

114. Feb. 4/17,1973. St. Cyril of New Lake

Categories : [Letters](#)

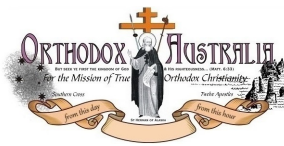
Date : September 2, 2016

Dear Brother in Christ, Nicholas [Eastman],

Greetings in our Lord Jesus Christ. We were glad to hear from you again and are happy to try to answer some of your questions.

Your mixed feelings lately, especially at Holy Transfiguration Monastery, doubtless reveal several things. One of them, as you yourself must realize, is your own immaturity! Clearly, you do not yet know your own mind, and so you should not hurry to make any decision regarding something so important as the monastic life. A decision pleasing to God and which is for your own salvation should not be accompanied by feelings of confusion. If your feelings are confused, stop for a while and let them “settle” and see where your heart really is or wants to be. In the meantime, keep your regular life of spiritual discipline, church services, etc., as well as you can, also doing your duty in the place where you happen to be. In your case, this certainly means applying yourself to study, so as not to lose this opportunity. Do not fall into the trap of thinking (mostly idly!) about “spiritual” things so much that you neglect the humble “worldly” things right in front of your nose. Any learning you can get now, even if it seems very boring or worldly, can be very valuable to you later. Do not waste the opportunity you have and incur judgment later for this! When and if God leads you to the monastic life — then will be time enough to concentrate on “spiritual” things, under proper guidance.

Another cause of your confusion has some substance to it, and about this you should have the right ideas. This is the difference between “Russian” and “Greek” Orthodoxy. Most of the differences are not really substantial, such as the difference in music, details of church services, etc. But a few of them are important and could get you unnecessarily confused. One of these is the practice of confession and receiving Holy Communion: the “Russian” practice is usually not to receive Communion without confession, while the Greeks receive Communion a number of times without confession. Basically, this question is solved for one by one’s own spiritual father, and the only confusion arises when someone from “Russian” practice enters a “Greek” church or vice versa. Our own rule (which I practiced, for example, when I visited Fr. Panteleimon and Fr. Nektas in Seattle last week) is always to receive confession before receiving Communion the first time in a “Greek” church, but after that to receive Communion for several days in a row without going to confession again, provided that one keeps the full “Russian” rule of prayer before receiving Holy Communion and that nothing has come up that disturbs one’s conscience. This is also the usual “Russian” practice in Passion Week, when those who have confessed on Great Thursday may receive Communion without confession on Great Saturday and on Pascha. The important thing is that one has a regular discipline of confession (which should be rather frequent) and not receiving



Holy Communion carelessly or with an unclean conscience. There is no problem at Holy Transfiguration Monastery, since there the novices and monks confess their thoughts daily to their elder and receive sacramental absolution at least once a week, as I have heard. In your case, you should ask your spiritual father what to do, and not change to “Greek” practice until you should be under a “Greek” spiritual father. There is much more that can be said on this subject, but basically I would say that if frequent Holy Communion is a good thing, then frequent confession is also good!

Most other differences between the “Greek” and “Russian” traditions are of minor importance, and one can find that in some respects the “Russians” are closer to more ancient and traditional practice (as I discovered last week in Seattle when I asked Fr. Ephraim of Holy Transfiguration Monastery about the way they performed the services), and in some respects the “Greeks” are closer. In music, the “Greeks” have preserved the more ancient practice, as 4-part harmony certainly does come from the West. In our Hermitage we try to stay to 2-part harmony, which is closer to “Greek” practice. (Fr. Neketas, the Greek priest from Seattle, found this quite satisfactory when he visited us some time ago.)

You notice that I put “Greek” and “Russian” in quotations marks — because we are one in Christ, and we should by no means let differences of nationality or custom cause rivalries among us. We have much to learn from each other, but both of us must learn first of all from Christ our Saviour and the pure tradition of His Church! Both “Greeks” and “Russians” have faults and have introduced some minor “innovations” into church practice; but if we love each other in Christ, these faults are tolerable, and it is far preferable to tolerate them than to go about “reforming” other people and being overly critical. Each parish and monastery is free to preserve the Orthodox tradition as fully as it wishes and can, preserving all humility and love.

Concerning your parents, pray to God and do not despair over them. Even if they were to die outside the Faith, you can pray for them privately, even though the Church cannot pray for them as for her own children.

Since Father James would like you to visit us, why don't you come for the summer or part of the summer? — not as a novice, but as a “laborer.” Of course, you will find that we are very primitive and disorganized, as we are certainly not well established as is Holy Transfiguration Monastery, and all we have are some shacks and an unfinished church. Nonetheless, we are remote from the world and quiet, and there should be no more than one or two other people with us this summer, so one of us would have time to talk with you. Also, there is lots of physical work! Please know that you are welcome.

Please pray for us, and write again. Please ask Father James to pray at Liturgy for the newly reposed Bishop Savva and for Elena (Lopeshanskaya, a friend of ours).

With love in Christ our Saviour,
Seraphim, monk