

## The Church: A Living Theology (Gale Bellas-Papageorge)

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As a child, I remember thinking that church was so uninteresting. “Why is the priest repeating himself over and over again?, I would think to myself. I was so bored by the repetition. Nothing changed in the service: the same words, the same motions, the same responses by the choir and the cantors each and every Sunday. In the car on the way to church, I would forecast it in my head. I could anticipate what would be said and done and how my boredom would follow.

I can imagine that there are many other children in our churches who feel the same way, maybe even more so today because of the hurried growth of today's culture. They like to be rewarded instantly. They can shop at mega malls or Super Walmarts and Targets and come home with exactly what they were looking for on the very same day. They have fingertip access to movies, blogs, music, books, texting. There's very little they have to wait for these days.

Who can blame them, then, for not wanting to spend a good part of their Sundays in a place that anticipates rewards that are not visibly seen and prolonged in many cases, perhaps even until the next lifetime. Gods will, salvation, and all the rewards that the church promises are not instantaneous and require dedication, commitment, continual prayer and hard work. This concept is difficult for youth to comprehend, because culture is teaching and enticing them with something very different.

As it happens, the repetition of the service in the Orthodox Church, which I had been so bored with as a child, actually teaches us anticipation, patience, and a sense of not quite arriving.



The repetition of the Liturgy every Sunday is in anticipation of what is yet to come. It is our re-creation of the Kingdom and a taste of what it will be like: a constant communion with God and with others. But isn't this, in a sense, immediate gratification in itself: a taste of the Kingdom and our salvation in the here and now, as well as the anticipation of what's to come?

Likewise, the gratification experienced in the Orthodox church is one that is not fleeting, like every other truth in our lives, such as a meaningful relationship we have with someone, those that are truly good for our hearts and souls, as opposed to those which may only boost our egos.

Why, then, keep searching for happiness and fulfillment when we have everything we need right here in the church? Why waste time in this precious life chasing fleeting desires?

It seems to me that this is the value of the church that we need to pass down to our children. Not to say that they shouldn't participate fully in their lives around them or enjoy the material and intellectual pursuits the world has to offer. They should, however, be taught to shift their focus to the values of the church as their grounding and where true happiness and meaning organically arises, which also require a physical presence once a week. Otherwise, the emphasis on their source of happiness shifts to the values of the secular world.

I appreciate that my parents brought me to church, no matter how bored I was. Since no one explained the liturgy to us in those days, and the liturgy was all in Romanian, I really had to wait for the reward until I was old enough to understand. But now that we know how valuable the liturgy is to us and how to put these benefits into words because of all the education, discussions and writings available, we should translate these rewards, both the practical and transient, to our children.

We don't compromise the sacredness or the mystical essence of God by explaining the living theology of the Orthodox church and faith to our children. On the contrary, we demystify the theology so they can be agents and active participants in their faith and enjoy the benefits of the church at an early age.