

Key Aspects of Orthodox Spirituality

Feasts of the Orthodox Church

Pascha and the Paschal Cycle (Lent—Holy Week—Pascha—Ascension—Pentecost)

Nativity-Epiphany Cycle

Other Christocentric Feasts: Transfiguration, Elevation of the Cross

Feasts of Mary: Nativity, Entrance in the Temple, Annunciation, Dormition (Assumption)

Major Saints' Feasts: John the Baptist, Peter & Paul & Apostles, etc. etc. etc.

Icons — not only in churches, but in homes for private and family devotions. We have already looked at many examples of icons and explored some of the spirituality of icons.

Veneration of Mary and the Saints goes hand-in-hand with veneration of icons.

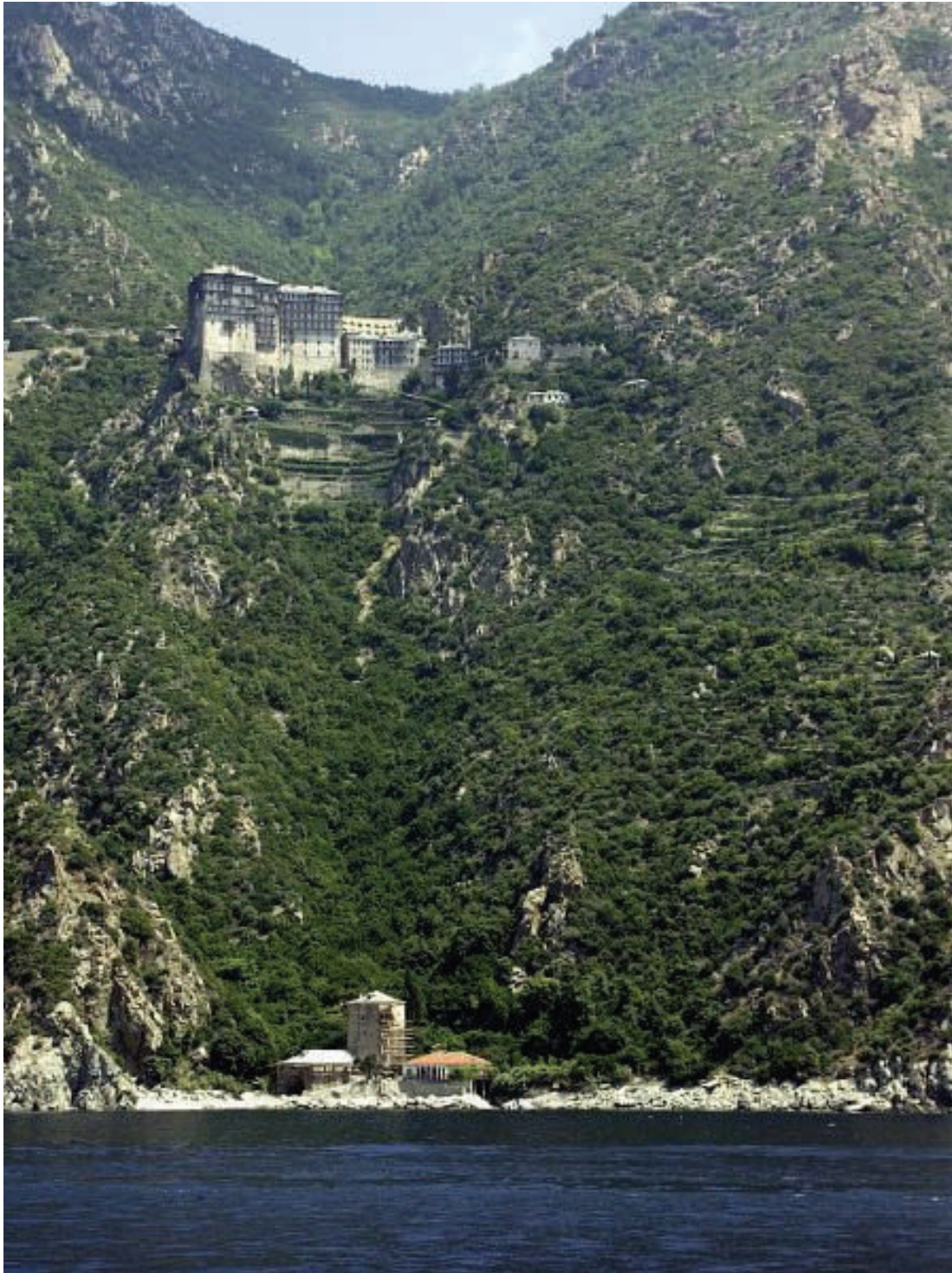
Fasting according to ancient rules that are very rigid. Most people do not follow rules of fasting strictly — modification and application of rules to everyday life is an essentially Orthodox approach.

Personal Prayer can take many forms. Widespread use of prayer books.

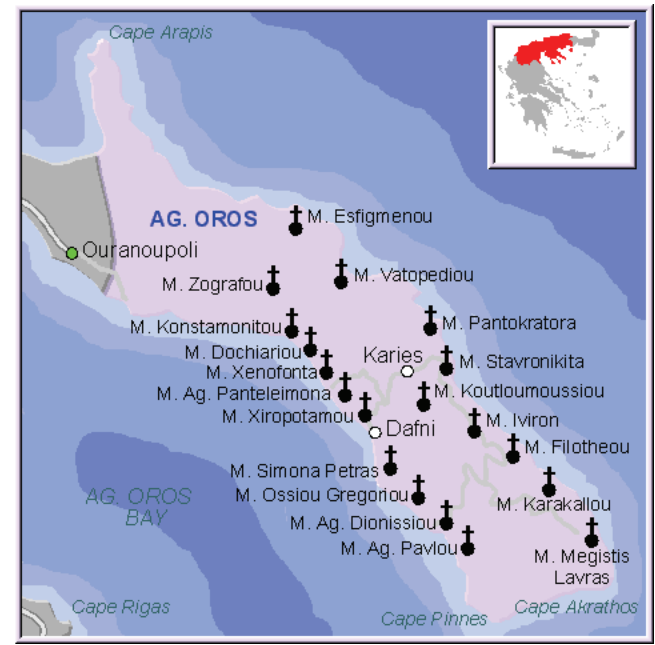
“Before all else, let us first list sincere thanksgiving on the scroll of our prayer. On the second line, we should place confession and heartfelt contrition of the soul. Finally, let us present our petition to God. This has been shown to be the best way of prayer.”

Ladder of Divine Ascent, St. John Climacus

The Jesus Prayer has become one of the most widely used and discussed forms of prayer. Its wording is usually “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me,” and other versions that are shorter or longer than the standard form. It is often prayed on a prayer rope. The most famous description and exploration of its meaning are found in the 19th-century anonymous Russian book, *The Way of a Pilgrim*. It is a classic of Orthodox literature.



MOUNT ATHOS













Panoramic Views of Meteora Monasteries

Key Aspects of Monastic Spirituality

Philokalia and other literature going all the way back to the beginning of the 4th century, when Anthony left the worldly church and fled to the Egyptian desert, where Christian monasticism began.

Hesychasm was the system of prayer and contemplation that developed over the centuries, especially on Mount Athos, which remains to this day the primary centre of Orthodox monasticism.

Nepsis is the Greek word for the key concept of watchfulness, awareness, wakefulness — the opposite of the sleepy, unaware state that most people live their lives. The person who is spiritually awake lives in the present moment with **discernment**, another key aspect of spirituality.

Warfare against the passions is the constant activity of the monk who aims to attain spiritual and bodily purity. The ultimate goal is *apatheia*, passionlessness, or freedom from the passions. This is not the same as apathy! As a matter of fact, it's the exact opposite, as a person who attains to *apatheia* is more likely to be open to the needs of others. The person who has attained to purity from the self and the needs of the self can literally burn with love for God and the neighbor. Such a person sees the whole world as a sacrament of God's presence.

The apophatic way is the primary path of contemplation in the Orthodox tradition. It involves the laying aside of all thoughts, concepts and images in order to encounter God in the darkness of unknowing. It is the way of negation. Union with God takes place through the *uncreated energies* of God. We are deified by participating in the energies of God. These energies are a way of describing our union with God in his *nearness* while still affirming his *otherness*.

Beginnings of Christian Church & Faith

Experience and Memory of Christ

30-80 AD preached and lived in the first Christian communities

65-95 AD recorded in four Gospels, several letters by Paul and other apostles and early Christians.

Formation of New Testament Canon c. 200-350 AD

Gnostic Gospels, other writings which did not make it into NT

Beginning of Prayer and Worship forms

Baptismal Creeds and Eucharistic Forms

Beginnings of Christian Theology: 2nd Century

Martyrdom c. 100-300 → Cultic Veneration

Construction of Churches and shrines

c. 300 onwards Ecclesiastical institutionalization 7 Ecumenical Councils — Creeds

Rise of Sainthood → Churches and shrines

Expansion of Sacramental & Worship Forms Iconographic & Hymnographic Sophistication



The Five Ancient Centers of Orthodoxy

Latin West: Rome — Greek East: Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem

Historical Outline of the Orthodox Church

Substantial unity of the church during first 800 years — but growing differences in church administration and ritual. Language barriers grew stronger.

800 AD Enthronement of Charlemagne as Emperor in the West

Mid-9th century Photian Schism was the first serious break in communion between East and West. *Papal primacy* became an increasingly divisive issue.

989 Baptism of Prince Vladimir and beginning of the Russian Church.

1014 The *filioque* was officially accepted by Pope Benedict VIII, after previous popes had refused to endorse it.

1054 Mutual excommunication of Rome and Constantinople. This is the conventional dating of the split between East and West, a split which endures to the present. Attempts at healing the schism were thwarted by the politics of the day.

1204 Diverting of the Fourth Crusade to Constantinople & Sacking of the City. In the minds of the Orthodox this was the proof that the schism could not be healed.

1439 Council of Florence was a failed attempt at reconciliation. Most Orthodox representatives caved in to pressure and acknowledged the Pope as “supreme head of Christendom,” but the Orthodox Church as a whole rejected this council.

1453 Fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks. Much of the Orthodox East was under Ottoman rule for centuries. Centre of power in the Orthodox East shifted to Moscow.

1821 Greek War of Independence begins. Greek Church became *autocephalous* in 1850.

1965 Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras lifted anathemas of 1054. Great Schism between Catholic West and Orthodox East remain.

The Eternal State

Spirituality is an activity for the present life. It is a way of tasting the eternal kingdom while living in the world. Words are important because the Word became flesh and came to us. But the language of the eternal kingdom is *silence*! The apophatic way of union with God entails a freedom not only from images and concepts, but a freedom from words.

Eschatology is the branch of theology that deals with the end times and the things of the end. The Orthodox Church does not subscribe to any predictions about when the end will come. All forms of millenarianism, *chiliasm*, are branded as heretical. Eternity will be ushered in by the **Resurrection of the Dead** and the **Last Judgment**, after which people will be consigned to heavenly bliss or eternal punishment in hell. The eternal kingdom is identical with the eternal state of the saved. This is the *aion*, the age to come.

But what comes in between? What happens to the soul immediately after death? Here the church is reticent because Christ himself was reticent and the Bible says little on this subject. It is clear that a separation does take place after death, and some experience distance from God while others experience the presence of God (see Luke 16:22-26). The latter are in a place of light, of repose and refreshment, where there is no pain, sorrow or suffering.

“Neither the structure nor the substance of creation is destroyed. It is only the outward form of this world that passes away — that is to say, the conditions produced by the fall. And when this outward form has passed away, man will be renewed and will flourish in a prime of life that is incorruptible, so that it is no longer possible for him to grow old any more. There will be ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ (Revelation 21:1); and in this new heaven and new earth man shall abide, for ever new and for ever conversing with God.” (St. Irenaeus of Lyons, c. 130-200) Man is not saved *from* creation, but *with* creation! The final manifestation of man as *microcosm* and mediator.