



What It Means To Be Byzantine

Jesus asked his disciples:

"Who do people say that the Son of man is?"

*They replied, "Some say John the Baptizer,
others Elijah, still others Jeremiah
or one of the prophets."*

*"And you, "He said to them,
"who do you say that I am?"*

*"You are the Messiah,"
Simon Peter answered,
"the Son of the living God!"*

(Matthew 16:13-16)

Byzantine Catholics Are Followers of Jesus Christ

Byzantine Catholics are followers of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of the Living God, who in His great mercy came into the world and assumed our human nature by becoming a man so that He could save us from our sins by His Passion, Death, Resurrection, and glorious Ascension to Heaven.

We are the witnesses to God's saving action in human history and the bearers of the Good News of Christ to the ends of the earth.

The Byzantine Catholic Church Is the New Testament Church Led by the Holy Spirit

The Byzantine Catholic Church traces its very foundation to the Twelve Apostles, who were the companions of Jesus as he walked on this earth some 2000 years ago.

After the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (*Acts 2:1-4*), the Apostles began to proclaim the Gospel, first to Jerusalem and then to the Gentiles. The first mission of the New Testament Church to the Greek-speaking Gentiles was to Antioch, in the Roman province of Syria. This is where "the disciples were first called Christians" (*Acts 11:26*).

Antioch became the staging area for the

great missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul that resulted in the foundation of a string of Greek-speaking Christian communities in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey) and Greece.

Similar missionary journeys were undertaken by other Apostles throughout the Hellenized Eastern Mediterranean, as well as deep into the heart of the Latin West, to Rome itself, the capital of the empire.

As the Christian Church grew, each nation and culture who received the Gospel in turn influenced the growth of the Church. Even at a relatively early stage in the history of the Church, two major heritages developed and remain with us today: the Eastern or "Greek" tradition, and the Western or "Latin" tradition.

The Church in the West had its principal center at the imperial capital of Rome. It is known in our present-day as the Roman Catholic Church. The Church in the East grew and developed from the Churches in Jerusalem, Antioch, and Alexandria. These three Eastern centers shared a common language, Greek, and similar mode of discourse that formed the basis for the subsequent development of the Eastern Christian tradition.

The Byzantine Catholic Church shares in the inheritance of the first Greek-speaking Christian communities of the Eastern Mediterranean world, founded by the Apostles of Jesus Christ.



The Byzantine Catholic Church Shares in the Inheritance of the Byzantine Religious Culture of the Christian East

A landmark event in the history of the Church, and particularly in the Eastern Church, was the decision in 325 by the Roman Emperor Constantine to move the imperial capital from Rome to Byzantium (Byzantium), a small town on the Bosphorus, which he renamed Constantinople (presently Istanbul, Turkey). This shift in the secular political balance had a dramatic impact on the Eastern Church, for a new secular and religious center—Constantinople—was created in the heart of the Christian East.

The Eastern Roman, or "Byzantine," Empire centered in Constantinople was a Christian empire that flourished for over 1,000 years and engendered a new and unique culture infused with Christianity. Naturally, the Church based in the capital city of Constantinople gradually came to have a pre-eminent influence in the Christian East, spreading a religious culture that was both a synthesis and dynamic restatement of the existing strands of the Eastern Christian culture that had

been cultivated in the Greek-speaking world—the "Byzantine" religious culture.

Byzantine Catholics in America are the spiritual descendants of Christians in Central and Eastern Europe and the Middle East who are the heirs of this Byzantine religious culture and

who, therefore, trace their spiritual heritage to the Great Church of Constantinople, known as Hagia Sophia (The Church of Holy Wisdom).

The spiritual heritage of the Byzantine Catholic Church is the same that was given to us by the Apostles and matured in the Christian East during the period of the Byzantine Empire. This heritage includes the doctrines, liturgical practices, and underlying theology and spirituality that came from the Christian Church of the Byzantine Empire. This heritage is shared among all Christian peoples, regardless of ethnicity or nationality, who trace their spiritual roots to the Great Church of Constantinople and to the Byzantine religious culture that grew from that Church.

From the First Millennium, Christians of the Byzantine tradition have referred to themselves as “Orthodox Christians.” Byzantine Catholics are Orthodox Christians who embrace full communion with the Church of Rome and its primate, Pope John Paul II, the successor of St. Peter, the first among the Apostles.

Byzantine Worship: God With Us

Byzantine Catholic worship joyfully celebrates the presence of the Kingdom of God on Earth in and through its divine services and liturgical life. Byzantine Catholics are witnesses to the reality of the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ, and fol-



low Christ, in and with Him, to His heavenly Kingdom in the Divine Liturgy, which is the principal liturgical service of the Byzantine Church.

In the Divine Liturgy, we begin worship by assembling together as the Body of Christ, celebrating the presence of Christ among us with psalms and hymns. Standing attentively in His presence, we are taught by His Words in the Epistle and Gospel, and learn how to apply the Gospel to our lives in the sermon, or homily.

We then respond to God by freely offering the sacrifice of our own lives to Him in the form of bread and wine, and, uniting our sacrifice with Christ’s own eternal sacrifice, we ascend with and in Christ to His table in His heavenly Kingdom, where He feeds us with gift of His Body and Blood, transforming us into His Body, making us bearers of Christ and partakers in His nature, and uniting us with Him in His Kingdom. Following the Divine Liturgy, we return to the world as “witnesses to what we have seen” in the unfolding of the Kingdom of God before our eyes, and as missionaries to the world, sanctifying it with the presence of Christ.

Byzantine Catholic worship also celebrates the time of salvation in which we live, sanctifying the time of the world with the presence of Christ at regular periods each day.

For Byzantine Christians, following the Jew-

ish tradition of reckoning time, the day begins at Vespers, the ancient service of evening prayer that makes present the finality of the present world and the dawn of the eternal new day in Christ, celebrating the birth of the Kingdom of God,



which itself begins with the end of this world, with the “evening” of this world.

At Vespers, we chant psalms and hymns that celebrate the creation and fall of this world, and its redemption, renewal and, transfiguration inaugurated by

Christ’s Death and Resurrection. At Dawn, the Byzantine Church runs to greet the Risen Lord in the prayer service of Matins (Greek: *Orthros*), where the dawn of new life made possible through the Resurrection of Christ is made present in psalms, chants, and hymns. At Matins, we praise the dawn of the “day without evening,” and glorify God who has fulfilled all things in Himself.

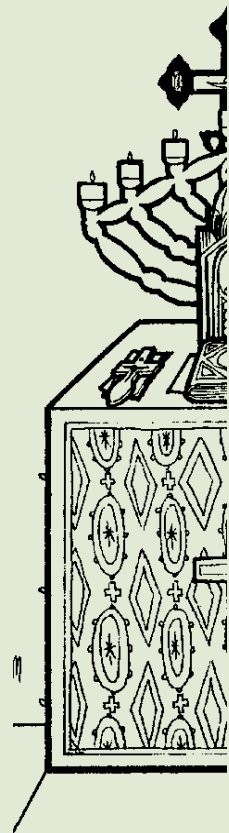
During the entire course of the day, the Byzantine Church remembers the saving presence of God, and in particular the events of Christ’s suffering passion for us, in a series of brief services known as the Divine Hours.

Byzantine Christians, in celebrating the divine presence that is among us at worship, recognize this presence in all senses and forms of expression, realizing that with the advent of His King-

dom, Christ has filled all things with Himself, and made all things sacred and beautiful in His sight. Byzantine Christian worship is therefore holistic in content and expresses and manifests this beauty in various forms—ancient sacred religious poetry and hymns, moving chanting styles, brightly brocaded vestments, the burning of incense, the use of candles, the veneration of icons. The Byzantine Christian worships God with his whole person and recognizes the presence of God in all of his senses, bearing witness to the fact that, in Christ, there is no distinction between “sacred” and “profane,” but that in the Kingdom of God, which is manifested in this world by the Church, all things are fulfilled in Christ to be what they were created to be—namely, a means of communion with Him.

Inside Our Churches: God's Kingdom on Earth

Byzantine Catholic churches are designed to manifest, or make present, in their architecture and arrangement, the presence of the Kingdom of God on Earth. The sanctuary, located behind an icon screen, manifests Heaven, the dwelling place of God. The Holy Table makes present, in a particular way, Heaven, and manifests the Lord’s banquet table to which all are called. On the Holy Table are placed the Book of Gospels and the Holy Gifts during the Divine Liturgy, and in the center of the table stands the tabernacle (*artophorion*)



Shining forth from heaven, the divine light transfigures and “deifies” the figures depicted in the icons placed on the icon screen (*iconostasis*), transforming them by God’s uncreated energies into bearers of the divine nature. Icons, whether depicted on the icon screen or elsewhere, are therefore a graphical depiction of the saving energies of God and their tremendous transformative and transfigurative power. They are a graphic and tangible manifestation of salvation in Christ, of what transfigured life looks like, and where our lives are hopefully leading us.

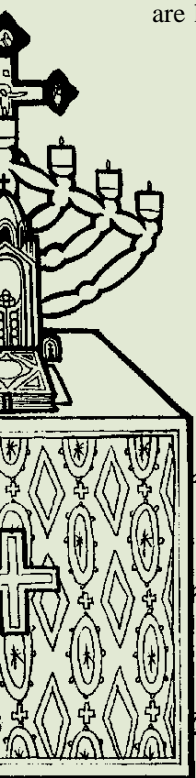
Unlike other religious art, icons are also a participation, here and now, in the event or person depicted in the icon. Icons make present these events and persons for us. We therefore show icons the same respect we would for the event or person represented in them, because these are, in reality, present before us in the form of the icon. When we venerate icons, our veneration is directed at the event or person depicted, and not at the picture itself or the wood on which the icon is painted. Icons are venerated, but are never worshiped, for worship belongs to God alone. In fact, in venerating the persons depicted by icons, we are in fact rendering glory and praise to God, who by His great



mercy and love has transfigured these persons and made them holy.

The main body of the church, or nave, is the gathering place of the assembly, the Body of Christ. Its walls are covered with icons which make present the reality of the communion of the entire Body of Christ, in heaven and on earth—and, therefore, of our communion with the saints of God throughout the ages. When we celebrate the Divine Liturgy, we are co-celebrating with the heavenly hosts of angels and saints. The iconography that surrounds us in the nave manifests this reality for us in a graphic way. The nave, then, manifests the fullness of the reality—in heaven and on earth—that is the Church, the Body of Christ. Standing in the nave as “the Church,” we look forward to the sanctuary, as we, in our individual lives in this world, and collectively as the Church, look forward to the ultimate coming of the Kingdom of God.

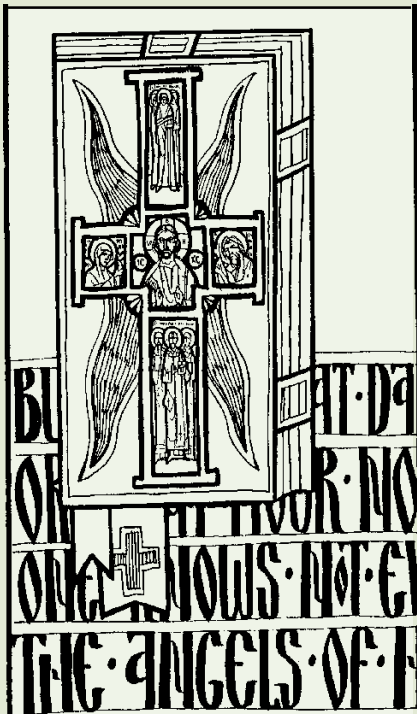
During the Divine Liturgy, the Kingdom of God is revealed and made manifest to us, the Church. We approach the sanctuary to receive communion with God, and thereby to experience here and now the Kingdom of God on Earth. The design of the church building, therefore, reflects our understanding of the Church and the central facets of our Christian faith regarding the meaning and goal of our lives. The church building manifests our Christian faith in graphic terms and allows us to participate in that faith in a tangible



the New Life, we are reconciled both to Christ and His Body, the Church, and are empowered again through God's grace to live the New Life in Christ. In Holy Confession, we repent of our sins and receive forgiveness and absolution along with the grace to persevere in this world to live the New Life in Christ, in spite of our failures and shortcomings.

Holy Anointing: Although we have received the gift of New Life, living as we do in this world, we are not immune to suffering and sickness. When our Lord walked among us on Earth, He was not indifferent to human suffering but repeatedly reached out to those suffering and in need, healing them with His divine power. In the Mystery of Holy Anointing with Oil, we are anointed with blessed oil for our illnesses, both bodily and spiritual, which sacramentally makes present to us through prayer, oil, and human touch the healing ministry of Christ. The entire Church celebrates this Mystery on Holy and Great Wednesday in anticipation of the Holy Pascha, the Feast of the Resurrection.

Holy Matrimony: God is revealed to us not as a sole, solitary being but as a Trinity of Three Persons, living in an endless and perfect communion of unselfish, self-emptying love. The New Life in Christ is this life of the Holy Trinity—a life of unselfish love for others. This life of self-giving, self-emptying love is most beautifully and



dramatically expressed in this world in the Mystery of Holy Matrimony, in which a man and a woman are called together to live as one through mutual self-giving and selfless love, thereby conquering themselves and growing in holiness through Christ. In the Mystery of Holy Matrimony, the couple are crowned with the divine grace and strength to grow together in love and holiness, and live the New Life of Christ more abundantly.

Holy Orders: The Church, the Body of Christ, is a universal priesthood of believers. Yet among this universal priesthood, some are called to serve the Church in a particular way in the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church. The Mystery of Holy Orders calls men to serve the Body of Christ as deacons, priests, and bishops through the laying on of hands, in which Christ Himself gives them the grace and power to perform this service in His Name for the sake of His Body.

Text taken from the website of the Byzantine Catholic Church in America (unofficial) at www.byzcath.org.

An Invitation

ALL CHRISTIANS ARE WITNESSES to the New Life that Christ has given to us in His Church. Byzantine Catholics recognize this and know that there are many good people outside the Catholic and Orthodox Churches and that these other religions can and do bring their members close to God.

The Byzantine Catholic faith, however, is not simply a way of life, a set of doctrines and beliefs, ritual practices, and customs. Our Byzantine Catholic faith is Life itself. It is a Life that is truer, fuller, more abundant, and more authentic than any other life—it is Life that is everlasting and has no end, and over which even death has no power. We warmly invite you to join us and share, even now, in this New Life in Christ.

Welcome Home!

Are you a Byzantine Catholic who is no longer active in the Faith? Are you not a member of any Church or maybe find that the Church you currently belong to is not a home to you? To you we issue a special invitation to come join us. We both need and want you as a member of our family.

