

A FEW WORDS ON ORTHODOXY

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1. INTRODUCTION

Thanks for inviting me; I've been looking forward to this morning.

By way of an initial disclaimer, I should say that although Don's schedule describes me as Greek Orthodox, that's not quite right. I'm a member of St Paul Orthodox Church in Dayton, which is part of the Orthodox Church in America, a daughter church of the Russian Orthodox Church. On the other hand, the various Orthodox Churches—Greek, Russian, Serbian, Syrian, and so on—are a single body in communion with one another, so it doesn't really matter. My own parish includes people of Russian and other East European background; but it also has Arabs, Greeks and Ethiopians; and more than half of us are converts who have been led to Orthodoxy in order to follow Christ, and not for any ethnic reason.

Another disclaimer: I've given talks like this a number of times, but they're always a little intimidating to me. I'm not sure starting out where you are coming from, what you know and what you want to know. Also, although I try to take my faith seriously, I spend a lot more time talking about easy things like analytic number theory, non-Euclidean geometry, and infinite cardinals. I hope you'll forgive me and get a second opinion if I say something that doesn't make sense, remembering that getting your information on theology and history from a mathematician is not actually the preferred technique. Finally and most importantly, you've given me an impossible job. As I understand it, I'm here to represent a Church with some hundreds of millions of members, with a history spanning every continent, and twenty centuries. I'm supposed to tell you everything you need to know about this institution, its customs and beliefs, and I'm supposed to leave plenty of time for questions. If this is typical of the assignments you give your guests, then I can see why the only way you can get speakers is to get people's moms to lean on them.

Faced with an impossible task, then, let me try to give fragments of a number of talks, hoping to give you some glimpses of how we live, how we pray, and what makes us sing. I hope very much that this conversation can be the beginning of our getting to know one another, and not the end.

2. HISTORY

2.1. Origins of Orthodoxy. Let me start out by trying to help those of you who may not know anything about Orthodoxy get a handle on who we are and where we come from. Following Christ's death and resurrection, the Church set about following Christ's commandment to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Christian

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communities sprang up in cities throughout the Mediterranean world, as well as farther afield—Ethiopia, Persia, perhaps even India. The churches in the larger cities prided themselves on foundation by the Apostles, Rome remembering Sts Peter and Paul, Alexandria recalling Mark, Antioch claiming Peter as its bishop before he traveled to Rome, and remembering that it was there the disciples were first called Christians. These early communities gathered around an over-seer, in Greek an *epi-skopos*, in English a bishop, whose office descended from the community's first foundation by St Paul, by one of the Twelve, or by one of their fellow-workers. The difficulty of travel and reality of persecution forced these communities to be able to be self-sufficient, but we know that they visited and wrote letters to one another. After all, we still have the letters Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth, in Thessaloniki, and elsewhere. The churches in those cities have not closed their doors, and the Orthodox Christians there read these letters today.

Here's a cartoon history of what happened next: As time went on, tensions began to grow within what had been a united Church. Philosophical and linguistic divisions between the Greek-speaking East and the Latin-speaking West became more acute as the Eastern and Western halves of the Empire divided and as travel became more difficult. In the West, Rome was the only church of apostolic foundation; the bishop of Rome held undisputed first place among western Christians. The East, where numerous communities could trace their roots to the apostles, had never accorded the pope the monarchical authority he held in the West. There were cultural differences as well. The Latin West was during much of this period an intellectual backwater that cultured Greeks found it difficult to take seriously. Greek attitudes to Latin civilization are neatly captured by the dismissal of Latin by one Eastern Roman emperor as, "a barbaric and Scythian tongue."

Positions on both sides hardened around a number of issues. Some of these were important, like the western tendency to view human relationships with God in legalistic, juridical terms, instead of the ontological terms of the East. Others were real trivia, like the facts that Eastern priests wore beards, and used leavened bread at communion. These differences came to a head when the pope claimed the authority to alter the Creed agreed to at Nicaea and Constantinople by all the bishops, East and West, meeting in council. With this act, the Catholic Church in the West under its patriarch in Rome separated itself from the Orthodox Church in the East with its patriarchs in Constantinople, Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch. The usual date given for this formal split is 1054; real history is always more subtle than this.

2.2. What Orthodoxy and the Western Church don't share. So, there are the origins of Orthodoxy: we started out as the early church in the east; the Catholic West left us around 1054. Since then, the two churches have evolved in different ways. The Catholic Church over the last millennium has seen the development of scholasticism, a huge interest in Aristotle through his student Thomas Aquinas, the Reformation, and splintering into competing denominations. It has also done well: Catholics discovered America, and the oceanic empires of western Christians gave them enormous missionary opportunities.

Orthodoxy missed all these things, and that's something important to realize as we try to understand one another. In our Church, Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas are essentially unknown, liturgical Latin was never used, a Reformation never happened, and married men have always been permitted to be priests. The

Western Church has been formed by a whole series of theological disputes that we simply haven't experienced. When I was getting ready to give a talk like this a few years ago at the Forum at West Richmond Friends, an Orthodox colleague said to me that I should make clear whether or not we were Roman Catholics. I replied that I thought the Quakers were far more Catholic than we, since Catholics and Protestants in the West are bound together by 500 years of cohabitation after the East and West split, and then by 500 years of shared disagreements of which the Orthodox Church has not been a part. Most Western Christians probably know instantly whether or not they accept the Immaculate Conception, for instance—the doctrine that Mary was born without the taint of Original Sin. I, on the other hand, am not sure what to think about this doctrine, since the whole notion of Original Sin in anything like its developed Western form doesn't exist in Orthodoxy. The fact that Orthodoxy stands so far apart from the disputes dividing the west can make us a valuable resource in healing those disputes, even as you may be a resource to us. But it also means that we are strangers to one another, and must be enormously careful not to misunderstand one another.

2.3. Orthodoxy Today. Today, Orthodoxy is a single, unified faith, organized into about a dozen national Orthodox churches (Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Serbian Orthodox, and so on), which share a common theology and are in full communion with one another. One of these churches is the Orthodox Church in America, to which I belong. While Catholic and Protestant evangelization spread west, first by land and later to your overseas empires, Orthodox mission spread overland to the East, moving out from the Mediterranean to Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, Georgia, and Russia. Depending on who's doing the counting, there are somewhere between 100 and 300 million Orthodox Christians today, fewer than the Catholics, but far more than any Protestant church. Orthodoxy is the predominant religion of Greece, Russia, and much of Slavic Eastern Europe. It goes back to apostolic times in Africa, particularly in Egypt and in Ethiopia; and it is small but growing further south, especially in East Africa.

2.4. Orthodoxy in America: Alaska. In America, Orthodoxy dates back to 1794, when the first missionary monks arrived in Alaska, which was then a Russian possession. The Alaskan mission has to be one of the least-known efforts of its kind (anybody here ever hear of it?), but to me is one of the most inspiring. For European Russians, Alaska was literally at the end of the earth. To travel from St Petersburg to Alaska took from one to two years, depending on weather and the route. The slow way to get to Alaska was overland across Siberia; those in a rush went by ship across the Atlantic, around South America (no Panama canal yet), to the Russian base in Hawaii, and on to Sitka.

There's lots I could say about the Alaskan mission, but some of what I find admirable is:

- The monks really listened to the Alaskans. While some of the authorities back in Europe felt that the Alaskans were pagans whose previous culture and beliefs should be suppressed, the people in the field kept reporting back that this was not the case. The Alaskans knew there was a God Who had created the world, they said, and that God had breathed life through a straw into the nostrils of the first humans. There were things the Alaskans didn't know—about Christ, for instance—but the right approach was to

show how God's new revelation grew from the truths the Alaskans already recognized.

- The monks empowered the local people, inventing alphabets for the local languages, translating the Gospels and service books into these languages, ordaining the Alaskans as priests to lead their own communities, treating the Alaskans as equals.
- The monks stood up for the local people against Russian commercial and military authorities, at one point ending up under house arrest to keep them from administering to the natives the oath of allegiance that would make them legally subjects of the Emperor with equal status to the Russian traders.

To see just how startling all this is, one needs perhaps to look at the tragedy that befell the native Alaskan church when the Russians abandoned Alaska and the Americans stepped in. Perhaps it is enough to say of this sorry period that the Protestants did not regard the native Alaskans—including educated leaders of their communities literate in three languages—as the social equals of Americans. The program of separating children from their parents and communities in order to Americanize and Christianize people who thought they had been Christians for 3 generations and Americans for 200 was also hard for the Alaskans to understand and to appreciate. Some Alaskans fled to Siberia where they could live in freedom, but most remained; and despite real suffering, the Orthodox Church in Alaska remains strong. One of the OCA's three seminaries is in Kodiak. The leader of the original group of missionaries, and the most revered saint of the American church, was St Herman of Alaska. The Russian missionaries Innocent (later Metropolitan of Moscow) and Juvenalii (martyred at Lake Iliamna), the native Alaskan martyr Peter, and the priest Jacob (the first native Alaskan priest) have all been recognized as saints by the Orthodox Church in America.

So while Western Christians were discovering and evangelizing America, so were Orthodox Christians. America for us was a poorly understood land mass at the end of the Aleutians; and even at the beginning of the 20th Century, the head of the Church on this continent bore the lovely title of Bishop of the Aleutian Islands and All America.

2.5. Orthodoxy in America: Ethnic Jurisdictions. During the 19th Century, the Orthodox population of the US gradually grew, and its ethnic range expanded. America continued to be ecclesiastically a missionary province of the Russian Church, though the Russians found themselves ministering to Serbs and Greeks and Syrians as well as to Russians. The first Orthodox bishop consecrated in North America, for instance, was the Lebanese St Raphael Hawaweeny of Brooklyn. It is only in the last hundred years that we have seen the tragic scandal of the separation of the One Holy Church in America into ethnic jurisdictions, a separation brought about by the combination of a large migration of Greeks who regarded themselves as temporary Americans struggling to preserve their Hellenism and by the Byzantine ecclesiastical politics (both figuratively and literally) that followed the Bolshevik Revolution. Separate ethnic jurisdictions are universally recognized as a scandalous violation of the canons; but we are still struggling to find a way past them politically.

3. OUR WORSHIP

Having gotten through that history, let me try to become a bit more immediate and personal by asking the question, what might American Protestants find unfamiliar about our worship, our beliefs, and our lives?

3.1. Formal Prayers. One thing you might find unusual is the notion of a formal service itself. The outline of our usual eucharistic services is ancient, going back far before the times of the 4th century hierarchs St John Chrysostom and St Basil the Great who get credit for them. We recite Psalms, quote large fragments from the Bible, and repeat long prayers written centuries ago, largely based on Biblical material. Of course, lots of change has happened since the 4th century, and particularly our music continues to evolve and grow today, but much of our worship is hardly contemporary. (This, after all, is a Church which can refer to a 10th century saint as Simeon the New Theologian.) What do we mean by praying in other people's words? We are doing several things during the liturgy in this way. We are proclaiming together the words of scripture. We are empowering and treating equally our brothers and sisters in the faith who have gone before us, who stand invisibly present with us, and from whose insights we can still learn. We are deepening our own faith, since by praying the words of those whose faith and love of God is particularly profound, we are moved to reflect upon and deepen our own faith. Let me just give one quick instance of this sort of reflection. Our principal hymn at Christmas, due to St Auxentius the Hermit, goes like this:

Thy Nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom,
For by it those who worshiped the stars
Were taught by a star
To adore Thee, the Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on High.
O Lord, glory to Thee.

Notice everything that is being said here. The images are all biblical, taken from the story of the wise men in St Luke's Gospel, but in this brief hymn is a whole theology of God's and the Church's relation to the world. God does not reject the pagan magi; instead, God speaks to them with the language they understand—that of the stars. But neither does God leave the magi where they are. Instead, He leads them to a greater light, the Sun of Righteousness, the dawn from heaven. It is in this way that the light of wisdom shines forth into the world from Christ Himself. Every time I sing this hymn, I am moved anew by the breadth and depth of God's love. I pray with St Auxentius in part because my own prayers aren't this good.

3.2. The Bible. This may be a good moment at which to comment on the relation between the Orthodox Church and the Bible. I've been asked, "Are you a Bible church?" I'm not quite sure how to answer that question. My immediate reaction, "I think so; didn't we write the Bible?" seems like it has the potential both to alienate and to confuse. At bottom there is within the Church one standard and one authority, who is Christ Himself. The light of Christ has shown forth in the persons of Christians throughout the ages, and is embodied in the communal memory we call Holy Tradition. The Bible is a central part of that Tradition. All our worship services are based upon it. To follow the full cycle of daily prayers is to read in the

course of a year the entire New Testament except for the Book of Revelation, to read large portions of the Old Testament, and to read the Psalms each week. It is not unusual to have services like the Great Blessing of Water at Theophany which consists in part of 14 readings on how God has blessed His people through the ages with water. The vesperal liturgy for Great and Holy Saturday includes 15 Old Testament lessons, one of which is the Book of Jonah. Although I've sometimes joked that only at an Orthodox Bible study could one find people showing up without Bibles (and I've experienced this), the average Orthodox sees an enormous amount of the Bible in the course of the life of the Church. One of our Easter hymns contains the verse, "The inspired prophet Habakkuk now stands with us in holy vigil. He is like a shining angel who cries with a piercing voice, 'Today salvation has come to the world, for Christ is risen, as all-powerful.'" Would you know what this hymn was about? Plot summaries for Habakkuk, anyone? The existence of an ode like that is pretty good proof that *somebody's* reading the Bible.

3.3. The Physical Transfigured. Another thing you might find unfamiliar in our worship, and in our theology and lives, is the importance for us of physical things. Humans are spirit, soul, and body; and God works through all these vehicles for our salvation and transformation. God made the world, and declared it good. In the most awesome of mysteries, Christ came into the world as a physical being, sharing and transforming all that we are. We use our bodies in worship, and participate in the transformation of the physical to serve the divine. You will see us making the sign of the cross, prostrating ourselves, lighting candles, and kissing the cross of the Lord, the Gospel book, and the holy icons. Our worship, based on the models in the Old Testament of worship in heaven, appeals to all the senses: our touch, in all the things I just described; our taste, as we receive the Lord's body and blood, and blessed bread and wine; our smell, as we breathe the incense; our sight, as we behold the holy images of Christ and of His mother and of the saints; our hearing, as we listen to hymns and spiritual songs, to the intoning of the prayers, and to the proclamation of God's word. This surrounds and envelopes the whole person, and bends the whole person to the service of Christ. There's also a lot going on in this sort of worship for children, who are full members of the Church, who receive the eucharist from the time of their baptism as infants, and who are expected to be in church. I have found it profoundly touching to watch my children, too little to talk or to understand the high theological words of grown-ups, worshipping in their own way: making the sign of the cross, doing prostrations (or, as my son Nicholas once said, frustrations), kissing the icons, sleeping on the floor during long night services, or, in the case of my son Peter, probably doing one of the few truly new things left in the life of a 2000 year old Church by standing solemnly before the congregation and being anointed with holy oil while wearing a rubber bunny nose.

3.4. Icons. Part of our physical worship you might find unfamiliar are icons, which were actually not invented by Apple Computer. Icons are images of Christ and of the saints, painted in traditional styles upon wood, which cover the walls of our churches. They serve prosaic uses as the books of the unlettered, telling the story of the faith in images. For us, they are more than this, though. A physical image of Christ is a manifestation of a profound truth: that in Christ, God Himself has come down to pitch His tent in our midst (as the prologue of John says), incarnate as a physical human being, that He whom the heavens cannot contain has been

born in a cave. We believe that our worship and our lives, Christ and His saints are forever present with us. A common Orthodox greeting says, “Christ is in our midst!” In the holy icons, we have windows into heaven, making this invisible presence visible. Icons are not graven images. We venerate them, and believe that our veneration passes on to the original of the image depicted; but we do not worship them. To pray and meditate in their presence, is, however, a deep fact of Orthodox spirituality.

3.5. Mysteries: Confession. You might find the notion of what in Greek are called holy mysteries, what the Roman Catholics call sacraments, also confusing, though I think I can give you some ways to think about these practices. I’ve talked enough about the transformation of the physical cosmos to serve God to give you a reasonable idea of how we construe baptism and the eucharist. Let me also offer a personal meditation on another mystery, holy confession. At least once a year, and preferably more frequently, we are asked to confess our sins and to seek forgiveness before God. For me, this is always deeply moving. It’s not easy to do, though. One has to confront oneself as one is. One has really to think seriously about how one has missed the mark, how one has failed to love Christ above all, and those around one as one’s self. One has to ask oneself, what am I doing that leaves me feeling alone and separated from Christ, from whom nothing in fact can separate me. One has to confront concrete failings, to face the bleak fact that many of one’s sins are the same as last time. One has to ask if one is really struggling to serve God, or if one has given up. At least, that’s what I have to do.

In confession, one stands in a dimly-lit church before an icon of Christ or of His mother, in the presence of everything one regards as holy. Candles light the room. Elsewhere in the chapel, one’s fellow-Christians are praying. Perhaps a reader is chanting the Psalms. A little to one side stands the priest. He points out the holy icons, reminds one that one stands in the presence of Christ and makes one’s confession to Him alone, and that the priest is only a legal witness. “Since your last confession, is there anything you have now to confess?” I don’t know how this whole experience sounds to you, but I have never felt closer to God than I do at this moment. This is real. I stand before the throne of Christ Himself to reveal all that I am. I stand before Him with all pretenses stripped away, since only by being who I really am, can I share in what He really is. Only by bringing my own being to light can I share in the light of Christ, in Whom there is no darkness at all. I bring to Him my repentance, and humbly ask His forgiveness. Following the confession and the questions, advice, and words both of warning and of consolation from the priest, one bows before the icons. The priest places his hands upon his stole upon the head of the penitent, makes the sign of the cross, and announces the good news of forgiveness. “God it was who pardoned David by the hands of Nathan the priest. May the same God forgive you, Timothy, all the sins you have confessed before me, an unworthy priest. Go your way, and think no more on them.” This is the place of sacraments in our lives.

4. THE RESURRECTION

I’d like to do two more things. Before giving an earlier version of this talk, I asked everybody I knew for advice about what to say. One of the most interesting responses was from our parish priest, Fr Ted Bobosh. He said, “I would start with the resurrection, because it is central to the faith, and because it’s unexpected.

Ask them what the resurrection means to them, and then go from there.” I haven’t started with the resurrection, but I’d like to end with it, by reading to you a brief sermon of St John Chrysostom which is well known to all Orthodox, and which forms part of our Easter liturgy.

4.1. Time in the Orthodox Church. As I thought about why this sermon moved me so much, though, I realized that much depended on the whole context in which I encounter it; and that I had to make that context visible to you as well. This brings me to the second thing I’d still like to do: to talk, not about things you might find unfamiliar in Orthodox worship, but about what you might find unfamiliar in Orthodox life. After all, Orthodoxy is not a system of religious services; it is a way of life. What would you find different if you came to live with us? (Actually, if I’m thinking about my own family, our standard of housekeeping is the first thing that occurs to me, but that is, arguably not of divine origin. One member of my household claims always to mention the refrigerator at confession. I wish the state of my own soul were such that I could get down to details like that!)

Let me start with our relationship to time. For Orthodox people, the rhythm of the Church’s year is an important part both of life and of how we experience God. As icons transfigure wood and paint to serve a divine purpose, so the Church’s calendar transfigures time itself. The year is a dance in which each day commemorates a list of saints, and the events of our year are marked by the Church’s 12 major feasts, her 4 principal fasts, and the smaller celebrations of personal significance, like our name days, the feast days of the saints whose names we bear. We celebrate the baptism of the Lord on Theophany, January 6, when we bless water. With this holy water, we bless our homes. We celebrate the Meeting of the Lord in the Temple on February 2, when we also bless candles and sing of God’s servants, the bees. (I’d like us to bless light bulbs and fluorescent tubes as well, but somehow, that seems crass.) We remember Christ’s Transfiguration on Mt Tabor on August 6, and bless the harvests of our fields.

But more than anything, our year is marked by the preparation for the Great Feast of Pascha, Easter, the Feast of the Resurrection. Let me try to walk with you through this process of preparation. It begins quietly, nearly 3 months before the feast, with a series of five pre-Lenten Sundays. We remember Zacchaeus, and how we ought to follow Christ above all; the Publican and the Pharisee, and how we ought to come before God in humility; the Prodigal Son, and how God welcomes the repentant, and so on. The Church does nothing suddenly, so during this time, we have a week without the usual Wednesday and Friday fast, followed by a week with the usual fasting rules, followed by a week in which meat is forbidden, before we enter at last into Great Lent itself, singing “Let us begin the Fast with joy!”

4.2. Fasting. It may seem strange to fast at all, let alone to fast with joy; so maybe I should say a few words about what fasting means to us. The discipline of fasting is obviously ancient, and it has always been part of the Church. In the Gospels, Christ says that following His Ascension, His disciples will fast; and He tells us how to behave not if we fast, but when we fast. It seems to me that fasting for us plays much the role that simplicity plays for Friends or Brethren or Mennonites. When we fast, we abstain from rich foods, and we try to limit our intake of food to what is essential. We try to pray more often, and to give alms more generously. We examine our lives and try to give up what is frivolous. Many of us turn off the

television; I stop reading the Net news. Do we do this to punish ourselves and make ourselves miserable? Do the followers of the Radical Reformation try to live simply and plainly in order to suffer? We fast in order to clear our minds and hearts of the extraneous, in order to center down and grow closer to Christ. In Greek, to be ascetic means to be an athlete. We fast because we are athletes preparing, St Paul tells us, to run a race. Fasting also helps us practise confronting small temptations so that, with the help of Christ, we may also resist larger ones.

During Great Lent, we are challenged to take a discipline of simplicity seriously, saying good-bye for 40 days to meat, fish, dairy products, alcohol, and oil. The church will be changed to more sombre colors; the music will move into a new key; the services will become longer. Many of us will go to confession and will attend church more often. To me, one of the most deep and moving parts of our corporate religious life is the quiet simplicity of our Wednesday lenten liturgy. There, in the darkness of the evening, the priest enters with the body and blood of Christ; and the people prostrate themselves upon the floor singing, “Lo, the King of Glory enters. Lo, the mystical sacrifice is upborne fulfilled.”

4.3. Holy Week and Pascha. Great Lent ends with Lazarus Saturday, the day before Palm Sunday when the Church, following the chronology of St John’s Gospel, celebrates the raising of Lazarus. Now we enter into Holy Week, which is a separate fast leading up to Pascha. Even at a normal parish, it’s possible to end up in church more or less continuously during this week; at a cathedral or monastery, it is impossible to avoid this. This is the week for our family when the error of living 50 miles from the nearest Orthodox Church become clear—we used to put about 1000 miles on the car going to and from church in the 9 days between Lazarus Saturday and Pascha; now we cut down on driving by just moving to a motel in Dayton for the last part of the week.

Finally, after one has reflected for 5 weeks, prayed and fasted and given alms for 6 more, and heard the Church’s meditations on the final week of Christ’s earthly life (an amazingly deep and subtle collection of hymnody) day and night for a week, the night of Pascha arrives. In Russia, especially, services will literally run all night, but in a typical American parish, vespers for Pascha will begin between 11 and 11:30 Saturday evening. For one last time, we pray in the sombre Lenten tones of the past 6 weeks. Then, at midnight, we walk in solemn procession around the outside of the church, halting at the door. As the door to the church opens, we proclaim for the first time the Paschal hymn, “Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life,” and we enter the church to begin the feast. The church, which was dark as we began our procession, is now ablaze with light. The sombre Lenten colors are replaced by white. The long wait is over, and the new day has dawned. “This is the chosen and holy day,” we sing, “First of Sabbaths, king and lord of days, the Feast of Feasts, Holy Day of Holy Days, on this day, we bless Christ forevermore.” The service will go on—we’ll be in church until past 2 AM, and there will be a feast following that, the contents of Easter baskets filled with the foods from which we’ve been fasting. Hams are common; in my parish, pepperoni pizzas loom large. But now we hear the Easter sermon of St John Chrysostom, St John of the Golden Tongue. If you want to do this as a sort of game, the way they do at the monasteries on Mt Athos, every time I say, “bitter,” you’ll echo, “bitter,” and every time I say,

“Christ is risen,” you’ll echo, “Christ is risen.” But don’t do anything that makes you uncomfortable.

4.4. The Easter Sermon of St John Chrysostom.

Whoever is pious and loves God, let him rejoice in this great and glorious festival. Whoever is a true servant, let him enter into the joy of his Lord. Let him who has wasted his body in fasting now receive his reward, him who has labored from the first hour today receive his just wage, and him who came after the third hour celebrate this feast with a good heart. He who came after the sixth hour, let him not be distressed, for he too shall lack nothing, and he who came only at the ninth hour, let him approach without trembling; even he who did not come until after the eleventh, let him have no fear on account of his tardiness. For the Lord in His magnanimity will receive the last even as the first, refreshing the laborer of the eleventh hour like the laborer of the first. He takes pity on the last even as He nourishes the first. To the one, He gives; to the other, He makes a present. He accepts their labor as He measures their good will, rewarding the deed according to the intention of the doer.

Enter, then, all of you, into the joy of our Lord; early comers and late comers alike, receive your wage! Rich and poor, dance together! Let the austere and the indulgent alike celebrate this day; let those who have fasted and those who have not fasted take part in its rejoicing! The table is well-laden; let all take their nourishment. There is no lack of meat; let no one go hungry away. Taste, all of you, of the meal of faith; taste, all of you, of the richness of virtue. Let no one be cast down on account of poverty, for the kingdom belongs to us all. Let no one weep for his sins, for pardon has risen from the grave. Let no one fear death, for the Redeemer’s death has set us free.

The Redeemer has cast him out, since He had him in His power. He Who went down into Hell has despoiled Hell. He has filled Hell’s mouth, which tasted His flesh, with bitterness, as Isaiah says when he cries: it was bitter to Hell to meet You in its depths, bitter, because Hell’s power was broken; bitter, because Hell’s malice was outwitted; bitter, because Hell was slain, cast down from his mastery and bound in chains. Hell thought to receive a corpse, and found a God. Expecting dust, Hell encountered heaven. Thinking to receive the seen, it stumbled on the unseen. O death, where is thy sting? O Hell, where is thy victory?

Christ is risen, and death lies in the dust. Christ is risen, and the devils are put to flight. Christ is risen, and the angels exult. Christ is risen, and life is quickened. Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in the tomb. For Christ is the first among the dead to rise from the dead. To Him be glory and honor, unto the ages of ages. Amen.

5. GOODBYE

With that I'll leave you; in the style of a representative of a Church known for 3 hour services, I'm sure I've gone on far too long. I've left out much more than I've put in, but I hope I've given you some sense of what Orthodoxy is about, where we come from, what we believe, and what makes us sing. I meant what I said at the beginning about hoping this is the start of a conversation and not an end. Come see us in Dayton any time you can; I'd be happy give either directions or rides. And I'm more than happy to answer questions formally or informally for as long as people like.