

**St. Nicholas Antiochian Orthodox Christian Cathedral Los Angeles,
California**

Fall 2021 Adult Study:

Orthodox Christian Faith and Practice

Instructor: Subdn. Seraphim Keshishian
(818) 300-8136 • siropkeshishian@gmail.com
CA 90057 With Fr. Andrew Andrews as In-class Resource

Wednesdays: 7:30 to 8:30 p.m.
2300 W 3rd Street, Los Angeles,
www.stnicholasla.org

TEXT: Hopko, Father Thomas. *The Orthodox Faith*. Four volumes. Revised and expanded by David C. Ford.

Available in print or online at [The Orthodox Faith - The Symbol of Faith - Orthodox Church in America \(oca.org\)](http://oca.org)

Zoom Link to Join: <https://tinyurl.com/SNC-O101-2021>

Zoom Video Recording and Outline Texts located at: www.stnicholasla.com/adulteducation.

Nov. 10 Worship (Vol II pp. 16-60 new; Vol. II pp 3-58 old)

The Church Building, the Sacraments

NOTES:

The Church Building

- The fact that Christ the Immanuel (which translated means “God with us”) has come, determines the form of the Orthodox church building. God is with man in Christ through the Holy Spirit. The dwelling place of God is with man.
- “We are the temple of the living God . . .” (2 Cor 6.16).
- **Orthodox Church architecture:** Traditional interior consists of
 1. Narthex: where we light the candles before entering the church
 2. Nave: the assembly of the people of God
 3. Sanctuary: the Holy Place

4. Dome: Christ Pantocrator, Ruler of the Universe
5. Iconostasis: Icon Screen
6. Apse: the icon of Theotokos with Christ appearing within her over the altar area

Altar Table

- It is the symbolic and mystical presence of the heavenly throne and table of the Kingdom of God; the table of Christ the Word, the Lamb and the King of the ever-lasting life of God's glorified dominion over all of creation.
- On the altar table, there are **The Gospels**, **Antimension** (means instead of the table, it contains the signature of the bishop and a relic of a martyr saint), **tabernacle** (it's in the shape of the church building, it has holy communion reserved for the sick and dying)

Oblation Table: Proskomedie (in Greek)

- The oblation table is the place where we prepare the Holy Gifts: the bread and wine. The **chalice** (cup of the wine), the **diskos** (stand for prosphoro, bread), **spear** (liturgical knife), **liturgical spoon**, the covers for the chalice and diskos, the **star** which holds the covers of the diskos, the sponge and cloths for drying the chalice after the liturgy are on the table.
- On top of the oblation table, there are various icons.

Icons

- The icons bear witness to the reality of God's presence with us in the mystery of faith. "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1.14). Christ is truly man and, as man, truly the "icon of the invisible God" (Col 1.15; 1 Cor 11.7; 2 Cor 4.4).
- **Iconostasis:** Icon screen that shows the unity with Christ, his mother, all the saints, and angels.

- **Beautiful Gate:** They are between the icons of the Theotokos and Child and the glorified Christ, showing that everything which happens to us in the Church happens in history between those “two comings” of Christ: between his coming as the Saviour born of Mary and His coming at the end of the age as the King and the Judge.
- Over the doors we have the icon of Christ’s Mystical Supper with his disciples
- **North and South gates:** These are the deacon’s doors. They usually have angels (Archangels Michael and Gabriel) on them.
- Besides the iconostasis, there are icons on the walls and ceilings. The “canon” of Church design is to have the icon of Christ the Almighty in the center of the building, and the icon of the Apse found over the altar area. Apse is called the “image of the Church” since Mary is herself the prototype of the entire assembly of believers in whom Christ must dwell. In the altar area it is also traditional to put icons of the saints who composed Church liturgies and hymns.

Sign of the Cross

- On the altar table is a small hand cross used for blessing and for veneration by the faithful. The Orthodox place their first two fingers and thumb together to form a sign of the Triune God and cross themselves from the head to the breast and from shoulder to shoulder, right to left. This symbol shows that the cross is the inspiration, power, and indeed the very content of our lives as Christians; and that man’s mind, heart, and strength must be given to the love of God and man.

Vestments

- The **baptismal robe (sticharion)** is worn by all those who serve at the altar at the service of holy communion. For priests and bishops, it is traditionally white symbolic of the white garment in which every Christian is clothed on his day of baptism, symbolizing the new humanity of Jesus and life in the Kingdom of God (Rev 7.9ff). The deacons and subdeacons (and acolytes) also wear this garment but as it is their outer garment it is often decorated more brightly in the color of the season.
- The **stole or epitrachelion** is the second vestment and a sign of the pastoral office. The deacon and subdeacon has a similar garment called an **orarion**

wich is not joined but wrapped around the body. The method of rapping is different for a deacon and a subdeacon.

- Deacons, priests, and bishops all wear **cuffs**. When they wear them, the clergy read psalms.
- **Belts(zoni)** are used by priests and bishops. It gives them strength.
- Priests wear **phelonion**, a large garment that covers them.
- Bishops wear **omophorion**, the sign of their episcopal office as leading pastor of the local church.
- **Sakkos**: imperial robe | **mitre**: the imperial crown | **orlets**: the eagle that he stands on | the **staff** symbolized their secular power | **despota**: vladyko or master
- **Trikiri**: One of the candelabra ,used by bishops, holds 3 candles standing for the trinity.
- **Dikiri**: Another candelabra, used by bishops, that holds 2 candles standing for Jesus’s 2 natures.
- **Epigonation or Palitsa** is a piece of diamond-shaped cloth. It means the sword of faith and the Word of God. These are worn by bishops and priests. In the Antiochian tradition this garment signifies that the clergyman has been blessed to hear confessions.
- **Skufya**: pointed hat| **Kamilavka**: round hat worn by clergy. This garment is used differently across the various Orthodox traditions.
- Priests wear crosses. In Russian Orthodox tradition, all priests wear crosses. In Antiochian and Greek Orthodox tradition, only Archpriests and Archimandrites wear pectoral crosses. Bishops wear crosses and the image of Mary and the Child (panagia—the “all holy”).

Christian Symbols

- **Light:** The light of candles leads us to Christ, the Light of the world and of the Kingdom of God. It is the universal symbol for the mystical presence of God.
- **Incense:** Incense is the symbol of the rising of prayers, of spiritual sacrifice, and of the sweet-smelling fragrance of the Kingdom of God.
- The Church also uses bread, wine, wheat, oil, water, flowers, and fruits as signs of God's love, mercy, goodness, life, and the very presence given to man in creation and salvation.
- The **initials and letters of Christ's name**; the **triangle of the Trinity**; the circle of eternity; the **fish** which stands for Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour; the **eye** of God's omnipresence; the **anchor** of hope; the **rock** of faith; the **flame** of God's consuming presence; the **vine** which Jesus named himself—"I am the vine, you are the branches" (Jn 15.5); the **alpha and the omega** (Rev 1.8); the **crown and staff** of Christ's kingship; and many others—all of which indicate some aspect of the saving presence and action of God in the world.

The Sacraments

- Sacraments are also known as the Holy Mysteries. There are seven: **baptism, chrismation (or confirmation), holy eucharist, penance, matrimony, holy orders and the unction of the sick.**
- The Orthodox Church traditionally considered everything which is in and of the Church as sacramental or mystical. The practice of counting the sacraments was adopted in the Orthodox Church from the Roman Catholics.
- **Baptism** is the birth into the eternal life of God. It literally means starting anew and immersion in water. It is always connected with repentance, change of mind. It is a spiritual rebirth. The sponsor or godparents reject Satan and accept Christ as Lord and King and God. After the Creed, the person to be baptized is also prayed over and blessed with sanctified oil as the sign that his creation by God is holy and good. The person is immersed three times in the water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy

Spirit. Through the act of immersion, the baptized person dies to this world and is born again in the resurrection of Christ into eternal life.

- **Chrismation** is the gift of the power to live the life of Christ which is born in man by baptism. Through Chrismation you receive “the **seal** of the gift of the Holy Spirit”. It is also called **confirmation**. Traditionally in Orthodoxy, it is done together with baptism, unlike in Catholicism and Protestantism. There is special oil called **holy chrism** is also called **myrrh** is prepared by the bishops of the Church on Holy Thursday. After the baptism and chrismation, the person newly-received into God’s family is tonsured. The **tonsure**, which is the cutting of hair from the head in the sign of the cross, is the sign that the person completely offers himself to God. Together with being baptized and chrismated, the new-born child is also “**churched.**”
- **Holy Eucharist:** It means **thanksgiving**. This food is the “mystical supper of the Son of God,” the body and blood of Christ, the mystery of the holy eucharist—the communion to Life Itself. It is called the “**sacrament of sacraments**” and **communion**. The eucharist in the Orthodox Church is understood to be the **genuine** Body and Blood of Christ precisely because bread and wine are the mysteries and symbols of God’s true and genuine presence and manifestation to us in Christ. Thus, by eating and drinking the bread and wine which are mystically consecrated by the Holy Spirit, we have **genuine communion** with God through Christ who is himself “the bread of life” (Jn 6.34, 41).
- **Matrimony:** Union of man and woman. The mystery of Christian marriage transforms human love, childbearing, and family communities into realities of eternal proportion and significance. It is not a juridical contract. It contains no vows or oaths. It is, in essence, the “baptizing and confirming” of human love in God by Christ in the Holy Spirit.
- **Penance:** The mystery of penance is the remedy for spiritual sickness. It allows us to turn again to God, to be taken back, to be forgiven and to be received once more into the life of God from which our sins have separated us. **Not** every sin requires the necessity of formal penance through sacramental ritual. This is obvious because Christians are never completely without sin. Sacramental penance is **necessary** for those receiving Holy Communion when they have committed grave sins or when they have been separated from the eucharistic meal for a long time. There are three main elements to the act of formal penance: sincere sorrow, heartfelt confession of

sins, formal prayer of absolution through which the forgiveness of God through Christ is sacramentally bestowed upon the repentant sinner.

- **Unction:** It is the remedy for our physical sickness which is the power of sin over our bodies, our inevitable union with suffering and death. Holy unction allows us to be healed; to suffer, not “unto death” but, once more, unto life everlasting. It is the incorporation of our wounds into the life-creating cross of Christ. Christ came to the world to “bear the infirmities” of men. One of the signs of his divine messiahship was to heal the sick. Unction is the Church’s specific prayer for healing. If the faith of the believers is strong enough, and if it is the will of God, there is every reason to believe that the Lord can heal those who are diseased. During the preparation of Holy Unction, we light 7 candles. The wounds of the flesh are consecrated, and strength is given that the suffering of the diseased person may not be unto the death of his soul, but for eternal salvation in the resurrection and life of the Kingdom of God. Holy unction is the sacrament of the spiritual, physical, and mental healing of a sick person whatever the nature or the gravity of the illness may be.

Holy Orders: the sacrament of priesthood, ministry, -teaching, and pastoral care. The clergy of the church exist to make manifest, present and powerful in the Church the divine life of the Kingdom of God to all men while still living in this world. Christ is present now, always, and forever in his Church. The sacramental ministry of the Church—the bishops, priests, and deacons—receive the gift of the Holy Spirit to manifest Christ in the Spirit to men

-The **bishops** are the leading members of the clergy. **Episkopos** means bishop in Greek. A bishop of the chief city of a region which has within it other bishops with their own particular dioceses is usually called the **metropolitan or archbishop**. “**Metropolitan**” means “bishop of the metropolis,” the main city. The title of **archbishop** means “leading bishop” of an area, but sometimes the title is given to certain bishops for personal or honorary reasons. The title of **patriarch** belongs to the bishop of the capitol city of a region containing other metropolitanates and dioceses. Once again, however, it must be clearly understood that sacramentally all bishops are identical and equal. No bishop in Orthodoxy is considered infallible. None has any “powers” over or apart from his priests, deacons and people or the other bishops. All are servants of Christ and the Church. The rule in the Orthodox Church is that the bishops be single men or widowers.

- The **priests** of the Church, also called **presbyters**, are those who assist the bishop in his work. Today, the priests normally exercise the function of pastors of the local churches or parishes. In the Orthodox Church, a married man may be ordained to the priesthood.

- **Deacons:** In more recent times, the **diaconate** has been extended to many as a permanent position for full or part-time service to the work of the Church. In the office of deacon, the men may now not only assist the priest and bishop in liturgical services, but will often head educational programs and youth groups, do hospital visitation and missionary work and conduct projects of social welfare. The Orthodox tradition also has special blessings for the particular ministries of sub-deacons and readers.