

On Pious Behavior in Church

Archpriest Victor Potapov

St. John the Baptist Cathedral ~ Washington, DC

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[Edited for Sts. Sergius and Herman Monastery]

Our prayer in church is communal prayer, in which both clergy and laity participate. All of us, the clergy and the laity, comprise the visible, earthly Church. In the church building, we see before us icons of those who are invisibly present: the Mother of God, Queen of Heaven and the earth, along with those others whom the Church has glorified. And the Head of the Church, our High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, himself sits on the Throne in the Altar, in the form of His Body and Blood.

With what reverence and trembling ought we to stand before such a most sublime assembly! The Church of God is the House of God, and in it a particularly prayerful atmosphere ought to reign. Not only do the clergy and the singers bear responsibility for this, but so does each individual person praying. Loud conversations in church, very much disturb those who are trying to delve into the words of the divine service and those who are attempting to "collect their soul" for confession. It is not only loud conversations that disturb the peace of the church. Not infrequently one cannot help but notice that even during the most important points in the Divine Services, some people (especially young people) are standing in church with their hands in their pockets, or are crossing - in front of the reader or the priest - from one side of the church to the other, or are sitting on a bench with their legs crossed. This is absolutely impermissible. Parents will sometimes give an entire prosphora even to quite small children, who then drop crumbs all over the floor; people walk on these crumbs and thereby involuntarily trample the sanctified bread. Would it not be better for parents themselves to give their children prosphora a piece at a time, and see to it that they do not drop crumbs? Sometimes children come to church with chewing gum in their mouths. We ask parents to instill in their children the understanding that this is completely impermissible.

To preserve decorum in the church, we remind everyone of a few of the rules of outward prayerful behavior:

- One should come to church in time for the beginning of the divine service.
- On entering the church, one should sign oneself thrice with the sign of the cross.
- One should not sit on the floor, nor put holy things on it such as candles, icons, etc. When venerating icons, one crosses yourself twice with a bow each time, then a kiss of veneration, then a bow and cross a third time. Women should not wear lipstick which can damage the icons. Men should not wear hats within the Church, and women are encouraged to wear a head covering as the Apostle Paul mentions as an apostolic practice.
- Ancient church custom establishes that men are to stand on the right side and women on the left.
- No conversations are permitted in the Temple of God, either during the divine service or after its conclusion.
- In church, handshakes are superfluous and unnecessary, and kissing of women's hands is completely impermissible.
- The faithful are to come to church in attire appropriate to their gender. Some attire that may be permissible to wear on the street or at the beach is completely unacceptable in church, and one may under no circumstances come to divine services so attired: Immodest clothing violates the decorum of the church's setting. It is impermissible for women to be at services dressed in short dresses (i.e. hemline above the knee), in trousers or in apparel with shoulders and arms uncovered. We encourage all to not wear clothing with a lot of logos, etc, that draw attention to oneself in the Church.
- Those who have come to the divine service late should move forward quietly, without pushing those who are praying.
- One should not move about, buy or place candles, or venerate icons during the following most important points in the divine services:

At the All-Night Vigil:

- ❖ During the entrance of the priest or deacon with the censer at Vespers.
- ❖ During the reading of the Six Psalms. During the reading it is forbidden to place candles (when all the lights in the church are turned off).
- ❖ When the priest comes out with the Holy Gospel and during the reading of the Gospel at Matins.
- ❖ During the singing of "More honorable than the Cherubim" and the Great Doxology ("Glory to God in the highest").

At the Liturgy:

- ❖ During the Little [with the Gospel] and the Great [with the Chalice] Entrances.
- ❖ During the prayer for Ukraine and America.
- ❖ During the reading of the Epistles and the Gospels.
- ❖ During the singing of the Cherubic Hymn [from the words: "Let us who mystically represent the Cherubim" until the final three-fold singing of "Alleluia."]
- ❖ During the Eucharistic Canon [from the exclamation: "The doors! The doors! In wisdom, let us attend!"; throughout the singing of the Symbol of Faith: "I believe in one God..."; throughout the whole Canon, when "A mercy of peace" is sung, until the conclusion of the hymn to the Theotokos: "It is truly meet...", or if it is a feast, until the conclusion of the hymn (zadostoinik) sung in its stead]. This is the part of the Liturgy at which to show greatest reverence; throughout this whole time there is to be no walking about the church or extinguishing of candles.
- ❖ During the singing of "Our Father".