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Encountering The Beauty Of The Church: The Way Of Love



JONATHAN JACKSON | 10 MARCH 2020

I would like to briefly express what the Orthodox Church means to me, as one who has entered into it later in life. This of course, is impossible to articulate with words, because it is a mystery, but I will speak, like a child in awe.

I am in awe at the Orthodox Church. It’s beauty, its grace. The mystical silence and stillness, which abides here. I am in awe at the purity of the Church’s teachings. The Lives of the Saints and Martyrs, the prayers and hymns of the Church, the Protection of the Panagia. The humility and sanctity of the Holy Mountain. The Icons and writings of the Fathers of the Church. The mercy of the Sacraments, the Christ-like humility of the Priesthood.

Orthodoxy is not a religion. It is Life. It is not a list of rules. It is Mystical Communion with the Holy Trinity. It is actual communion with God and man. In the Orthodox Church there exists the grace of Theosis, Deification and Transfiguration. Icons drip myrrh, relics miraculously heal, Saints are filled with Divine Light, infants receive Holy Communion, Priests confess their own unworthiness as they pray over the penitent before them, the mentally handicapped can be theologians too, because they can pray with purity of heart. The whole world is a Sacrament, for the Spirit of Truth "art everywhere present and fillest all things."

In the Orthodox Church I found a Hospital for the Sick, whereby our wounds, sins and delusions are healed through communion with the Holy Trinity and the "Cloud of Witnesses", (the communion of saints) which radiate the love and truth of God.

Everything can be found here, in the mystic Church; all of the scattered pieces of truth come together in the mysterious joy of communion with God. Nothing has been added to the Holy Tradition and nothing has been taken away. The Church is God-Breathed.

The Way Of Love

Orthodoxy is the Way of Love. Religion without love is an offense to God. We don't pray and fast and give alms and attend vigils to impress God or appease His anger, as if He were some kind of tyrannical pagan deity.

We do these things out of love! We do these things because it draws our hearts closer to Christ. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. When I pray, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, the sinner," I am not praying to change Christ's heart towards me. I am not praying as if God's back is turned to me, out of anger and disapproval—His back is not turned to me at all! He is facing me! He is pursuing me! He has left the ninety-nine to seek out the one lost sheep. Christ is looking at me with infinite love and mercy! Even the very flames of hell are His love. As a father (and dear friend) on the Holy Mountain wrote so beautifully in a poem he shared with me… in the poem Christ says, "I do not hold hell in my hand to threaten…" Tell me, does the world know this Christ? The Christ of the Orthodox Church?

I am the one who has drifted away. I am the one who is repenting, not God. He is the Great Physician… and repentance along with the Jesus Prayer and Holy Communion are the medicine He has given me for the healing of my soul and body. The entire sacramental life of the Church is for our healing and salvation.

I am not changing God in my prayers or worship. He is changing me, by His Grace! Christ is love! The Holy Trinity is Love. God is not petty, harsh and vindictive one day and then gracious, loving and merciful the next. He is Love, everyday, all the time, in every circumstance. The Orthodox Church reveals this to the world and this transforms everything in our lives. By encountering the love of the Holy Trinity, we are continually healed and transformed by Grace into the likeness of Christ. It is God who first loved us! I am in awe at the beauty of the Orthodox Faith.

Orthodoxy is Life, it is the Church of the Resurrection! It is universal and eternal in its union with God. It houses many different and beautiful cultural expressions, but transcends them, because we are all “one in Christ.” The Orthodox Church is not a cultural phenomenon. I am not Russian, Greek, Romanian, Serbian or Arab; I come from a culture that is not Orthodox. And yet somehow, because of the mystery of The Body of Christ, I feel that I am somehow Greek and I am Russian and Romanian… I am one with my brothers and sisters for we share the same blood, the Blood of Christ.

Orthodoxy is divine therapy. It is the true healing offered by Christ Himself. It is His love that heals us. We, as God’s beloved patients, need only receive the medicine of the Great Physician and trust Him with our whole being—this is salvation. If He says the most important thing is to “Love God with all of your heart, mind soul and strength and love your neighbor as yourself” than we should follow that holy prescription! If he says, “Take, eat; this is my body…” And also, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” Then we should do that very thing. He is the Physician; He knows how to cure us! Why should we try to invent other ways to be healed? Could there be anything more profound than to receive the Body and Blood of Christ? Could there be anything more sacred and mysterious?

Orthodoxy is healing, it is our response to Grace and our participation in the Love of the Holy Trinity. It is the Way of Love.

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