

ON THE LIGHTING OF CANDLES IN CHURCH



St. Simeon of Thessalonica (15th century), commentator on the Divine Liturgy, states that pure wax symbolizes the purity and chastity of those who offer it. It is offered as a sign of our having repented of stubbornness and self-will. The softness and pliability of wax speaks of our readiness to obey God. The burning of the candle represents man's deification, his

becoming a new creature through the fire of God's love.

The candle is a witness to faith, of man's belonging to the Divine light. It expresses the flame of our love for the Lord, for the Mother of God, for the angels or for the saints. One must not light a candle with a cold heart, merely as a formality. The external action must be supplemented by prayer, if only the simplest one, using one's own words. The smoke of the flame continuing to rise symbolizes our prayer continuing to rise to God.

There are no absolute rules as to how many lighted candles should be offered, though some like to light one for each person for whom prayers are being offered. Their purchase is an offering to the Church, voluntary and not burdensome.

Sometimes it so happens that the candle stand is filled, leaving no place to set a lighted candle. The attendant may extinguish some of the previously lit candles. One should not be upset if, at the end of the service, your candle is extinguished; the sacrifice has already been accepted by God.

The burning wax candle is pleasing to God, but He prizes the burning of the heart even more. Our spiritual life, our participation in church services, is not limited to the candle. The candle will not free us from sin, will not unite us with God, and will not give us the power to wage the unseen warfare. The candle is filled with symbolic meaning, but we are saved not by symbols, but by the full reality, Divine grace.