I believe in Jesus Christ, so why do I need the Church?

What is believing?
The word “believe” means to have faith, but faith is not a matter of mere understanding and believing in God in rational knowledge.

There is more to faith than just saying: ‘I believe’

After all, anyone can say … I believe,
St James in his Letter (part of the Bible) says, “even the demons believe and shudder” (2:19).

Nothing wrong with asking questions …

- Several times in the Gospels, Christ tells us to strive! He assures us, “for everyone who asks … receives, and everyone who searches … finds, and for everyone who knocks, … the door will be opened”.
- If we are really sincere in our belief and really want to follow Jesus, then our search will ultimately lead us to the Church.

Faith is a personal experience of divine reality.

It is much more than just belief in the Bible.
- God’s word is not held captive in a book!
- John’s gospel concludes that “the world could not contain the books that would be written”.
- And there are many things, like our knowledge of the nature of Christ, eg. the word, οὐμοοας is not found in the Bible.
- Lot of misunderstanding about Orthodoxy and the Bible.

In fact …..

The Bible belongs to the Church!
The Church does not belong to the Bible.
The Bible is a written testimony and a product of Holy Tradition.
- It took almost 340 years after Christ to universally accept the canon of the Bible as we have it today.
- It was the Church Fathers who determined the canonical books of the New Testament.
- It is the Church Fathers who have explained the meaning of the various writings for all generations to come - exegesis.

To accept the Bible without accepting the Church Fathers & Holy Tradition is incomprehensible!

So in believing …

- To truly believe, we must have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and we do this by becoming followers!
- It was for this reason that Christ established the Church.
- Church is the foretaste of the Kingdom of God - it is heaven on earth
- Her mission is to sanctify the world and to lead all people to salvation.
The Church is the fulfillment of our Lord's words:

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (Mt 24:35); “... and on this rock I will build My Church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it” (Mt. 16:18).

We need the Church, because, as we will see, the Church is the 'Ark of Salvation'

So if we believe in Jesus, let's start with what He says:

- “I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread, will live forever;” (Jn 6:48-50)

will live forever and added (when preaching in the Synagogue):

- “Truly truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day…” (Jn. 6:53-5)  

But, where do you get it? Where do you get this Body and Blood of the Son of Man?

This is not a TV commercial,

but the fact is,

you can only get it, “exclusively” in His Holy Church!!!

And this gift of the Bread of Life is available to each and everyone one us, every time we celebrate the Holy Eucharist!

After all, who do you think started the Church?

The formal Church was established with the blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ and was consecrated by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

As, Jesus told His Apostles, “The Holy Spirit … will teach you all things, and bring to remembrance all that I said to you” (Jn 14:26), and He added, “the Holy Spirit will guide you to all truth.” (Jn16:13)

“He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me.” (Lk 10:16)

But which Church?

We usually talk of Orthodox, Roman Catholics and Protestants, but the fact is, there are many many different churches that claim to believe in Jesus.

There can only be ONE TRUTH!
Known as 'The Church': One Holy, Catholic & Apostolic Church

451: 4th Ec Council

1054: Great Schism

Roman Catholic

Protestants

Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

St Leo:
“that which was visible in the Redeemer, has now passed into the Sacraments.”

Holy Sacraments

1. Baptism
2. Chrismation
3. Confession
4. Holy Unction
5. Holy Communion (Eucharist)
6. Marriage
7. Ordination

What do these words mean?

- Sacrament is a Latin word. In Greek the word used is Μυστήριον, meaning ”mystery”.
- Eucharist comes from the Greek word εὐχαριστία meaning ”thanksgiving”.
- Liturgy comes from the Greek word λειτουργία which means ”λαός” (people) - the Liturgy is the work of the people (εργα του λαού).
- Easter & Sunday have spiritual meaning in Greek:
  Πάσχα - Passover
  Κυριακή - the day of the Lord.

Without the Church, we cannot have the Eucharist! 
And without the Eucharist, we cannot have the Liturgy!

The Liturgy is the Mystery of Mysteries

The very essence of the Liturgy is Christ’s command:
“Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19)
Is it because:

- Services are too long (chanters take hours)
- "It’s all Greek to me" ..αβγδ...
- Other things to do, etc etc.

Or is because:

- We do not understand

If we knew and understood that the Divine Liturgy embraces the Kingdom of Heaven and is:

- Christ's ministry, life, sacrifice and Resurrection
- Full of theology
- Full of symbolism
- Where we can receive the Body and Blood of Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ...

then we should realise that we need The Church!

The Physical Church

- The early Christians gathered and worshiped in a liturgical manner similar to the synagogue order.
- Practice moved to the graves (the catacombs) of the Martyrs for celebration of the Eucharist.
- And we continue to do this, to this day … …

Today …

- We celebrate the Liturgy on the Altar Table, which has the bones of the Saints ‘wax’ cemented into it.
- We have the Αντιµησιον (antimension) - a rectangular “cloth”, which represents the entombment of Christ and sits on the altar and can be used in the absence of a consecrated altar - it has sewn into it, portions of relics of saints.

Historical setting - Liturgy

- Last Supper (Gospels - Jesus Himself!)
- Book of Acts - breaking bread
- Clements of Rome (1st Century)
  – Eucharistic prayer
- Polycarp of Antioch (1st Century)
  – Role of the Bishop
- Tertullian (2nd Century)
  – 2 parts of Liturgy - Catechumens and Faithful
- Justin Martyr (2nd Century)
  – Early Order → Typikon
- Irenaeus of Lyon (2nd Century)
  – Apostolic Succession

So what we have today is the Liturgy as it became developed by the Fathers

- We can see from the very beginning, the Liturgy is the Eucharist!
- Developed by the same Fathers who put the Bible together.
So, to believe in the Bible and to believe in Jesus and not the Church and the Church Fathers is absolutely incomprehensible!
The Sacrament of Confession also shows why we need the Church.

Christ Himself inaugurated the Sacrament of Confession

- Jesus told His Apostles:
  - “Whosoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whosoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (Mt16:19 & 18:18)
- And again, after His Resurrection:
  - “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any they are retained.” (Jn21:22-3)
  
*This He passed on to His Apostles …*

But, who is the forgiveness for?

- Was it *only* for those living at the time of Jesus?
- Or was it for all people of *all times*?
- Christ came for all people of all generations and this continues to this day with the people who followed the Apostles - the Church elders, the Bishops.
- And so once again, we can see that: *this can only happen in His Church!*

So, what can we say about our faith, our Church, today?

*In essence, our Church is one and the same as the early Church - because we are linked with the past (Tradition), through Apostolic Succession*

As St Paul says:

“Stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter.” (2Th. 2:15)

“remember … and maintain the traditions just as I handed them on to you.” (1Cor. 11:2)

And this Tradition continues to the present day …. the same spirit, the same faith, the same ethos, the very same being.

Apostolic Succession

- Known as "Apostolic Succession". Tradition is passed down through the Bishops, who have succeeded from the Apostles.
- The word tradition comes from the Latin: *Tra-di-to*, which means “handing down”.
- In Greek, **παραδοση** - receiving and passing on.
- Apostolic succession - *Viva vox apostolorum* (vivid voice of the Apostles) and it is this that: "guarantees the True Church & allows the Church to be infallible! It is the backbone of the Church."
  - Archbishop Stylianos (Systematic Theology)
The Bishop

- Bishop is the “Living image of Christ”
  Επισκόπος - literary means over & seeing (overseer)
- Where the Bishop is, there is the church
  - Without the Bishop there is no Mystery of the Church!
  - And only through the Bishop can a Priest celebrate the Mystery (ordination)
- Ordination of Bishop - 3 Bishops - “laying of hands”
- Patriarch, Archbishop, Metropolitan are titles - not higher ordinations - all these are ordained Bishops

Ordination – Bishop Iakovos

This is our Church, we are directly linked with Our Lord & Saviour Jesus Christ

Past Fathers
- Patriarch Bartholomew
- Archbishop Stylianos
St Constantine & Helen Church

So, what does all this mean for us today?

St Constantine & Helen Church

Late Byzantine Fathers
- Early Byzantine Fathers
- Nicene Fathers
- Apostolic Fathers

Apostolic Fathers

The Apostles

So, what can we say to conclude?

Orthodoxy is a way of life, living our life in the Church through the sacraments.
And, if we really believe ....

... then we need the Church because in every Divine Liturgy, Christ Himself is truly present!
Only in the Liturgy can we receive the “Body and Blood of Christ!”

St Nicholas Cabasilas “if we are properly prepared (prayer, humility, fasting and confession), nothing prevents us from being perfectly united with Christ”.

And this perfection in Christ can only be attained in the liturgy - in His Holy CHURCH!

We should enjoy the Liturgy & get involved!

• Start by bringing the prosforo and the wine,
• Also bring an Greek/English Liturgy book,
• When entering the Church, light a candle - this is like a small prayer - Christ Is the Light!
• Use our body - Sign of the cross, bow our heads etc
• Respond: Αµην, Κυριε ελεησον, etc.
• Sing the hymns, Recite Creed (I believe), Lord’s Prayer
  But do not upset the chanters!

And we thought we did not need the Church!

Abbot Vasileios, Mt Athos:
– Those who think they know Christ outside the Church, know very little about Him; those who belong to the Church live “in Him”.

St Cyprian of Carthage
– “He who does not have the Church as his mother, does not have God as his Father”.

“As the prophets beheld, as the Apostles have taught, as the Church has received, as the Teachers have dogmatized …
This is the faith of the Apostles, this is the faith of the Fathers, this is the Faith of the Orthodox ...this is the faith that has established the universe!”

This is our faith. Having this wonderful treasure, let us preserve it, let us keep it, and let us follow it, so that this treasure becomes the victory of Christ in us. Amen.

Questions & Discussion