

Why We Stand in Prayer

In its highest state, the Orthodox Christian worship of God is worship “in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). Such prayer has both an inward and an outward aspect. Inward prayer of the heart is spoken of by many Fathers of the Church, for example in the *Philokalia*. In the Divine Services of the Orthodox Church, it is customary for the outward aspect of prayer to include our body through standing in prayer, making the sign of the cross, bowing, making prostrations, and processing. Orthodox Christians stand in prayer, in the spirit of King David who exclaims, “My foot hath stood in uprightness; in the congregations will I bless thee, O Lord” (Psalm 25:12*), and “They have been fettered and have fallen, but we are risen and are set upright” (Psalm 19:8). A modern day Confessor of the Church under the Communist Yolk, Fr. George Calciu, has spoken about how difficult it was for him as a child to stand still in prayer: “There were no chairs or pews in church. After church, when we came back home, mother used to say to us: ‘Don’t you know that this is your prayer to God, just standing there until your feet hurt? This is a child’s prayer to God.’”

Orthodox churches usually include some chairs for the aged and infirm, but it is common practice to sit only during Old Testament readings and the Kathisma readings (during Matins). Parishioners may sit when they must, but we ask for all to stand during the reading of the Six Psalms, the reading of the Gospel, and when the congregation communes the Divine Gifts.

*Numbering is according to the Septuagint version.

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