

Time And Worship

As Orthodox Christians we follow an ancient calendar. The day begins when the sun sets, so the first Service of the day is Vespers. Thus, Saturday evening Vespers is the first Service of Sunday. Then, in the morning, we celebrate Matins, called Orthros in Greek. If there's a special celebration – such as a feast day or the day of resurrection (Sunday) – the Divine Liturgy is celebrated. These three Services – Vespers, Matins and Divine Liturgy – make up the cycle of Services in many parishes.

In monasteries, the Vespers-Matins-Liturgy cycle can be celebrated all at once. In this case, it would be called *Vigil* that lasts through most of the night. Monasteries also add in the *Canonical Hours* (1st, 3rd, 6th and 9th) as well as *Compline* and the *Mid-night office*. This is what is considered a full liturgical cycle.

(1) Orthodox Christians understand the Bible to be very supportive of a cycle of prayers:

“Seven times a day I praise thee for thy righteous ordinances.” (Psalm 119:164)

“...pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thessalonians 5:17-18)

(2) We believe that prayer – including a cycle of Services – is a way of sanctifying time. We are so used to what is called in Greek *chronos* (time). This is the time set by your watch; but sanctified time in Greek means *kairos*. This time is much different: We are called to sanctify all aspects of our life, including time.

(3) Each one of these Services is different and has different hymns. Because we have a cycle of feasts (celebrating biblical events as well as saints), the hymns contain much of our theology about those feasts and saints. Seminary education does not only take place in the classroom or in books, but formation through the Services every day. If you want to know what we believe, see how we worship (*lex orandi lex credendi*).

(4) It is this cycle of Services that has produced innumerable saints, so we know it works. Don't fix what ain't broken!

(5) It refocuses our ego-driven mindset. We are forced to actually devote time to worshipping God more than an hour once a week. It creates a pattern of prayer in us.

(6) The Services take us through the crucifixion and resurrection. In the

evening, we are led into the darkness of the night (crucifixion and burial) and then, in the morning, we are led out of death into life. **“For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”** (1 Corinthians 2:2)