

# St. George Newsletter

November 2011

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## On going to church

"Sunday was beautiful. I got up early, stood through Liturgy, the meal after church was great, and then I went home and rested." It is easy for us to speak of "going to" or "standing through" church. But what indeed is going on with us during the services? Have we come to stand (even "well, and with fear") and absorb "energy" from the priest, from the icons, from the incense?

The preaching of the Church is freedom, and the Church does not act on a person without his participation. Thus, we do not simply go or stand through a service, but take part in it.

It is clear that the priest, the altar servers, and the singers are taking part in service. But how are the rest to be? Probably it is harder for them. When a person serves or sings, because of the activity, he does not notice the length of the service. But those standing in church notice. The rest are also called upon to follow after the words of the service attentively and pray them -- that is, mentally agree with the words.

Standing in church is not a show of strength or asceticism of Orthodox Christians. We stand to remind us that we are not the audience present while the priest serves the service. It is not easy to keep attention for an hour and a half. After all, our daily prayers, if read from the prayer book, take no longer than fifteen minutes.

The strength to pray at Liturgy comes from the heart. Often it is easier for us to pray in our own words, and not those of the prayer book, because these words come from the heart. We need to apply this heartfelt desire to Liturgy. What do we pray for? For the peace of the whole world. For our friends and relatives, the sick, the travelers, those who are in prison. We pray that God would give us true freedom and

true happiness -- that is, freedom from sin. We shouldn't just stand around and chat and joke before service and then walk into church just in time. We should think to ourselves, what do we need? What are we sad over? For all these things the church prays.

When we get distracted during services, someone else continues our prayer. What if we get distracted? Pray for a few minutes in your own words, and then realize, that the parish around you is praying for the same things. Let's not get discouraged by losing attention. This serves only to distract us more.

In Greek, the word "Liturgy" means "common work". Thus, we all are participants. Our simple, heartfelt prayers are joined with the Liturgy prayers. Believe this -- in the words of the Liturgy prayers, all of our (good) desires are expressed.

Often we hear "You shouldn't put up candles during the six psalms, the Gospel reading, the Eucharistic canon" and so on. Absolutely correct. But it is better not to stand candles at all *during* the service. This does not mean that the "churchy" people should criticize others who do this. The Church is not a system of rules and prohibitions. But we should think about this: if we are lighting candles during the service, we are not participating in that part of the service. We are not participating in the common work. We, who are striving towards "churchiness", should be aware that the whole parish prays together at Liturgy, and that we offer our private prayers before or after the Liturgy. What if we haven't finished our communion prayers? What is better, to skip Liturgy (even while being physically present) to read personal prayers, or to pray together with everyone, resolving next time not to put off our preparation. The answer is obvious.

Let the outcome of this article *not* be: “Father is upset that people are lighting candles during services”, but instead, let us become more aware of our high calling: all of us offer up the bloodless sacrifice to God as a “royal priesthood” (1 Pet. 2:9) together with the necessary ordained priesthood.

### **From the pages of the Trebnik**

*Services for the sick*

#### Baptism of the sick

In the trebnik there is a service “Shortened form of Baptism...in fear of death”. As a rule, this service is done when a newborn is likely to die, and it is not possible to serve the entire service. Sometimes an adult desires baptism on his death bed. If he is also likely to die before being able to come to church, he may be baptized in the hospital or at his home using this service.

The service is extremely short: the priest reads a single prayer, pours oil into water, and pours it over the head of the sick person three times, saying “The servant of God... is baptized in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” The priest then immediately chrismates the person, “The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit”.

A dying person cannot be baptized against his will (this is different from an infant being baptized according to the faith of its parents, as it does all things by the will of its parents). Those who come back to good health after this short-form baptism are fully Orthodox Christians and can (and must) participate fully in the sacramental life of the Church.

If it is too late even to summon a priest, the Church recognizes baptism by the laity. This is not the normal method of baptism, but is acceptable in the case of a dying person. An Orthodox layperson pronounces the same words, “The servant of God... is baptized in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit”, sprinkling water on the head three times. In this case, if the person returns to health, he must go to the church and receive chrismation

from a priest. He may then fully participate in the sacraments of the Church.

#### Communion of the sick

If a person is very sick and unable to make it to church, he is all the same able to unity with God through Holy Communion. The priest goes to his home or the hospital with a portable tabernacle. The service goes like this: the priest, in behalf of the sick person, reads a few communion prayers and the creed. The communicant confesses and is communed from reserved holy gifts, which are consecrated, as a rule, on Holy Thursday. It is not permissible to commune a person who has lost consciousness.

If a person, even handicapped or sick, is able to make it to church, he should come and take part in the services and commune in church. Of course, doing this, he may sit instead of stand, and so on. If this is difficult for him to accomplish himself, but still possible, other Orthodox Christians should take this opportunity to do good and bring the person to church.

Must a person fast before receiving communion at home or in the hospital? We fast before communion not in order to purify our stomachs, but as an ascetic exercise. We approach communion on an empty stomach to sense our physical weakness and dependence on God. If a person has already been weakened by sickness, it is not necessary for him to weaken himself further. He need not fast specially before home communion, which can take place at any time of day or night.

#### Molebens for the sick

In the trebnik there is also a special moleben for those who are sick. This moleben can be ordered by consulting with the priest. As in other molebens, there are troparia, a Gospel reading, and prayers.

There is something not quite right about the word “ordering” for a moleben. A person does not simply ask the priest to do a service and

then walk away, but rather stands alongside the priest during the service, praying with him. Thus we hear in the Gospel: Christ heals the sick according to their own faith, or the faith of their friends and relatives.

One can also commemorate the sick at proskomedia at Liturgy. All the slips received for the sick are read at proskomedia in the altar, and certain of them are read aloud at the augmented litany. The most important is the commemoration at proskomedia. You need not be disappointed if you do not hear the name at the augmented litany; the commemoration has taken place at proskomedia. What applies to molebens applies to commemoration. Yes, it is possible to write a commemoration slip and then leave, but best of all is to pray together with everyone in church over the health of your friend or relative.

### Unction

There are two types of unction. In our diocese, as a rule, the bishop visits the parish during Great Lent, and all the people prepare by confession and communion for general unction. Here all are anointed: the sick and the healthy. Although in many parishes unction is served on Wednesday night of Holy Week, one must not connect unction with the service of that evening. The matins for Holy Thursday, which is served on Wednesday evening is dedicated to the establishment of the Eucharist at the Last Supper, and not at all connected to unction.

Unction is also served separately for a sick person. It is served only once per illness for a person. To perform unction several times for the same illness shows a lack of faith in the sacrament or worse yet - superstition, that somehow unction, due to its rareness, is greater than communion.

There is no other sacrament of the Church as poorly understood as unction. There are as many people in church to receive unction as there are on Pascha, but at no other time. This in itself is not bad; it is not at all a bad thing to confess and receive unction. What is not good is the neglect of spiritual life throughout the rest

of the year. There is a certain opinion that somehow going to unction once a year cleanses a person from his sins. It does not. We are cleansed from our sins when we stop committing them. We receive forgiveness from God for our sins, but in order to free ourselves from their effects on our life, we must free ourselves from the sins themselves. This we cannot do through ritual, but only through the resolve to live, with God's help, a new life.

### **Construction project**

\$100,000 (1 sponsor)	\$50,000 (1 sponsor)
\$20,000 (1 sponsor)	\$15,000 (2 sponsors)
\$10,000 (4 sponsors)	\$5,000 (8 sponsors)
\$2,000 (5 sponsors)	\$1,000 (10 sponsors)

My last message regarding fund raising raised many questions among parishioners and potential donors. I wanted to answer them by a concrete plan for fundraising.

Of course, a donation to the church may be made at any time in church by check or cash, or via PayPal (credit card or bank transfer) on our web site [stgeorgeslc.org](http://stgeorgeslc.org). We also operate the website [buildarussianchurch.com](http://buildarussianchurch.com), where one may purchase "virtual bricks" in our church building, or make donations towards large and visible parts of our church.

In the coming days, the site [buildarussianchurch.com](http://buildarussianchurch.com) will be update for our fund drive. Some people are afraid to donate, because they cannot give the entire necessary amount, and worry that there will not be enough donors. Thus, starting now, I would like to set some concrete goals. Right now, we need \$300,000 to qualify for a building loan. With our current monthly income, this leaves us with very manageable monthly payments on our mortgage.

We would like to start building in spring or summer next year. Thus I want to set a fundraising goal of \$300,000 by the beginning of Great Lent, February 19, 2012. This will give us

time to file the paperwork and renew our building permit, and begin construction in time for our parish holiday.

The difference in this fundraising drive is that we are soliciting pledges, rather than donations. If you are able to donate a large sum, but are afraid that the goal will not be met, you can make a pledge in any of the above amounts. This pledge is a promise to the church to donate that amount when all \$300,000 has been pledged. Of course, your pledge can be paid immediately. All donations are tax-deductible.

If all of the smaller pledges are made, we will break up the larger pledges. As we raise money in church and the \$300,000 need goes down, we will update the fund drive amount.

When you pledge, your name will be placed by your pledge on [buildarusianchurch.com](http://buildarusianchurch.com). Of course, you are welcome, and encouraged, to pledge anonymously. If you pay your pledge immediately, that will be recorded on on virtual brick wall on the web site, which will eventually hang as a plaque in our new church hall.

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