power of death is swallowed up, and we are
raised from earth to heaven: invincible weapon,
adversary of devils, glory of martyrs, true ornament
of Saints, haven of salvation, bestowing on the world
great mercy!*

- from Vespers for the Elevation of the Cross

From earliest times, Christians have claimed as their own the sign of the Cross. While the exact way of making the Cross has varied from time to time, from

place to place, the method most common in the Orthodox Church today is to place the thumb and first two fingers together, in honour of the Holy and Undivided Trinity. The two remaining fingers are placed together and bent down to the palm, signifying Christ, in his two natures, having lived on earth. We then touch our fingers to our forehead, abdomen, and right then left shoulders.

We make the sign of the Cross:

- at the beginning of the readings from the Apostle and the Gospel, (but not the psalms at the Hours or Vespers).
- at each of the four affirmations in the Creed:
 - ◇ *in one God, the Father...*
 - ◇ *in one Lord, Jesus Christ...*
 - ◇ *in the Holy Spirit, the Lord...*
 - ◇ *in one, holy, Catholic...*
- at the dismissal, *May Christ our True God...*

Bows

Sometimes, after we cross ourselves, we add a low bow from the waist, touching the floor with our right hand. We do this:

- during the Hours, at:
 - ◇ *Come, let us worship...*
 - ◇ *Alleluia* at the end of the psalms.
- whenever the Holy Trinity is invoked in prayer.
- at the end of each petition of a litany.
- during the Anaphora, when the priest exclaims the words of the Saviour, at the words, ‘...for the remission of sins.’
- whenever the priest blesses us with a holy object, including the Cross, the chalice, the Holy Things, and the Gospel Book, among other things. If he blesses with his hand, (or if the bishop blesses with his hands or candles), we simply bow low, without making the sign of the Cross. This is to distinguish between the honour given to the priest as a human being and that given to sanctified objects as channels of God’s grace. We also bow without the Cross whenever we are censed, when we ask

forgiveness before confession and communion, and after *O Lord, save the pious*, when the deacon says and ‘*unto the ages of ages*’.

Prostrations

To prostrate ourselves is one of the deepest acts of physical worship that we can offer, and it is reserved for specific times in the Liturgy.

A prostration is made by crossing ourselves then falling upon our hands and knees and touching our head to the floor. Many people find it easier to allow their hands to touch the floor slightly before their knees. Then the hands are used to push the body back into the upright position. (Be careful not to trip over long skirts, dresses, or cassocks as you get back up).



Prostrations are made at the Divine Liturgy at the following times during the Anaphora:

1. At the beginning of the chanting of *It is meet and right to worship the Father, and the Son...*
2. While we sing *We praise Thee, we bless Thee*, there is a dialogue between the priest and deacon, in which the priest asks the Father to send the Holy Spirit to change the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. After the triple *Amen*, said by the deacon, we all make a full prostration.
3. A prostration is made at the end of the hymn to the Mother of God, *It is truly meet to bless thee*, at the words *...thee do we magnify*. On certain feasts and during certain seasons, we sing different hymns to the Mother of God. A prostration is still made at the end of the hymn.