

10) Finally, the biggest: Love. God is love, the Evangelist John tells us. Love is the greatest virtue or gift, writes the Apostle Paul. Jesus Christ showed us how to love. He gave us a New Commandment to love our neighbor as more than our self. The mysteries and discipline of the Orthodox Church encourage and guide us into this.

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Ten Things I Love About You: The Orthodox Church as the Fullness of Christianity



In preparing a prison inmate for Orthodox Christian baptism, I a sinner reflected on main points that have made and do make Orthodox Christianity dearest, truest, and most worthwhile in my unworthy life as an American convert. I came up with 10. But more than any such points of course, it is faith, prayer, worship, and example that convince and convict. Still, perhaps this poor offering may help a bit in reflecting on how we may be ready with an answer for our hope, as the Apostle Peter taught. They hopefully are based in the Symbol of Faith or Creed of the Church, and above all in faith in Jesus Christ, summed up in the prayer:
“Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me.”

1) The complete and correct Creed. Orthodoxy preserves the original Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed as formed and proclaimed by the ancient Church. Others changed it. We say it at every Liturgy and at each Compline in original form and hold to it in our hearts and faith.

2) Coming from that first point: We preserve the deepest theology of Christian Trinitarianism. We don't subordinate the Holy Spirit, which is a full member of the Trinity so to speak in the deepest sense in Orthodox teaching. Not so elsewhere. The Trinity is the ultimate mystery of love.

3) Following all the true Ecumenical Councils, Orthodoxy most clearly upholds the true nature of Christ as fully God and fully man, one person with two natures. Christ is Truth. We don't water this down by interfaith intellectualism into Deism or Unitarianism, as many of the old Puritans did, expressed in confusion in much of modern American heterodox Christianity.

4) Orthodoxy reads Holy Scripture as both literal and symbolic in light of Church Tradition. No confusion or ignoring or tweaking of the Bible; we don't like Protestants leave out books of the historical canonical Bible, and we rely primarily on the Old Testament used by the Apostles. We look to the inspired early Church Fathers for guidance in interpretation in light of Tradition inspired by the Holy Spirit, rather than any pope or preacher.

5) We preserve that ancient and inspired and living understanding of the Church that, like the Holy Spirit (2), Grace is not objectified. Orthodoxy teaches and demonstrates how grace is uncreated, not created. Grace is divine. Grace is not the essence of God but the energy of God. Yet that energy is uncreated. It forms a whole different basis for natural law—not legalistic, or rationalistic and individualistic in the modern senses. It highlights how theosis, or oneness with the divine energies through Christ, is the purpose and salvation of man.

6) There is no pope or preacher in the way. Christ is the Way, and His “one holy catholic and apostolic Church” of the Creed, the Orthodox Church, does not center on any one individual mortal, whether one pope in Catholicism or the idea that everyone is a pope in Protestantism. The Church is the Body of Christ. The Orthodox Church is continuous from Pentecost and has kept true to the Holy Spirit's inspired Tradition. The Church didn't disappear and doesn't change under the orders of any mortal; it is the fullness of biblical Israel (and also not the modern nation-state of Israel as some wrongly believe). “Orthodoxy” means simply right teaching and right glorifying both.

7) Orthodoxy emphasizes ascetic synergy in salvation, given in Slavonic. Salvation is the synergy of God's uncreated grace and our free will and struggle. Asceticism or asceticism is our will with God's grace to be sacrifice self to serve God and each other. That's why fasting in all senses (including alms-giving and discipline of prayer and desiring) is so much more important, for example, in Orthodoxy as a whole than in Catholicism or Protestantism. Faith is not just “in our head” but involves our body, too.

8) The true teaching of iconography in Orthodoxy is upheld by the Seventh Council growing out of the work of the first six councils. It is part of our full-bodied approach to worship, reflecting the Incarnation of Christ as central to His Church as His Body.

9) Related to (8), the beauty of Orthodoxy. That's why St. Vladimir the Great converted to Orthodoxy, and his people as well. They saw the beauty of Orthodox worship and knew not whether they were in heaven or on earth, they said. This beauty of worship is physical and embodied, just as our Incarnational Lord, a reminder that Logos means also “harmony.”