

Vinny Arrigo  
St. Haralambos, Canton, Ohio  
Metropolis of Pittsburgh  
Senior Division

### Topic #3

*How do you respond to people who question your belief in God and participation in the life of the Church?*

The most dominant religion in the United States is Christianity. Roughly 83% of adults in America identify under some faith of the Christian Church. To put this into perspective, there are about 323 million people in the United States, according to census.gov, and this number keeps increasing. 83% of that would be equal to 268.1 million people. This is a rough estimate considering the number of people in the United States is ever changing. The biggest faiths of Christianity in the U.S consist of; Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. So, when I get questioned on my religious beliefs, it's rather interesting to hear the responses. People claim to know about our Orthodox faith and my response to that is this; "You may believe you have my faith down to a science, but I assure you, there's more than meets the eye."

I am fortunate to go to a school that is so diverse religiously. I remember, about a month ago some of my friends and I were preparing our speeches after school, and we somehow made it to the topic of religion. I remember sitting back and listening to my friends talk about everything from their churches, faith, and their liturgies. I was rather interested because none of my four friends had a similar answer. One was Roman Catholic, another Baptist, one Protestant and a Lutheran. One of my friends asked me about my faith and I told him I was a Greek Orthodox Christian. This group wasn't aware of Orthodoxy and seeing as Orthodox Christians make up 1.7% of the U.S population, I don't blame them. They began questioning when I go to church, what our liturgy is like, and what Orthodox Christians believe in. They were not questioning me out of hostility of my religion, but more so out of curiosity and ignorance. My only reaction to this was to answer them. However, while I was answering this barrage of questions, one question stood out to me. "What does being Greek Orthodox mean to me?" at the time, I was stunned. I couldn't truthfully answer my friend. It wasn't until, as of late, did I actually come to a realization. I finally found what I believe to be an answer and would like to share it with you.

Greek Orthodoxy isn't just another religion. It derives from the Greek words *orthos* meaning "true" and *doxa* meaning "glorification." When combined Orthodoxy becomes the "true worship" of God and this feels correct because when I walk into an Orthodox Church I feel the presence of God, more so than anywhere else. When you walk into a Greek Orthodox Church all of your senses are engaged. Your sight is engaged by the beautiful icons the incense draws your sense of smell in. The Presanctified Liturgy invites us to "taste and see" Holy Communion. In doing so, 2 Peter 1:4 states, "We become partakers of Divine Nature." The prayers and hymns grip at your hearing. Holding the most holy body of Christ, grabs your sense of touch, as you do all in your power to prevent any of it from touching the floor.

It also stimulates you spiritually. All of the aforementioned experiences trigger a wonderful feeling inside. It's the closest thing to Heaven on Earth. It feels like an unwavering love.

We're more than just fellow churchgoers. We're like a family. When one of us is hurting, the rest of us hurt with them. When one of us is happy, the rest of us are just as joyful. We have a steadfast love for each other. We're united by our heritage yes, but that's not the beauty of it. The beauty of Greek Orthodoxy is that we're all united by our love for God.

So, in conclusion, my faith isn't just a faith. It's a lifestyle. It's a tightknit community filled with love and truth. Many theologians and historians claim that Greek Orthodoxy is the oldest faith of Christianity. There is a reason this is one of the oldest established religions. We are a family. Orthodoxy cannot be summed up, but I can try. It's the Story of God and All of Us.