Orthodox Essay, Research Paper

Greek Orthodox Church

I have decided to visit a Greek Orthodox Church, Saint Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox church. I went alone because I figured that this would not draw too much attention during the service. I tried to find a near by church that will give the service partially in English. When I found one near me it was my luck that I went at the time when it was all spoken in Greek. The English service was at six in the evening, and the all-Greek service started at ten in the morning. So to my discouragement I was at a lost at any attempts that I had preplanned to adapt to this new environment. I didn?t even get the name of the priest. While I was there sitting in the back I was able to dissect some of the norms of the church and the culture with in.

The church external appearance was quit different than other churches that I have seen. It was basically a big white stucco block with a gold dome on top and four decorated spikes on each corner of the building that surrounded the dome. The people of course were all Greek and were very well dressed. Most of the men and boys all wore suits, and If not they had some kind of vest on. I don?t know if this was some kind of rule or tradition, but it mostly seemed as a respect to God. The women all wore the basic dresses, and all the skirts fell down below the knee. Everybody was proper and ordered. As I walked in the church I entered a lobby of some kind. What I saw hear was something like social hour. Everybody was in there. They were all speaking Greek, and I felt as if I was in a family reunion party. The children were all together; the adults talked together and the young adults all were together. The way they all socialize is when someone comes up to say hello, they give each other a kiss on the cheek and a hug. These people are all very close to each other. It seems as if the church is the center of their lives. I admire that trait as well. To enter the auditorium you must enter this little room, which has a piece of garment from St. Constantine and St. Helen. Also there were candles lit. As they walked through this little room they lit a candle and knelt down for a moment to pray, and then touched each garment and made a cross over their chest. Then I entered the auditorium. I felt as if I was in heaven. There were incense burning, paintings on the walls, ceiling, and on the dome. The one thing that caught my eye was that there was gold every where. There were gold borders, trim and even gold in the paint. The communion table was all in gold as well.

I sat in the back so I could get a batter look at everybody. When people entered the auditorium, went into a silence as if it was some kind of disrespect. When the sermon started everyone stood up and all the priest came out. The one priest that was the least decorated said one thing and we all knelt and a prayer was said. Having everything said in Greek made this part the most difficult for me to follow. During the sermon we all sat up and sang songs, which were not like any church songs. These songs all had a long whining tune to them. At some points of the service it seems that the priest would read out of a book that seemed like a liturgy book. The priest would sing out a passage and the people would respond to what he said. The responses were repetitive, so it might have been a common response like in catholic churches. During these readings almost everyone had their head bowed. I was there for almost an hour and they began the communion ceremony. This is the only thing that I know about the Greek Orthodox Church. Communion to them is huge. They actually perform it the same way the Catholics perform it. They have the priest start off and then the rest of the church was offered. The huge difference between the Greeks communion and the Catholics communion is that the Catholics believe that the bead and wine is the spirit of Jesus Christ, but the Greeks believe that it is the actual body of Jesus Christ. They believe that if it is consumed, it transforms into the actual blood and flesh. Greeks and Catholics went into wars because of this. After communion I was expecting offerings to be passed out but there was none. Later I found out that it was made independently in a box by the doors. When I look around the auditorium everybody is very proper, well poised in their seats. I was kind of slouched, but corrected myself as I realized how everyone was. I had to cut my visit short after two and a half hours at the church; I had to call it quits.

When I was done I had a chat with my father and I told him about how long the service was. He explained that those services are done when they say they are done, and that there is no predetermined time of when they will be done. The service might take up to six hours long, all this done in the name of God. When I was there trying to understand what was going on I did notice a lot of praising. The majority of the time was singing and praying. The priest was really not doing much, as priest would have in a common Christian church. In my observations the church seems to be the center of the community. All the Greeks, in the area, go there to attend this church. They all know Greek and it is a church for the Greek mind. There culture is tied into the church, one being how they only speak Greek in the church. It seems to be a huge family, when they gather there. The church is the center of their life, and I was lucky to experience their love for the church and for another.