

A Few Things to Know Before You Attend the Divine Liturgy

By Victor Beshir



Welcome to the Lord Jesus Christ's paradise on earth, the Coptic Orthodox Church, a fulfilling Christian faith and practice that is as old as Christianity.

The Coptic Orthodox Church is a Biblical church, whose Biblical interpretations are based on the writings of the early church; when the church in the whole world was only one church, with one Lord, one faith, and one baptism (Ephesians 4:5).

The Coptic Orthodox Church has preserved the faith and beliefs as taught by the Lord Jesus Christ, received by the apostles, and delivered to the members of the Coptic Church by St. Mark the apostle, the writer of the second gospel, without changes until this day.

Worship in the Coptic Orthodox Church is well known as the most ancient and spiritually deepest one around. It reflects the spirituality and fulfillment of the early church.

We welcome you to our church that receives all its faith, dogma, teaching, and worship from St. Mark, the writer of the second Gospel, who in turn received all from the Lord Jesus Christ. So, the Coptic Orthodox Church was established by one of Jesus Christ's apostles about 2000 years ago. This is why **the Coptic Orthodox Church is an Apostolic Church.**

Before you attend the Divine Liturgy in the Coptic Orthodox Church, we would like to tell you a few things:

- ❖ As such, **our worship is as old as Christianity**. The first Divine Liturgy was celebrated by the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 26:26-30), (Mark 14:22-26), (John 6:53-59). Since it is old, it is not similar to the kinds of worship that one might have experienced in another church.
- ❖ As worship in the Bible is full of symbols and rituals, **worship in the Coptic Church is also full of symbols and rituals**, which are the ladder of spirituality that takes our soul on a journey destined to heaven. With such deep spirituality, you need to understand the prayers, the symbols, and the rituals to be able to enjoy the deep spirituality of the prayers. This is why we recommend that you first need to learn about the church, study its worship, and understand its prayers prior to attending the Divine Liturgy. You may ask if there are special meetings, prayers, or Bible study for those who wish to be introduced to the faith and worship of the church.
- ❖ You may have noticed that we do not call our main worship a mass or worship; but we call it "**Divine Liturgy**," since it was first celebrated by Christ and was written by the Apostles of our Lord. Every word in the Divine Liturgy is taken from the Bible.
- ❖ In order to help you understand the Divine Liturgy, you may ask for a Divine Liturgy book and follow the prayers using either the screen, if there is one, or help from someone who is familiar with the prayer. You may also ask to be seated next to a person who can guide you throughout the prayers.
- ❖ Since some churches pray the Divine Liturgy with more English than others, you may ask if your church has one with more English.
- ❖ Whenever prayers are done in a language other than English; or when a long song is sung, this is your time for your own deep personal prayers, and you may follow the translation.
- ❖ Follow the majority in what they do. For example, if the majority bows down their heads do the same. When they stand, you may stand too. As a matter of fact, we stand for most of the time.
- ❖ Please don't cross your legs in the church; since it offends people. Crossing one's legs in our culture is a sign of pride. Since one should not stand before God in pride, then a person should not cross his/her legs in the church.
- ❖ To allow one's self to fully concentrate in prayers without distractions, please don't sit next to a door or in the last row of pews.
- ❖ As a traditional church we still follow the old tradition of the seating order of the churches and cathedrals; where men sit on one side of the church (left), and the women sit on the other side (right).
- ❖ Another tradition that the Coptic Orthodox Church follows is that of the women wearing scarves upon entering the church, and throughout the Divine Liturgy, as well as ALL religious services. This practice is based on the biblical teaching mentioned in 1 Corinthians 11:6-8. Scarves are usually available. They are located on the women's side for those who do not have. Please feel free to borrow one to use during the services.
- ❖ Don't be afraid, we will not ask anyone to come forward to declare their salvation status or to speak to the congregation.
- ❖ When the deacon says, "Kiss one another with a holy kiss," people start to stretch their two hands together to touch their neighbors' hands. Just watch and do the same. It is simply a reminder based on the Lord's commandments of love and peace that a person should not come to the church before he/she has made peace with everyone else, "*Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift*" (Matt. 5:23-24).
- ❖ At the end of the Divine Liturgy, you will notice people leaving their pews to go to the altar to receive the Holy Communion. The Holy Communion is offered only to the members of the Oriental Orthodox churches, which are: the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Armenian Orthodox Church, and the Indian Orthodox Church. You become a member after you get baptized into the Coptic Orthodox Church. For more details about becoming a member, please ask the priest.
- ❖ At the end of the Holy Communion, the priest sprinkles water on the congregation. This is a blessing and a reminder of the blessing of our Lord.
- ❖ Some churches offer sermons in both Arabic and English at different times of the Divine Liturgy. Usually the sermon is given immediately after the reading of the Gospel. Many Orthodox churches also give the sermon at the end of the Divine Liturgy. Depending upon the need, there are some churches that have available either people

who will translate as the sermon is given, or have a separate sermon in English only. It would be wise to ask in advance to know where and when the English sermon will be given.

❖ At the end of the Divine Liturgy, the priest distributes pieces of bread loaves, which have been blessed at the beginning of the Divine Liturgy. You are welcome to join the line and receive the blessed bread.

❖ People then leave from the church to the coffee room. You are welcome to join. You may notice that a majority of the people speak Arabic. We hope that you will not be offended. Simply put, it is their comfort language and not intended to offend or exclude visitors.

❖ Please keep in mind that there are some people in the church who have recently come from Egypt, and they might act as if they are still in Egypt. So, you may notice some different customs or behaviors, but most of these are culture related. As you know, cultures interpret behavior differently; what could seem normal to some might be abnormal to others. A nice hint is "Don't take it personal."



We heartily welcome you and pray for you to join us, and to keep yourself centered in the Lord Jesus Christ, enjoying the deep spirituality and the original Christian faith. To prepare yourself for the rich spiritual experience of the Divine Liturgy, it is helpful to participate in a Bible study or other meetings. Please keep in mind, the devil will try to stop you from coming back to the church as he tried in the old days with Adam and Eve and got them out of the Paradise. Therefore, resist him following the Bible command, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).



St. Mark the founder of the Coptic Church