

OUR JOURNEY INTO



THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

By Fr. John Armstrong

*" We have seen the true Light! We have received the heavenly Spirit!
We have found the true Faith! Worshipping the undivided Trinity,
who has saved us!"*

WE FOUND IT!

Our whole family was received into the Orthodox Church on June 14, 1992, Pentecost Sunday, at St. John of Damascus Orthodox Church in Poway, CA. All four boys were baptized and chrismated; Stacy and I (having already been baptized in the Name of the Trinity) were received into the Church by chrismation (to chrismate means to anoint; Christ is *the* Anointed One; Christians are little anointed ones, members of His Body, the Church; chrismation is "the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit;" cf. 2 Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:13; 1 Jn. 2:20,27). What all this means, among other things, is that we embrace the Orthodox Catholic faith (ortho-doxa = "right-glory" or "right-worship" or "right-teaching"; catholic = "according-to-the whole" (Gk: kata-hole), the whole faith, held by all, everywhere, from the beginning; "the Faith once for all delivered to the saints" of Jude 3; the "one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism" of Eph. 4:5). This Faith is expressed in, for example: the doctrinal formulations of the Seven Ecumenical Councils (cf. Acts 15); the Nicene Creed (cf. 1 Cor. 8:6, 15:3-4; 1 Tim. 1:15, 3:16); liturgical-sacramental life and worship; hierarchical Church government (bishops, priests, and deacons); the communion of saints; Orthodox icons, architecture, and music; and of course, the Holy Scriptures, the God-inspired, primary written witness of Holy Tradition (the Presence and Life and expression of the Holy Spirit abiding in the Church). It amazes even me that I'm writing these things, that I really believe them, and that I am convinced that this is in fact the biblical, apostolic faith, "the true faith." Maybe you're wondering how I went from being a "Bible-only," fundamentalist Baptist to being an Eastern Orthodox Catholic. It's been quite a journey. And *since you asked ...*

I'VE ALWAYS WANTED IT

As long as I've been a Christian I've always wanted to be a real one. I've always wanted to be holy and serve God with my whole life. I've always wanted to know God as He really is and to follow only that which He has given. By His grace I came to know Christ by reading the Scriptures (March 1979). By His grace I've tried to live a dedicated Christian life ever since. My vocation and ministry were one and the same (i.e. being a youth pastor, pastoral intern, and then Bible/science teacher in Christian schools for eight years). From the very beginning I've wanted to build my life on the Word of God, on obedience to Christ's commands (Mt. 7:24; 28:20). From the very beginning I've had a passion to teach and preach His holy Word. Seeking, knowing, loving, and serving God continues to be the burning desire of my heart and the primary pursuit and focus of my life. At least I want it to be. For now, any ministry I have will be as a layman. Maybe someday I will be an Orthodox priest (yes, they can be married; this is even encouraged; see 1 Tim 3:4-5; Titus 1:5-6), but that would probably involve going to seminary again, something difficult to do with a family. We'll have to see how God leads our lives. Through it all we want only Him.

Several factors converged and worked together to lead us into the Orthodox Christian Faith:

THIS AIN'T IT!

1. **A study of the Book of Revelation** during the summer of 1990 led me to the conviction that **(a)** the Eucharistic celebration of Christ's death and resurrection as commemorated in the Lord's Supper **must be** the heart and focus of weekly corporate Christian worship. Actually, the whole Book of Revelation is a Divine Liturgy, a heavenly worship service, a reflection of the worship of the first century Church, a reflection of the worship in heaven. I didn't find this reality in evangelical churches, not to mention the fact that their worship and theology are anti-liturgical and anti-sacramental. What I found in the typical Protestant (baptistic) service was something remotely similar to half of the historic, Christian service, "the Liturgy of the Word" (occasional readings from the Psalms, spontaneous prayers, occasional Scripture readings, and a biblical exhortation), but no "Liturgy of the Altar" (union with God through participation in the Lord's Supper). Although, as a Protestant, we celebrated the Lord's Supper about once a month, we denied: the Real Presence of Christ in the elements (although Christ plainly says, "This is My Body... this is My blood ..." with reference to the consecrated bread and wine; cf. 1 Cor 10:16-17); that the grace of salvation is communicated through them (cf. John 6:48-58); or that Communion had any actual participation in the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ at Calvary. Most Protestants lack this Scriptural and all-encompassing view of the Lord's Table. I began to wonder, "Did Christ intend for the *sermon* to be the focal point and climax of corporate Christian worship?" I realized the answer was a definite, "No!" Rather, communion with Christ and union with God by the Holy Spirit through the Eucharistic offering together with all the members of the Body of Christ was what Christ gave to His Church to enable Her to be the Church and to bear witness to His salvation in the world. This is clearly the focus of the heavenly liturgy (Rev 4-5; Isa. 6) and is the destiny of Christ's triumphant Church (Rev 19:5-9).

Preaching is commanded and essential (1 Tim 4:13; 2 Tim 4:2; etc.), and is actually a kind of communion with Christ, the Word, when it is rightly divided and proclaimed in the power of the Spirit, but it should not be the exclusive or primary focus of the weekly corporate Christian assembly (cf. Mt 4:4; 6:11--"Give us this day our daily bread." "Daily" is literally "above nature" (epiousion), that is to say, the Bread of the Kingdom, or Christ, a reference to the Eucharist; the Lord's Prayer has always been prayed in the context of corporate Eucharistic Christian worship, as well as "in your closet... to your Father... in secret").

I also began to wonder from this study of the Book of Revelation that perhaps **(b)** the pre-millennial view of the return of Christ was incorrect. Of course, I believed, and still firmly do believe, in the bodily return of Christ, that's perfectly clear in Scripture, and that it ought to have an present impact on our lives for holiness (1 John 3:3). What I questioned was the idea that Christ would return and set up an earthly, temporal Kingdom for a literal 1000 years. Being a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary (ThM 1988) I am thoroughly familiar with the content and development of this system of eschatological teaching. Such a view, however, was not embraced by the whole Church from the beginning and was ultimately rejected, only to be revived relatively recently and peculiarly in Western Europe and America.

Thus, I desired (a) to participate in eucharistic, sacramental, liturgical worship as Christ has given to His Church (as recorded in Scripture: 1 Cor 10:16-17; 11:1,20,23-34; John 6:48-58; etc.) and I also wanted (b) to have a correct understanding of true, sound biblical doctrine; for example, eschatology. I wanted to know and believe and practice the apostolic faith.

2. As a Bible teacher in a Christian high school I became acutely aware of what I would call *the Protestant dilemma*--that within Protestantism there exists *great doctrinal confusion*, that there is NOT "one faith" shared by all Protestants even though they all share the one Book. Although Protestants correctly reject the doctrine of an infallible Pope, in a way, each one has become their own pope--the individual has become the final authority in the interpretation of Scripture. My students held conflicting even contradictory doctrinal positions about various issues. But who was right? One or the other? Both? Neither? How could one decide? Everyone claimed that the Bible was their sole source of truth and authority, and that their view was the correct "biblical" interpretation. This bothered me. How could anyone know the true doctrine on any issue (for example, eschatology or the Lord's Supper)? God did not inspire several correct interpretations. I grew weary of the same old dogmatic pontifications of those who claimed to be "preaching the Word," especially when it was clear that their doctrinal positions were not clearly, consistently, and comprehensively defensible from Scripture. Sound biblical teaching, rightly divided, leads to a deepened devotion to Christ, conviction of sin, and a healthy spiritual life, and prepares one for the life to come, not merely on how to live a better life here and now, not merely for the increase of knowledge. Sound biblical teaching must also be true to the doctrine which has been taught from the beginning in the Church (1 Cor 11:2; 2 Thess 2:15; 2 Tim 1:13-14; 2:2; Jude 3). This compelled me to examine my beliefs, to seek the truth afresh, to discover and embrace (if I could find it) "the faith once for all delivered to the saints," the faith and life of Christ and His Church, the teaching of the Christian faith which has been held from the beginning. I knew this must be thoroughly biblical, but I became convinced that it must also be thoroughly consistent with the understanding of Scripture handed down in the historical Church. Such a perspective cannot ultimately and completely be found in Protestant evangelicalism. I knew that the church I was attending did not possess it.

3. *The (baptistic, evangelical) church I was attending* went through many trials while we were there, all of which served to precipitate the conviction in my heart that their doctrine and worship were neither consistent with the New Testament nor with what the Church has believed and taught and practiced down through the centuries. It was obvious that contemporary evangelical "worship" is often very entertainment-oriented, man-centered, designed to make people, even unbelievers, feel comfortable (cf. 1 Cor 14:24-25). As one friend put it, the typical Protestant service is often like a "glorified Lawrence Welk show." Truly, the so-called "worship service" is usually nothing more than a big Sunday school class with the pastor giving the lesson. Church was "good" if the sermon was "good", or if the choir or special music or praise band were entertaining or contemporary. Communion with the living God somehow got pushed aside for the sake of the music and the sermon. I began to wonder, "Where is God in all of this? Where was faithfulness to the Apostolic Tradition as expressed not only in the content, but also in the spirit of the Scriptures?" I began to realize that the "success" of Sunday morning depended primarily on the creativity of the pastoral staff, "the worship team," rather than on each person submitting to and participating in the received Tradition of worship and theology and spirituality handed down from the beginning in the Church. I began to think that the Apostles would be shocked if they were to return and see this sort of thing being presented as the "church" of Christ. Many other aspects of this particular church's "ministry" led me to the realization that this was *not* true biblical Christianity even though they claimed (very dogmatically) that it was.

I realized that, even though many good things can and do result from a sincere commitment to God and His Word, much error and false teaching also abound. If this particular church's ministry was "genuine Christianity" I wanted no part of it. I became convinced that Protestant evangelicalism was missing something, but I wasn't exactly sure what.

4. *Hungering for a more God/Christ-centered and biblical worship* I began, in the Fall of 1990, to meet with a few like-minded friends to seek the face of God. We patterned our gatherings after the groups of John and Charles Wesley in the 18th century who were fed up with a nominal Church of England and, knowing there must be more, sought the Lord with their whole heart. We met once a week and read or sang several Psalms to focus our hearts on God; then we'd literally prostrate ourselves and pray our hearts out to the Lord. This was followed by reading several chapters of a Gospel seeking to know the Lord and His teaching, to do His will. We desired to know His glory, to seek His face (see Exodus 33:12-34:8; Ps. 27:8). One prayer, I distinctly remember praying: "God, please shake us loose from the false ideas we have about You; shake us loose from the false doctrinal grids that keep us from You, from knowing You as You really are..." God began to answer our prayers.

COULD IT BE ROMAN CATHOLICISM?

5. *The Christ-honoring ministry of John Michael Talbot*, a Roman Catholic Franciscan monk, made me ask a very important question, "How can a Roman Catholic produce such glorious, biblical, Christ-exalting music?" That bothered me since I "knew" (as a protestant) that Roman Catholic doctrine was "all messed up," and yet he believed it, and yet he produced such awesome Scriptural music. He has produced 50 CDs to date. I have most of them. (I highly recommend one of them, "Meditations in the Spirit;" it's excellent). JMT's ministry had a major impact on my spiritual life. Stacy and I attended one of his concerts in October of 1990. It was great! We went forward at the altar call (in a Roman Catholic church) and rededicated our lives to the Lord. We wanted to follow JMT's invitation to be "radical" for Jesus ("rooted like a radish"; cf. Colossians 2:6-7). We wanted to follow Christ wherever He would lead us, even if that meant—God forbid!—becoming a Roman Catholic. We wanted God's will and we knew that they claimed to be "the Church."

6. That began ***a serious study of the Roman Catholic faith***. I devoured everything I could get my hands on. I checked out many books by Roman Catholic authors and even read much of the Vatican II documents. I became more and more persuaded that Roman Catholicism was the historic Christian faith, at least I yearned that it was so. I embraced most of what I read. It was a real struggle to overcome my previous Protestant prejudices, but I gradually began to understand terms like sacrament, liturgy, Eucharist, etc. What I found was wonderful. I began to ache and hunger to receive Holy Communion, which, as a non-Catholic, I was unable to do. I dialogued with priests, nuns, theologians, and monks yearning to know the truth about the Church of Christ. However, there were at least three things I couldn't (and still can't) justify or accept Scripturally or historically as being part of the true Catholic faith: the infallibility of the Pope and his universal pastoral authority over all Christians, the immaculate conception of Mary, and purgatory. I wanted to be a Catholic, but I couldn't embrace these things, certainly not as infallible doctrine. So, armed with a hunger for Eucharistic worship, a desire to know true biblical doctrine, and the conviction that somehow the Church must be historically Catholic I began to study the Episcopal church (i.e. Anglo-Catholicism).

COULD IT BE ANGLO-CATHOLICISM?

7. I began attending *the early-morning liturgy at a local Episcopalian church* (the Church of England in America in 1990) and I loved it. I could worship liturgically and receive communion at the altar (since I had been baptized in the Name of the Trinity and believed in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist). They use the same liturgical calendar and service structure as the RCC. It was like Roman Catholicism without the Pope and without those peculiar Roman Catholic doctrines. It seemed like a happy middle ground. Although I enjoyed the worship, I began to see some serious doctrinal and moral flaws with the Episcopal church: the ordination of women as bishops and priests; the ordination of homosexuals; the "blessing" of homosexual "marriages." Obviously these things are a distortion of the true Christian faith. How could I become an Episcopalian? How could I join a group which endorsed such things? Should I become a Roman Catholic whose doctrine I couldn't fully embrace? I wasn't sure. I began calling Episcopal priests out of the phone book to discuss my journey and dilemma. "By chance" I called a Fr. Christopher Kelley, a godly man committed to the biblical, historic Christian faith. He was serving in an Anglo-Catholic Episcopalian church and invited me to attend a Bible study he was teaching. I went. It was very good (on the subject of traditional Christian spirituality as taught in the Beatitudes). He seemed to understand what I was going through in search of the true Church of Christ. He invited me to a luncheon at his local church for a dialogue between Episcopal and Orthodox priests. I said I'd come. "But what in the world is an Orthodox priest?" I thought to myself.

Everything up to this point took place during a five month period, August through December, 1990. It was a very intense and agonizing time. This quest was a daily concern. Every day I read something or listened to some tape or talked with someone or prayed with someone or explored the Scriptures seeking to know the truth. I knew that the church I was attending, (a Baptist church) was not "the Church;" it, and the baptistic faith, do not represent true biblical Christianity. I knew that somehow the true faith was catholic, liturgical, sacramental and somewhere on earth to be found (Mt. 16:18; 28:20; Jn. 14:16; etc.). I became convinced that Christ established a Church, He did not just bring a Book. The Church, not the Scriptures, is "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). The Scriptures were birthed within the Church, by the Holy Spirit, for the Church, to be correctly understood and lived within the life of the Church, not to be used as some independent standard outside the Church. Up to this point I was convinced that only the Roman Catholic Church had any truly legitimate claim to truly be the Church founded and built by Christ down through the centuries. Then I went to the Orthodox-Episcopal luncheon ...

8. At *the luncheon-dialogue between Episcopal and Orthodox priests* a young man, Jim, a recent graduate of St. Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary read a paper he had written and we all discussed it. His paper was called, "*Modern Orthodox Eucharistic Theology.*" It blew me away! I had never heard anything like this before. It put together many of the things I had been studying and yearning for up to this time (theology, worship, sacraments, spirituality, Ecclesiology, Christology, Pneumatology, Soteriology, Eschatology all woven together in the life of the Church). I told Jim that I thought I might be on the Canterbury trail (i.e. that I was considering becoming an Episcopalian under Fr. Kelley's influence; the Archbishop of Canterbury is the "head" of the Anglican Church; there is also a book called "Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail," by Robert Webber, an evangelical who became an Episcopalian and teaches at Wheaton College). Jim smiled and said, "It (i.e. the Canterbury

trail) ends in Moscow!" (i.e. a serious quest for the true Church ends in Orthodoxy; Moscow became the third center of world Orthodoxy after Rome and then Constantinople). I didn't really understand what he meant, but I had an idea. I wanted to know more. This was the end of December 1990. I got Jim's phone number, but didn't call him until sometime in January of 1991.

COULD IT BE ORTHODOXY?

9. I began *a friendship and serious dialogue with Jim* about the Orthodox faith. We would talk on the phone for hours. He recommended books to read, tapes to listen to, and services to attend at a local English-speaking Orthodox Church. Slowly, but surely, I became convinced that Orthodoxy had preserved the fullness of the apostolic faith (doctrine, theology, worship, etc.) of the Church established by Christ. Only the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church had any legitimate claim to be "the Church", historically speaking. Every other church regardless of their sincerity and commitment to Christ and the Scriptures could only possess certain aspects of the faith. Every Protestant group could be traced to some reaction against the Roman Catholic Church in an effort to preserve the "true faith." Each church had their own peculiar emphasis and doctrine, but rejected significant and necessary components of the faith given by God through Christ in the Church. Still, I agonized over the decision to choose between Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. I agonized over the fact that I knew many godly individuals within both Protestant and Catholic churches. I had been a committed Protestant Christian. But no Protestant church can ever be "the Church." They have all (every denomination or independent group of them), either knowingly, or unknowingly, cut themselves off from the fullness of the faith found only in the "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church." But Orthodoxy would also claim that the Western (Roman Catholic) Church has distorted the faith by (1) claiming the universal jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome over the whole Church along with his claim to infallibility; by (2) altering the Nicene Creed by adding the phrase "and the Son" (filioque clause) to the statement about the procession of the Spirit from the Father (see Jn. 15:26) which actually distorts Orthodox Trinitarian theology and ultimately finds expression in other areas of theology and Christian life; and by (3) introducing teachings foreign to the undivided Apostolic Church: purgatory, the immaculate conception of Mary as dogma, papal infallibility, papal universal jurisdiction, to name the most significant. The Roman Catholic Church is historically the Western expression of the Church, but it has not preserved the fullness and faith of the one, undivided, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. Neither has any other Western Protestant group (since they never possessed it). These things are biblically, historically, and theologically verifiable. I soon learned that others had come to a similar conclusion.

10. We discovered that *a group of about 2000 ex-Campus Crusade Christians* had become Orthodox in the late 1980's. We visited a couple of their churches (one in Santa Barbara, and one in Ben Lomond near Santa Cruz) which again confirmed in our hearts the truth of the Orthodox faith and our need to embrace it. Their journey is recorded in a book well worth reading called, "Becoming Orthodox," by Fr. Peter Gilquist. There is also a sequel to this book called, "Coming Home," which tells the stories of 18 Protestant clergy who converted and became Orthodox priests. (These books, and many others, can be ordered directly from Conciliar Press, 1-800-XN-PRESS). During our journey a well-known evangelical converted to Orthodoxy, Franky Schaeffer, son of the famous evangelical theologian and philosopher, Francis Schaeffer. It seemed that our journey was paralleled by

many others like us. My perception is that many thinking and seeking evangelicals are realizing the deficiencies of Protestant evangelicalism and embracing historical Christian Catholicism whether Eastern (Orthodox) or Western (Roman), although I believe that Orthodoxy has preserved the fullness of the apostolic faith.

11. We began **attending St. John of Damascus Orthodox Church**. We fell in love with their liturgical life, worship, theology, and spirituality. Truly nothing compares with the corporate Orthodox worship (once you begin to understand it and enter into it). It's awesome and wonderful, and thoroughly biblical, even though it takes some getting used to since it's "eastern." I personally believe that prayerful participation in the services is essential for understanding the Orthodox faith. As one Orthodox monk and Bishop has stated, "The Orthodox service books as a whole are in the last analysis little else than one vast and extended meditation upon Holy Scripture." The monks of Holy Transfiguration Monastery have said, "The liturgical books of the Church are a divine university wherein we are schooled in the things of God... They set for us a banquet that we might partake and be filled." I have found these things to be true. As Christ responded to the question, "Where are You staying?" so I would respond to anyone interested in Orthodoxy, "Come and see." We fell in love with the Orthodox faith at St. John's and gradually became convinced that we should be received into the Orthodox Church

12. My father, a committed Christian whom I love and respect, **counseled me** to contact some of my professors at my alma mater, Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS), before I made such a significant change in my life. I corresponded, directly or indirectly, with four professors during this journey; two were from DTS, one was from Westminster Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Escondido, CA and one was the former head of the Old Testament department at DTS, my former Hebrew professor, and now (to my knowledge as of 5-25-95) an Episcopalian and professor at Trinity Evangelical Episcopal Seminary. One highly respected professor at DTS actually stated that the Orthodox Church had preserved the true Christian faith better than any other church; he said that he embraced the doctrinal formulations of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, "and, yes, even the teaching about icons." I spoke with the other professor at DTS after I had become Orthodox who told me of another Dallas grad who had converted to the Orthodox Christian Faith. The professor at Westminster was very open and was "very persuaded" by my presentation about Mary. The Episcopalian professor also was very interested in my journey and told me that after he had experienced formal, liturgical worship (within the Church of England) there was no going back to the shallow, man/sermon-centered, entertainment-style of worship. I understand and fully agree. Once you experience and comprehend Orthodox liturgical worship-theology-doctrine-spirituality there's no turning back; nothing on earth compares with it, nothing; it's heavenly worship (Isa. 6; Heb. 8:1-6; 12:18-29; Rev. 4-5, etc.), the worship of heaven manifest on earth. All of these conversations served to confirm the direction that God seemed to be leading our lives.

ORTHODOXY IS IT!

It took us about a year and a half to convert (January 1991 until June 14, 1992). Thus, I studied the Orthodox faith (intensely) for about 18 months before being received into the Church. It's now been more than two years and I remain fully persuaded. If Orthodoxy isn't *IT*, *IT* isn't. I love being an Orthodox Christian! [*Actually now it's been more than 15 years!*]

IT COST US ALOT, BUT IT'S WORTH IT

Becoming Orthodox has cost us a lot. I lost my job at the Christian school where I was teaching (another story in itself), being falsely accused, misunderstood, and dishonored by those I served and loved. Convinced that Christ and His Church (the Kingdom of God) are the pearl of great price, the treasure hidden in the field, worth giving up everything to obtain, we have counted the cost and have followed Christ into His Church. He has richly rewarded us with "right worship" and "right teaching," the "true faith." Participating in the services of the Church and worshipping the Lord in an Orthodox manner is the passion of our lives (cf. Psalm 27:4; 63:1-2; 73:25-26; 122:1; Eph. 1:22-23; 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:4-5). "Blessed are you when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely because of Me. Rejoice and be glad for great is your reward in heaven."

IS IT FOR YOU?

I realize I've written quite a bit. A lot has gone into this journey. I hope you've found it interesting. I hope you've found it challenging. I hope you've found it edifying. I hope you'll feel free to ask me anything about what I've said or offer any comments or critique. Before I close I'd like to share a few personal insights.

(1) My purpose in telling you these things is simply to recount my own personal faith journey. It is not my intention to criticize you personally or the faith which you have in the risen Lord. The points I have made are intended to accurately reflect my personal journey, my thoughts, my feelings. I have tried to express the points and progression of my quest for the true faith of Christ as they actually unfolded and developed. Any insights you have about my journey or blind spots you can see in my thinking I would gladly receive and consider. If you desire a more doctrinal-dogmatic-Scriptural defense of any particular aspect of the Orthodox faith I would be glad to prepare a humble response.

(2) Every human being must search for himself the answers to the questions that I have wrestled with. My own past reminds me that there are many sincere and godly Christians who are not visibly united to the Orthodox Church. I am compelled to respect the right and convictions of every man for the faith which he or she has. I am not a judge, but only of my own life and conscience (1 Cor. 4:3-5; 5:12). I must answer to God for how I seek and follow Him. The Christian life is a journey. God calls each of us to seek Him with our whole heart. He continually calls us into His Kingdom (1 Thess. 2:12). My response to that calling led me and my wife and children into the Orthodox Church. I believe it is "the Church." However, I also recognize that God's Spirit and God's grace are available and working mystically outside the Church, in other churches, even where there is no church. Wherever there is true faith and genuine piety we must rejoice. The greatest commandment is to love God. The proof of our love for God is in our obedience to Him and how we love one another.

(3) I still personally agonize over the fact that all professing Christians are not united together in one Church, sharing one, undivided faith. Orthodoxy teaches that Christian unity is based on the fullness of the faith, not on any least common denominator. Although we must affirm one another in the clear truth of Christ and His Word, we must also be willing to dialogue to try to understand one another and be committed to follow the truth wherever it leads, whatever the cost. Each of us is personally responsible to seek, live, proclaim, and defend

the truth God has revealed. Our salvation and the salvation of others demands it (1 Tim. 4:9-16). At the same time we must pursue love and holiness and show forth the meekness of Christ. We should pray that all true Christians bear witness to God's truth and love, until we all reach the unity of the faith once for all delivered to the saints. If you can clearly demonstrate a more perfect way, please show me. I will listen. I want only Christ and His Church.

May our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ use these words to further His perfect will in your life. Are you willing to *do* His will? That is the question (see John 7:16-17).

P.S. Sunday, June 11, 1995 marks our three year anniversary as Orthodox Christians. I still love being Orthodox; I still would not trade this for anything. The sacramental life is real. Growing in God's grace and love make life worth living. I would give up all I own to follow the Savior into His holy Church. Life is a struggle, but God's grace makes life worth living. Orthodoxy has given me an eternal perspective. I am constantly challenged to commit my entire life to the Lord; I am constantly challenged to make Jesus Christ and His holy Gospel the very center and focus of my life.

P.P.S. Sunday, June 14, 1998 marked our sixth anniversary as Orthodox Christians. On July 14 we are planning to move to Pennsylvania where I will attend St. Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary, and God willing at the end of a year be ordained to the Holy Priesthood. Thanks be to God for all things! {We have agreed to stay two years and complete the M.Div. }

Thursday, May 27, 1999

Since that last update in 1999 MUCH has happened, which will have to be written in another edition or a sequel. Until then, may Christ our true God fill you with His profound peace and ineffable love!

P.P.P.S. I was ordained to the Holy Priesthood on November 14, 1999. I graduated St. Tikhon's Seminary with the Master of Divinity in May 2000. I have been serving St. Herman Orthodox Church in Littleton, Colorado since August 2000. Today is December 13, 2007, the Feast day of St. Herman of Alaska our heavenly patron. *Holy Father Herman, pray unto God for us!*

