



## Thoughts of Leaving the Orthodox Church

Dear XXX,

First off, please forgive the delay in my reply. I have nothing but excuses, save fear of failing you in my answer.

I was once in a similar state as you now find yourself. I got to the point where, though I found comfort in praying the services and serving as pastor, I hated everything “Orthodox”. A magazine would arrive with a picture of a priest in vestments — a service, baptism, or some such — and I would look at the picture with loathing and cast it aside in anger. It usually found its way to the back of the bathroom toilet. Then I’d have a visceral reaction every time I saw it.

I hated all things that looked and smelled of “Orthodoxy” — all the while trying to lead a small community. It was awful.

I won’t go into the details of how I got to that point, but (forgive me here, please) I remember walking into the church early one morning and cursing myself before all the saints portrayed on the icons. It was a horrible two years.

That said, it was years ago, here I am ... still.

Back in 2006, I was hearing confessions at St George, Houston, during one of the Presanctified Liturgies. The church was dark and full, lots of confessions, the choir was singing beautifully. I wept.

It occurred to me that that very moment, when I felt close to God and heaven, would not have been possible if I had not held on during those terrible years. You might not be able to hear this in your current state but, really, it’s all — ALL OF IT — worth it.

During those years of struggle I tried everything — confession, counseling, crying, cussing, prostrations, Jesus Prayer, gossip — everything! What can I say? I’m a poor priest and a great sinner. But, like you, I truly believe that the Orthodox Church is the fullness of Christ in the world. Honestly, in hindsight, I thank God that I was ordained; else, in my weakness, I might surely have left the Church.

Now, years later, things are drastically different. Oh I’m still worthless if you scratch me hard enough. But I look back on those bad years in awe. My life, ministry and outlook are so much — so vastly — different now, through no feat of my own, save hanging in there.

Oh sure, there was God’s mercy, etc, yada, yada, yada. But, spoiled that I am, I expected that. Besides, some things sound trite when you’re in a funk. God is, after all, God; of that I had no doubt. Though unconscious of it, I had plenty of doubts about me.

What is remarkable is that I stayed. And that has made all the difference. The problem wasn’t the Church, Orthodoxy, or Mercy, you see. It was me.



I needed the Church.

I have added you to my poor prayers; I covet yours. (You're welcome to vent this way if needed.)

With love in Christ,

Fr Joseph

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