

**ST. SAVA SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH**  
ISSAQUAH, WA  
PRIEST'S GREETING – FEBRUARY 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Recently I met a young man who is not baptized, but was curious about the Christian Faith since he came from an Orthodox tradition. He was confused about Christianity in general because so many “churches” claim to be Christian. His basic question was, “What is the true Christian Church?”

This young man was lacking a basic understanding of the Christian Faith. He was aware that the Bible was a very important book and that whatever form of worship people participated in had to be consistent with the Bible. Fundamentally, this is true, but he was missing a very important point, and that was that in the Holy Tradition of the Church, the Bible is just one element – in written form. He wasn't aware that the Bible is a part of Holy Tradition and that Holy Tradition existed before the Bible, as we know it in the form of the Old and New Testaments.

If one wants to understand the true Christian Church, one has to study the history and teachings of the Church from the earliest times. The Orthodox Church has evolved, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, into the form we recognize today. However, this evolution is not out of the context of the original teachings of the Church. Unfortunately, from the 11<sup>th</sup> c. to the present day, starting with the Christians in the West (Roman Catholics), the Christians of the West changed many teachings and practices of the Original Christian Church making them inconsistent with the original teachings of the Church. The Eastern Church at that time (today the Orthodox Church) has not changed its fundamental teachings, forms of worship and practices.

All too often, living in this pluralistic society, with no understanding of the Ancient Church, people tend to think that it's all the same. If the word “Christian” is attached to the name of a “church”, it should be valid. However, as reported recently in U.S. News and World Report, many Roman Catholics as well as Protestants are looking for a more traditional form of worship – liturgical, because their current form seems empty to them. This growing trend in this country is an indication that there is something fundamentally wrong with current Roman Catholic and Protestant theology. To worship God does not mean that we are to entertain ourselves during worship services, which is often the case in such churches.

For us who are cradle Orthodox or not baptized but who grew up in a quasi-Orthodox environment, it isn't enough just to go through the motions pretending to be an Orthodox believer. This is especially true for those who are baptized. To be baptized and not practice the Faith into which you were baptized is an unfortunate state of affairs and definitely does nothing for one's soul. For children who are at the mercy of their parents, the parents will answer to God for their lack of attention to raising their children in the Faith. If the parents themselves don't follow the teachings and practices of the Orthodox Faith, how are they any different from Roman Catholics and Protestants, who massaged the teachings and practices of the True Church to suit their personal needs?

The young man I met is an inquirer because he is looking for something substantive in his life. He is being proactive. For someone not to be interested to know God means that the person is totally entrapped in the cares of this world, which promotes being self-centered. When things go bad, all a person does is complain about others, not realizing that God can help him out of his misery and give meaning to his life.

When Jesus was assembling His apostles, He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” (Jn 1:43) Then Philip found Nathaniel and said to him, “We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. And, Nathaniel said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” (Jn 1:45-46) Here is an example of how people can be confused about what to believe without a thorough understanding of history or circumstances. After Nathaniel met Christ, he acknowledged that, “You are the Son of God!” (Jn 1:49)

My dear Brothers and Sisters, come to our Holy Church and see what the true Faith is all about. Don't rely on what you hear on the streets. Here you will find the Christ and be united with Him and know that you have come back to your true home.

Your servant in Christ,

Fr. Ilija Balach  
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