

## **Participation**

There are several aspects of participation that are helpful to Orthodox Christians and their goals for growing in their faith.

First you have the direct participation in the Holy Sacraments. Every Sunday, (sometimes even during the week, particularly Lent) you'll go to Divine Liturgy where you as a parishioner will participate in the Divine Service. Your prayers join together with your brothers and sisters in Christ and rise to God, and in turn God participates back by filling us with the Holy Eucharist. This participation is essential to every Orthodox Christian; it is the body and blood of our lives! (As a matter of fact, without the layman's participation a Priest cannot even perform a Divine Liturgy.) Then there is Confession, Marriage, Baptism, Chrismation, and Holy Unction, among other Sacraments that involve us. Each having a very deep and personal way of affecting us down to our very core!

Beyond the Sacramental participation, (which ought to be our main focus) we also participate in our relationships. One of the main things I've heard priests say over the years is fellowship! Make sure you surround yourself with good people, people that believe what you believe, (i.e. in God, in the Church, etc.) What better friendships could you find than those at church? For this very reason many Orthodox churches have what is called the Agape meal after church. It is usually a pot luck event, where the people gather after church services and get to know one another. The purpose is to become a family. Through this participation our faith is strengthened by our new friends and their own Orthodox experiences and stories they share with us.

Our own family life is another way we participate in God's grace and love. When we participate at home our prayer and theology, together as a family we grow together a stronger bond, not only with God but with each other. It was explained to me as my intended and I sat down for pre-marital counseling that when both partners grow towards God, they grow closer together, and the three, (my husband, myself and God) create a triangle, the top end being God. Now if one of us decided they did not need to grow towards God, the triangle would be broken and the two would grow apart, for one would continue to follow God and get closer to the peak of the triangle, whereas the other would slip down the slope of the triangle off to the side and away from God, and away from his/her beloved. The same can be said for Children.

Thirdly, participation in our daily lives. It is not enough to go to church on Sunday. We must eat, sleep and breathe our faith. There should be nothing we do before asking the question, is this right? Will this further my spiritual life? Will this bring me closer to God? If we are vigilant, then God will be on our hearts and in our minds constantly. If we can attain this goal then when temptations come our way, (and they

will) we'll have a better chance to overcome them, by the simple fact that we have prayer on our lips constantly. This sounds easy, but as most Orthodox can tell you it is probably one of the hardest. Think about your daily life. Your job, where your boss hounds you over the stupidest things every time he sees you! What is your first thought when you see him? Is it a Christian thought? Or your children, the youngest keeps getting bullied by the middle child and you're eldest, instead of being an example eggs him on. You roll your eyes and feel the blood begin to boil because you go through the same charade every night! Or even your beloved spouse, who can't seem to get it through her head that you'll fix the dishwasher when you get a minute! What's the problem anyway, the dishes can still get washed, it's just a little more inconvenient, so what? Even these little things can become potential stomping ground for the Devil and his minions if we are not vigilant and participate in our Godly spiritual life every day.

So how do we do this? We pray, we read our Bible's, we encourage each other, we go to church, and we commune with our brothers and sisters in Christ not just in church but outside church. We also guard ourselves, making sure we keep away sinful thoughts from our minds and keep off sinful words from our tongues. By doing all this we are participating in a Godly life, an Orthodox life.