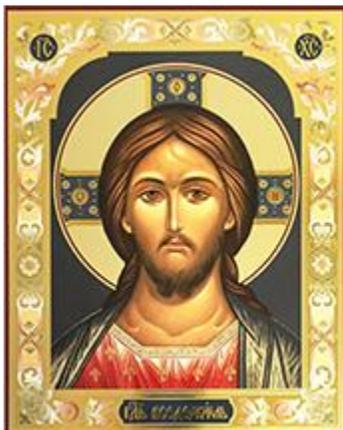


WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

Introduction



Religious Education in the Home

Веронаука у Кући

"It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." (Gal. 2:16-18)

At a meeting of the Orthodox clergy in Indianapolis with pastors of various Christian confessions, our priest was asked a question: "How -much does your Church focus its teachings to Jesus Christ, and how-much does She emphasize Him as a Savior in her

mission? Of course, surprised by their ignorance of Orthodoxy, the priest excitedly gave the necessary information and shared it with his parishioners on the feast of the Lord's Ascension. Since I was present there, I remember Fr. Dragan's emotional words and I will describe them here:

It is unknown to me whether there is a church on earth which directs *or* emphasizes in its teachings, worship, and prayers the Holy personality of Jesus Christ more than the Orthodox Church does, now for over two millennia. We are with Christ since the Annunciation, the day when the Lord announced good news through Archangel Gabriel to Most Holy Virgin Mary that she will bear a Son and name Him Jesus. We are with Him since His birthday - Nativity or Christmas, the most joyful feast of all Christians. We are with Christ on the day of His baptism - Theophany, when He was baptized by St. John. We are with Jesus on the day of the Transfiguration, when, in the presence of two heavenly witnesses, Moses and Elijah, He showed the greatness of the heavenly glory to His disciples. As He fasted and prayed in the wilderness for 40 days, we also fast with Him for 40 days, before His Birth and His passion. When Satan tempted Him, Jesus rejected his vile offerings, and we also try to reject any demonic temptations. We welcome Christ with child-like joy when He solemnly enters Jerusalem on the feast of Palm Sunday. We are with Christ at His Last Supper, and we rejoice at the institution of the Holy Sacrament of Communion. We are with Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, when, while praying to the Heavenly -Father, His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground for us and for our salvation. We are with Him when one of -is disciples betrays Him, and hands Him over to be crucified in exchange for 30 silver pieces. We are with Christ at the Golgotha Cross when he uttered His last words: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."

We are with Christ in Hades when he brought forth Adam and Eve and freed them from the torments of hell. We are with Him in the grave for three days, and with the most solemn joy we await His Holy Resurrection, and we sing with Mary Magdalene, the Apostles and the universe from all our hearts: "Christ is Risen !" In this joy, we await the glorious Ascension in which He deified His received body and honored it by sitting at the right side of the Father. Then we are with Him forever, on the feast of the Pentecost, when with the Descent of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, He founded His Church, and made His disciples sacred and precious gifts so that they could organize this Church and expand it throughout the universe.

And much, much more.

Just to mention the days of the week:

Monday is dedicated to the Angels who surround Christ, and who ceaselessly sing: "Holy! Holy! Holy! We are with Christ!"

Tuesday is dedicated to St. John the Baptist, who baptized Christ --z -vas His godfather. We are with Christ!

Wednesday is dedicated to the Holy Cross and the Most Holy Theotokos, and to sad remembrance of the betrayal of Christ. Therefore, we fast on this day. We are with Christ!

Thursday is dedicated to the apostles who organized and expanded ne Church, and to St. Nicholas of Myra in Lycia, who also ""physically" defended Orthodox teaching that Jesus Christ is the Son God! We are with Christ!

Friday is the day dedicated to the Holy and Life-giving cross of the Lord and to the Most Holy Mother of God, who remained "paled as a *ax candle, watching her Son hanging on the Cross." We venerate and honor this salvific instrument on which Christ was crucified and *d*ied for us and for our salvation, and we fast on this day. We are with Christ!

Saturday is dedicated to the memory of all reposed in the faith and hope in the Resurrection. We are with Christ here, also!

Sunday is the day of Resurrection. We are always with Christ!
You ask me, "How is our Church in Christ!?" (Gal. 2:16-18)

We, the Church, both as a whole, and as individuals, strive to be justified by the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and through His divine grace, experience the fullness of St. Paul's words from the beginning of the text: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me!" All aforementioned, we spiritually experience and feel through the Holy Sacraments, worship and prayer. By serving and prayerfully participating, we publicly confess the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God as our Savior and Giver of

Resurrection. To Him be glory and thanks unto the ages of ages. Amen.

The above said encouraged me to put together this book, and based on the Dogmatic of protodeacon Vojin Rakic, present in a brief text the Orthodox Christian teaching about "What is the Church" and thereby provide an opportunity for our faithful to answer any eventual questions of the heterodox.

It was taught about "What is the Church" by my professors and earners, special priests at Prizren's Seminary of "Sts. Cyril and Metnodius" in the period from 1955-1960. This teaching is confirmed by my fifty three-year experience as a clergyman in the Serbian Orthodox Church. Adhering to the words of St. Paul the Apostle: "Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct." (Hebr. 13:7; 17) On the 55th anniversary of my graduation, I described them in an article published in the "Observer" of the New Grachanica Diocese. We present them here in their entirety.

And thirdly, in this booklet we also present the text on "Fasting and Prayer", two inseparable Christian virtues, if you want "two wings for your soul to soar to the Kingdom of heaven." This was written by Zivan Marinkovic, Archpriest – Stavrophore and long-time Rector of the Seminary of Sts. Cyril and Methodius in Prizren, and the long-time envoy of the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church, at the final exams. A great man of knowledge, spirituality and parental love. And now let us return to the opening words of the Apostle Paul from the beginning of this writing: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me!"

I remember a story I read about a monk who knocked on the heavenly door, asking to come in. "Who are you?" - a voice asked. The monk replied: "It's me!" The door did not open. Several years after, he tried again. While he was knocking, the same voice asked him: "Who are you?" "It's me!" - replied the monk. Again, the door -remained closed. At the end, he went there again. This time, he was older and much wiser as a Christian. When he heard the voice "Who are you?" the monk replied: "You are in me!", the voice replied: 'Come in!'

You are in me.

When someone asks: Who is a true Christian?

There are a lot of answers. A Christian is a person who acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, and who adapts his life according to the teachings of Christ. He is baptized and belongs to the Church. He loves his enemies and prays for those who persecute him. He receives and participates in the Holy Sacraments. He prays daily. He devotes his life to Jesus Christ, and to others.

All these answers are good but incomplete, because one of the most important elements of a true Christian is missing. A true Christian is the one in whom Christ lives. You are in me!

The Holy Apostle Paul expressed this when he said: "It is no longer I live, but Christ lives in me." (Gal. 2:16-18). And our Lord Jesus Christ confirmed this when He said: "I

am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." (John 15:5). "He who eats My flesh *and* drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him." (John 6:56).

You are in me.

The center of faith of Holy Apostle Paul is not only in justification by faith, as some may point out. The center of his faith is in the union with Christ: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" - this is the entire content of Christianity. "Emanuel, God is with us; Emanuel, God is in us!" The Apostle Paul had a favorite saying: "In Christ!" He used it 164 times in his epistles to express the closeness of his union with Christ.

And today, we do not say that we are in Holy Chrysostom, or in St. Basil, or in St. Sava, but we continue to use the term "In Christ!"

When we do so, we profoundly confess our faith. We proclaim that Christ is not only a mere historical figure, or a great person from the past, but a living God present in us now. He is in us!

Let us pray to Him:

Lord, when I am foreseen, forgotten, or neglected, and my heart continues to be in peace, I know what this is: You are in me.

When my desires go unfulfilled, my suggestions are ignored, and my advice is ridiculed, but I continue to be patient and kind...

When I overcome difficulties, and successfully face hostility...

When I meet and accept any loss, injustice, confusion, calmly and peacefully, I know what this is: You are in me.

When I am satisfied with the little things...

When I return good for evil, when I forgive and turn another cheek...

When I speak only good about others, when I see only goodness in others, I know what this is, oh Lord: You are in me.

When I help others, when I go the extra mile, when I do more than is expected, when I speak the truth, when I live the truth, I know, I know what this is, oh Lord: You are in me.

To You we give glory unto ages of ages. Amen.