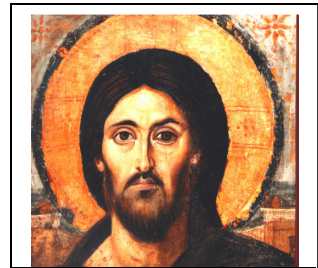


Religious Ed Sundays

A program of the Religious Education Team of St. Catherine



This icon, from St. Katherine's Monastery on Mt. Sinai, depicts Jesus Christ with two different looks on His face: One is of a loving man, and the other is a fearful judge.

ORTHODOXY – TRUE WORSHIP

What you will learn today, Key Themes:

- Worshiping our King and God above
- Exploring God's nearness in worship
- God who is above us is also God who is with us

“As a friend talking to his friend, man speaks with God, and drawing near in confidence he stands before the face of the One who dwells in light unapproachable.”

St. Symeon the New Theologian

Sources/Resources

AUDIO FILES:

- Father Lou - Intro to Orthodoxy 1st class – Church Tour
<http://www.stcatherinechurch.org/audio/classes/introduction-to-orthodoxy-fr-lou/>
- Father Evan – Orthodox Potpourri 2nd class – Altar area
<http://www.stcatherinechurch.org/audio/classes/orthodox-potpourri/>

SCRIPTURE RESOURCES:

- The Book of Hebrews chapters 9 and 10 – heavenly worship
- The Nativity Gospel - Luke 2: 1-20

GOARCH WEBSITE RESOURCES: <http://www.goarch.org>

- Worship & Liturgical texts

DIVINE LITURGY RED BOOK – Introduction to Divine Liturgy by Alkiviades Calivas

BOOKS*

- * We shall see Him as He is – Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov
- * On prayer - Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov
- * The Orthodox Way – Bishop Kallistos Ware

* Items with asterisk can be found in the St. Catherine bookstore

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- **Worshiping our King and God above**

“Come let us worship our King and God, come let us worship and fall down before Christ, our King and our God, come, let us worship and fall down before Christ himself, our King and our God.” Thus is the Church inviting us to worship our Almighty God, during Church services, and our behavior in the presence of such a King should match the invitation.

Our God is a totally Awesome God! Overwhelming in His Mighty Power! Breathtakingly Glorious in His Splendor! Unsurpassed in the passionate depth of His Mercy and Love! Majestic in Holiness, Awesome in Glory! If we try to describe the Infinite, Eternal, Transcendent, Sovereign, Omnipotent God as He Truly Is, we soon run out of superlatives for He is the Indescribable One, Magnificent beyond the farthest stretches of our imagination.

Let us ask ourselves one single question: If we would hear about such a King on earth how would we prepare to meet him and how would we behave in his presence?

And again the Church is inviting us: *“With the fear of God, love and faith draw near”*
Let us take a quick look at the three spiritual states the Church is inviting us to:

- ◆ **Fear** - the only fear we should have in our hearts is the fear of proving unworthy of such a Majestic, Awesome, Loving Lord and King.
- ◆ **Love** – It is in our nature to return love to the ones who loves us. How much more then, should we give our entire hearts to the One who IS Love? 1 John 4:8
- ◆ **Faith** – “I believe O Lord and Confess the You are truly the Christ, the Son of the Living God, who came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the first.”
- ◆ **Draw near** – “He who in obedience and humility draws near to the Lord Jesus Christ will never desire to be separated from Him. (St. Nicholai Velimirovich)

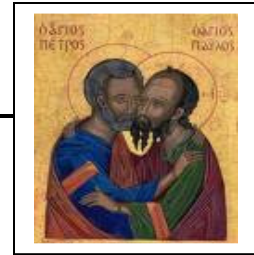
If our hearts are set aright then our worship, our attitudes and behaviors will also be set aright and then the name Orthodoxy – the True Worship, will become a way of life and not just the name of a Church or a set of teachings.

Activities:

- Read together with your family and/or friends psalm 102 and 103 and meditate on God’s awesomeness but also on His nearness.
- Think about ways we show reverence and respect in front of our Lord and King. Some examples are – full prostrations, or prostrations from the waist, bowing our heads, prayerfully standing in front of the altar, kneeling etc.

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- **Exploring God's nearness in worship**

While it is appropriate to speak about God in terms that evoke our sense of awe, respect, and wonder. It is also necessary and healthy spiritually speaking to understand God in terms that relate to God's nearness and the intimacy we should feel in worshipping Him. Although we say that God is our King, Mighty Lord, Creator of the Universe, we must also affirm that He is our loving Father, the Good Shepherd, and the One who dwells within the hearts of every believer. We also affirm that God dwells in the heavens, that He alone is truly Holy and we can never hope to understand the depths of Him nor the true nature of His being. Yet, God is also inside of us, He lives inside our hearts, runs through our veins, animates our thoughts, and because of His life-giving Spirit we live and draw breath each day!

Our faith teaches and reminds us of God's closeness and deep love for us. Our faith reminds us of God's desire to be in relationship with us and dwell inside of us. In fact, in Church we take part in and observe many things that witness to God as the loving Father our Daddy (Abba)¹, and the God who is the Good Shepherd who knows and calls each of His sheep by name.

Can you think of some of the ways we are reminded of God's nearness in worship? From the moment we enter Church we begin to participate in the worship of the Church. After lighting a candle, we kiss a member of God's family, St. Catherine, as a sign of our love for her and for God. During the Liturgy we are asked to love on another so that with one mind we may confess, that, "Christ is in our midst." And as we respond to this command we embrace those around us with a holy kiss. We are also reminded that God is with us and that all of His loved ones surround us when we look around our Church and see the beautiful icons that show God's saints who stand with us in Christ. We also see our heavenly King standing among us, we see Christ our God standing next to St. John the Baptist on the icon screen. Our God lives among His people and stands next to them because He loves them and invites them to stand with Him.

There is one more powerful way that confirms our God's deep desire and love for us: Holy Communion. In the chalice brought out by our priests there is the very Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. Each Divine Liturgy we have the great opportunity to receive God inside of us! Can you imagine what a special thing this truly is? The God and Creator of the Universe comes to live inside His creation, you and me. This is truly a wonderful thing, but more importantly it is the ultimate sign of God's desire to be close to us and to be near to us. When we receive Holy Communion, God comes to live in us, His Body enters ours, and His Blood flows through our veins! Truly our God is inside each of us, and His ultimate desire is to live a close relationship of love with every one of His beloved children.

¹ When we recite the "Our Father" we are bringing to mind this reality, that the God who lives in the heavens is also our loving Daddy.

Activities:

Think of the other ways we learn that God is among us, close to us in worship. Make a list and discuss them. Talk about Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for us. Discuss the mystery of the Eucharist (read John 6.51-59). Read and discuss the parable of the Prodigal Son, 15:11-32, and the parable Good Shepherd John 10: 1-16.

Things to consider:

Our Church is a special and holy place; as a result we should act appropriately. How do you think we can show our deep respect and love for God's house? Certain actions in Church help us to understand God's desire to be with us, close to us? What actions do this and how can we further our understanding of these things by the way we act? Maybe we aren't sure of how to behave in Church, what things are ok and what things are not, make a list of do's and don'ts and discuss them.



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- **God who is above us is also God who is with us**

As we have established, Orthodoxy literally means “True Worship”. Our true worship or true approach to God is one whereby we approach Him in humility. Remember the Parable of the Publican (Tax Collector) and the Pharisee. Even though the Publican was a sinner, God heard his prayer because he approached in honesty and humility, recognizing his sin with the heartfelt words, “Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner.” When one recognizes God’s greatness, compared to us, we approach God in awe. God, on the other hand loves us so much that He responds to our approach with tender love and compassion, like a loving parent.

We are to give our best to God. Even more than this, God always is there for us as a loving, compassionate parent. In fact, that is why Jesus came to live with us and save us. He did not wait until we were worthy of Him, but came while we were still sinners. “We love God because He first loved us.” (1 John 4:19). So really it is through the love of God FIRST, which we experience through Jesus, that our desire approach God with awe, deep love and respect grows.

The context of how we worship and act within the Church, the temple, is a balance between God who is completely above us, unapproachable yet at the same time God who is with us, “Emmanuel.” We then enter His “House” like we might enter the house of a King or Queen, or the President of the United States. We would enter their house with awe, dressed in our best, with our best manners. The splendor of such a visit would be something that we would talk about for years. Now imagine if the King, Queen or President came and sat down with us and treated us like we were the most special of people, with a unique familiarity, kindness, and love. Wouldn’t we feel so special?

At that moment, this awesome experience would become deeply personal. And so it is with our entrance into our Lord’s House. We could add that this same awe, balanced with familiar love, is the essence of our personal approach to God in private and corporate prayer.

When we approach God in worship, we give our very best. When we do this, we not only honor God, but we honor His image within us as we are created to be Godly. Let’s always keep this in mind, not only in Church, but also in our personal prayer life. With this in mind, let’s give God our very best—our best love, our best manners, our best respect. Let us approach Holy Communion just as we would the greatest King that ever lived—because that is exactly what IS happening. Let us prepare in humility. When we receive our piece of bread after Holy Communion or at the end of Church, let’s eat carefully trying not to drop any crumbs. As we cross ourselves, do it slowly with love and respect—offering our best to God.

Activities:

- 1) Read The Nativity Gospel (Luke 2:1-20) and discuss how God who is above us becomes one of us.
- 2) Look at the icons in the Church of Jesus—The Ruler of the Universe (in the dome) showing God—above us, and the icon of Mary with Jesus in the Altar apse showing how God took on flesh from Mary and came to live with us. Discuss God's great love for us.
- 3) The next time you receive Holy Communion, discuss the unimaginable miracle that takes place as we receive in our bodies, Jesus who with the Father and the Holy Spirit created EVERYTHING in the whole wide world.