

Why do Orthodox Christians use incense in their worship?

Because it's Biblical!

Incense and the Altar of Incense in the Old Testament

The Book of Exodus, chapter 30

¹ "Make an altar of acacia wood for burning incense. ² It is to be square, a cubit long and a cubit wide, and two cubits high—its horns of one piece with it. ³ Overlay the top and all the sides and the horns with pure gold, and make a gold molding around it. ⁴ Make two gold rings for the altar below the molding—two on opposite sides—to hold the poles used to carry it. ⁵ Make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. ⁶ Put the altar in front of the curtain that is before the ark of the Testimony—before the atonement cover that is over the Testimony—where I will meet with you.

⁷ "Aaron must burn fragrant incense on the altar every morning when he tends the lamps. ⁸ He must burn incense again when he lights the lamps at twilight so incense will burn regularly before the LORD for the generations to come.

³⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Take fragrant spices—gum resin, onycha and galbanum—and pure frankincense, all in equal amounts, ³⁵ and make a fragrant blend of incense, the work of a perfumer. It is to be salted and pure and sacred. ³⁶ Grind some of it to powder and place it in front of the Testimony in the Tent of Meeting, where I will meet with you. It shall be most holy to you. ³⁷ Do not make any incense with this formula for yourselves; consider it holy to the LORD.

Incense in heavenly worship around the Throne of the Lamb in eternity

The Book of Revelation, chapters 5 & 8



⁶ Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders (presbyters). ⁷ He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. ⁸ And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders (presbyters) fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

³ Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the

throne. ⁴The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand.

Why do Orthodox Christians anoint people with blessed oil for healing and the forgiveness of sins?

Because it's Biblical!

The Gospel of Mark, chapter 6

Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. ⁷Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits. ¹²They went out and preached that people should repent. ¹³They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

The Letter of James, chapter 5

¹³Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. ¹⁴Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders (presbyters) of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

Why do Orthodox Christians go to confession with their priest for healing and the forgiveness of sins?

Because it's Biblical!

The First Letter of John, chapter 1

⁸If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we claim we have not sinned, we make God out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

The Gospel of John, chapter 20

¹⁹On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. ²¹Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." ²²And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Why does the Orthodox Church have bishops, presbyters and deacons ?

Because it's Biblical!

The First Letter of Paul to Timothy, chapter 3



¹Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being a bishop, he desires a noble task. ²Now the bishop must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. ⁵(If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)

⁶He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. ⁷He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

⁸Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁹They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. ¹²A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. ¹³Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

The Acts of the Apostles, chapter 14

They returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, ²² strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said. ²³ Paul and Barnabas appointed presbyters (elders) for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

The Letter of St. Paul to Titus, chapter 1

⁵ The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint presbyters (elders) in every town, as I directed you. ⁶ A presbyter must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. ⁷ Since a bishop manages God's household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not

violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁸ Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. ⁹ He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

The First Letter of Peter, chapter 2

²⁴ Jesus himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵ For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.

Why do Orthodox Christians believe that we truly receive the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ in communion?

Because it's Biblical!

The Gospel of John, chapter 6



⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

⁵³ Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.

⁵⁶ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever." ⁵⁹ Jesus said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

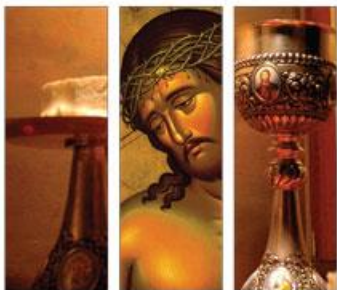
The First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, chapter 10

¹⁶ Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?

¹⁷ Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

The First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, chapter 11

² I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the traditions just as I passed them on to you.



²³For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant (testament) in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you

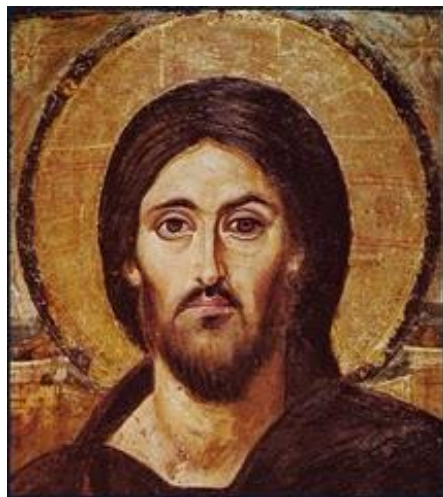
proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Why do Orthodox Christians believe
that receiving the Body and Blood of Jesus in communion
is to be taken so seriously?

Because it's Biblical!

The First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, chapter 11

²⁷Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner is guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. ²⁹For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep (died). ³¹But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.



The 6th century icon of Christ
in St. Katherine's Monastery on Mt. Sinai

Why do Orthodox Christians use icons in their worship?

Because it's Biblical!

The Lord Jesus Himself is described as the Icon of God by St. Paul

The Letter of St. Paul to the Colossians, chapter 1

¹⁵ He (Jesus) is the icon of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

The Second Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, chapter 4

⁴ The god of this age (the devil) has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the icon of God.

Why do we hear the phrase “now and forever and to the ages of ages” so many times in the Liturgy and other Church services?

Because it's Biblical!

The Letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians, chapter 3

²⁰ Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹ to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

The First Letter of St. Paul to Timothy, chapter 1

¹⁷ To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory to the ages of ages. Amen.

The Second Letter of St. Paul to Timothy, chapter 4

¹⁸ The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and bring me safely into His heavenly kingdom. To Him be the glory to the ages of ages. Amen.

The Letter of St. Jude

²⁵ To the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and to the ages of ages. Amen.

The Book of Revelation, chapter 5

¹³ Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: “To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, to the ages of ages.”

Why do we pray “Kyrie eleison” or “Lord, have mercy” so many times in the Liturgy and other Church services?

Because it's Biblical!



The short answer is: because **we take the words of the Bible seriously as a model for our prayer, whether we're praying together as a community or personally.**

For example, we take Scripture verses like Psalm 4:1, 28:2, 41:4, 51:1-2 and 57:1 - that are intensely personal prayers and yet were also part of the communal worship of ancient Israel in both the Temple and the synagogue - as models for our prayer today:

Have mercy upon me and hear my prayer. (Psalm 4:1)

Hear my cry for mercy as I call out to You for help, as I lift up my hands in Your holy Temple. (Psalm 28:2)

I said, “Lord, have mercy on me and heal me for I have sinned against You.” (Psalm 41:4)

Have mercy on me O God, according to Your great mercy, according to Your great compassion, blot out my transgressions. (Psalm 51:1-2)

Have mercy on me O God, have mercy on me, for in You my soul takes refuge. (Psalm 57:1)

“Lord, have mercy” is also based on the cry of the blind man sitting along the side of the road near Jericho: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” (Luke 18:38); the cry of the 10 lepers for healing: “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” (Luke 17:13); and the prayer of the tax collector in the parable that the Lord Jesus told “to some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else” about the tax collector (publican) and the Pharisee: “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” (Luke 18:14). “Lord, have mercy” is a prayer that engenders humility. It enables us to see ourselves more clearly for who we really are and therefore be less harsh and judgmental of others.

The late Metropolitan Anthony Bloom (1914-2003) mentions in his little book, *Beginning to Pray*, that in Greek, the word for mercy has the same root as the word for olive oil, a substance that was used extensively in the ancient world to soothe the pain of wounds, bruises and injuries, as – for example – in the parable of the good Samaritan told by the Lord Jesus (Luke 10:34).

And in Hebrew, the word for mercy is *hesed*, which is often translated into English by the phrase “steadfast love.” In many other languages used by the Church – Slavonic, as well as Russian, Serbian and Romanian – the word for mercy has many related connotations: tenderness, kindness, sweetness, compassion and pity. When we pray for His mercy in the Liturgy by singing “*Lord, have mercy,*” we’re asking God - in His limitless love for us - to soothe our pain by healing the sickness of our hearts and minds and the defects of character that cause it, and to nurture us with His holy love in a way that transforms us into merciful, loving, compassionate and humble people – His people, saints.

And finally, as the Scriptures teach, it is His mercy that will bring us through death to eternal life!

“Keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.” (Jude 1:21)



Praying the Bible in the Liturgy

Orthodox Christians are not merely to read the Bible; we are also to *pray* the Bible. This takes place most clearly and completely in the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom on a Sunday to Sunday basis. Yes, there are two readings from the New Testament during the Liturgy – an Epistle reading from one of the Letters of the apostles Paul, Peter, James and John or other apostolic writings; and a Gospel reading from one of the four evangelists – but we pray the Lord’s Prayer and also sing verses from the Book of Psalms. In the priest’s blessing, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all,” we hear St. Paul’s final farewell to the Church in Corinth (*2 Corinthians 13:13*); and in the choir’s singing of “Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of *Sabaoth*, Heaven and Earth are full of Your glory,” we hear the song of the angelic cherubim first heard by the Old Testament prophet Isaiah in the Temple in Jerusalem (*Isaiah 6:1-5*). The prayers of the Liturgy are full of biblical imagery and shot through with hundreds of Biblical quotes. In fact, the Russian Orthodox theologian, Paul Evdokimov (1902-1970), once calculated that there are 98 quotations from the Old Testament and 114 quotations from the New Testament woven into the prayers of the Liturgy. The language of the Liturgy is the language of the Bible! To come to Liturgy attentively is to learn to pray the Bible!