

Group B (7-12 years old) - October 2014

The Holy Church

1. The Church – definitions, names.

a) The Church: the community of faithful who were baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity and remained in communion with God and each other through prayer and partaking of the Holy Spirit through the Holy Sacraments celebrated by the canonically ordained clergy: priests and bishops. (see the parable of the Vine and the branches; other names: The Body of Christ, the Kingdom of God, the Bride of Christ)

b) the church – the building/place especially built and consecrated through a special service by the bishop, where the faithful come to pray together and receive the grace of the Holy Spirit. (other names: the House of God, the ark of salvation)

The Church as the community of the faithful or the communion of people with God.

“Behold, I am with you always to the close of ages.” If two or three are gathered in My name, there I will be in their midst.” “He who remains in Me will have eternal life.”

-the establishment of the Church: invisibly, by Christ on the Cross, where, through His Passion, all faithful have been, objectively, redeemed; visibly, on the Pentecost, when the grace of the Holy Spirit has been conferred upon the Apostles, according the Christ’s promise and when the 3000 people were baptized and formed the first Christian community in Jerusalem.

-the mission of the Church: the sanctification of her faithful, their union with Christ and their salvation through teaching, guiding and conferring of the saving grace. “Apart from the Church there is no salvation...” “He who does not have the Church as his mother cannot have God as his Father” (St. Ciprian of Carthage).

-the spread and growth of the Church in the world: “Go, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. He who believes and is baptized will be saved...”

-Church members.

The militant Church - the living members of the Church: clergy and lay people.

The triumphant Church - the Church in heaven: angels, saints, faithful who have fallen asleep in the Lord.

The characteristics of the Church:

One – the Church is One and Unique because there is only One God, who dwells in her. The Orthodox Church is the true Church (“orthos” + “doxa” = the right believing);

Holy – because her head is Holy and her work is holy.

Catholic (Universal) – operates on the conciliar principle; all theological and



dogmatic teachings are decided by the gathering of all bishops, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Apostolic – it has been established on the Gospel of Christ, preached by the Apostles. (Apostolic succession: all clergy can trace their ordination back to the Apostles).

Church organization: based on territorial and/or national principle, but preserving the unity in faith and dogma (the same unchanged Creed from the Apostles and the intercessory prayer):

- the parish – the faithful from a particular district, town or village, lead by the parish Council and the priest.
- The eparchy/diocese/archdiocese – the faithful of many parishes from a particular territory: city, county, province, lead by a diocesan Council and the bishop/archbishop.
- The Metropolia and Patriarchy – the faithful of a province or country, lead by a Metropolitan/Patriarchal Council and a metropolitan/patriarch.

-Life in the Church:

-the admission into the Church is through confession of faith and Baptism.

-in order to remain in the Church one must obey the divine commandments and the rules of the Church; those who disobey and refuse to repent are excommunicated in order to eliminate their influence on the other members of the Church.

-when such a person returns to the fold, they must show contrition and humility before they are re-instated.

Story 1: An old and wise man was rewarded with the privilege of visiting Paradise and Hades. In Hades he saw sad men and women, very skinny, sitting around a huge, tempting mound of rice. They were starving because they had to use spoons with very long handles.

In Paradise, he saw men and women sitting around a platter of rice, using also spoons with very long handles. However, they were all happy and joyful, because they used their spoons to feed each other.

Story 2: Having exhausted (to no avail) all ways and means to get his parishioners to be involved in the life of the parish, a parish priest found the right solution: in the Obituary section of the newspapers he posted the following announcement: "Subsequent to a long and painful suffering, our parish has died. The funeral service will take place next Sunday at 10:00 am in our church."

Many parishioners have read the announcement with amazement and interest. Out of curiosity, many came to church in such a number that around 9:30 there was no more room available. At the specified time, the service began. First, the priest asked the people to approach the casket and view the deceased. Then, they were to exit the



church through the side doors and decide whether to come back in or go home. In perfect silence the parishioners followed the instructions and out of so many, only a few went home. What did they see when they looked into the casket? They saw themselves since a mirror had been placed into the casket. As a result, the mournful atmosphere turned into a joyful celebration because the dead parish was alive again.

2. The Church – the house of God and the place of worship for the faithful; the component parts.

In the beginning, Christians used to pray in private homes and when the persecutions intensified, they gathered in hidden places: mountains, caves, catacombs, in the middle of the night or early in the morning. After 313, when Emperor Constantine the Great granted liberty to Christians, they began to build churches.

Churches are built in a special way and are dedicated by the bishop. Churches can be built in the form of an ark (the Church is the ark which helps us to the other side of the stormy sea of life, to the shore of salvation: the Kingdom of God) or a cross (in memory of our Lord Jesus Christ who established His Church on the Cross.)

The roof is provided with at least one steeple, signifying the final destination of all Christians: the dwelling place of God the Father. At the very top of the steeple, a cross is mounted, which stands as an indication of Christ's infinite love for us, for through His Cross He brought the reconciliation between heaven and earth and opened the heavenly kingdom for us. Therefore, through the Cross, the kingdom of God descends in our churches through the holy services.

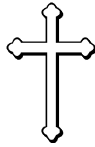
The church's interior and, sometimes, exterior walls, as well as the ceiling are painted with icons, which speak to us about the activity of Jesus Christ and depict the personalities who became saints through their exemplary life.

The church's interior is divided into three sections: the pre-nave, the nave and the altar. Some churches have a narthex.

The pre-nave is the section of the church where some services are performed and where certain church objects are kept: the baptismal font. In the early church, this was the place for those who had not been baptized yet.

The nave, as the largest part of the church, is the place for those who were baptized. A chandelier is suspended from the ceiling, symbolizing the divine light which descends upon the faithful. Along the walls of the nave there are seats where people, especially the older folks, the sick and the children can rest during certain times of the service. Closer to the altar, there are seats for the church chanters.

The Altar is the most important part of the church, where the clergy perform the most important services. The Altar is separated from the nave by a wall with icons, called iconostasis. On the left side in the Altar there is a special corner, called the prothesis, where the priest prepares the Eucharistic elements of bread and wine, which during the Divine Liturgy become the Body and Blood of Christ. In the center of the Altar is the Holy Table, the



most important object in the church, where the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ through the invocation of the Holy Spirit by the priest. The Holy Table has one leg, in the center, where the list with the names of the church founders is placed on the day of consecration.

Only clergy and some men, who have the permission of the priest can enter the Altar. On the day of the church's consecration all people are permitted to enter the Altar.

3. The Church – objects for services; Rules for conduct in Church.

In order to celebrate Church services, certain objects are necessary. Most of them are kept in the Altar and the priest brings them out when needed. Other objects are kept in the main part of the church.

The most important objects are the ones on the Holy Table:

Holy Antemension – is a square cloth depicting the burial of Christ, provided with a little pocket where a piece of a relic is inserted. Each church must have an Antemension, which has been blessed by the bishop and given to the priest. The Divine Liturgy cannot be celebrated without an Antemension.

The Gospel Book – contains parts of the four Gospels, conveying the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, which are read by the priest according to an old established practice.

The Crucifixion Cross- is a big wooden cross, depicting the Crucifixion of our Saviour, located just behind the Holy Table. It reminds us about the Passion of Christ for us. This Cross is brought in the middle of the church on Holy Thursday night.

The Cross – a smaller size, made from wood or metal and is used by the priest to bless the faithful and for blessing of the water.

The Tabernacle – is a church miniature where the Holy Communion (in a dry state) is kept, for emergency: the sick and children.

Candle holders - are supports for candles, which remind us that "the light of Christ shines for all." The candle holders can have 1, 2, 3 or 7 arms, symbolizing the fact that God is one, Christ had two natures (divine and human) the Holy Trinity, and the 7 Sacraments or the 7 days of creation.

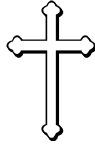
The following objects can be found at the Prothesis:

The Chalice – a large stemmed metal cup adorned with engravings and decorations, which holds the wine for the Holy Eucharist, which is given to the faithful.

The Diskos – a stemmed flat metal platter holding the bread for the Holy Communion.

The Spear – a spear shaped metal object, very sharp, used by the priest to prepare the Communion bread. It reminds of the spear used by the Roman soldier to pierce the side of Christ on the Cross.

The Communion Spoon – is used to give Communion to the faithful. All faithful receive Communion with one spoon as a sign of our unity in God; it cannot be contaminated as it holds the Holy Eucharist.



Other Church objects:

The Baptismal Font – a large metal container used for Christenings.

Icon stands – are made from wood, beautifully carved, supporting the icons for veneration.

Icons – depict our Lord and Savior, the Holy Virgin, angels or saints as well as biblical scenes, reminding us of their lives and facilitating our dialogue with them in prayer. There are also icons on the church walls (murals) which serve the same purpose. The icons are blessed by the priest with special prayers and holy water.

Priestly vestments – are specially made and adorned, blessed and worn by the clergy during the Church services.

Rules of conduct in Church

One of the basic rules concerning the religious objects is the respect, preservation and proper use of the sacred objects. These objects should never be used for anything else than their destination and by the proper people. Stealing these objects is a serious moral offence.

People who donate and adorn the churches with these sacred objects are considered founders and the Church acknowledges their contribution during the Divine Liturgy, praying for "those who love the beauty of God's house."

There are also rules concerning the physical and spiritual preparation of those who attend the Church services and especially the Divine Liturgy: private prayers, proper hygiene and attire, not being a distraction to others and being quiet throughout the services.