

ORTHODOX ETIQUETTE: Behaviour in the Holy Temple

1. Entering the Holy Temple. . . Late

“We come to the Holy Temple on time as if to a ‘Great Banquet’, with reverence because we are partaking of the very Body and Blood of Christ, our Saviour. Coming to the Orthros before the Divine Liturgy will ensure that you will be settled in plenty of time to pray without distraction.

“Arriving late (after 10:30) without due cause is inappropriate. Arriving late causes distraction and is inconsiderate and disrespectful to the rest of the faithful, to the priest, and to God.

Experience testifies that regularly coming to Church late is more a matter of ‘habit’ than circumstance: there are those who come late, and those who don’t. The time to arrive is before the holy services start, 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, enter the holy Temple 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, before entering. Try not to interrupt the Liturgy by your late arrival.

“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 Holy Eucharist! ‘Proper preparation’ for Holy Communion assumes the ascetical effort of arriving on time for the service.”

2. Standing Up

“It is the custom of Orthodox Christians to stand throughout the holy services. This is because the traditional Christian posture for prayer and worship is standing. In most ‘Orthodox countries’ there are no pews in the holy temples. [At All Saints], we have benches along the walls for the elderly and the sick. If you need to sit during the Divine Liturgy, do so; but remember to stand at these times:

- **when the Liturgy begins**
- **during the Little and Great Entrances**
- **whenever the priest is censuring the holy ikons and the faithful**
- **whenever the priest comes out of the Holy Altar, or faces the people**
- **during the Gospel reading**
- **at the Anaphora** (beginning with ‘*Let us stand well*’ all the way through to the Hymn to the Theotokos)
- **for Holy Communion**
- **at the final Blessing.**

“You may sit during the **Epistle**, and during **Litanies** (*‘In peace, let us pray to the Lord...’*).

“Whenever a holy hierarch (Bishop, *et al.*) is visiting the parish, out of respect follow his example and stand and sit when he does. And do not turn your back on him.”

3. Leave the Lipstick!

“Have you ever looked at an ikon in just the right light and seen the lip prints all over it? It’s disgusting, isn’t it? In fact, it’s downright gross. “Lipstick may look fine on lips, but it looks horrible on icons, crosses, the Communion spoon and the priest’s or bishop’s hand. Icons have been ruined by lipstick; and even though the cross can usually be cleaned after everyone venerates it, it just isn’t considerate to others to impose your lipstick on them. **NEVER approach the Holy Cup wearing lipstick.**

God is not impressed with how attractive you look externally – your makeup or your clothing – but how attractive you are internally, your adornment with good works and piety.”

4. Walking In and Out

Certainly, parents should have ready access to the doors to take out small children (0-3 years) if they are distracting or need a short break—for this reason the doors are to be accessible, i.e. let us avoid the temptation to **congregate at the back**; instead, let us challenge ourselves to **move forward into the Nave, closer to God.**

For times when it is **inappropriate**, unless absolutely necessary, to walk in/out, the following list is a guideline:

- The **beginning of the Divine Liturgy** (*‘Blessed is the Kingdom...’*)
- The **Entrances: with the Gospel; and later, with the Holy Gifts**
- The **Trisagion** (*‘Holy God, Holy Mighty...’*)
- The **Epistle & Gospel Readings, and Homily**
- The **Creed, the Lord’s Prayer**
- The **Anaphora** (beginning with *‘Let us stand well...’*, all the way through to the Hymn to the Theotokos)
- The distribution of **Holy Communion** (i.e. the Body and Blood of Christ in our midst), **through to the end of the Dismissal.**

5. Talking During the Holy Services

We all love to see each other at Church, and are eager to talk, but silence is precious. The holy services are a conversation with God, Who is present, and we break that prayer/conversation when speaking to others. This consideration applies to all services of the Church, whether it be the Orthros read prior to the Divine Liturgy, or when the priest is hearing Confessions. It is best to save conversation until after the holy services. We especially do not talk during the following:

- The **beginning of the Divine Liturgy** (*‘Blessed is the Kingdom...’*)

- The **Entrances: with the Gospel; and later, with the Holy Gifts**
- The **Trisagion** (*‘Holy God, Holy Mighty...’*)
- The **Epistle & Gospel Readings, and the Homily**
- The **Creed, the Lord’s Prayer**
- The **Anaphora** (beginning with *‘Let us stand well...’*, all the way through to the Hymn to the Theotokos) **BE ESPECIALLY QUIET.**
- The distribution of **Holy Communion** (i.e. the Body and Blood of Christ in our midst), **through to the end of the Dismissal. BE ESPECIALLY QUIET.**

6. Leaving Before the Dismissal

Leaving the holy services early (unless some emergency arises) is always inappropriate. Just as with arriving late, it causes distraction and is inconsiderate and disrespectful to the rest of the faithful, to the priest, and to God.

“Leaving before the Dismissal – besides being rude – deprives us of a blessing. Worship has a **beginning** (*‘Blessed is the Kingdom...’*) and it has an **end** (*‘Let us depart in peace...’*). To leave immediately after Holy Communion is to treat the 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.”

7. But, What do we About our Children???

Bring your children early, bring them on time. Help them grow in faith, getting used to being in the Holy Temple; help them to make the worship of God part of their life. Bringing them late – *repeatedly* – only reinforces bad habits, making the habit more difficult to break, and supports a secularised outlook.

Talk to children about Christ, read to them prayers and Holy Scripture – every day. If the child is to partake of the Holy Communion then parent(s) should read the Canon of Preparation with their child(ren). Children, when they reach the age of **7 years**, make confession as per the instruction of the priest. Children should refrain from food before coming to church. If the child is used to being well fed before church, then they should be gradually weaned off food before the Liturgy. Children aged 3 plus can easily go without food until after Holy Communion - if you support them with prayer, if you encourage them by good example. If you have to feed them, give them something small and fasting before church (no meat, no chocolate biscuits and such like). **Do not feed children during the holy services**, with babies we can make an exception – but first speak with, receive a blessing from, the priest.

Children should **NEVER approach the Holy Cup with food in their mouth.**

Bringing children late to church is short-sighted and only makes things more difficult in the longer term.

Leaving before the Dismissal – besides being rude – **deprives children of a blessing. We deprive our children of God’s blessings by not being still and participating in God’s holiness.**

Parents – all of us – will be judged by God on how we have nurtured the faith of our children.

Text adapted from instructions given by Father David Barr, presbyter of Saint Elias Antiochian Orthodox Church in Austin, Texas. Quotations are from his article which first appeared in *The Word*, January 1997, pp. 4-7.