

The prayer rope (Rod Dreher)

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Rod Dreher

I had a prayer rope, in fact, one that had been given to me a few years earlier in New York by an Orthodox friend. I had been grateful for the gift, but had never prayed it. I prayed the rosary. Still, I cared for the *chotki*, though I hadn't seen it in a while. I jumped out of bed and went into my office, where I found it in a drawer. I remembered how my friend had shown me how to wrap it around my wrist, and I did so. Haunted by that dream, I decided that I should find the nearest Orthodox church and go to it to pray that very day.

It was a Saturday, and I had to put in some time at the office. When I left work that

afternoon, I drove over to St. Seraphim Orthodox cathedral in the Oak Lawn neighborhood of Dallas, not far from downtown, where my office was. The parking lot was empty, except for a single car. I pulled in next to it. As I got out, I saw a young man walking out of the church towards that car. I stepped to him to introduce myself, and we discovered as we extended our hands to shake that we were both wearing the same type of prayer rope. I would discover later that these were not common types. We had a laugh at that. I told him that I was not Orthodox, but wanted to go into the church to offer a prayer. He excused himself to ask the archbishop for permission, then came back to let me in.

I was dazzled by the interior of the church, which you can see [here](#). I didn't know what to do once I was inside. I remember going over to the left side of the nave, standing before an icon of the Blessed Mother, and asking for her prayers. Then I kneeled in the center of the nave and poured out my anguished heart to God, silently asking for help. When I finished, I turned to leave, and saw the young man sitting on a bench in the narthex, the back of the church. I thanked him for showing me the church.

"Do you know how to pray that thing?" he asked, pointing to my prayer rope.

"Not really," I said.

"Let me show you."

He taught me the Jesus Prayer, and taught me how you clear your mind, and focus your breathing. I thanked him for that.

"Try it," he said, not willing to let me leave.

So I prayed ten beads, breathing as he taught me to breathe, and clearing my mind. It felt good.

"That's something else," I said. He smiled.

In the parking lot, he told me he was a soldier based in Fort Hood, and a fairly recent convert to Orthodoxy. He had driven nearly three hours north to go to vespers that night. His time serving in Afghanistan had been rough. He said that the government was not leveling with the American people about the war. I didn't want to hear that back then, but it turned out he was right.

The young soldier — I forget his name — had told me that the [Philokalia](#) was good to read, so I stopped by a Borders on the way home to see if they had it. They did not have it, but they did have a book called [The Mountain of Silence](#), by Kyriacos

Markides, which is more or less a journalistic-style introduction to Orthodox spirituality. I bought the book, and devoured it. I began to pray my *chotkid* diligently. And I began to reconnect with God.

You can read Rod Dreher whole story of conversion from Catholicism to Orthodoxy here: <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/finding-your-religion/>