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### Topic #3

*"Discuss how icons play a helpful role in the prayer life of an Orthodox Christian."*

I would like to reflect on the important roles that icons have in our lives as Orthodox Christians. As you know, the word icon comes from the Greek word "eikona" meaning image. In its earliest form, icons included the cross, the fish and other symbols that represent Christ. By the 5<sup>th</sup> century, icons became more prevalent with beautiful paintings, mosaics and other art. But, it was our Lord who clearly defined His guidelines in Exodus 20 of the Bible, more commonly referred to as the 10 Commandments. "You shall not make for yourself an idol or a likeness of anything in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God." We do not worship the paint or the wood of the icon but deeply respect the person depicted.

From the moment one enters our church, it is clear that icons not only enhance the beauty of our church but also have a key role as a means of worship and veneration. How then, do we as Orthodox Christians, justify the use of icons in both our religious services and our daily lives? Each time I enter our Church, I feel a great sense of peace as I venerate by doing my cross, bowing and kissing icons. More importantly, as I sit in the pew during the service, I think of the miraculous events depicted on these exquisite icons. I see the incarnation of our Lord, His miracles, His crucifixion and His Resurrection. I think to myself what a beautiful visual story of our faith exists on these church walls available to anyone even if they can't read or write. Truly, this is a magnificent way of education the masses.

Icons also serve as a visual reminder and aid us in prayer and mediation. For example, when I see the icon of Christ's crucifixion, I think of all that Jesus did and how He suffered to save us. Not only are icons a visual reminder but those depicted on the icons serve as role models for each of us in our daily lives. As I look at the many icons belonging to my grandparents and great grandparents in my home, I reflect on the superior character and deeds of those depicted and the dreams and aspirations that my grandparents had for me. By seeing these icons, I think of the way that the Lord would want me to be and how I should live my life. They encourage me to imitate the Lord's teachings and virtues each and every day.

In conclusion, icons should not just beautify our lives but rather icons should aid us in prayer, in meditation and in living a good Christian life in a way that joins us to the goodness and holiness of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.