

GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THE ASSUMPTION

# Studies in the Faith

## The Divine Liturgy (Part 1)



GREEK ORTHODOX  
CHURCH  
OF THE  
ASSUMPTION

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## DIVINE LITURGY (part 1)

*I shall wash my hands in innocence, O Lord, and shall serve before Your altar. I shall listen to the voice of Your praise and declare all Your wonders. Lord, I have loved the beauty of Your house, the place where Your glory abides. Destroy not my soul with sinners, nor my life with men of blood in whose hands are transgressions; their right hand is full of bribes. But as for me, I have walked in innocence. Redeem me, O Lord, and have mercy on me. My foot is set upon the straight path; in the assemblies, O Lord, I shall bless You.*

(Prayer from the preparatory service of the Kairos)

### READING ASSIGNMENTS

Welcome to the Orthodox Church: by Frederica Mathewes-Green, Pages 98-134.

## THE DIVINE LITURGY THE SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST

**T**he Eucharist, or the Divine Liturgy, is the central mystery of the Church. It is at once the source and summit of her life. In it, the Church is continuously changed from a human community into the Body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit, and the people of God, St Nicholas Cabasilas has written, "By dispensation of His Grace, He {Christ} disseminates Himself in every believer through that flesh whose substance comes from bread and wine, blending Himself with the bodies of believers, to secure that, by this union with the immortal, man too may be a sharer in incorruption,"

### A CONTINUOUS PENTECOST

Each Divine Liturgy is a continuation of the mystery of Pentecost. It is the renewal and confirmation of the coming of the Holy Spirit who is ever present in the Church. Giving emphasis to this, a prayer in the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom reads, "Make us worthy to find grace in Your presence so that our sacrifice may be pleasing to You and that Your good and gracious Spirit may abide with us and with the gifts here presented and with all Your people."

### THE MESSIANIC BANQUET

In the present age, between the two coming of Jesus Christ our Lord, the Divine Liturgy is always the messianic banquet, the meal of the kingdom, the time and place in which the heavenly joins and mingles with the earthly. The Eucharist initiates mankind, nature, and time into the mystery of the uncreated Trinity. The Divine Liturgy is not simply a sacred drama or a mere representation of past events. It constitutes the very presence of God's embracing love, which purifies, enlightens, perfects, and deifies (2 Peter 1:4) all "those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." (Rev 19:9), i.e., all who through Baptism and Chrismation have been incorporated into the Church and have become Christ-bearers and Spirit-bearers.

### PARTAKERS OF DIVINE NATURE

The Eucharist "is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, the flesh which suffered for our sins and which the Father in His graciousness raised from the dead." (St. Ignatius of Antioch) "The bread of life Himself changes him who feeds on Him and transforms and assimilates him into Himself" (Nicholas Cabasilas). "By this flesh (of Christ in the Eucharist) our community is raised to heaven; that is where the bread truly dwells; and we enter into the holy of holies by the pure offering of the Body of Christ." (St. Gregory Palamas).

## THE LOCAL CHURCH

The mystery of the church as the body of Christ is fully realized in the Divine Liturgy, for the Eucharist is Christ crucified and risen, in His personal presence. Every local Church, living in the full sacramental life, is the "miracle of the new life in Christ lived in community and is built upon and around the Table of the Lord." The Eucharist unites the members of the Church, both to Christ and to one another: "because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread..." (I Cor. 10:17).

## THE TERM "DIVINE LITURGY"

The Divine Liturgy is the sacred rite by which the Orthodox Church celebrates the mystery of the Eucharist. This title for the Eucharist is derived from the two Greek words, *theia* and *leitourgia*. The word *theia* means "pertaining to God," hence divine. The term *leitourgia* comes from two words *leitōs* (people) and *ergon* (work), hence "the word of the people" or "a public service, act or function." The word *leitourgia* was used in Greek antiquity to describe those services and acts which were performed for the benefit and common interest of all, including acts of worship.

## THE ORIGINS OF THE DIVINE LITURGY

The Divine Liturgy is composed of two parts, the first of which is referred to as the "Liturgy of the word", or the "Liturgy of the Catechumens," The second as the "Eucharist" or the "Liturgy of the Faithful." The first part of the Divine Liturgy, otherwise known as the "Liturgy of the Word," is a Christianized version of the synagogue service. The Eucharist, or the "Liturgy of the faithful", was instituted by Christ Himself at the last supper on Holy Thursday to perpetuate the remembrance of his redemptive work and to establish a continuous intimate communion between himself and those who believe in Him. The actions and words of the Lord concerning the bread and wine formed the basis for the Eucharist, the chief recurrent liturgical rite in the Church.

## THE LITURGIES OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

The following are the Liturgies of the Orthodox Church and when they are used in the order in which they were historically developed:

### a. The Divine Liturgy of St. James

Celebrated once a year on October 23rd, Usually only at Specific Locations such, cathedral Church's for example. Developed by 150 AD

### b. The Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great

Celebrated ten times a year; on the five Sundays of Lent, on Holy Thursday morning, on Holy Saturday morning, on the Feastday of St. Basil (January 1st) on the Eve of Christmas and on the Eve of Theophany (Epiphany). Developed by the early 4th century.

### c. The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom

The most common liturgy, celebrated on most Sunday mornings and weekdays throughout the year. Developed early 4th century,

### d. The Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts

The Divine Liturgy of the Pre-sanctified Gifts is celebrated only on Wednesdays and Fridays during Great Lent and on the first three days of Holy Week. This liturgy is basically a vesper service with the distribution of communion incorporated into it. It differs from the above three in that there is no consecration.

## rites used by other jurisdictions

### Divine Liturgy of St. Mark

Used in the Alexandrian Orthodox Churches

### Divine Liturgy of St. Gregory

Used in the Cappadocian and Alexandrian Orthodox Churches

## MULTIPLE SERVICES OCCURRING ON SUNDAY MORNING

The Services that occur on Sunday morning:

- a. **The service of the Kairos:** Time in prayer to put the priest in the right frame of mind to serve Christ at the altar.
- b. **The service of Vesting:** Priest recites prayers of vesting as each part of the vestment is put on.
- c. **The service of the Proskomide:** Preparatory service for Bread and Wine to be consecrated.
- d. **Orthros or Matins Service:** Hymns focus on the resurrection of Christ and on the life of the Saint(s) or feast-day commemorated. Ends with the singing of the Great Doxology.

## REVIEW

1. How many different Liturgies are currently in use in the Orthodox Church?
2. Name these Liturgies and when they are used.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.
  - e.
3. During Sunday morning worship, how many services take place? What are they?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.
  - e.
4. How many parts are there to the Divine Liturgy? Name them and give the purpose of each.
  - a.
  - b.

## THE DIVINE LITURGY: PART ONE - THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

The first Christians were Jews. Our Lord Himself was Jewish as were the Apostles and many of the early Saints of the Church. Coming from a Jewish background, the first Christians took what was familiar to them and Christianized it. They took the style of worship which took place in the synagogue temple and made it into a Christian service. Hence, on a daily basis the apostles continued their Jewish worship practices. For example, we read in Acts of the Apostles (3:1) that Peter and John were going to the temple, because it was the hour of prayer. Not only did they continue in Jewish worship practice, but they kept the liturgical cycle of daily prayers at three set hours of the day.

This Christianization of Jewish temple worship also manifested itself in other areas of Traditional Jewish life. We are told in Acts of the Apostles (20:16) that St. Paul was in a hurry to return to Jerusalem in order to be there for Pentecost. The feast of Pentecost was actually one of the major feasts of the Jews, the Feast of Weeks, a harvest festival celebrated fifty days after Passover. Pentecost literally means the fiftieth day. It was a feast of joy and Thanksgiving for God's protection and His rich provisions. The whole community presented itself before the Lord as "holy convocation" (see Lev 23:15 - 22). The first fruits of the wheat harvest and loaves baked from the new wheat crops were offered to the Lord. The people worshiped God, the source of life. They thanked Him for His great acts of deliverance in history and His gift of the Promised Land. It was on this Jewish festival of Pentecost that God gave humanity the gift of the Holy Spirit, the pledge of a new Promised Land, our Lord's coming kingdom. Hence, the Jewish feast of Pentecost became the Christian feast of Pentecost.

Other areas of Jewish traditions were Christianized as well. The vestments the priest wears as he celebrates the Liturgy are a Jewish tradition Christianized (See Exodus chapter 28). Incense was used in Jewish temple worship. Incense is used today in the services of the Orthodox Church. The Divine Liturgy is no different as the first part of the Liturgy is actually the Jewish Synagogue service Christianized.

The six basic components in ancient synagogue worship are as follows:

1. **The Litany:** The first and opening part of the synagogue service was a series of prayers; a litany. In its present form the Divine Liturgies of the Orthodox Church begin with the "Great Litany." The celebrant says, "In peace let us pray to the Lord." and the congregation responds, "Lord, have mercy."
2. **The Confession:** The Litany was followed by a confession of God's faithfulness and of mankind's sin. In the Orthodox Liturgies today, this confession is found in the silent prayers the priest reads between the Great Litany and the Scripture reading.
3. **Intercessory Prayer:** The third part was the Eulogy, the prayers of intercession. Likewise these intercessory prayers complement the confessions in preparation for the Scripture readings.
4. **Scripture Readings:** This was followed by the reading from the law and the prophets. In today's Orthodox Liturgies, these readings include periscopes from the Old Testament during Vespers and readings from the Gospel and the Epistles during Liturgy.
5. **Preaching:** The readings were followed by a sermon which expanded upon the reading as clarified its relevance toward daily life.
6. **The Benediction:** Following the sermon was the concluding prayer.

Those familiar with the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom as it is celebrated every Sunday, will look at the above structure of Synagogue worship and immediately recognize the fact that this is also the basic structure of the first part of the Divine Liturgy.

This is how the Jews worshiped and by extension the first apostles who were Jews worshiped the same way. Since Jesus was Jewish, this then, is the manner in which our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ worshiped! To Jesus, the above synagogue service was worship. If we read scripture with "Liturgical Eyes" the extent of syna -

-gogue worship in the lives of the early Christians becomes clear. See Acts of the Apostles 13:1ff for an example (While they were worshiping and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.")

The first part of the **Liturgy of the Word** is the Great Litany. It is called the Great Litany because it is rather long and extended. The litany covers every aspect of human need. It prays for the Church, the world, for the whole of creation. It prays for our release from trials and tribulations in our daily lives. Some of the petitions revolve around material need. It is not only the priest (or deacon), but the whole congregation who offer these petitions, and after each one request God's mercy.

The Antiphons, three in all, and separated by brief petitions, were originally selected series of psalms chanted antiphonally, that is, by two alternating groups of people verse by verse. To these psalms eventually were added hymns to Christ which came to prevail and to displace the psalms. For the sake of brevity we now hear only a few verses from the psalms, if any at all, introducing the hymns to Christ. These hymns, which are "By the Intercession of the Theotokos", "Save Us O Son of God," and "Only Begotten Son", have rich content for study and meditation. In particular the hymn "Only Begotten son of God" is a very ancient hymn proclaiming the Church's doctrine of Christ.

After the third Antiphon there takes place the procession of the Holy Gospel Book, called the Small Entrance, as compared to the procession of the prepared gifts of bread and wine during the Eucharist, called the Great Entrance. The Small Entrance, as the video pointed out, is a liturgical way of highlighting the importance of God's Word and symbolizes Christ's coming into the world to teach us God's truth. It is an act drawing attention to and preparing for the readings of the biblical lessons. The Small Entrance is accompanied by hymns called *Apolitikia* and *Kontakia* which are resurrectional and/or are related to the feast being celebrated or to the patron Saint of the local Church.

The Trisagion hymn is also a very ancient Trinitarian hymn. Its inspiration and content are based on the Old Testament, that is, the prophet Isaiah's vision of God sitting on His throne of glory and surrounded by angelic beings singing: "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His Glory." (Is. 6:5). Overwhelmed by this vision of the holiness and majesty of God, Isaiah experienced deeply his own sinfulness, and was then cleansed as an angel touched his lips with a burning coal. Ours should be a similar experience of awe before the holiness and glory of the Lord. The Liturgy is God's throne of majesty, "...a burning bush shining with God's glory".

The end of the Liturgy of the Word occurs with the giving of the Sermon. The sermon takes place at the end of the Liturgy of the Word because it is an integral part of the reading of the biblical lessons and should reflect the truth and power of God's Word. Here is how Bishop Augustinos describes the importance of preaching for the establishment of the Churches in history:

*"Not one Church was established without sacred preaching, and no Church thrived or multiplied its membership without preaching. In subterranean cemeteries called catacombs, where Christians took refuge in times of persecution, there was always a sermon when the Divine Liturgy was offered, It was a simple preaching which came from the heart of the bishop or priest."*

## REVIEW

1. Name and describe two specific ways you can prepare for the Liturgy?
2. What factors keep people from preparing for the Liturgy? What factors can motivate a person to prepare for the Liturgy?
3. What is the difference between passive and active participation in the Liturgy? When are you a passive or active participant?
4. How do you participate actively in the Liturgy?
5. Name and discuss specific ways the Liturgy itself both demands and helps us to participate actively.
6. What would you say to someone who says, "I don't get anything out of the Liturgy"?

## OVERVIEW

### **The Divine Liturgy**

*Liturgy of the word*—Begins at the end of the Doxology and continues until after the Gospel is read.

- Emphasis is on the Word of God
- Gospel and Epistle Book
- Catechized would attend this service only

*Liturgy of the Faithful*—Begins after the Gospel is read and continues to the end of the service.

- Emphasis is on the sacrament of the Eucharist
- Jesus Christ is present at the sacrament in the form of the Eucharist
- The emphasis on the Lord's prayer in preparation for the sacrament of the Eucharist

**The Divine Liturgy is an interaction between God and His people.**

- ✘ We come to the Liturgy to receive the sacrament and to give ourselves in prayer
- ✘ All petitions are in the plural denoting the communal aspect of prayer in corporate worship
- ✘ All petitions are in the form of commands because a response is demanded from us
- ✘ We must be active participants in the Liturgy if we are to live the Liturgy after the Liturgy. If we are to take Christ and our faith into the world in which we work and live.

## SESSION CHECK LIST

- Attended class session
- Read pages 98-134 of Welcome to the Orthodox Church by Frederica Mathewes-Green.



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