

## 5. An Important Note: Orthodoxy Is Fullness

There is a famous story about the monk of the Egyptian desert, Abba Lot, who went one day to his Elder, Abba Joseph, and said, “Abba, as far as I can I say my little rule of prayer, I fast a little, I pray and meditate, I live in peace and as far as I can, I purify my thoughts. What else can I do?” Raising his hands upward, the Elder responded, “If you will, you can become all flame,” and brilliant light radiated out from his fingertips, like lamps of fire. Now, as much as we may want to have this “finger-fire superpower,” it’s not likely to happen for us exactly like that. The point of the story is that there is no limit to what God can do in us, if we will give our whole hearts to Him.

In our culture there is a tendency towards what we could call minimalism, as well as towards legalism. Though we may not express it this way, our operating mode tends to be based on this question: “what’s the list of things I need to do to be good, and how can I get those things done most conveniently?” Or even, “what’s the least I can get away with doing, and still be considered a good Christian?”

However, Orthodoxy teaches us to ask a very different question: “how can I receive more grace from God?” That is, we are taught by our whole tradition not to allow ourselves to grow complacent, or self-satisfied. Because God is infinite, the possibilities for our growth and for receiving more grace from God are also infinite. St. Gregory of Nyssa even speaks of this process of growth and increase as eternal.

This begins with the way we look at the question of “salvation” in the Orthodox Church. Salvation for us is maximalist, not minimalist! It means not only forgiveness of our sins (though it certainly includes that), but also our healing, our sanctification, our being filled with God’s grace and united to His life. Yes, Christ saves us by dying on the Cross. He also saves us by rising from the dead. He also saves us by becoming incarnate and being born of the Virgin, and being baptized in the Jordan, and by performing all His earthly ministry. He saves us by His glorious ascension and by sending the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. He saves us by our baptism, and our chrismation, and by feeding us with His precious Body and Blood. AND He saves us through membership in His Body, the Church, and by the whole life and tradition of the Church.

Although it might offer more of a (false) sense of security if there were, there is no list of 3 things which we can check off and be “all set” and able to take a snooze. That is not to say there aren’t certain indicators that we are on the right path. These would include many of the things addressed in this guide. While we can be totally confident in God’s mercy and love and the fact that He has done, is doing, and will do all that is necessary for our salvation, we must also exercise our free will at every moment to give our “Amen” to God. Whatever progress we may have made (or think we’ve made), it is always better to say with St. Paul, “forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3:13-14) It will be helpful when considering everything else that is written in this handbook to keep in mind that Orthodoxy is fullness. God’s uncreated Grace, and the possibility for our receiving it, is limitless — but we must be willing to receive it.