

The Divine Liturgy



of
our Father among the Saints
John Chrysostom

(With Commentary and Notes)

The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom is today the primary worship service of over 300 million Orthodox Christians around the world, from Greece to Finland, from Russia to Tanzania, from Japan to Kenya, Bulgaria to Australia. It is celebrated in dozens of languages, from the original Greek it was written in to English and French, Slavonic and Swahili, Korean and Arabic.

What does the word Liturgy mean? Liturgy is a Greek word that in classical times referred to the performance of a public duty; in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament made some 300 years before the coming of Christ and still used by the Church today, it referred to worship in the Temple in Jerusalem; and for Orthodox Christians it has come to mean the public worship of the Church. Because Liturgy is always a corporate, communal action, it is often translated as “the work of the people” and because it is prefaced by the word “Divine” it is specifically the work of God’s people and an experience of God’s coming Kingdom here and now by those who gather to worship Him. This means that the Liturgy is not something that the clergy “performs” for the laity. The Liturgy was never meant to be a performance or a spectacle merely to be witnessed by onlookers. All who are present for worship must be willing, conscious and active participants and not merely passive spectators. The laity con-celebrate with the officiating clergy as baptized believers and members of the “royal priesthood...a people belonging to God” (1 Peter 2:9).

The Divine Liturgy is also called the Eucharist. The Christian Eucharist is a meal specifically connected with the Passover meal of the Old Testament commemorating the liberation of the ancient Israelites from slavery in Egypt as told in the Book of Exodus. At the Last Supper with His disciples, Christ transformed this ancient Passover ritual into an act done in remembrance of Him: His life, teaching, death and resurrection. He is the new and eternal Passover lamb whose sacrificial death and resurrection from the dead frees all of humanity from slavery to sin, evil and death and opens the path to forgiveness and liberation from sin, freedom from death, eternal life and the coming of the Kingdom of God. *Eucharistia* is the ancient Greek word for “thanksgiving” or “gratitude.” The Eucharist is an expression of gratitude to God for the gifts of His Son and Spirit, our redemption and freedom.

Who was St. John Chrysostom? St. John Chrysostom (347-407AD), the 4th century Patriarch of Constantinople, was one of the most important saints and Fathers of the Church and is revered as a preacher, teacher and liturgist. He was so well known for his preaching that after his death he was given the title Χρυσόστομος, a word that means “the man with the golden mouth.” During his sermons, his congregation would often burst into applause. Eloquent and uncompromising, he spoke out forcefully against political and clerical corruption, the conspicuous consumption of the wealthy, and for the needs of the poor and disenfranchised of his day. Preaching that “feeding the hungry is a greater work than raising the dead,” he was responsible for initiating ministry to Constantinople’s poor, with the Church providing meals for several thousand people every day. More than 600 of his homilies have survived. He had a deep love for the Scriptures and, as Metropolitan Kallistos Ware once wrote, “he can truly be called an evangelical.” His series of 55 sermons on the Acts of the Apostles are the only surviving commentary on that book of the Bible from the first 1,000 years of Christian history. His treatise *On the Priesthood* – which discusses the requirements and responsibilities of those who would

seek to serve Christ and His Church as bishops, priests and deacons – is still read in Orthodox seminaries to this day. "When the priest calls upon the Holy Spirit," Chrysostom wrote, "angels attend him and the whole sanctuary is filled with the heavenly hosts." Although the Liturgy that bears his name has changed in a number of details over the centuries, it is certain that the central prayer of the Eucharistic anaphora - or prayer of gratitude and offering - goes back to him. John died in 407AD while still in exile for his preaching against the excesses and corruption of the imperial court. His final words were "Glory to God for everything!" His memory is celebrated by Orthodox Christians on November 13th each year; and by Roman Catholics, Anglicans and some Lutherans on September 13th.

The Divine Liturgy celebrates the intersection of heaven and earth. There is a story in the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, the earliest written account of the history of Russia, of how Prince Vladimir of Kiev (958-1015AD), while still a pagan, desired to know which was the true religion, and therefore sent envoys to visit the various countries of the world in turn. They examined both Judaism and Islam, going first to the Muslim Bulgars of the Volga and then to the Jewish Khazars, but continued on their way dissatisfied. Traveling next to Germany, they found Christian worship more satisfactory, but complained that the services they attended lacked beauty. Finally they journeyed to Constantinople, and having attended a Divine Liturgy celebrated in the great Church of the Holy Wisdom, they reported back to Vladimir that during the celebration of the Liturgy "we knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth. We cannot describe it to you. Only this we know: God dwells there among men, and their service surpasses the worship of all other places; for we cannot forget that beauty."

"We knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth." When we participate in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy with eyes that *really* see and ears that *really* hear we stand in the Presence of God and catch a glimpse of His eternal Kingdom. Although our worship takes place in this world, in the context of space and time, it touches upon the transcendent reality that we address as the one, true and living God. St. Germanos, the 7th century Patriarch of Constantinople and author of one of the first commentaries on the Divine Liturgy, described the Divine Liturgy as an "awesome sacrifice" and "the clear image of heavenly realities." During the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, "the Church is the Temple of God, a house of prayer, a holy place, an assembly of the people, heaven on earth...and resonates with the cross, tomb and resurrection of Christ." When we gather for worship we offer our praise to the Father, through His Son our Lord Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit. To attend the Divine Liturgy prayerfully and attentively, with one's heart open to the descent of the Holy Spirit, and receiving the gifts of the bread and wine – Christ's Body and Blood - in the sacrament of Holy Communion, is to participate in what St. Nicholas Cabasilas, the 14th century Byzantine mystic, described as "the greatest of the Mysteries...beyond which it is not possible to go." It is to fulfill the words of the Lord Jesus that "true worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and Truth (John 4:23) and that those who eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood "have eternal life" and will "live in Me and I in them" (John 6:53-56).

The Service of Preparation: Prior to the beginning of the Liturgy there is a special Service of Preparation for the bread and wine distributed during the Eucharist called in Greek the *proskomede* or *prothesis* (literally, a "setting forth" or "presentation" of the

bread and wine). Originating in the 8th century, the service in its present form probably dates from the 14th century. Originally performed by deacons, today the service is normally done by a priest who may be assisted by a deacon during the *Orthros* or Service of Morning Prayer that precedes the Liturgy. In cutting the bread in preparation for its distribution as the Body of Christ during the Liturgy, prophetic verses from the 53rd chapter of the Book of Isaiah are recited that refer to the coming Messiah as God's Suffering Servant, describing Him in terms of the lambs sacrificed at Passover. At the pouring of the wine and water into the chalice in preparation for its distribution as the Blood of Christ, the priest recites verses from the Gospel of John (19:34-35) that describe the blood and water that poured forth from the side of the Lord Jesus after a Roman soldier pierced His side with a spear during the crucifixion to see if He was dead. In addition to the preparation of the bread and wine for use at the Eucharist, the *Proskomede* is also a service of remembrance and intercession: many of the saints are commemorated, ranging from the prophets of the Old Testament to the apostles, from bishops to martyrs, from monks and nuns to miracle-workers; and prayers of intercession are offered for those members of the local congregation and others who are sick and suffering, as well as for those Christians who "have died in hope of resurrection to eternal life" as the prayer says. When the Service of Preparation is completed, the prepared gifts are prayed over a final time, incensed and then covered with specially decorated cloths called *kalemata* or veils, ready to be carried in procession during the celebration of the Liturgy.

The Divine Liturgy is structurally divided into two parts. The first part of the Divine Liturgy is called the *synaxis*, the "gathering" or "assembly" of the Church. Christians are called out of the world – called by the Word of God in the Spirit – to gather together as a community in order to offer praise and worship to the one God, our Father, and be transformed by our relationship to Him. This is, in fact, the literal meaning of the New Testament Greek word *ekklesia*, used in the Gospel of Matthew and the Letters of St. Paul and normally translated by the word "church" in English. It is precisely this assembly – this gathering of the People of God in response to His call in order to celebrate our worship – that constitutes the Church as the Body of Christ (Ephesians 1:23; Colossians 1:18). This first part of the Liturgy is primarily didactic and instructional. Because its focus is the message of the Good News of Jesus Christ and culminates in the reading of the Scriptures and the sermon, it is also called the Liturgy of the Word. However, the Liturgy of the Word is not merely instructional in an intellectual sense. This is why hymns are sung, requests are prayed for and the glory of God is praised. As St. John Cassian (c.360-435AD) has written: the hymns, prayers and the Scripture readings will only make sense to those who are striving to live a life worthy of the Gospel and open to being enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Because of its emphasis on instruction, it is also occasionally referred to as the Liturgy of the Catechumens. A catechumen is an individual who is in the process of converting to Christianity and is under instruction before baptism. The word comes from the Greek word *katechein*, meaning "to instruct orally." In the ancient Church, catechumens as well as those not prepared to receive the Holy Communion were required to leave the building before the beginning of the Eucharist. This second part of the Liturgy culminates in the receiving of Holy Communion, called *Eucharistia* or Thanksgiving, and is entitled the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The Eucharist was reserved only for baptized Christians who lived their faith and as such, it is often called the Liturgy of the Faithful.

The Divine Liturgy is therefore composed of: 1.) The Synaxis, the Liturgy of the Word, sometimes also called the Liturgy of the Catechumens; and 2.) the Liturgy of the Eucharist, or the Liturgy of the Faithful. In ancient times, the Liturgy of the Word began with what is today called the Small Entrance in which the clergy and the laity, led by the Bishop and the Gospel Book, would enter the Church and process up to the *ambo*, an oblong platform or lectern with steps that stood in the center of the Church, in what is today called the *nave*. The Scriptures were read from it; chanters would often lead the congregation in singing from it, St. John Chrysostom preached his sermons from it and even public announcements were made from its steps. Today the Liturgy of the Word starts with “Blessed is the Kingdom . . .” and ends with the call for the catechumens to depart. The latter entreaty is not always read today since catechumens are no longer required to leave as was the case in ancient times. In current practice, these two divisions are not particularly clear for several reasons. *First*, we no longer expect people to leave before the Liturgy of the Eucharist. *Second*, Byzantine church architecture was slightly different than today’s. Originally, the first part of the service did not take place at the altar, but revolved around the *ambo*, or as we might say today, the pulpit. *Third*, according to the rubrics, the sermon is to immediately follow the Gospel reading. This created a natural pause between Liturgy of Word and the Eucharist. Today, however, the service often simply continues after the reading of the Gospel and for pastoral reasons, the sermon is placed at the end of the Liturgy, separating the reading of the Gospel from its proclamation.

Every Divine Liturgy is a festive event, a celebration which people are to come to with "joyful and generous hearts" (Acts 2:46) and not out of a sense of duty or obligation. The Divine Liturgy is *the* fundamental activity of the Church, the most intimate facet of the Church’s living faith in Jesus Christ and a function of Holy Spirit within the body of believers. Do we come to Church on Sunday mornings to celebrate? Do we come with a sense of gratitude for all that has been done for us in Christ Jesus? Do we come because we are filled “with peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17)? Do we come knowing that in the Liturgy we stand in His Presence?

Father Thomas Hopko, the *dean emeritus* of St. Vladimir’s Seminary in New York, has lamented that unfortunately, “our highly praised liturgical tradition is for the most part unknown and unlived by great numbers of our people.” And Father Alexander Elchaninov (1881-1934), a well-known spiritual father forced to live in exile in France following the Russian Revolution, wrote in his book *The Diary of a Russian Priest*: “We know little, and in most cases do not try to find out anything about our church services, about the life of the Church. We should fill this gap and become living members of the Church! Few people today even realize that the so-called “choir” speaks and sings in the name of the entire congregation and that in the early Church there were none of those specially trained professional singers who now perform this duty. All sang, testifying to their own faith and with a sense of responsibility for the words they uttered. Sometimes we do not even know the words. And how many understand them? When we attend a service in the Church, we seem to sign a letter we have not read, to assume duties which we ignore. Christianity is not merely a philosophical system, it is a life, a special way of life and this must be studied and lived continuously. ***The Church is alive and will live forever! Let us not hang like dry, withered leaves on this ever-living tree!***”

THE DIVINE LITURGY OF SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

Priest: Blessed is the kingdom (*cf. Mark 11:10*) of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (*cf. Matthew 28:29*), now and forever and to the ages of ages (*Ephesians 3:21*).

People: Amen. (*1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalm 106:48*)

THE ANTIPHONS

THE GREAT LITANY or LITANY OF PEACE

**Priest:* In peace let us pray to the Lord (*Acts 8:24*).

People: Lord, have mercy (*cf. Deuteronomy 4:31; Daniel 9:9; Matthew 15:22; 20:30*).

**Priest:* For the peace of God (*Philippians 4:7*) and the salvation of our souls (*1 Peter 1:9*) let us pray to the Lord (*Acts 8:24*).

People: Lord, have mercy (*cf. Matthew 15:22; 20:30*).

**Priest:* For peace in the whole world (*cf. Zechariah 1:11*), for the stability of the holy churches of God (*1 Corinthians 15:9*), and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord.

**The parts of the Liturgy belonging to the deacon are marked with an asterisk.*

Scripture

"Strive first for the Kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 5:33).

"The Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21)

"The Kingdom of God is...righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17).

"Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27).

"In me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33)

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful!" (Colossians 4:15).

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23).

Blessed is the Kingdom...

The opening proclamation of the Divine Liturgy is the announcement of our destination and goal in life: the Kingdom of God and the Liturgy is a pilgrimage toward and a participation in His Kingdom. This announcement brings out the stark contrast and ultimate choice that everyone must make: Do I seek first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness (Matthew 6:33) or am I more interested in building my own little kingdom with my life, the kingdom of ME? We begin the Liturgy by saying, "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" because following Jesus means that we have to set the Kingdom of God as the highest priority in our lives and stop trying to build the Kingdom of Me. And when we say the Lord's Prayer in the Liturgy, the priest ends the Prayer by singing, "*Yours* is the Kingdom and the power and the glory: of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" to remind us that it's *His* Kingdom that is of ultimate importance and not ours.

In her book *Dangerous Surrender*, Kay Warren – the wife of Saddleback pastor Rick Warren – examines her inner life and writes eloquently about the Kingdom of Me: "Not only do I seek complete control of everything around me, but my greatest and deepest love is reserved for myself. I am desperately in love with myself. If I am completely honest, I have to admit that there are many times when I want the world to revolve around *me* – my comfort, my pleasure, my convenience. I desire that others...make *me* happy, meet *my* needs and refrain from offending *me*, hurting *me*, wounding *me*, upsetting *me* or irritating *me*. I want to be understood, appreciated, acknowledged, elevated, praised, valued, attended to, catered to, respected, admired, accommodated, listened to, loved adored and cherished. My greatest efforts every day go toward myself." Can we not see ourselves in that paragraph? Writing in the *Philokalia*, St. Maximos the Confessor (580-682AD) calls this *philautia* or self-love and says that this obsessive and narcissistic love of self is at the root of all human sinfulness, lust for power, hatred and violence. The first maxim of the spiritual life is given to us by St. John the Baptist in the Gospel of John (3:30): "He must increase, but I must decrease." In order to follow the Lord Jesus and enter His Kingdom we must deny ourselves – all of our self-centered ways of seeing the world around us and our selfish behavior that results from this distorted vision – and pick up our cross and follow Him (Matthew 16:24).

What is the Great Litany?

The Liturgy is a school of prayer, teaching us how to pray and what to pray for. The Great Litany is a series of requests to God. As Father Lev Gillet (1893-1980) has written, the Great Litany opens with a request that God's peace be given to us, a state of inner peace, the ridding our minds and hearts of every obsession with "worldly things," hostile feelings and personal anxiety in order to worship the living God in a state of inner calmness, trusting attentiveness and singular concentration on "the one thing necessary" (Luke 10:42). Notice also that in many of these petitions we are praying for very concrete human needs: for the overall welfare and unity of our churches; for our local parish and the people in it; for religious and civic leaders like our bishops and priests as well as our national and local civil leaders; for an end to every war and all strife between nations and peoples; for good weather and adequate food; for those who are sick and suffering; for safe travel; and for our deliverance from distress, danger and want. We end by entrusting "ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ" before praising the Holy Trinity.

Priest: For this holy house (*cf. Psalm 93:5*) and for those who enter it with faith (*Hebrews 11:1; James 2:20*), reverence (*Leviticus 19:30; Hebrews 12:28*), and the fear of God (*2 Corinthians 7:1*), let us pray to the Lord (*cf. Acts 8:24*).

People: Lord, have mercy (*cf. Matthew 15:22; 20:30*).

**Priest:* For our Archbishop (*cf. 1 Timothy 3:1-7*) (*Name*), the honorable presbyters (*Titus 1:5-6*), the deacons (*1 Timothy 3:8-13*) in the service of Christ, for all the clergy and the laity, let us pray to the Lord (*cf. Acts 8:24*).

People: Lord, have mercy (*cf. Matthew 15:22; 20:30*).

**Priest:* For our country, the president, and for all those in public service, that they might be strengthened in every good deed, let us pray to the Lord (*cf. Acts 8:24*).

People: Lord, have mercy (*cf. Matthew 15:22; 20:30*).

**Priest:* For this parish and city, for every city and country, and for the faithful who live in them, let us pray to the Lord (*cf. Acts 8:24*).

People: Lord, have mercy (*cf. Matthew 15:22; 20:30*).

**Priest:* For favorable weather, an abundance of the fruits of the earth, and for temperate seasons, let us pray to the Lord (*cf. Acts 8:24*).

People: Lord, have mercy (*cf. Matthew 15:22; 20:30*).

Scripture

"Holiness adorns Your house, O Lord, forevermore" (Psalm 93:5).

"How lovely is your house, O Lord Almighty. My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord. Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; they are ever praising you! Better is one day in Your courts than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a door keeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked" (Psalm 84:1,2,4,10).

"I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and serene lives in all piety and holiness. This is good and pleases God our Savior..." (1 Timothy 2:1-3a).

"Seek the peace and prosperity of the city....pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper" (Jeremiah 29:7).

"Ask the Lord for rain in the springtime. It is the Lord who makes the storm clouds. He gives showers of rain and plants of the field to everyone" (Zechariah 10:1).

**Priest:* For travelers by land, sea, and air; for the sick, the suffering, the captives, and for their salvation, let us [pray to the Lord \(cf. Acts 8:24\)](#).

People: Lord, have mercy [\(cf. Matthew 15:22; 20:30\)](#).

**Priest:* For our deliverance from all affliction, wrath, danger, and distress, let us [pray to the Lord \(cf. Acts 8:24\)](#).

People: Lord, have mercy [\(cf. Matthew 15:22; 20:30\)](#).

**Priest:* Help us, save us [\(Psalm 109:26\)](#), have mercy upon us [\(Psalm 51:1\)](#), and protect us [\(Psalm 32:7; 40:11 and 2 Thessalonians 3:3\)](#), O God, by Your grace.

People: Lord, have mercy [\(cf. Matthew 15:22; 20:30\)](#).

**Priest:* Remembering our most holy, pure, [blessed \(Luke 1:46\)](#), and glorious Lady, the Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary, with [all the saints \(Revelation 8:3\)](#), let us commit ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God.

People: To You, O Lord [\(Psalm 25:1\)](#).

Priest (in a low voice): Lord, our God, whose power is beyond compare, and glory is beyond understanding; whose mercy is boundless, and love for us is beyond words to describe: Master, look upon us and upon this [holy house \(Psalm 93:5\)](#) in Your compassion. Grant to us and to those who pray with us [the riches of Your mercy and compassion \(Ephesians 2:4\)](#).

For to You belongs all [glory, honor](#) and worship to the [Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit \(cf. Matthew 28:29\)](#), now and forever and [to the ages of ages \(1 Timothy 1:17\)](#).

People: Amen [\(1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalm 106:48\)](#).

Examples of Doxology in the Scriptures

"To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory to the ages of ages. Amen" (1 Timothy 1:17).

"The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for His heavenly Kingdom. To Him be glory to the ages of ages. Amen" (2 Timothy 4:18).

"To Him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can imagine, to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations and to the ages of ages. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20-21).

"To the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power and authority before all ages and to the ages of ages. Amen" (Jude 25).

"To the One seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing, honor, glory and power to the ages of ages" (Revelation 5:13).

THE FIRST ANTIPHON

(The designated verses from the Book of Psalms are sung with the following short hymn)

People: By the intercession of the Theotokos, Savior, *save us (cf. Matthew 8:25) (3x).*

**Priest:* Again and again, in peace let us *pray to the Lord (Acts 8:24).*

People: Lord, have mercy *(cf. Matthew 15:22; 20:30).*

**Priest:* Help us, save us *(Psalm 109:26), have mercy upon us (Psalm 51:1), and protect us (Psalm 32:7; 40:11 and 2 Thessalonians 3:3), O God, by Your grace.*

People: Lord, have mercy *(cf. Matthew 15:22; 20:30).*

**Priest:* Remembering our most holy, pure, blessed *(Luke 1:46), and glorious Lady, the Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary, with all the saints (Revelation 8:3), let us commit ourselves and one another, and our whole life to Christ our God.*

Scripture

On most, though not all Sundays of the year, the three designated verses from the Book of Psalms that are sung with the hymn "By the intercessions of the Theotokos..." at the first antiphon are:

"Bless the Lord, O my soul! May all that is within me bless His holy Name" (Psalm 103:1).

"Bless the Lord, O my soul and do not forget all the gifts that come from Him" (Psalm 103:2).

"The Lord has established His throne in heaven; over all things His kingship is supreme" (Psalm 103:19).

Commentary – What are the Antiphons?

Structurally, the Great Litany or Litany of Peace is followed by what most Liturgy books call "the Antiphons": a series of verses from the Bible that on Sundays are usually, although not always, drawn from Psalms 103 and 146 and sung by a cantor, each verse then followed by a refrain that was to be sung by the congregation as a whole. In ancient times the Liturgy began with what we now call the "Little or Small Entrance". In 7th century Constantinople the people came in long processions through the city, singing psalms, and assembled in the forecourt of the Great Church of the Holy Wisdom i.e. Christ, to await the arrival of the Patriarch and the Emperor. On some occasions they might wait just inside the many doorways of the church singing psalms and praying. The Great Litany or Litany of Peace, with the Antiphons and the short Litanies and prayers that follow it, are survivals of this ancient practice.

People: To You, O Lord (*Psalms 25:1*).

Priest (in a low voice): Lord our God, save Your people and bless Your inheritance (*Psalms 28:9*); protect the whole body of Your Church; sanctify those who love the beauty of Your house (*Psalms 26:8*); glorify them in return by Your divine power (*2 Peter 1:3*); and do not forsake us (*Psalms 27:9-10*) who hope in You (*cf. Psalms 39:7; 71:5; 1 Timothy 1:1; 1 John 3:3*).

Priest: For Yours is the dominion, Yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (*cf. Matthew 28:29*), now and forever and to the ages of ages (*Ephesians 3:21*).

People: Amen (*1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalms 106:48*).

THE SECOND ANTIPHON

(The designated verses from the Book of Psalms are sung with the following hymn)

People: Save us (*cf. Matthew 8:25*), O Son of God (*John 20:31*), ("*who rose from the dead*"),¹ to You we sing: Alleluia (*Psalms 150:6*) (3x). Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit (*cf. Matthew 28:29*); both now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen (*1 Timothy 1:17*).

¹ On weekdays we sing ("*who is wondrous in Your saints*").

Scripture

On most, though not all Sundays of the year, the three designated verses from the Book of Psalms sung with the hymn "Save us, O Son of God..." at the second antiphon are:

"Praise the Lord, O my soul! I will praise the Lord all my life! I will sing to the Lord as long as I live" (*Psalms 146:1*).

"Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God" (*Psalms 146:5*).

"The Lord is King forever; your God, O Zion, rules from generation to generation" (*Psalms 146:10*).

Commentary – Praise the Lord, O my soul!

In the Liturgy we constantly praise the Name of the Lord. All Christians are to "proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (*1 Peter 2:9*). Praising God is not simply *one* thing that we do among many others; it is *everything*! We are called to praise God in everything that we say and everything that we do, by the content of our character and the quality of our lives. In this sense, praise and worship are not merely something we occasionally do on Sunday mornings: it is a lifestyle, an entire way of living that expresses our commitment to Christ. Worship "in Spirit and Truth" (*John 4:24*) always implies integrity, commitment and compassion in our day-to-day living. As Metropolitan Anthony Bloom (1914-2003) once remarked, Christians "should try to live in such a way that if the Gospels were lost, they could be re-written by looking at us."

THE HYMN OF JUSTINIAN

Only begotten Son (*John 1:18*) and Word of God (*John 1:1*), although immortal You humbled Yourself for our salvation, taking flesh from the holy Theotokos and ever virgin Mary and, without change, becoming man. Christ, our God, You were crucified but conquered death by death. You are one of the Holy Trinity, glorified with the Father and the Holy Spirit – save us.

**Priest:* Again and again, in peace let us pray to the Lord (*Acts 8:24*).

People: Lord, have mercy (*cf. Matthew 15:22; 20:30*).

**Priest:* Help us, save us (*Psalms 109:26*), have mercy upon us (*Psalms 51:1*), and protect us (*Psalms 32:7; 40:11 and 2 Thessalonians 3:3*), O God, by Your grace.

People: Lord, have mercy (*cf. Matthew 15:22; 20:30*).

**Priest:* Remembering our most holy, pure, blessed (*Luke 1:46*) and glorious Lady, the Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary, with all the saints (*Revelation 8:3*), let us commit ourselves and one another, and our whole life to Christ our God.

People: To You, O Lord (*Psalms 25:1*).

Priest (in a low voice): Lord, You have given us grace to offer these common prayers with one heart. You have promised to grant the requests of two or three gathered in Your name (*Matthew 18:19-20*). Fulfill now the petitions of Your servants for our benefit, giving us the knowledge of Your truth (*1 Timothy 2:4*) in this world, and granting us eternal life in the age to come (*Luke 18:30*).

Priest: For you are a good and loving God and to You do we offer glory, to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit (*cf. Matthew 28:29*), now and forever and to the ages of ages (*Ephesians 3:21*).

People: Amen (*1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalm 106:48*).

Commentary – The Hymn of Justinian

The second Antiphon is followed by a sort of mini-Creed, the hymn ‘Only-begotten Son and Word of God...’ It is an excellent summary of the essentials of the Christian faith in the Holy Trinity and in the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ Jesus, the Word of God made flesh. Well worth learning by heart, this hymn dates from the sixth century and is attributed by the majority of contemporary liturgical scholars to the Roman Emperor Justinian (482-565 AD), the man responsible for the construction of the Great Church of the Holy Wisdom in Constantinople. The hymn ‘Only-begotten Son and Word of God...’, which ends the second Antiphon, was originally the Entrance Hymn or, in Greek, the *Eisodikon*, of the Liturgy, as it still is today in the Liturgy of St James: this was the beginning of the Liturgy when the clergy came, not from within the Altar, but from the narthex, or vestibule, through the main doors of the church together with the laity.

THE THIRD ANTIPHON

(The designated verses of the Psalms are sung with the Apolytikion, which on Sundays is a special hymn honoring the Resurrection of Christ.)

THE SMALL ENTRANCE

(While the Hymn honoring the Resurrection or Apolytikion is sung, the priest, carrying the holy Gospel Book, comes in procession before the Beautiful Gate of the Iconostasis offering in a low voice the following prayer)

Master and Lord our God, You have established in heaven the orders and hosts of angels (cf. *Hebrews 12:22*) and archangels to minister to Your glory. Grant that the holy angels (*Matthew 25:31*) may enter with us that together we may serve and glorify Your goodness. For to You belongs all glory (cf. *Psalms 96:8*), honor, and worship to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit (*Matthew 28:29*), now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen (*Ephesians 3:21*).

(The priest blesses the entrance saying in a low voice) Blessed is the entrance of Your saints always, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen (*1 Timothy 1:17*).

(He then raises the holy Gospel Book above his head and says)

**Priest:* Wisdom. Let us stand!

People: Come, let us worship and bow down (*Psalms 95:6*) before Christ. Save us, O Son of God (*1 John 5:5*) *(who rose from the dead)*,¹ to You we sing: Alleluia (*Psalms 150:6*).

(The priest enters the sanctuary. The Apolytikion is repeated and the Hymn honoring the saint of the parish – or Troparion in Greek – and the Kontakion of the day – usually a hymn honoring the Theotokos – are sung.)

¹On weekdays we sing: (“who are wondrous among Your saints”), while the Feasts of the Lord have their own special Entrance Hymns.

Commentary – The Small or Little Entrance

Father Alexander Schmemmann (1921-1983) wrote: “We meet the expression ‘Little Entrance’ (as distinct from the *Great Entrance* at the beginning of the Liturgy of the faithful) for the first time in manuscripts of the 14th century. This was the time of the final and definitive consolidation of the Eucharistic *ordo* into its contemporary state. We know that for a long time this entrance was the *beginning* of the Liturgy, its first rite. In contemporary practice, this entrance is above all the entrance with the Gospels, i.e. the solemn carrying of the Gospel book out from and then back into the altar through the royal doors. In several manuscripts it is even called ‘the entrance with the Gospels.’ In essence the *entrance* consists in drawing near to the *altar*, which was from the beginning the focus of the temple, its holy place. And therefore the entrance, the drawing near to the altar, is always an *ascent*. In it the Church ascends to the place where her genuine “life is hidden with Christ in God,” as St. Paul writes in Colossians 3:3. She ascends to heaven where the Eucharist is celebrated. The Eucharist is always a going out from ‘this world’ and an ascent to heaven. All our worship services therefore, are an ascent to the altar and a return back to ‘this world’ for witness to “what no eye has seen nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

THE TRISAGION HYMN

**Priest:* Let us pray to the Lord (*Acts 8:24*).

People: Lord, have mercy (*cf. Matthew 15:22; 20:30*).

Priest (in a low voice): Holy God (*Daniel 4:9*), You dwell among Your saints. You are praised by the Seraphim with the thrice holy hymn (*Isaiah 6:2-3*) and glorified by the Cherubim and worshipped by all the heavenly powers. You have brought all things out of nothing into being (*2 Maccabees 7:28*). You have created man and woman in Your image and likeness (*Genesis 1:27*) and adorned them with all the gifts of Your grace. You give wisdom and understanding (*2 Chronicles 1:10*) to the supplicant and do not overlook the sinner but have established repentance as the way of salvation. You have enabled us, Your lowly and unworthy servants (*Matthew 25:31*), to stand at this hour before the glory of Your holy altar (*cf. Exodus 29:37*) and to offer to You due worship and praise. Master, accept the thrice holy hymn also from the lips of us sinners and visit us in Your goodness. Forgive our voluntary and involuntary transgressions, sanctify our souls and bodies, and grant that we may worship and serve You in holiness all the days of our lives (*cf. Luke 1:74-75*), by the intercessions of the holy Theotokos and of all the saints (*Revelation 8:3*) who have pleased You throughout the ages.

Priest: For You are holy, our God (*cf. Leviticus 19:2*), and to You we give glory, to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and forever . . . *and to the ages of ages.

People: Amen. Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us (3x).

Glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (*Matthew 28:29*); both now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen (*1 Timothy 1:17*). Holy Immortal, have mercy on us.

Commentary – The Trisagion Hymn

The solemn singing of the *Trisagion*, the thrice-holy hymn praising the Most Holy Trinity, is one of the most important and oldest of our Orthodox hymns. The story told about the origin of this hymn connects it to an earthquake that shook Constantinople sometime in 450AD. The earthquake proved catastrophic and people gathered in the streets and began praying, asking God to have mercy on them, singing *Kyrie eleison* or Lord, have mercy. During this tragedy a small boy came forward and said that, in a vision, he had heard the hymn of the angels gathered around the throne of God, singing what we today call the *Trisagion*: Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us. The people took up this chant and the aftershocks ceased. Clearly based on the song of the angelic Seraphim heard by the Prophet Isaiah (6:5), by the end of the 6th century, the *Trisagion* had been incorporated into the text of the Liturgy. Today, the *Trisagion* constitutes the last part of the Great Doxology at Matins and should also be part of every Orthodox Christian's morning and evening prayers. It is even sung in Greek and Latin on Holy Friday at St. Peter's Basilica in the Roman Catholic Church.

In the Orthodox tradition the *Trisagion* is primarily understood as a hymn to the Most Holy Trinity. St. John of Damascus (676-749AD) wrote a whole book explaining the meaning of this hymn! This teaching is best summed up in a hymn written by the Emperor Leo the Wise (866-912 AD) for the feast of Pentecost, which we still sing at Vespers on that day. "Come, peoples of all nations, and let us worship God in three persons: the Son in the Father, with the Holy Spirit. For the Father, before time began, begot the Son, co-eternal and co-reigning with Him; and the Holy Spirit was in the Father, and glorified with the Son; one power, one essence, one God, whom we all worship as we sing: Holy God, who created all things through the Son, with the co-operation of the Holy Spirit! Holy Mighty, through whom we have come to know the Father, and through whom the Holy Spirit came into the world! Holy Immortal, the Comforting Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and rests in the Son! Holy Trinity, glory to you!"

What does it mean for us to sing this ancient hymn and call God thrice-holy? *First*, it signifies that the God whom we worship is completely, totally and utterly transcendent. The one, true and living God stands outside the created universe of time and space as we know it. Because of this we can never fully grasp the divine Reality and must approach God in worship with a sense of reverence and awe. God is, as the Liturgy will later say in one of its prayers, "ineffable, beyond comprehension, invisible, beyond understanding, existing forever and always the same, You and Your only-begotten Son and Your Holy Spirit." In fact, St. John Chrysostom wrote a treatise entitled *On the Incomprehensibility of God* in which some of these very phrases are used to describe God. For this reason, the one God, our Father, is not and should never be pictured as an old, white-bearded man sitting on a throne. Whenever this occurs in art, even in so-called Christian art – and even in the iconography found in some of our churches – it is completely idolatrous and wrong. Yet, this utterly transcendent and holy God, the Creator of the universe whom we cannot even begin to comprehend, has chosen to reveal Himself to us as complete and total Love, Truth, Light and Life in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the "Christ in whom the fullness of the Deity dwelt in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9). *Second*, because the *Trisagion* is based on the hymn of the angels, St Nicholas Cabasilas (c.1319-c.1391) comments that in singing the *Trisagion* during the Liturgy "human beings and angels form one Church and one choir." During the celebration of the Liturgy, heaven and earth intersect and our worship here becomes an icon of the worship going on around the throne of God in heaven (Revelation 4:1-10). *Third*, to call God thrice-holy implies His absolute purity. For us as human beings, this carries moral connotations, for "Your eyes are too pure to look upon evil and You cannot tolerate wrong" (Habakkuk 1:13). The holiness of God *demand*s repentance: the cleansing and purification of one's mind and heart, and the consecration of one's life in love to Him. In the Old Testament, God said to the people of Israel through Moses, "Be holy because I, the Lord Your God, am holy" (Leviticus 19:2) prior to issuing the commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself" (19:18). And in the Sermon on the Mount, after the Lord Jesus tells us to love even our enemies, He concludes by issuing, in essence, the same challenge: "Be perfect, therefore, as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). This call by God for us to share in and reflect His holiness is the fundamental axiom of the Christian life. As Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910-1997) has said, "As Christians, we have been created for great things. We have been created to be holy since we have been created in the image of God."

Priest: Again, fervently.

(The priest, turning towards the Prothesis, says in a low voice) Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord (*Psalms 118:26*). Blessed are You, seated on the throne of glory in Your kingdom, seated upon the Cherubim (*Daniel 3:54-55; Psalm 98:1*) always now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen (*Ephesians 3:21*).

People: Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us.

THE SCRIPTURE READINGS

THE EPISTLE

**Priest:* Let us listen attentively. (*cf. Nehemiah 8:3*)

(The Reader reads the appointed verses from the Book of Psalms.)

**Priest:* Wisdom.

Reader: The reading is from (*the name of the book of the New Testament from which the apostolic reading is taken*).

**Priest:* Let us listen attentively. (*cf. Nehemiah 8:3*)

(The Reader reads from the designated apostolic letter or the Acts of the Apostles.)

Priest: Peace be with you (*John 20:26; 1 Peter 5:14; 3 John 15*).

People: Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia (*Psalm 150:6*).

Commentary – The Letters of the New Testament read during Liturgy

The word "epistle" simply means "letter." Such Scripture readings are also sometimes called "the apostolic reading." Based on a lectionary - an order of readings - that was established in the 7th century, during the course of the year the Church reads the writings of the Apostles in the order in which they are found in the New Testament. We start at Pascha with the Acts of Apostles written by St. Luke the Evangelist as a companion volume to his Gospel. It is the earliest history of the Church and tells the story of how the Good News of the Resurrection of Christ traveled from Jerusalem to Rome itself, the center of the Empire and focuses primarily on the missionary preaching and teaching of the Apostles Peter and Paul. After Pentecost we read from the Letters of St. Paul, more or less in the order of their length, beginning with his Letter to the Romans, and then the Letters of the other Apostles: St. James, St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude. This takes us to the beginning of Lent and during Lent we read the Letter to the Hebrews. In the liturgical tradition of the Orthodox Church, only the Book of Revelation is never read during the Divine Liturgy. In the reading of these letters we are reminded of the Apostles' witness to Christ and are called to imitate them in their willingness to offer themselves wholly to the proclamation of the Gospel. "Therefore I urge you, be imitators of me," the Apostle Paul wrote (1 Corinthians 4:13).

Priest (in a low voice): Shine within our hearts, loving Master, the pure light of Your divine knowledge and open the eyes of our minds (*cf. Ephesians 1:18*) that we may comprehend the message of Your Gospel. Instill in us also reverence for Your blessed commandments, so that having conquered our sinful desires, we may pursue a spiritual life, thinking and doing all those things that are pleasing to You (*cf. 1 John 3:22*). For You, Christ our God, are the light of our souls and bodies, and to You we offer up glory, together with Your Father who is without beginning and Your all-holy, good, and life-creating Spirit (*Psalms 143:10; John 6:63*), now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen. (*Ephesians 3:21*)

THE HOLY GOSPEL

Priest: Wisdom! Arise! Let us hear the Holy Gospel. Peace be with all (*John 20:26; 1 Peter 5:14; 3 John 15*).

People: And with your spirit (*cf. Philippians 4:23; 2 Timothy 4:22*).

**Priest:* The reading is from the holy Gospel according to (*Name*). Let us be attentive!

People: Glory to You, O Lord, glory to You (*cf. Psalm 29:1*).

*(*The Priest reads the designated reading for the day from one of the four Gospels)*

People: Glory to You, O Lord, glory to You (*cf. Psalm 29:1*).

Commentary - the Gospel book, the Gospel and the four Gospels

Adorned out of reverence and largely kept on the altar, it contains exclusively the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. It is a sacramental embodiment of Christ and in the Liturgy is kissed and treated like an icon of Christ, an icon written in words not paint. Traditionally, the bringing out of the Gospels is said by St. Nicholas Cabasilas, a 14th century mystic and saint, to represent the manifestation of Christ to the multitudes. The entrance hymn sung by the clergy, taken from Psalm 95:6, professes what our response ought to be to the Lord Jesus: "come let us worship and bow down before Christ." The centrality of the Gospels in the Liturgy of the Word and their placement on the altar impresses upon us that Christ is the center of the Church and that Christ ought to be the center of our lives. It is through the Gospels that we know who Christ is. As St. Tikhon of Zadonsk (1724-1783) wrote: "Whenever you read the Gospel, Christ Himself is speaking to you. And while you read, you are praying and talking to Him."

At every Liturgy we read from the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, all of which convey the life, teachings, crucifixion and the resurrection from the dead of our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ. But, in addition, the Scriptures often speak of *the* Gospel and we sometimes forget that the Gospel itself is a message and not merely a collection of books: in fact, it is the most important message in history. The word Gospel derives from the Old English "God-spel," literally meaning glad tidings or, in more modern English, good news. It is a word-for-word translation of the Greek word *evangelion* that is used in the New Testament and the Liturgy. In ancient times an *evangelion* was often a

proclamation of victory in battle: a herald proclaimed the good news that the war was over, the emperor was victorious, the enemy had been defeated and the city and its people had been saved from calamity and certain destruction. It is a proclamation to be celebrated! One thinks of the relief and joy found on the faces of the men and women in Times Square in old photographs, celebrating the end of World War II. For us, the Good News is that in Jesus Christ “the Word of God made flesh” (John 1:14) and “the King of kings and Lord of lords” (Revelation 17:14), the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has become human and been victorious over sin, evil and death; having “died to sin once for all” (Romans 6:10) and rising from the dead He has delivered us from our mortality. Death, for us, has now become a Passover to what the Gospel of John calls “eternal life” (John 3:16).

The Gospel of Mark, according to modern scholars, was the first written gospel, around AD 65 or 70. It was used in composing the Gospels of Luke and Matthew. Compared to the two later Gospels, Mark’s is much shorter, more direct and informal and written in the simple Greek used throughout the Mediterranean world of his time. Traditionally, the writing of Mark’s Gospel has been associated with the witness of the apostle Peter and rooted in Mark’s relationship with him. At the closing of the *First Letter of Peter* the apostle speaks of “my son Mark” much as the apostle Paul wrote of Timothy in his letters. St. Irenaeus of Lyons, around 185AD, wrote that “after the deaths of Peter and Paul, Mark – the disciple and interpreter of Peter – handed down to us in writing those things that Peter had proclaimed.”

The Gospel of Luke, is “an orderly account” (Luke 1:3) written by Luke, a second generation Christian who knows eye-witnesses and traditions handed on to him concerning the events of Jesus’ life. He is traditionally regarded as a physician and follower of St. Paul. He not only gives us a Gospel surrounding the events of Christ’s life but also the first story of the early Church in a companion volume, the Book of the Acts of the Apostles which is read each year during the 50 days between Pascha and Pentecost.

The Gospel of Matthew is traditionally linked with the apostle Matthew who was a tax collector. Some church Fathers also believed that his Gospel was originally written in Aramaic, the language of Jesus, though modern scholars believe the version we have today was originally written in Greek. Of the 660 verses in Mark’s Gospel, 600 are to be found in Matthew’s Gospel and 350 in Luke’s Gospel and only 60 in neither. Because of the similarities between these three gospels, scholars have named them the Synoptic Gospels, from the Greek *syn-* ‘together’ + *opsis* ‘seeing.’

The Gospel of John, however, is written in a different style and considered to be the most theologically oriented of the four Gospels. Tradition relates that St. John knew the other Gospels and decided to write a different kind of text. Although we contain the four Gospels in a single book, they all derive from different Christian communities of the early Church. Over time, they became recognized as the most authoritative books concerning the life of Christ and his message. While there were many other gospels and writings concerning Jesus that circulated in the ancient world, particularly in Gnostic and other heretical circles, most were not found to be suitable for public reading in Church during worship. The four Gospels that today constitute the heart of the New Testament are the oldest and most trustworthy books concerning Christ that we possess.

THE HOMILY

(Following the readings, it is customary for the priest to proclaim the Gospel.)

Commentary – The Homily or Sermon

The preaching of the Gospel and the Eucharist are inseparably wedded together in the Divine Liturgy. The sermon is not optional; it is an essential part of the Liturgy. As we would never think of Communion ever being omitted from the Liturgy, so the preaching of the Word of God should never be omitted.

The whole life and ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is best described by the word *evangelion* or Good News! Christianity is not a search for God. It is not our groping and stumbling alone in darkness, trying to find the ladder to heaven. It is God Himself coming in the Person of His Son that He may lift us out of our blindness and helplessness into His light. The Gospel of Christ is primarily an announcement of what God has done – and does – in the Person of Jesus. When the apostles preached, they merely made a proclamation, an announcement of what God had done in Christ. “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Corinthians 5:19) and making “Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). But even more than this: Christ is risen! By His death He conquered death. Having ascended into heaven, He sent the gift of the Holy Spirit upon the earliest Church in Jerusalem on Pentecost, bringing them new life and power, changing their lives completely, filling them with that Life which is truly life. This is the message! This was, and is, the Gospel! The entire emphasis is on the good news of what God has done in Christ to overcome humanity’s bad news of sin and death.

There is a wonderful story about the Greek word *evangelistes*, or evangelist, one who delivers the good news. Apparently, the word was first used in 490 BC following the battle of Marathon when the Persians had moved their great army against Athens. The outnumbered Athenians met them 25 miles outside of Athens, fought a bitter battle and finally won the victory. The people of Athens were locked in their city, frightened and trembling, not knowing the outcome of that crucial battle. A messenger, Pheidippides by name, was sent to bring the good news to Athens. Pheidippides ran the entire 25 miles and when he arrived, his message was this: “*Hairete! Nenekamen!*” – “Rejoice! We have conquered!”

This is the message of the Gospel of Christ: “Rejoice! We’ve won!” This is why every priest – and indeed, every Christian – cannot help but be an evangelist, spreading everywhere the good news of the faith. It’s as if I was on my deathbed dying of cancer and someone suddenly came to me announcing that the cure had just been found. This is why the early Christians proclaimed the Resurrection of Jesus with such joy and unrestrained enthusiasm. Christ is risen and our sins are forgiven! Christ is risen and death is conquered! Christ is risen to fill us with the power of the Holy Spirit! Christ is risen and with Him we too will rise to a life that is truly life! We Christians, as carriers of God’s good news, are sustained by unending hope. Suffering and defeat are known, but never accepted as final. Energized by the Holy Spirit who makes all things new, we light

candles rather than curse the darkness. This is why every Christian preacher is best described as an evangelist – a bearer of the good news of victory. We are called to preach the good news of God's forgiveness, the good news about the death of death in Christ's Resurrection, the good news of God's power given to us in our weakness, the good news about our great Liberator and Deliverer, the Lord Jesus.

Our preaching must be like a candle burning brightly on a dark night or a drink of cool, fresh water given to one dying of thirst in the terrible heat of the desert. Never forget what the Apostle Paul writes to Timothy, his young protégé: "Do the work of an evangelist!" (2 Timothy 4:5).

- Father Anthony Coniaris
from his book, *Preaching the Word of God*

A sermon which touches the audience provides a beginning for healing. Excellence in preaching should not be measured by the length of the sermon but by the interest of the congregation.

All who have been ordained for the ministry of the Word have received from God the command never to abandon our duty and never to be silent whether anyone listens to us or not. Thus I am determined – for as long as I live and as long as God pleases to leave me in this life – to fulfill this duty and carry out this command, whether anyone pays attention or not.

- St. John Chrysostom (347-407AD)

We are really preaching to others if we ourselves do what we say; if we are pierced with God's love; if, since we cannot avoid sin, our tears wash away the stains on our life that come with each new day. We must ask ourselves whether anyone has ever discovered God through our words, repented after our reproof, abandoned destructive habits because we spoke out, or turned from greed or pride. How many lives will we bring in our arms to God from the harvest of our preaching? Listen to what the Lord said after sending out his preachers: "The harvest is indeed great, but the laborers are few." I say this sadly: though many crave the Good News, there are none to preach it. There are priests in plenty around us, but seldom do we find a laborer for God's harvest. We accept the role but not the work.

- St. Gregory the Great (540-604AD)

Every sermon, every lesson, has meaning and value only when it is the result of personal spiritual experience and knowledge. Every sermon pronounced only with our lips is dead and false and those who listen always unmistakably feel it.

- Father Alexander Elchaninov (1881-1934AD)

A sermon which is not confirmed by the priest's life is like a picture of bread instead of real bread.

- Archbishop John Shahovskoy (1902-1989)

THE PRAYER FOR THE FAITHFUL

Priest (in a low voice): Again, we bow before You and pray to You, O good and loving God. Hear our supplication: [cleanse our souls and bodies from every defilement of flesh and spirit \(2 Corinthians 7:1\)](#), and grant that we may stand before Your [holy altar \(cf. Exodus 29:37\)](#) without blame or condemnation. Grant also, O God, progress in life, faith, and spiritual discernment to the faithful who pray with us, so that they may always worship You with reverence and love, [partake of Your holy Mysteries without blame or condemnation \(cf. 1 Corinthians 11:27-32\)](#), and become worthy of Your heavenly kingdom [\(2 Thessalonians 1:5\)](#).

Priest: And grant that always guarded by Your power we may give glory to You, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and [to the ages of ages \(Ephesians 3:21\)](#).

People: [Amen \(1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalm 106:48\)](#).

Commentary – The Prayer for the Faithful

With this prayer, the second part of the Divine Liturgy begins: the Liturgy of the Faithful. In the ancient liturgical tradition of the Church the catechumens – those preparing to become Christians – would at this time be dismissed, leave the Church building and often go to an adjacent building for further instruction. Only those who had proclaimed their faith in Christ, received instruction and been baptized as Christians were allowed to remain and participate in the Eucharist. Although prayers for the dismissal of the catechumens are no longer done in most Orthodox Churches today, at St. Paul's these prayers are restored to the Liturgy during Great Lent for those who wish to enter the life of the Church through Baptism and/or Chrismation on Pascha. The prayers for the catechumens, Father Schmemmann has written, "are above all a liturgical expression of a fundamental calling of the Church – precisely the Church as *mission*." A Church without catechumens, without a sense of mission, is not fully the Church commissioned by Christ to proclaim the Gospel to all people (Matthew 28:19-20).

What does it mean to be faithful? Metropolitan Kallistos Ware has written: "In the Creed we do not say, "I believe that there is a God." We say, "I believe in one God." Between belief *that* and belief *in*, there is a crucial distinction. It is possible for me to believe that someone or something exists, and yet for this belief to have no practical effect on my life. I can open a telephone directory and scan the names recorded on its pages; and, as I read, I am prepared to believe that some (or even most) of these people exist. But I know none of them personally and so my belief that they exist makes no particular difference to me. When, on the other hand, I say to a much beloved friend, "I believe in you," I am doing far more than expressing a belief that this person exists. "I believe in you" means: I turn to you, I rely upon you, I put my full trust in you and I hope in you. Faith is not merely the supposition that something might be true, but the assurance that Someone is there. Faith, then, is a personal relationship with God; a relationship as yet incomplete and faltering, yet none the less real. Faith is to know God not as an abstract principle, but as a Person. To know a person is far more than to know certain facts about that person; there can be no true awareness of other persons without mutual love. Here, then, are the two least misleading ways of speaking about the God who surpasses our understanding: He is personal and He is love. And these are basically two ways of saying the same thing. Our way of entry into the mystery of God is through personal love. Our God is beyond all we can think or express, yet closer to us than our own heart."

THE GREAT ENTRANCE

People: We who mystically represent the **Cherubim** (*Ezekiel 10:2; Hebrews 9:5*) sing the thrice holy hymn to the life-creating Trinity. Let us lay aside all the cares of this life that we may receive the King of all.....

(While the Cherubic Hymn is being sung, the Priest prays in a low voice) No one bound by **worldly desires and pleasures** (*Titus 3:3*) is worthy to approach, draw near or minister to You, the **King of glory** (*Psalms 24:7-8*). To serve You is great and awesome even for the **powers of heaven** (*Daniel 4:35*). But because of Your ineffable and immeasurable love for us, You became man without alteration or change. **You have served as our High Priest** (*Hebrews 4:14*), and as **Lord of all** (*Acts 10:36*), have entrusted to use the celebration of this liturgical sacrifice without the shedding of blood. For You alone, Lord our God, **rule over all things in heaven and on earth** (*1 Chronicles 29:11*). **You are seated on the throne of the Cherubim** (*Psalms 98:1*), the Lord of the **Seraphim** (*Isaiah 6:2*) and the **King of Israel** (*Matthew 27:42*). You alone are holy and dwell among your saints. You alone are good and ready to hear. Therefore, I implore you, look upon me, Your sinful and **unworthy servant** (*Luke 17:10*), and **cleanse my soul and heart from an evil conscience** (*cf. Hebrews 10:22*). Enable me by the **power of Your Holy Spirit** (*Romans 15:15*) so that, vested with the grace of the priesthood, I may stand before Your **holy table** (*cf. Exodus 25:23-30; 37:10-16*) and celebrate the mystery of Your holy and pure Body and Your precious Blood. To you I come with bowed head and beg you: **do not turn Your face away from me** (*Psalms 142:7*) **nor reject me from among Your children** (*Wisdom 9:4*), but make me, Your sinful and **unworthy servant** (*Luke 17:10*), worthy to offer to You these gifts. For You, Christ our God, are the Offerer and the Offered, the One who receives and is distributed, and **to You we give glory** (*Psalms 96:8*), together with Your Father who is without beginning and Your all-holy, good and life-creating Spirit (*John 6:63*), now and forever and **to the ages of ages. Amen** (*Ephesians 3:21*).

(The Priest censens the altar area and sanctuary, reciting in a low voice the “Cherubic Hymn,” “Having Beheld Christ’s Resurrection” (on Sundays), and the 50th Psalm. Then the Great Entrance takes place.)

Priest:* May the Lord our God remember all of you in His kingdom (*cf. Luke 23:42*), always, now and forever and **to the ages of ages (*Ephesians 3:21*).

People: Amen (*1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalms 106:48*).

(The priest enters the sanctuary, while the people sing the end of the Cherubic Hymn.)

People: . . . invisibly escorted by the **angelic hosts** (*cf. Psalms 148:2*). Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! (*Psalms 150:6*)

(The priest places the holy gifts on the holy Table, covering them and censuring them.)

Why do Orthodox Christians use incense in their worship?

Because it's Biblical!

Incense and the Altar of Incense in the Old Testament

The Book of Exodus, chapter 30

¹ "Make an altar of acacia wood for burning incense. ² It is to be square, a cubit long and a cubit wide, and two cubits high—its horns of one piece with it. ³ Overlay the top and all the sides and the horns with pure gold, and make a gold molding around it. ⁴ Make two gold rings for the altar below the molding—two on opposite sides—to hold the poles used to carry it. ⁵ Make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. ⁶ Put the altar in front of the curtain that is before the ark of the Testimony—before the atonement cover that is over the Testimony—where I will meet with you.

⁷ "Aaron must burn fragrant incense on the altar every morning when he tends the lamps. ⁸ He must burn incense again when he lights the lamps at twilight so incense will burn regularly before the LORD for the generations to come.

³⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Take fragrant spices—gum resin, onycha and galbanum—and pure frankincense, all in equal amounts, ³⁵ and make a fragrant blend of incense, the work of a perfumer. It is to be salted and pure and sacred. ³⁶ Grind some of it to powder and place it in front of the Testimony in the Tent of Meeting, where I will meet with you. It shall be most holy to you. ³⁷ Do not make any incense with this formula for yourselves; consider it holy to the LORD.

Incense in heavenly worship around the Throne of the Lamb in eternity

The Book of Revelation, chapters 5 & 8

⁶ Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders (presbyters). ⁷ He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. ⁸ And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders (presbyters) fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

³ Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. ⁴ The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand.

THE PETITIONS

**Priest:* Let us complete our prayer to the Lord.

People: Lord, have mercy (*cf. Matthew 15:22; 20:30*).

**Priest:* For the precious gifts here presented, let us pray to the Lord (*cf. Acts 8:24*).

People: Lord, have mercy (*cf. Matthew 15:22; 20:30*).

**Priest:* For this holy house (*Psalms 93:5*) and for those who enter it with faith, reverence, and the fear of God (*2 Corinthians 7:1*), let us pray to the Lord (*cf. Acts 8:24*).

People: Lord, have mercy (*cf. Matthew 15:22; 20:30*).

**Priest:* For our deliverance from all affliction, wrath, danger, and distress, let us pray to the Lord (*cf. Acts 8:24*).

People: Lord, have mercy (*cf. Matthew 15:22; 20:30*).

**Priest:* Help us, save us (*Psalms 109:26*), have mercy upon us (*Psalms 51:1*), and protect us (*Psalms 32:7; 40:11 and 2 Thessalonians 3:3*), O God, by Your grace.

People: Lord, have mercy (*cf. Matthew 15:22; 20:30*).

**Priest:* For a perfect, holy, peaceful, and sinless day, let us ask the Lord (*1 John 5:14-15*)

People: Grant this, O Lord.

**Priest:* For an angel of peace, a faithful guide, a guardian of our souls and bodies (*cf. Exodus 23:20; Psalms 91:11*), let us ask the Lord (*cf. 1 John 5:14-15*).

Commentary – Angels in the Bible and the Liturgy

For an angel of peace...One of the things we pray for at every Liturgy is for an angel to guard us and guide us. Each of us has been given a guardian angel. It is about our guardian angels that the Lord Jesus spoke of when He admonished His disciples not to “look down” on children, “for I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven” (Matthew 18:10-11). And during Baptism, the celebrating priest prays specifically that an angel of light be assigned to the child being baptized. Mother Alexandra (1909-1991), known in the world as Princess Ileana of Romania, established the Convent of the Transfiguration in Ellwood City, PA in 1968. As a small child, she was given the privilege of seeing her guardian angel – the angel that would guide and guard her throughout her long and often difficult life. She recounted the event in her little book, *The Holy Angels*. “It was early morning, when I was seven years old, that I saw the angels. I am as sure of it now as I was then. I was not dreaming, nor “seeing things” – I just know they were there, plainly, clearly, distinctly. I was neither astonished nor afraid. I was not even awed – I was only terribly pleased. Our night nursery was lit by the dawn and I saw a group of angels standing, as if chatting, around my brother’s bed. I was aware of this, although I could not hear their voices. They had no wings. At the foot of my brother Mircea’s bed stood one heavenly being, a little aside from the others – taller he

was, and extraordinarily beautiful, with great white wings. In his right hand he carried a lighted taper; he did not seem to belong to the group of angels gathered around the bed. He clearly stood apart and on watch. I knew him to be the guardian angel. I then became aware that at the foot of my own bed stood a similar celestial creature. He was tall and his robe was dark blue with wide, loose sleeves. His beauty was such as I cannot describe because it was comparable to nothing human. His wings swept high and out behind him. One hand was lifted to his breast, while in the other he carried a lighted taper. Love, kindness, understanding, and assurance flowed from him. Delighted, I crawled from under the bedcovers and, kneeling up against the end of the bed, I stretched out my hand with the ardent wish to touch my smiling guardian, but he took a step back, put out a warning hand, and gently shook his head. I was so close to him I could have reached him easily. "Oh, please don't go," I cried; at which words all the other angels looked toward me and then they vanished. I was but a child when I saw my guardian angel. As time passed I still sporadically remembered and acknowledged his presence, but mostly, I ignored him..."

The Liturgy speaks over and over again about the reality of angels and archangels, the cherubim and the seraphim. The Scriptures witness to the reality of angels from beginning to end, from Genesis to the Book of Revelation. What are angels? The word "angel" is a Greek word that means "messenger." Angels are purely spiritual beings that have often served as God's messengers at critical times in human history. In the Old Testament, the Archangel Michael appears to the prophet Daniel (10:13) and is mentioned again in Jude 9 and the Book of Revelation (12:7). In the New Testament, the Archangel Gabriel appears to both Zechariah to announce the birth of his son, John the Baptist (Luke 1:10-20); and to Mary the Theotokos to announce the birth of her son, our Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 1:26-37). An angel comforts the Lord Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane shortly before His crucifixion (Luke 22:43); and angels announce His resurrection to the women who come to His tomb and find it empty (Luke 24:4-7). At the Second Coming, the Gospel of Matthew (25:31) tells us that the Lord will be escorted by "all the angels." The Scriptures mention many different kinds or ranks of angels. The cherubim and the seraphim are mentioned throughout the Old Testament and are particularly associated with the Temple in Jerusalem and the Ark of the Covenant by the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel. In fact, the angelic hymn that Isaiah (6:5) heard sung by the seraphim in the Temple, "Holy, holy, holy Lord God of *Sabaoth*: Heaven and earth are full of Your glory" is still sung at every celebration of the Liturgy to this day. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul mentions other types of angels such as thrones, powers and principalities (Colossians 1:16; Ephesians 1:21). The role of angels has been significant in the history of our salvation as well as in our praise and worship of the living God during the Liturgy. We believe that if we listen carefully to the message of the angels, we can often hear the voice of God in our lives.

Commentary – The Sign of the Cross

The Sign of the Cross is one of Christianity's most ancient customs. It is a sign of blessing and commitment to the Crucified Lord. Tertullian (c.160-240), an ancient Christian writer in North Africa first mentions the Sign of the Cross: "We Christians wear out our foreheads with the Sign of the Cross." A simple custom, it is a statement of Christian faith which incorporates the entire body. Like many ancient customs, it has

been performed in a diversity of ways over the centuries. Current Orthodox Christian practice, used by all since the 17th century, involves combining the thumb, pointer and middle finger while placing the ring finger and the pinky against the palm. The unity of the three fingers represents the unity of the undivided Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three persons but one God. The two fingers pressed against the palm represent the two natures of Christ: human and divine. It indicates our belief in Jesus, who is fully God and fully human. Our motion, of course, recalls the cross: forehead, stomach, right shoulder and left shoulder, but also the God who is Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As one moves through the sign, one recites, at the forehead, "In the name of the Father"; at the navel, "and of the Son"; and across the shoulders, "and of the Holy Spirit, Amen." It is as if to say "I love you Lord with all of my mind (forehead), with all my soul (navel), with all my strength (right shoulder) and with all my heart (left shoulder)." Done at various times as a sign of reverence, it is traditionally made before kissing an icon or the Gospel book; and during the Liturgy, whenever the Holy Trinity or the Virgin Mary is mentioned; before and after the Gospel is read; when lighting candles and during the creed. In short, few actions are so simple and yet symbolize so much of our Christian life.

Commentary – Praise God! Alleluia!

One of several ancient Hebrew words found in the Liturgy, "Alleluia" literally means "Praise God" and in the Scriptures is found primarily in the Old Testament Book of Psalms, where it is used 24 times in Psalms 104, 111-117 and 145-150. It is also found four times in chapter 19 of the Book of Revelation where it is the word of praise and worship used by all creation "for the wedding of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7). A joyful, often spontaneous word of thanksgiving and praise, it is sung throughout the Liturgy: with verses from the Psalms after the Epistle reading, just before the Gospel is read; at the end of the Cherubic Hymn during the Great Entrance; and as part of the normal Sunday Communion hymn taken from Psalm 148:1. In our Church alleluia is also sung during Lent and Holy Week as well as at funerals and memorial services.

Commentary – Amen!

The word "Amen" is another ancient Hebrew word used throughout the Liturgy. It is always an affirmation of the certainty and truth of what has just been said and may be variously understood to mean "Truly", "So say we all", "So be it", or "Let it be so." Most simply, it means "Yes!" Amen is our "Yes" to God. The Hebrew root means "to be firm, confirmed, to be reliable, have faith, to believe." We find the word "amen" used by the apostle Paul to end two of his letters (Romans 15:33; Galatians 6:18); and it is the very last word of the Bible, closing it like a seal: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen!" (Revelation 22:21). Thus, when we say amen, we are expressing our assent and confirming that which is said in the Scriptures and the Liturgy as being true and the foundation on which we build our lives. Father Lev Gillet writes that "in saying "Amen!" our whole life and being are engaged in an act of faith and ardent trust." To say this word is to make a commitment to Christ.

People: Grant this, O Lord.

**Priest:* For forgiveness and remission of our sins and transgressions, *let us ask the Lord.*

People: Grant this, O Lord.

**Priest:* For all that is good and beneficial to our souls, and for peace in the world, *let us ask the Lord (cf. 1 John 5:14-15).*

People: Grant this, O Lord.

**Priest:* For the completion of our lives in peace and repentance, *let us ask the Lord.*

People: Grant this, O Lord.

**Priest:* For a Christian end to our lives, peaceful, without shame and suffering, and for a good account before the awesome *judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10)*, *let us ask the Lord (cf. 1 John 5:14-15).*

People: Grant this, O Lord.

**Priest:* Remembering our most holy, pure, *blessed (Luke 1:46)*, and glorious Lady, the Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary, with *all the saints (Revelation 8:3)*, let us commit ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God.

People: *To You, O Lord (Psalm 25:1).*

Commentary – Remembering Death

For a Christian end to our lives...is a petition prayed at every Liturgy. The Liturgy confronts us with the fact that death is something that awaits all of us. Yet, living in a secular culture we often wish to avoid thinking about it. As Orthodox Christians, we understand earthly death to be an encounter with the Risen Christ and the door to what the Lord Jesus calls “eternal life” (John 3:16). For believers, death is not the end but a new beginning. Because of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the dead, Christians – as St. Paul wrote – know that “to die is gain” (Philippians 1:22) and “do not grieve as others do who have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Indeed, “here we have no lasting city but are looking for the city that is to come” (Hebrews 13:14). One of the most striking things about Christians in the ancient Roman world that their non-Christian neighbors were startled by and frequently commented on was the fact that they didn’t seem to be afraid to die. Christians who have died and risen with Christ in the waters of baptism (Romans 6:3-5) are to live their lives here and now in the light of eternity and that vantage point enables a person to see life from a completely new and different perspective, coloring how every relationship, task and circumstance will be dealt with. Priorities change. What in monastic writers is called the “remembrance of death” is a spiritual discipline that is meant to give our lives focus and clarity of purpose. Metropolitan Anthony Bloom (1914-2003) has written about the Christian attitude towards death: “Death is the touchstone of our attitude to life. People who are afraid of death are afraid of life. It is impossible not to be afraid of life with all its complexity and

dangers if one is afraid of death. This means that to solve the problem of death is not a luxury. If we are afraid of death we will never be prepared to take ultimate risks; we will spend our life in a cowardly, careful and timid manner. It is only if we can face death, make sense of it, and determine its place and our place in regard to it that we will be able to live in a fearless way and to the fullness of our ability. Too often we wait until the end of our life to face death, whereas we would have lived quite differently if only we had faced death at the outset." Life in this world is temporary. What are you doing in your life that honors God? What will be your legacy as a believer?

Commentary – Calling the Virgin Mary the Theotokos or Mother of God

Why do we remember the Virgin Mary? The Virgin Mary is the Mother of the Messiah, our Savior and King, the Mother of the Lord Jesus, the Theotokos or *Mother of God*. The theological significance of this title lies in the fact that in the womb of this teen-aged Jewish girl the Word, who was with God and was God, through whom all things were created, became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:1-3, 14). That title for the Virgin Mary is found in ancient Christian writings dating back to the second and third centuries and is used for the first time in surviving documents by an early Christian scholar named Origen (185-254AD). It was officially proclaimed as a title to be used by Christians to describe the Virgin Mary at the Third Ecumenical Council held in the city of Ephesus in 431AD.

Commentary – Remembering the Saints

Throughout the Liturgy we are asked to "remember all the saints" beginning with "the Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary" and her "yes" to God's plan for her life (Luke 1:38); and then, like all of them, to commit "our whole life to Christ our God." Who are the saints that we are asked to remember in these petitions? The saints are those men and women who, throughout the centuries and in every culture, have loved God and borne witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, and remained faithful to Him to the end, often at the cost of their own lives. They are people who have been transformed by their faith and truly are the "real deal" as Christians. They are men and women from every generation who have been *canonized*, i.e. set up as models of what it means to truly follow Christ and be faithful to Him, seeking and striving for His kingdom as their first priority in life (Matthew 6:33). When we speak of Sts. Peter and Paul and the apostles, Sts. Katherine, Irene and Barbara the martyrs, Sts. Basil, John Chrysostom and Nektarios the bishops, we are speaking of people who have been *canonized* by the Church in an official manner to serve as models of faithfulness and holiness for us to emulate. Canonization does not "make" anybody a saint. Canonization recognizes that someone already was, in his/her own lifetime, a saint.

The word *canonization* means that a Christian has been found worthy to have his/her name placed in the canon or official list of the saints of the Church. This *canon* is read during the various liturgical services of the Church, particularly *Orthros* or *Matins*. Every day of the year is dedicated to a number of saints whose names are remembered by the People of God. When a Christian's name has been included in the canon of saints, it is a

sign that the Church encourages the faithful to ask that saint for his/her prayers before God. Liturgical services may be specially composed in the saint's honor and celebrated by the Church. For the first thousand years of the history of the Church saints were recognized without any formal rite of canonization. Local congregations of the faithful simply began to remember certain well-known Christians in their liturgical gatherings, to ask them for help in prayer, to visit their relics, which frequently remained vehicles of the Holy Spirit, curing the sick in soul and body, as they had during earthly life. In the 10th century, in the west, the then-Orthodox Church of Rome began to insist that saints be formally and officially "registered" as such with the papal authorities. The first recorded canonization of this type was that of St. Ulrich of Augsburg, canonized in 993 by Pope John XV. For the next 600 years -- during which time the Roman Catholic Church split off from the Orthodox community -- the west developed a very precise (and some would say even legalistic) method of determining who were to be canonized as saints. The Orthodox Church never developed any comparable methods for canonizing saints. As in the early Church, the situation has remained very much determined by local practices and local traditions. Holy men and women continue to be recognized as such during their own lifetimes; they continue to be venerated and honored after their death; and Christian people continue to ask for their prayers and to visit their shrines.

It is the Holy Spirit who is the source of all holiness, all sanctity, in the life of the Church. Saints may be found in every country and every culture, ranging from Greece, Turkey and Russia to Serbia, Romania and America; from Palestine, Libya and Egypt to France, Ireland and Italy. Saints come from all walks of life: men and women, husbands and wives, kings and queens, soldiers, merchants, slaves, students, peasants and aristocrats, bishops and priests, monks and nuns. All were ordinary people who chose to live their lives in complete dedication to God, allowing Him to renew and transform them from the inside out. The saints, no matter what country they were from, language they spoke or station in life, never betrayed their innermost beliefs about Christ and strove to live their lives in complete honesty and integrity, no matter what the cost. They lived with courage and determination, love and humility, compassion, grace and joy. The saints reveal human potential at its finest and serve as role-models for us to follow today. To know and understand the saints of the Church is to deepen our relationship with their Master and ours, our Lord Jesus Christ. However – and this is important! – the saints are not simply those men and women whose icons adorn the walls and windows of our Churches. St. Paul writes that we are "*all* called to be saints" (Romans 1:7). And the text of the Divine Liturgy refers to us, the congregation gathered for worship, as saints. Shortly before the body and blood of Christ are offered in communion, one of the things that the priest sings in the Liturgy is: "Let us be attentive! The holy gifts are for the holy people of God." This is a paraphrase of a much more compact sentence in the original Greek: "*Proskomen! Ta ayia tois ayiois*" which may be more literally translated as "Let us be attentive! The holy (the Eucharistic Bread and Wine that are now the consecrated Body and Blood of Christ) for the saints." In the original Greek of the Liturgy, the word that is translated as both saint and holy is the same word: *ayios*. In other words, every Christian is called to be a saint, to be holy as God is holy, to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect (Romans 1:7; 2 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Peter 1:15; Matthew 5:48). To become ever more Christ-like, to be holy, to be a saint: this is God's will and plan for our life!

THE PRAYER OF THE PROSKOMEDE

Priest (in a low voice): Lord, God Almighty, You alone are holy (*Revelation 15:3-4*). You accept a sacrifice of praise (*Hebrews 13:15*) from those who call upon You with their whole heart (*Psalms 9:1*). Receive also the prayer of us sinners and let it reach Your holy altar (*cf. Exodus 29:37*). Enable us to bring before You gifts and spiritual sacrifices (*Hebrews 5:1*) for our sins and for the transgressions of the people (*Hebrews 9:7*). Make us worthy to find grace in Your presence so that our sacrifice may be pleasing to You (*1 Peter 2:5*) and that Your good and gracious Spirit may overshadow us, the gifts here presented, and all Your people.

Priest: Through the mercies of Your only begotten (*John 1:18*) Son with whom You are blessed, together with Your all-holy, good, and life-creating Spirit (*Psalms 143:10; John 6:63*), now and forever and to the ages of ages (*Ephesians 3:21*).

People: Amen (*1 Chronicles 16: 36; Psalm 106:48*).

Priest: Peace be with all (*John 20:26; 1 Peter 5:14; 3 John 15*).

People: And with your spirit (*cf. Philippians 4:23; 2 Timothy 4:22*)

THE KISS OF PEACE

**Priest:* Let us love one another (*John 13:34*) that with one mind (*Romans 15:6*) we may confess:

(The Priest kisses the holy Gifts saying) I love You, Lord. You are my strength. The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer (*Psalms 18:1-2*).

(At this time it is customary for the kiss of peace to be exchanged.)

During Christ's time, the kiss was one of the preliminary courtesies to any ceremonial meal: its omission caused our Lord to admonish Simon the Pharisee in his own house (*Luke 7:45*). Moreover, the Kiss of Peace is one of the oldest liturgical customs of the Church, as St. Paul reveals in his letters: "Greet one another with a holy kiss" (*Romans 16:16, 1 Corinthians 16:20, 2 Corinthians 13:12*). Like any kiss, the kiss of peace signifies mutual love and friendship. Yet the Scriptures and the saints - like Cyril, the 4th century bishop of Jerusalem who discusses the exchange of the kiss of peace with the catechumens in his *Catechetical Orations* - make it clear that this kiss is not simply an ordinary kiss but a "kiss of love," and a "holy kiss" by which we demonstrate that the source of our love for one another is the love of God and that Christ and the Holy Spirit are the bonds of mutual love among Christians. Historically, particularly up to the 6th century, the kiss of peace was exchanged at the Liturgy and a variety of other liturgical services; yet over time the practice died out among the laity, although it has continued to be exchanged among the clergy to the present time. Today, more and more parishes have all members - clergy and laity - participating in the kiss of peace. The customary greeting is: "Christ is in our midst" and the response is: "He is and will always be!"

People: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (*cf. Matthew 28:29*), Trinity one in essence and inseparable.

**Priest:* The doors! The doors! Wisdom! Let us be attentive!

THE CREED

People: I believe in one God, the Father (*Ephesians 4:6*), the Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth (*Psalms 121:2; Matthew 11:25*), and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord, Jesus Christ (*Ephesians 4:5; 1 Corinthians 12:3*), the only begotten (*John 1:18*) Son of God (*John 10:36; 1 John 5:5*), begotten of the Father before all ages. Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not created, of one essence with the Father (*cf. John 14: 9-11*), through whom all things were made (*Colossians 1:16*). For us and for our salvation, He came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and He suffered and was buried. On the third day He rose according to the Scriptures (*1 Corinthians 15:4*).

He ascended into heaven (*Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9-12*) and is seated at the right hand of the Father (*Colossians 3:1*). He will come again in glory (*Matthew 25: 31*) to judge the living and the dead (*Acts 10:42*). His Kingdom will have no end (*Luke 1:33*).

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord (*2 Corinthians 3:17*), the Creator of Life (*John 6:63*), who proceeds from the Father (*John 15:26*), who together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who spoke through the prophets.

In one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

I confess one baptism (*Ephesians 4:5*) for the forgiveness of sins (*Ephesians 1:7*).

I expect the resurrection of the dead (*Acts 24:15*) and the life of the age to come (*Mark 8:10; Luke 18:30*). Amen (*1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalm 106:48*).

Commentary – The doors! Guard the doors!

Around 112AD, a persecution against Christians broke out in what was then called Bithynia, a province of the ancient Roman Empire on the northwest coast of Asia Minor (modern Turkey). Accused Christians – men, women and even children – were arrested and interrogated by Pliny, the local Roman governor, who officially charged them to renounce their faith, curse Christ and worship the emperor's statue – or be executed. What crime had they committed? Of what were they guilty? In Pliny's own words, taken from his letter to the Emperor Trajan reporting on the whole matter, "the whole of their guilt...was that they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god and bind themselves by a solemn oath not to do anything evil...never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to lie nor refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so." Although their high morals were

unquestioned by Pliny, Christians were being persecuted for gathering in the early morning to sing hymns to Christ – in other words, for gathering to celebrate the Divine Liturgy. The exclamation to guard the doors, in ancient times, was a direction to the doorkeepers to close the doors of the Church and guard them. Father Lawrence Farley writes: “In North America today, we can forget that the most dangerous thing the early Christians did was to celebrate the Liturgy. Every time they did so, they risked their lives. Roman law made it quite clear that Christianity should not exist and what defined a Christian in the eyes of the state as well as those of the Church was participation in the Eucharist. In those first three centuries after Christ, every Christian knew that he or she risked prison, exile and even death by attending Liturgy. They never knew when Roman soldiers would break in on them, gather them up and lead them away to be imprisoned and/or executed. Worshipping the one true God under such a shadow and such pressures left a mark on their liturgical practice, an abiding reminder of the separation of the Church and the world: the closing of the doors. And persecutions are not a thing of the past. Christians in Eastern Europe faced persecutions up until the latter part of the 20th century and Christians in the Middle East and elsewhere still live under constant threat of arrest and martyrdom.” In Russia alone, secret police archives that have been released since the fall of Communism document the fact that, between 1918 and 1940, under Lenin and Stalin, more than 40,000 Orthodox priests were executed.

Commentary – Confessing the Creed

Do you know what you believe? Every Sunday, millions of Orthodox Christians around the world recite the Creed. When we say the Creed, do we realize what a remarkable thing it is that we’re doing? Do we realize how different this makes us from the world around us? In a society that celebrates individuality above all else we are doing something together as a community; in an age where the avoidance of commitment has been elevated to a virtue, we are pledging ourselves to a very specific set of convictions and to one another; in a culture that celebrates novelty, we are using words written long ago; in a throwaway, consumerist world we preserve the tradition of the “faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3) for nearly two millennia; in a society where the accepted wisdom changes from minute to minute, we insist that some truths are so critical that they do not change and must be repeated over and over again. Reciting the Creed during the Liturgy is a counter cultural act and goes against the grain of many of the values espoused by contemporary American culture.

The Creed, which is also called the Symbol of Faith, is a brief summary of the essentials of the Christian faith written in the 4th century at the first two ecumenical councils: the Council of Nicea in 325 AD and the First Council of Constantinople in 381 AD. These councils, attended by bishops from all over the ancient Roman world, were called to clarify the Christian teaching about God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. In the ancient world – like today – many individuals and groups who claimed to be Christian - but were not - taught things about the Lord Jesus at odds with the authentic Christian faith. One such group, called the Arians, taught that Jesus Christ was not truly divine, not fully God; and another group, called the Strugglers against the Spirit, taught that the Holy Spirit was not divine and should not be worshipped. These two councils, summarizing the experiences of the Apostles and the teaching of the Scriptures, proclaimed Jesus Christ to

be both fully God and fully human, the Word of God made flesh (John 1:1-14), who was crucified, suffered and was buried at a particular point in history – under Pontius Pilate – and rose from the dead; and the Holy Spirit was also proclaimed to be fully divine, to be the Lord who is also worshipped together with the Father and the Son as one God in Trinity.

The Creed is a summary of how we as Christians view God, the world and ourselves. It is, in fact, a very specific view of the world, a worldview that constitutes the lens through which we are to see everything and the structure by which we frame our thoughts, experiences and ideas. What we believe about the relationship between God and humanity, sin, redemption and forgiveness, good and evil, heaven and hell, as well as our responsibilities in this life, will affect what we do and determine how we live. For an Orthodox Christian to simply say the Creed by rote, without understanding what these words imply for our lives, is to stumble through life as if blindfolded, unable to see reality as it truly is. When we say “I believe” we are affirming that we see things as they really are and that we have a personal responsibility to live the vision contained in the words of the Creed. In the end, we are what we believe.

We believe that our God is the one God revealed in the book of Genesis as the utterly transcendent creator of everything, both visible and invisible – from whales and stars to mountains and grasshoppers, from photons and quarks to black holes and angelic hosts – and that in Jesus Christ we are able to address Him with intimacy as our Father. We believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah awaited by ancient Israel, the only-begotten and unique Son of God, of the same essence as the Father, being fully divine; and yet, in taking flesh from the Virgin Mary, becoming fully human. We believe that in the Word of God becoming human and being crucified for our salvation, we have been set free from sin; and in His rising from the dead, death has been conquered by God and the possibility of eternal life in His kingdom “that will have no end” is now open to us. We believe that the Holy Spirit is also divine and proceeds only from the Father and is to be worshipped by us together with the Father and the Son. We believe in the Church, the community of believers that the apostle Paul says is the Body of Christ and which the Creed describes as one, holy, catholic and apostolic – as possessing the fullness of faith and open to all; as being rooted in the teaching of the apostles and sent out into the world to proclaim the truth of God’s love for the human race. We believe in the necessity of the sacrament of baptism for the forgiveness of our sins and to fully participate in the death and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6: 3-11). We believe that Christ will come once again and that the entire human race – both those who are alive and those who are dead – will be under His judgment for how they have lived (Matthew 25:31-46 and Romans 2:6). We look forward to that day when Christ will return in glory and eagerly await the resurrection of all the dead, and the life of the age to come, that time “which no eye has seen nor ear heard, nor has the human mind even conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

If we live with this faith as the prism through which we view the world and our lives, we shall become what God has called us to be: His saints, a chosen and holy people and a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9) that offers His love and the gift of immortality to a fallen world wrapped in evil and death.

THE HOLY ANAPHORA or PRAYER OF OFFERING

**Priest:* Let us stand well. Let us stand in awe. Let us be attentive, that we may present the holy offering in peace.

People: Mercy and peace (*Titus 1:4*), a sacrifice of praise (*Hebrews 13:15*).

Priest: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with all of you (*2 Corinthians 13:13*).

People: And with your spirit (*cf. Philippians 4:23; 2 Timothy 4:22*).

Priest: Let us lift up our hearts (*cf. Lamentations 3:41*).

People: We lift them up to the Lord.

Priest: Let us give thanks to the Lord (*Judith 8:25; Psalm 107:1*).

Let us be attentive! It is inevitable that at times during the Liturgy, our minds will wander. This is to be expected! This is one reason why the priest calls us back to attention by saying, "Wisdom! Let us listen attentively!" at different points in the Liturgy: for example, before the Epistle and Gospel readings, the recitation of the Creed and here, just before the Prayer of Offering or Anaphora begins. We are human beings and not robots and the level of concentration we can muster at any given time will be different at each Liturgy we attend. However, there is a general remedy. The Liturgy is built, so to speak, to have many levels. For those who read their Bibles, who pray at home regularly, who take their faith seriously, the Liturgy has been found to be an unending source of spiritual wealth. But to appreciate this takes a lot of work. One can liken it to watching football. Someone who doesn't know the rules of the game will inevitably dislike watching the sport. Yet the spectator who knows the rules, who has played the game, who knows the game from the inside out, can be endlessly involved in what is going on. Thus, the first and most important way to combat mindless thoughts during Liturgy is to put the hard work of spiritual discipline in on the 'off-days', as difficult as that sounds.

A Practical Suggestion: The most saintly monk or nun has wandering thoughts during the Liturgy. When your mind begins to wander, stop, say the *Our Father* and try to follow along using the Liturgy book in the pews with the goal of understanding the meaning of the text. If you are not able to follow the text, focus on the altar, close your eyes and simply repeat the Jesus prayer: "Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Then pray about those people, events and things for which you are truly thankful. **Caution:** Remember that your mind has many tracks. The worst possible thing you can do is say to yourself, "Don't think that." Rather, change your thoughts by doing something else like focusing on the text of the Liturgy, saying the *Our Father* or the Jesus Prayer. Don't worry: your mind will eventually follow.

People: It is proper and right.

Priest (in a low voice): It is proper and right to sing to You, bless You, praise You, thank You and worship You in all places of Your dominion (*Psalm 102:22*); for You are God ineffable, beyond comprehension, invisible (*John 1:18*), beyond understanding, existing forever and always the same; You and Your only begotten Son (*John 3:16; Hebrews 11:17; 1 John 4:9*) and Your Holy Spirit. You brought us into being out of nothing (cf. *2 Maccabees 7:28*), and when we fell, You raised us up again. You did not cease doing everything until You led us to heaven and granted us Your kingdom to come. For all these things we thank You and Your only begotten Son (*John 3:16; Hebrews 11:17; 1 John 4:9*) and Your Holy Spirit; for all things that we know and do not know, for blessings seen and unseen that have been bestowed upon us. We also thank You for this Liturgy which You are pleased to accept from our hands, even though You are surrounded by thousands of Archangels and tens of thousands of Angels, by the Cherubim (*Ezekiel 10:2*) and Seraphim, six-winged, many-eyed, soaring with their wings (*Isaiah 6:2*),

Priest: Singing the victory hymn, proclaiming, crying out, and saying:



People: Holy, holy, holy, Lord of Sabaoth, heaven and earth are filled with Your glory (*Isaiah 6:3*). Hosanna in the highest (*Matthew 21:9*). Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord (*Psalm 118:26*). Hosanna to God in the highest.

Commentary – "It is proper and right to... worship You"

What is worship? Why is it important? In English, the words “worship” and “worth” have the same root. We worship whatever is of ultimate value to us. Orthodox Christians believe that worship of the one, true and living God is our highest calling as human beings and gives our lives meaning, purpose and direction. True worship, worship in the Holy Spirit, happens when – as the Lord Jesus commands in the Sermon on the Mount – we put God and the seeking of His Kingdom as our first priority, above anyone or anything else. Worship is to love God with all of our mind, all our heart, all our strength and all our soul (*Mark 12:30*). For this reason, worship should not be thought of merely as a *part* of life. Real worship is the offering of the *whole* of our lives – everything that we are and everything that we have – to God. In this sense, worship is more than simply going to Church for Liturgy on Sunday mornings. It is a way of life – a lifestyle of complete and total surrender to God, a burning desire to do His will in every facet of one’s life – that is nurtured by the Liturgy. Rick Warren has written in his best-selling book, *The Purpose Driven Life*: “God is not interested in half-

hearted commitment, partial obedience and the leftovers of your time and money. He desires your full devotion, not just little bits and pieces of your life.” In ancient times, the Latin word *sacramentum*, from which we get the modern English word “sacrament,” had a very specific meaning in military contexts: it was the oath of loyalty *unto death* that a Roman soldier took to the Roman emperor when he first joined the army. Latin speaking Christians soon began to apply this word to the liturgical rites of the Church, particularly Baptism and the Eucharist, which were seen as affirming one’s loyalty unto death to Christ, “the King of kings and the Lord of lords” (Revelation 19:16). When we participate in the sacrament of the Eucharist by eating and drinking the Body and Blood of Christ at the Liturgy on Sunday mornings, we are committing ourselves to a sacramental – and therefore surrendered and obedient – way of life the rest of the week.

True worship, worship that is authentic and fully and deeply Orthodox, is a way of life that many modern Orthodox theologians and spiritual writers have called “the liturgy after the Liturgy.” We go to Church to participate in the Liturgy, setting apart a specific time each week to offer ourselves to God in love, gratitude and joy for what He has done for us; and in return, at each Liturgy we attend, the gift of the Holy Spirit is renewed in us and we receive the gifts of the Body and Blood of His beloved Son Jesus Christ to nurture His life in us, so that we can become more Christ-like: more loving, more compassionate towards others, more patient, more forgiving, more grateful, more peaceful, more faithful, more joyful. As St. John the Evangelist and Theologian wrote in his *First Letter*, “By this we may be sure that we are in Him: whoever says, “I live in Him,” ought to walk just as He walked” (1 John 2:5-6). It is in the Liturgy that we are to open the doors of our hearts to Christ in the Holy Spirit so that we can love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:31). In other words, in the Liturgy, we are called to be transformed, to become like the God whom we worship. In our Tradition, this process is called *theosis*, a Greek word that means “becoming like God.” We are to become what we worship.

Commentary: Being Servants of God

When Orthodox Christians come forward to receive the Body and Blood of Christ at the Eucharist, the priest addresses each person individually as “the servant of God,” a phrase often heard in the Liturgy. However, the Greek word used here, just prior to receiving Communion, and throughout the Liturgy is actually “*doulos*”, which means “slave,” and so Christians are more accurately to think of themselves as “slaves of God,” a Biblical phrase used to describe Moses (15:3) and the prophets of the Old Testament (10:7) in the Book of Revelation. St. Paul, in his Letter to Titus (1:1), will also call himself a “slave of God,” as will the apostle James (James 1:1). And in his First Letter (2:16), the apostle Peter will write that Christians are to live their lives in freedom precisely because they are “slaves of God.” St. Paul will also identify himself as a “slave of Christ” (Romans 1:1) and tell the Christians of Ephesus that they are to be “slaves of Christ, doing the will of God” (Ephesians 6:16). A slave is someone who is completely dependent on his master; who is always obedient to his master and seeks to do his will. In our relationship with God, does this describe how we live? In the beautiful Lenten prayer of St. Ephraim, we address God as the “Lord and Master of my life.” Do we really believe this? Being a slave of God and a slave of Jesus Christ: this is the way that the apostles and saints define what it means to be a Christian!

Priest (in a low voice): Together with these blessed powers, merciful Master, we also proclaim and say: You are holy and most holy, You and Your only begotten Son and Your Holy Spirit. You are holy and most holy, and sublime is Your glory. *You so loved Your world that You gave Your only begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16).* He came and fulfilled the divine plan for us. On the night when He was delivered up, or rather when He gave Himself up *for the life of the world (John 6:51)*, He took bread in His holy, pure, and blameless hands, gave thanks, blessed, sanctified, broke, and gave it to His holy disciples and apostles, saying:

Priest: Take, eat this is my Body which is broken for you for the forgiveness of sins *(Matthew 26:26).*

People: Amen *(1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalm 106:48).*

Priest (in a low voice): Likewise, after supper, He took the cup, saying *(1 Corinthians 11:24):*

Priest: Drink of it all of you; this is my Blood of the New Testament which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins *(Matthew 26:28).*

People: Amen *(1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalm 106:48).*

Why do Orthodox Christians believe that we truly receive the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ in communion?

Because it's Biblical!

The Gospel of John, chapter 6

⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." ⁵³Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you have no life in you. ⁵⁴Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵For my flesh is truly food and my blood is truly drink. ⁵⁶Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever." ⁵⁹Jesus said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

The First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, chapter 10

¹⁶Is not the cup of blessing for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?

¹⁷Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

The First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, chapter 11

²I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the traditions just as I passed them on to you.

²³For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant (testament) in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

**Commentary: The witness of the early Saints of the Church
that the Sacrament of Communion is to be received as the Body and Blood of Christ**

St. Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch, who was executed in the Coliseum in Rome circa 115AD for being a Christian: "Those who have perverted notions about the grace of Jesus Christ that has come down to us...avoid the Eucharist and public prayers because they do not admit the Eucharist to be the flesh of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who suffered for our sins and who the Father, in His goodness, resurrected. The sole Eucharist you should consider valid is the one that is celebrated by the bishop or by some person authorized by him" (*Letter to the Church in Smyrna: 6,7,8*).

St. Justin the Philosopher and Martyr, who was executed in Rome for being a Christian circa 155AD: "After the one who presides at our worship has given thanks and all the people have given their assent, those who are called deacons give to each person present the bread and the wine mixed with water, over which the thanksgiving was offered, so that all may partake. This food is called by us the Eucharist. It is not lawful for anyone else to partake of it other than those who believe the things that we teach are true and have been washed in the waters of baptism for the remission of sins and rebirth, and who live by the teachings of Christ. We receive this food not as ordinary bread and drink. Just as Jesus Christ our savior became flesh and blood for our salvation, so we have been taught that the food that has been blessed by the prayer of His Word is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh and nourishes our flesh and blood. For the apostles, in their memoirs that are called Gospels, have passed on to us the things that Jesus commanded them. They relate that Jesus took bread and after giving thanks, said, "This is my body. Do this in remembrance of me." And in like manner, having taken the cup and given thanks, he said, "This is my blood" and gave it to them alone" (*The First Apology written to the Emperors Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius, and to the people of Rome: 66*).

Priest (in a low voice): Remembering, therefore, this command of the Savior, and all that came to pass for our sake: the cross, the tomb, the resurrection on the third day, the ascension into heaven (*Acts 1:9-11*), the enthronement at the right hand of the Father (*Acts 7:55*), and the second, glorious coming.



Priest: We offer to You these gifts from Your own gifts (*1 Chronicles 29:14*) in all and for all.

People: We praise You, we bless You, we give thanks to You (*Psalms 75:1*), and we pray to You, Lord our God.

Priest (in a low voice): Once again we offer to You this spiritual worship (*Romans 12:1*) without the shedding of blood (*Hebrews 9:22*), and we ask, pray and beg You: send down Your Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts here presented.



Priest: And make this bread the precious Body of Your Christ.

People: Amen! (*1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalm 106:48*)

Priest: And that which is in this cup the precious Blood (*1 Peter 1:19*) of Your Christ.

People: Amen! (*1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalm 106:48*)

Priest: Changing them by Your Holy Spirit.

People: Amen! Amen! Amen! (*1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalm 106:48*)

Commentary – The Holy Spirit in the Liturgy

The Divine Liturgy is a charismatic, Pentecostal event – an event in which the Holy Spirit makes the Risen and Living Christ present among us. Christ is present in the Divine Liturgy by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, making the Eucharist the source and summit of the Christian life, what St. Maximos the Confessor (580-662AD) called "the mystery of mysteries." And when we are receiving the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion, we are also participating in what St. Paul and the text of the Liturgy call "the communion of the Holy Spirit" (2 Corinthians 13:14). In Orthodoxy, the *epiclesis* or invocation, the "calling forth" of the Holy Spirit upon the faithful and the gifts of bread and wine being offered, is an essential element in the Eucharistic action, affirming the fact that it is only in and by the power of the Holy Spirit that the Church worships, lives and acts. The Church is the Body of Christ and it is the Holy Spirit that constitutes the Church on the day of Pentecost, at every baptism and at every Eucharist.

Father Sergius Bulgakov (1871-1944) has written that "The Church of Christ is not an institution. It is a new life with Christ and in Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit. The Church, as the Body of Christ, is by that very fact the domain where the Holy Spirit works. More: the Church is life in the Spirit because it is the Body of Christ. Those who live in Christ bear within themselves the Holy Spirit and inversely, those who have the Spirit learn the meaning of the St. Paul's words, "It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me." It is just this seal of the Spirit, this bearing of the Spirit, which the Orthodox soul seeks and desires above all else."

When in 1968, the current Patriarch of Antioch, Ignatius, addressed the World Council of Churches in Uppsala, Sweden, he described the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church in this way: "Without the Holy Spirit God is far away, Christ stays in the past, the Church is merely an organization, authority is a matter of domination, mission a matter of propaganda, the Liturgy no more than an evocation, and Christian living a slave morality. But in the Holy Spirit, the cosmos is resurrected and groans with the birth pangs of the Kingdom, the risen Christ is present, the Gospel is the power of Life, the Church shows forth the Holy Trinity, authority is a liberating service, mission is a Pentecost, the Liturgy is both memorial and anticipation and human action is deified."

In the Liturgy, all things are accomplished by God through Christ in the Spirit. Where the Spirit is, there is Christ; and where Christ is, there is the Spirit. As Father Thomas Hopko has written: "Christ is the King and the Spirit is His Kingship; Christ is the Anointed One of God and the Holy Spirit is the unction of His anointing; Christ is the Head of His Body, the Church, and the Holy Spirit fills His Body and gives it life; Christ is the Bridegroom and the Spirit fills his Bride, the Church; and Christ and the Spirit are perfectly and completely One in their inseparable unity in God, who is love."

"How happy and blessed are we Orthodox Christians that the Lord has given us life in the Holy Spirit," wrote St. Silouan of Mt. Athos (1866-1938). "The Holy Spirit lives in our Church in the sacraments, in the holy Scriptures and in the hearts of the faithful. God's love is known in our Church by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Until I was seven and twenty I simply believed that God was, but I did not know Him. But when my soul knew Him by the Holy Spirit, I was consumed with longing for Him and now, day and night, I seek Him with a burning heart." May we all seek the living God with burning hearts!

Priest: So that they may be to those who partake of them for vigilance of soul, forgiveness of sins (*Ephesians 1:7*), communion of Your Holy Spirit (*2 Corinthians 13:13*), fulfillment of the kingdom of heaven (*Matthew 4:17; 10:7*), confidence before You, and not in judgment or condemnation. Again, we offer this spiritual worship (*Romans 12:1*) for those who rest in the faith: forefathers, fathers, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, preachers, evangelists, martyrs, confessors, ascetics, and for every righteous spirit made perfect in faith (*Hebrews 12:23*).

Priest: Especially for our most holy, pure, blessed (*Luke 1:46*), and glorious Lady, the Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary.

People: It is truly right to bless you, Theotokos, ever blessed (*Luke 1:46*), most pure, and mother of our God (*cf. Luke 1:43*). More honorable than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim, without corruption you gave birth to God the Word. We magnify you, the true Theotokos.

Commentary – Who are the martyrs?

Derived from the Greek word meaning “witness,” a martyr is someone who suffers persecution and death for their faith in Christ. St. Gregory the Theologian, the 4th century Patriarch of Constantinople, once said that “it is mere rashness to seek death, but it is cowardly to refuse it” in witnessing to our faith in Christ. Over the past two millennia martyrs have been a symbol of strength for the faithful, a sign that God is more powerful than death. All of the Apostles, who experienced the Risen Jesus, except for St. John the Evangelist, were put to death for their faith in Christ. That so many Christians who knew Jesus were willing to die for their claim that “Jesus is Lord” (*1 Corinthians 12:3*) gives a powerful witness to us about who Jesus is. As St. Justin the Martyr wrote in the 2nd century just before his own execution in Rome for the faith circa 155AD: “for it is plain that, though beheaded, and crucified, and thrown to wild beasts, and chains, and fire, and all other kinds of torture, we do not give up our confession of faith; but, the more these things happen, the more others, in even larger numbers, become faithful.” This persecution of Christianity has continued through the centuries. To this day, Orthodox Christians continue to be persecuted under Communism, various dictatorships, and Islam. In fact, more Orthodox Christians died for their faith in the 20th century under Communism in the former Soviet bloc countries than in all the persecutions carried out by the Roman Empire during the first 300 years of Christian history.

St. Stephen (in Greek, *stephanos* means “crown”) was the first person in history to be executed for being a Christian. His story is told in the New Testament by Luke the Evangelist in the *Acts of the Apostles* (6:1-7:60). A “man full of the Holy Spirit,” he was one of the seven deacons chosen by the Apostles to minister to the Greek-speaking Christians of the first community in Jerusalem. Arrested for his public preaching of Jesus Christ, he was – like his Master before him – brought before the Sanhedrin. For his witness before the Sanhedrin to Jesus as the crucified and risen Messiah, he was condemned to death by stoning. Taken outside the city walls, he was brutally stoned to death by an angry mob. Stephen was the first of a long line of many, many men and women who have paid the full price in blood for their faith in Jesus Christ.

Priest (in a low voice): For Saint John the prophet, forerunner, and baptist; for the holy glorious and most honorable Apostles, for Saint(s) (*Names*) whose memory we commemorate today; and for all Your saints, through whose supplications, O God, bless us. Remember also all who have fallen asleep (*1 Thessalonians 4:13*) in the hope of resurrection unto eternal life (*Titus 1:2*). (*Here the priest commemorates the names of the deceased.*) And grant them rest, our God, where the light of Your face shines (*Psalms 4:6*). Again, we ask You, Lord, remember all Orthodox bishops (*cf. 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:7-9*) who rightly teach the word of Your truth (*2 Timothy 2:15*), all presbyters (*Titus 1:5-6*), all deacons (*1 Timothy 3:8-13*) in the service of Christ, and every one in holy orders. We also offer to You this spiritual worship (*Romans 12:1*) for the whole world, for the holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, and for those living in purity and holiness. And for all those in public service; permit them, Lord, to serve and govern in peace that through the faithful conduct of their duties we may live peaceful and serene lives in all piety and holiness (*1 Timothy 2:2*).

Priest: Above all, remember, Lord, our Archbishop (*Name*): Grant that he may serve Your holy churches in peace. Keep him safe, honorable, and healthy for many years, rightly teaching the word of Your truth (*2 Timothy 2:15*).

**Priest:* Remember also, Lord, those whom each of us calls to mind and all Your people.

People: And all Your people.

Commentary – The Leadership Structures of the Church

In remembering our local Archbishop, we are reminded that we are part of the Church as a whole, in this country and around the world. The Orthodox Church is a family of Churches that share the same faith and sacramental life. It is composed primarily of 14 autocephalous (self-governing) Churches: Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Moscow, Georgia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Cyprus, Albania, Poland, the Czech lands and Slovakia. Among these, in accordance with the canons of several Ecumenical Councils, the Patriarch of Constantinople (modern Istanbul, Turkey) is ranked "first among equals." Theoretically, every bishop is equal; however, some bishops hold a certain pre-eminence, are the chairmen of their respective synods of bishops and have special responsibilities. In the United States, the Greek Orthodox Archbishop of New York, who serves under the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, holds this primacy of responsibility. Within the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America of which we are a part, in addition to the Archdiocese of New York, there are eight Metropolises in the U.S. (territories based around a large city; *metropolis* is a Greek word meaning "mother city"): New Jersey, Boston, Chicago, Atlanta, Detroit, San Francisco, Pittsburgh and Denver. Together they form an eparchial (governing) synod of bishops, chaired by the Archbishop of New York, under the auspices of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. However, Orthodox Christians – while honoring and praying for their spiritual leaders – must always bear in mind that it is Christ Himself who is the true Head of the Church (Ephesians 5:23) and the "chief Shepherd" (1 Peter 5:4) of our souls.

Priest (in a low voice): Remember, Lord, the city in which we live, every city and country, and the faithful who dwell in them. Remember, Lord, the travelers, the sick, the suffering, and the captives, granting them protection and salvation. Remember, Lord, those who do charitable work, serve in Your holy churches, and who **remember the poor** (*Galatians 2:10*). Send Your mercy upon us all.

Priest: And grant that **with one voice and one heart** (*Romans 15:15*) we may glorify and praise Your most honored and majestic name, of **the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit** (*cf. Matthew 28:29*), now and forever and **to the ages of ages** (*Ephesians 3:21*).

People: Amen (*1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalm 106:48*).

Priest: The mercy of **our great God and Savior Jesus Christ** (*Titus 2:13*) be with all of you.

People: And with your spirit (*cf. Philippians 4:23; 2 Timothy 4:22*).

THE LITANY BEFORE THE LORD'S PRAYER

Priest:* Having remembered **all the saints (*Ephesians 1:15; Revelation 8:3*), again and again in peace let us **pray to the Lord** (*Acts 8:24*).

People: Lord, have mercy (*cf. Matthew 15:22; 20:30*).

**Priest:* For these precious Gifts offered and consecrated, let us pray to the Lord.

People: Lord, have mercy (*cf. Matthew 15:22; 20:30*).

Priest:* That our loving God who has received these gifts at His holy, heavenly, and spiritual altar as **an offering of spiritual fragrance (*Leviticus 1:13; Ephesians 5:2*), may in return send upon us divine grace and **the gift of the Holy Spirit** (*Acts 2:38; 10:45*), let us pray.

People: Lord, have mercy (*cf. Matthew 15:22; 20:30*).

Commentary – The Gift and Fruit of the Holy Spirit

To have received "divine grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit" and be in communion with God means that no matter who we are or what we look like, whatever language we speak or country we're from, whether we're rich or poor, white, black, red or yellow, God has touched our lives and filled us with the inexpressible joy of His love. God has called us to Himself so that we can become, by His grace, like Him in every possible way. God is good, holy, righteous, merciful, true, forgiving, loving and compassionate – and we, as baptized Christians, are given the gift of the Holy Spirit so that these qualities can blossom in us. St. Paul writes, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (*Galatians 5:22*). Does this describe us? Are we generous and gentle, kind and loving, patient and joyful? Have we allowed the Holy Spirit to be active in our lives so that we can become the living icons of His glory that we're called to be?

**Priest:* Having prayed for the unity of the faith (*Ephesians 4:13*) and for the communion of the Holy Spirit (*2 Corinthians 13:14*), let us commit ourselves, and one another, and our whole life to Christ our God.

People: To You, O Lord (*Psalms 25:1*).

Priest (in a low voice): We entrust to You, loving Master, our whole life and hope, and we ask, pray, and beg You: make us worthy to partake of your heavenly and awesome Mysteries from this holy and spiritual table with a clear conscience (*1 Timothy 3:9*); for the remission of sins (*Hebrews 10:18*), forgiveness of transgressions, communion of the Holy Spirit (*2 Corinthians 13:14*), the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven (*Matthew 4:17; 7:21*), confidence before You, and not in judgment or condemnation.

Priest: And make us worthy, Master, with confidence and without fear of condemnation, to dare call You, the heavenly God, FATHER, and to say:

THE LORD'S PRAYER

People: Our Father, who art in heaven:

Hallowed be Thy name.

Thy kingdom come,

Thy will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread;

and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us;

and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil (*Matthew 6: 9-13*).

Priest: For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (*Matthew 28:29*), now and forever and to the ages of ages (*1 Timothy 1:17*).

People: Amen (*1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalm 106:48*).

Commentary – The Lord's Prayer

The Lord's Prayer is prayed not only during the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, but at every sacrament and service of prayer in the life of the Church. It should also be part of our personal discipline of prayer on a daily basis. It is important to say that this is the Lord's Prayer: it is prayer of the Son of God Himself given to His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. All too often we say the Lord's Prayer by rote, without thinking about what the words we're saying really mean. But according to the ancient North African Christian writer Tertullian (160-220AD), it is a "summary of the whole Gospel." In the words of this prayer are contained the height, breadth and depth of the Gospel and the purpose and meaning of our lives: that we are called to be the beloved children of the one, true and living God, the Creator of the universe who has loved everything – from hummingbirds to galaxies – into existence.

OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN

By the word, "Our," the Lord Jesus teaches us to pray not merely as individuals but as members of His community, the Church. When we pray, we must not think only of ourselves. Living as we do in a consumer society plagued by individualism and self-centeredness, it is important to notice that in the Lord's Prayer the words I, me, my and mine are nowhere to be found. There is no room for selfishness in the heart of someone who prays the Lord's Prayer.

St. Paul writes: "because we have received adoption as God's children, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying Abba, Father!" (Galatians 4:5-6). Through Christ, in the Holy Spirit, Christians joyfully address the God who created the universe with stunning intimacy, as our Father. The God who has created 100 thousand million stars in our galaxy alone loves us and wants us to address Him as our Father. The God whom Jesus has taught us to address as our Father is the all-powerful ruler of the cosmos. In the original Greek, it is not the word "Heaven" but the plural form "Heavens" that is used here. This is an ancient way of saying that the God whom we worship and who loves us as His children is greater than the universe He has created and transcends it.

HALLOWED BE THY NAME

"Hallowed" is the old English word meaning "to make holy" or "to sanctify." How do we sanctify God's holy name? On this all the saints of the Church are clear: we sanctify God's name by how we live our lives as believers. We cannot make God's name holy by our prayers; God's name is already holy in ways we can scarcely even imagine. Rather, we are begging God that His name may be "hallowed" in us, that we will become holy, that we will become His saints by the depth and sincerity of our convictions and the loving quality and character of our lives: anything less than this would blaspheme God's name.

THY KINGDOM COME

The Lord's Prayer is an eschatological prayer and these words should make us tremble because here we pray for end of world and the coming of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse (Revelation 6:1-8). We pray for the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:30-46), that final day when every man, woman and child will stand before what St. Paul calls "the dread judgment seat of Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:10) to be judged by how compassionately we have lived, either entering into the kingdom of our Father "prepared before the beginning of the world" or "the eternal fire prepared for the devil and all of his angels" (Matthew 25: 34, 41).

THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

We can ultimately find meaning for our lives only by doing God's will and not our own, by serving the Kingdom of God and not the kingdom of me. The purpose of life cannot be found in what I want. It can be found only in what God wants. All of the Christian life is the bending of our will towards God's will and living accordingly – no matter what the cost. What does it mean to live according to God's will and so inherit the Kingdom of the

Father? To give food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to care for the sick, to visit those in prison, to welcome strangers (Matthew 25:30-41); to be a peacemaker, to be willing to be persecuted for the sake of righteousness, to be meek, merciful, and pure of heart (Matthew 5:3-11); to love one's enemies (Matthew 5:44); to pray, fast and give alms to the poor without ostentation or showiness (Matthew 6:1-18); never judging others (Matthew 7:1). Is this how we live?

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD

The saints of the Church have interpreted this petition in two ways: first, that we are declaring our total dependence on God for our day-to-day existence and that whatever we have to sustain our life is a gift from Him; and second, that this is a prayer for the Bread of Life, the Eucharistic Bread, the Bread that is His Body that we will receive in the mystery of Holy Communion, the Bread of eternal life (John 6:53-58).

FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US

The heart of the Gospel is forgiveness. To be forgiving is the most basic element of a truly Christian lifestyle. Forgiveness puts an end to the all too human cycle of vengeance and retribution. But to offer forgiveness to someone who has wronged us is often difficult to do. The practice of forgiveness requires humility, courage and strength of character. Nonetheless, here and elsewhere in the Gospels (Mark 11:25; Matthew 6:14), Christ makes it perfectly clear that we cannot ask God for forgiveness unless we are prepared to forgive others. What is the source of our ability to forgive others? Forgiveness of others is a response to our being forgiven. Christians can forgive because we know that we've already been redeemed and forgiven by God in the blood of His Son and the riches of His grace (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14). And, Christ tells us in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, the debt of sin that God has forgiven us is far greater than any debt owed us by another human being (Matthew 18:23-35).

AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL

This petition could be wrongly taken to imply that God Himself tempts us. Nothing could be further from the truth. On this, the Scriptures are absolutely clear: "No one, when tempted, should say, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil and He tempts no one. Rather, one is tempted by one's own desire" (James 1:13-14). We are tempted by our own desires: our egotistical arrogance and selfishness, hatred, cruelty, lust for power, greed, anger and a host of other vices that pull us away from God's loving Presence, forcing us to sink back into ourselves and making us children of evil instead of children of the God who is love (1 John 4:8).

FOR YOURS IS THE KINGDOM AND THE POWER AND THE GLORY...

This closing doxology that is today said by the priest is first found in an ancient Christian document from the early 2nd century called *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* which recommends that the Lord's Prayer should be prayed by Christians at least three times every day as part of one's discipline of personal prayer.

Priest: Peace be with all (*John 20:26; 1 Peter 5:14; 3 John 15*).

People: And with your spirit (*cf. Philippians 4:23; 2 Timothy 4:22*).

**Priest:* Let us bow our heads to the Lord (*Nehemiah 8:6*).

People: To You, O Lord (*Psalms 25:1*).

Priest (in a low voice): We give thanks (*Psalms 107:1*) to You, invisible King (*1 Timothy 1:17*). By Your infinite power You created all things and by Your great mercy You brought everything from nothing into being (*2 Maccabees 7:28*). Master, look down from heaven upon those who have bowed their heads before You; for they have bowed not before flesh and blood (*Matthew 16:17*) but before You the awesome God (*Nehemiah 9:2; Deuteronomy 7:21; Psalm 111:9*). Therefore, Master, guide the course of our life for our benefit according to the need of each of us. Sail with those who sail, travel with those who travel; and heal the sick, Physician of our souls and bodies.

Priest: By the mercy, compassion, and love for us of Your only begotten (*John 1:18*) Son, with whom You are blessed, together with Your all-holy, good and life-creating Spirit (*Psalms 143:10; John 6:63*), now and forever and to the ages of ages (*Ephesians 3:21*).

People: Amen (*1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalm 106:48*).

Commentary – Repentance: re-orienting our lives toward Christ

Repentance is a word found numerous times throughout the Divine Liturgy. What does it mean to repent? What is repentance? The Lord Jesus began His ministry by saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (*Matthew 4:17*). Repentance is thus the beginning of the Gospel, the starting point of our lives as Christians, the foundation upon which everything else must be built. The Greek term *metanoia* that is used in the Gospels and normally translated as "repentance," primarily means "a change of mind." Repentance is to change the way we think about God, ourselves and the world around us, seeing everything in a new way. Repentance is not only negative, it is not merely regret over past actions; it is also positive. It is not merely to wallow in guilt, self-pity and despair because of our sins, but rather it is a transformation of outlook, a change of direction, a re-orientation of our lives, a re-centering of our minds and hearts on Christ and His commandments. The life of a Christian, as a disciple of the Lord Jesus, is one of continual repentance. Metropolitan Kallistos Ware has written: "In this sense, repentance is not just a single act, an initial step, but a continuing state, an attitude of heart and will that needs to be ceaselessly renewed up to the end of our life." Repentance is therefore to "take every thought captive to obey Christ" (*2 Corinthians 10:5*) and so acquire "the mind of Christ" (*1 Corinthians 2:16*). As St. Isaac of Nineveh (c.700AD) said: "This life has been given to you for repentance. Do not waste it on other things." Or, as St. Basil the Great (330-379AD) put it even more succinctly: "Repentance is salvation."

HOLY COMMUNION

Priest (in a low voice): Lord Jesus Christ, our God, hear us from **Your holy dwelling place (Isaiah 57:15)** and from the glorious throne of Your kingdom. **You are enthroned on high with the Father (cf. Hebrews 8:1)** and are also invisibly present among us. Come and sanctify us, and let Your pure Body and **precious Blood (1 Peter 1:19)** be given to us by Your mighty hand and through us to all Your people.



**Priest:* Let us be attentive.

Priest: The holy Gifts for the holy people of God.

People: One is holy, **one is Lord, Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:11). Amen (1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalm 106:48).**

Commentary – Eucharistic Living: A Life of Gratitude

The Tradition of the Church describes the Eucharist in many ways. It is "the Lord's Supper" (1 Corinthians 11:20). It is "the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:9). It is about communion with God, that we may become sons and daughters of God the Father; that in eating bread and drinking wine set apart and consecrated by the Holy Spirit we are participating in the crucified, risen and glorified Body and Blood of Jesus. It is about fulfilling Old Testament sacrifices: as the Paschal lamb was sacrificed, its blood put on the doorways of faithful Jews hoping for the shadow of death to pass over their household as described in the Book of Exodus, so we put the Body and Blood of Christ, our Paschal lamb, on the doorway of our heart. It is about partaking in what St. Ignatius of Antioch (+115) called "the medicine of immortality," which we, who are sick and dying, need for eternal life. It is about receiving a purifying and divine fire, which burns away our sins.

Ultimately, the Liturgy summarizes the life we are called to live in communion with God and is, among other things, a school for Christian living. Within the liturgy we come to know God, the world, and ourselves, because the liturgy communicates the meaning and purpose of life and helps us to understand and internalize both the tragedy of the human condition as well as the limitless expanse and potential of the new life in Christ offered freely to everyone. It is only when we recognize the rich network of connections

between the Eucharist and our daily life can our lives be truly Eucharistic and lived with a grateful heart. Living in a Eucharistic way has everything to do with seeing life as a gift, a gift for which we are forever grateful. What would it be like to live every moment of our lives as a gift – even those moments that are difficult and painful? It is in seeing our life as a gift – "from the Giver of all good things" as we say in the Liturgy – that we acknowledge the Giver of our life, discover the meaning and purpose of our life and then can live accordingly. There should never be a Liturgy that we attend in which we do not come away with this insight for living. There should never be a time in Liturgy when there is not a movement of our heart: from a hardened heart to a grateful heart, from a heart of stone to a heart of flesh, from a heart often filled with resentment or anger or self-righteousness to a heart filled with gratitude, compassion, faith, hope, and love.

It is in the Liturgy of the Eucharist that the Lord Jesus gives us everything, giving Himself completely to us. By the power of the Holy Spirit – and, in this sense, the Liturgy is a truly charismatic event, worship in Spirit and in Truth – the bread is His Body broken for us on the Cross and the wine is His Blood poured out for us. The Word of God not only became flesh for us centuries ago in a far-away country; the Word of God becomes food and drink for us now at every Eucharistic celebration. God holds nothing of Himself back! The word that best expresses this mystery of God's total self-giving love is communion. This is the word that best contains the truth that, in and through Jesus, God wants not only to teach us, instruct us and inspire us, but He wants to become one with us. God desires to be fully and completely united with us so that we will be bound together with Him in a love that will stretch into eternity. This is what St. Paul means when he speaks of life "in Christ." He is so completely and totally united with Jesus that in his *Letter to the Galatians* he can say, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (2:20). This experience of loving union with Christ is the goal of every Liturgy, the experience you should have every time you receive the Body and Blood of the Savior. And such communion with Jesus means becoming like Him. In this sense, it is not just the Eucharist but the Eucharistic life – the liturgy after the Liturgy - that makes the difference. When, after services, we leave the Church we must live the Eucharist as long and as fully as we can. Because Christ is holy, just, merciful, and loving, Christians are called to participate in His holiness, love, mercy, and justice. The Lord Jesus gave us the Eucharist to enable us to choose gratitude as the basic stance of our lives. It is from this sense of gratitude that all genuine worship of God and compassion for others flows. Without this deep sense of gratitude, we remain little people with little concerns who live little lives full of anger, bitterness and resentment. This is a choice we ourselves have to make – on a daily, hour by hour and even moment by moment basis. Nobody can make this decision for us. It is in making this choice for gratitude that we can let the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit touch every part of our being and transform us from within. Real change – from the inside out! As often as we make this choice for Eucharistic living, everything – even the most trivial things – becomes different. Our "little" lives are caught up in the mysterious work of redemption and salvation. Once that happens, nothing is accidental, trivial or futile anymore and life opens its meaning to us from every side. The Eucharist summarizes the life we are called to live in the Name of God.

THE COMMUNION HYMN

People: Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise Him in the highest. Alleluia (*Psalm 148:1*) (3x).

(The Communion Hymn changes according to the Feast Day.)



Priest: (*After the breaking of the sacred Bread, the priest says in a low voice*) The Lamb of God (*John 1:29*) is broken and distributed; broken but not divided. He is forever eaten yet is never consumed, but He sanctifies those who partake of Him.



(Then the priest places a portion of the sacred Bread in the Cup saying) The fullness of the Holy Spirit. Amen (*1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalm 106:48*).

(He then blesses the warm water saying) Blessed is the fervor of Your saints, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen (*1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalm 106:48*).



Pouring the water into the Cup crosswise, he says:) The fervor of faith, the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Amen (*1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalm 106:48*).

*(The following pre-Communion Prayers are recited
by those prepared to receive the holy Mysteries of the Body and Blood of Christ.)*

I believe and confess, Lord, that **You are truly the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16), who came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the first (1 Timothy 1:15).** I also believe that this is truly Your pure Body and that this truly Your **precious Blood (1 Peter 1:19).** Therefore, I pray to You, **have mercy upon me, and forgive my transgressions (Psalm 50:1),** voluntary and involuntary, in word and deed, known and unknown. And make me worthy without condemnation to partake of Your pure Mysteries for the **forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7)** and **eternal life (John 3:15; 17:3).** Amen **(Psalm 106:48).**

How shall I, whom am unworthy, enter into the splendor of Your saints? **If I dare to enter into the bridal chamber, my clothing will accuse me, since it is not a wedding garment; and being bound up, I shall be cast out by the angels (cf. Matthew 2:1-12).** In Your love, Lord, cleanse my soul and save me.

Loving Master, Lord Jesus Christ, my God, **let not these holy Gifts be to my condemnation because of my unworthiness (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:29-30),** but for the cleansing and sanctification of soul and body and the pledge of the future life and Your kingdom. It is good for me to cling to my God and to place in Him the hope of my salvation.

Receive me today, Son of God, as a partaker of Your mystical Supper. I will not reveal Your mystery to Your adversaries. **Nor will I give You a kiss as did Judas (cf. Luke 22:47-48; Mark 14:43-45; Matthew 26:47-49).** But like the thief on the cross I confess You: **Lord, remember me in Your kingdom (Luke 23:42).**

* * *

**Why do Orthodox Christians believe
that receiving the Body and Blood of Jesus
in communion is to be taken so seriously?**

Because it's Biblical!

The First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, chapter 11

²⁷Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. ²⁹For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep (died). ³¹But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.

(The Priest prepares to receive Holy Communion.)

Priest: Behold, I dare to approach Christ, our immortal King and God.

The precious and most holy Body of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ is given to me *(Name)* the priest, for the forgiveness of my sins *(Ephesians 1:7)* and eternal life *(John 3:15; 17:3)*.

(He then partakes of the sacred Bread.)

The precious and most holy Blood of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ is given to me *(Name)* the priest, for the forgiveness of my sins *(Ephesians 1:7)* and eternal life *(John 3:15; 17:3)*.

(He then drinks from the Chalice.)

(Afterwards, he wipes the Chalice, kisses it, and says)

This has touched my lips, taking away my transgressions and cleansing my sins *(Isaiah 6:7)*.



*(The priest then transfers
the remaining portions of the consecrated Bread into the Chalice, saying)*

Having beheld the resurrection of Christ, let us worship the holy Lord Jesus, the only sinless One. We venerate Your cross, O Christ, and we praise and glorify Your holy resurrection. You are our God. We know no other than You, and we call upon Your name. Come, all faithful, let us venerate the holy resurrection of Christ. For behold, through the cross joy has come to all the world. Blessing the Lord always, let us praise His resurrection. For enduring the cross for us, He destroyed death *(2 Timothy 1:10)* by death.

Commentary: Who May Receive Holy Communion in the Orthodox Church?

Orthodox Christians fully participate in the celebration of the Liturgy when they receive the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus in Holy Communion, as the Lord Himself commands (John 6: 53-54). Because of Christ's promise of eternal life for those who eat and drink at "the Lord's Supper" (1 Corinthians 11:20), frequent reception of the Body

and Blood of Christ – at every Liturgy, if possible – is encouraged for all Orthodox Christians. To receive communion in the Orthodox Church, one must be a *practicing* Orthodox Christian. This means that you must be Baptized and/or Chrismated in the Orthodox Church and that your beliefs and lifestyle are in accordance with the teachings of the Church. In order to be properly prepared for this encounter with Christ, those seeking to receive communion should not be conscious of grave sin, having opened their hearts with prayer, fasted appropriately and lived with charity and love towards their neighbors. Because, as the Apostle Paul teaches, it is possible to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord “in an unworthy manner” and actually be “sinning against the Body and Blood of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 11:27-30), those who are aware of grave sin in their lives should first participate in the sacrament of confession - confess their sins and be reconciled to Christ and his Church - before approaching the chalice to receive communion.

What is *grave* sin, a “sin unto death” (1 John 5:16), that would bar us from approaching the chalice? St. Paul writes that those who commit the following sins “will not inherit the Kingdom of God: drunkenness, idolatry, sorcery, theft, sexual immorality, adultery and homosexuality” (1 Corinthians 6: 9-10; Galatians 5:19-21). The Book of Revelation adds “murderers” to this list (Revelation 21:7-8; 22:14-15). The presence of such serious sin in one’s life is an indication that one neither truly believes in God nor truly accepts the Gospel of Christ with all of its consequences for how we are to live.

St. Basil the Great (329-379AD) on Receiving Communion Frequently

Daily communion and participation in the holy Body and Blood of Christ is a good and helpful practice. The Lord clearly says: “The man who eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood has eternal life.” Who then can doubt that to partake of this Life continually is really to have life in abundance? For myself, I receive communion four times a week: on the Lord’s Day (Sunday), Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and on other days if there is the commemoration of a martyr. (*Letter 93*)

Receiving Communion

Frederica Mathewes-Green has written about her experience of receiving Communion in her book *At the Corner of East and Now*: “I drive carpool, write e-mail, read the paper, go to the mall, pop in a DVD. None of this matters; all of it could blow away overnight. What does matter is this slim golden thread: the Liturgy that begins each Sunday morning in my Church and reaches its fulfillment in the moment I receive communion. Prayer spills backward and forward from that moment, wrapping me into union with God. It’s the work of a lifetime that stretches on beyond my earthly life. This perspective is backward from the usual. What happens in church is the most important thing; what happens in the rest of my life seems transient and contingent. The Liturgy is whole and beautiful; the rest of my life seems random and bumpy. When death strips away from me all the shreds of foolishness, self-indulgence, gossip and greed, this will remain, one of the few things to remain. In the moment after communion, I press my lips against the chalice, a kiss of surrender, veneration and gratitude. It is the one true centering moment of my oblivious cycling days and weeks. On the chalice I see the face of Christ painted in enamel. I look at Him and He looks at me.”

(He takes the holy Cup, comes to the Royal Doors, raises it and says)

**Priest:* With the fear of God, faith and love, draw near.

(Those prepared come forth with reverence to receive Holy Communion while the people sing the communion hymn.)

(When administering Holy Communion, the priest says) The servant of God *(Name)* receives the Body and Blood of Christ for forgiveness of sins *(Ephesians 1:7)* and eternal life *(John 3:15; 17:3)*.

(When Communion has been given to all, the priest blesses the people with the Chalice, saying)

Priest: O God, save Your people and bless Your inheritance *(Psalm 28:9)*.

People: We have seen the true light *(John 1:9)*; we have received the heavenly Spirit; we have found the true faith *(1 Timothy 2:7)*, worshiping the undivided Trinity, for the Trinity has saved us.

Scripture

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Psalm 111:10).

"The fear of the Lord is truly life" (Proverbs 19:23).

"Fear the Lord and turn away from evil" (Proverbs 3:7).

"Fear God and keep His commandments" (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

"Let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of flesh and spirit, making holiness complete in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1)

"Fear God and give glory to Him for the hour of His judgment has come" (Revelation 14:7).

"The righteous will live by faith" (Hebrews 10:38)

"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Without faith it is impossible to please God for whoever would approach Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him" (Hebrews 11:1, 6)

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:30-31).

"Love is patient and kind. Love is not envious, boastful, arrogant or rude. Love is not irritable or resentful. Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. Make love your aim" (1 Corinthians 13:4-8; 14:1).

"Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:8)

(Having returned the Cup to the holy Table, the priest transfers the particles of the Theotokos and the saints into the Chalice, and then those of the living and the dead saying) Wash away, Lord, by Your holy Blood, the sins of all those commemorated here through the intercessions of the Theotokos and all Your saints. *Amen (1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalm 106:48).*

(He covers the vessels and censes them saying)

Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let Your glory be over all the earth
(Psalm 108:5).

(He lifts the vessels and says in a low voice)

Blessed is our God.....*(1 Peter 1:3)*

Priest (aloud): Always, now and forever and to the ages of ages *(1 Timothy 1:17).*

People: Amen (1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalm 106:48).

Commentary – Praying the Bible in the Liturgy

Orthodox Christians are not merely to read the Bible; we are also to *pray* the Bible. This takes place most clearly and completely in the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom on a Sunday to Sunday basis. Yes, there are two readings from the New Testament during the Liturgy – an Epistle reading from one of the Letters of the apostles Paul, Peter, James and John or other apostolic writings; and a Gospel reading from one of the four evangelists – but we pray the Lord’s Prayer and also sing verses from the Book of Psalms. In the priest’s blessing, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all,” we hear St. Paul’s final farewell to the Church in Corinth (2 Corinthians 13:13); and in the choir’s singing of “Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of *Sabaoth*, Heaven and Earth are full of Your glory,” we hear the song of the angelic Cherubim first heard by the Old Testament prophet Isaiah in the Temple in Jerusalem (Isaiah 6:1-5). The prayers of the Liturgy are full of biblical imagery and shot through with hundreds of Biblical quotes. In fact, the late French Orthodox theologian, Paul Evdokimov (1902-1970), once calculated that there are 98 quotations from the Old Testament and 114 quotations from the New Testament woven into the prayers of the Liturgy. The language of the Liturgy is the language of the Bible! To come to Liturgy attentively is to learn to pray the Bible!

But more than this: the priesthood, the vestments, the altar, the tabernacle, the oil lamps, the incense, and so much else of the Church's structures for worship are taken from the Old Testament Scriptures, particularly Exodus, Leviticus and the Book of Psalms, and are seen as the Christological fulfillment of the worship of the people of ancient Israel in both the synagogue and the Temple as described in the New Testament's Letter to the Hebrews. Every aspect of the Old Testament Passover/Exodus has been fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Christ and this is what we celebrate at each Divine Liturgy!

People: Let our mouths be filled with Your praise (*cf. Psalm 71:8*), Lord, that we may sing of Your glory. You have made us worthy to partake of Your holy mysteries. Keep us in Your holiness, that all the day long we may meditate upon Your righteousness (*cf. Psalm 35:28*). Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! (*Psalm 150:6*)

THE PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

**Priest:* Let us stand! Having partaken of the divine, holy, pure, immortal, heavenly, life giving, and awesome Mysteries of Christ, let us worthily give thanks to the Lord (*Psalm 107:1*).

People: Lord, have mercy (*cf. Deuteronomy 4:31; Daniel 9:9; Matthew 15:22; 20:30*).

Commentary - The Church Building or Temple and the People of God

Most Orthodox Churches are divided into three distinct parts, mirroring in some ways the Old Testament Temple in Jerusalem: the *narthex* or entry way; the *nave* or main body of the Church building; and the *altar* or *sanctuary*, located behind the *iconostasis* or icon "screen." The *altar* area corresponds roughly to what was called the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem Temple; the *nave* to the court of the faithful; and the *narthex* to the court of the Gentiles. As a consecrated building, specifically set aside for worship, everything we do in Church should be done in a spirit of respect, courtesy, reverence and even awe, because it is here, within these four walls, that the heavenly and earthly realms meet during the celebration of the Divine Liturgy and we will experience the presence of God – if we have eyes that *really* see and ears that *really* hear. St. Germanos, Patriarch of Constantinople (d. 760AD), wrote in his *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy* that "The Church is the temple of God, a holy place, a house of prayer, the assembly of the people, the Body of Christ...an earthly heaven in which the God of heaven dwells and moves." But the Church is more than a building! The Church is people – God's people – who gather together in His Name, thereby calling themselves Christians; who share a common faith and hope based on the Gospel; affirm the truth or orthodoxy of their belief and experience; and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all. The word *ekklesia* literally means those people who have been called out of the world by the Word of God to be His people. So the Church is a community, an assembly of people, who are baptized into Christ, receive the Holy Spirit and relate to God as their Father.

What do the Scriptures say about the people of God's Church? "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may proclaim the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people" (1 Peter 2:9, 19). "Like living stones, you are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). "You are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the prophets and apostles, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Ephesians 2:19-21). We are His people!

**Priest:* Help us, save us (*Psalm 109:26*), have mercy upon us (*Psalm 51:1*), and protect us (*Psalm 32:7; 40:11 and 2 Thessalonians 3:3*), O God, by Your grace.

People: Lord, have mercy (*cf. Deuteronomy 4:31; Daniel 9:9; Matthew 15:22; 20:30*).

**Priest:* Having prayed for a perfect, holy, peaceful, and sinless day, let us commit ourselves, and one another, and our whole life to Christ our God.

People: To You, O Lord (*Psalm 25:1*).

Priest (in a low voice): We thank You, loving Master, benefactor of our souls, that on this day You have made us worthy once again of Your heavenly and immortal Mysteries. Direct our ways in the right path, establish us firmly in Your fear, guard our lives, and make our endeavors safe, through the prayers and supplications of the glorious Theotokos and ever virgin Mary and of all Your saints.

Priest: For You are our sanctification and to You we give glory, to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages (*1 Timothy 1:17*).

People: Amen (*1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalm 106:48*).

Commentary – The word “mercy”

The word mercy in English is the translation of the Greek word *eleos*. This word has the same ultimate root as the old Greek word for oil, or more precisely, olive oil; a substance which was used extensively as a soothing agent for minor wounds. The oil was poured onto the wound and gently massaged in, thus soothing, comforting and making whole the injured part. The Hebrew word which is also translated as *eleos* and mercy is *hesed*, and means steadfast love and implies the relationship a father has with a daughter or a husband with a wife. The Greek phrase for “Lord, have mercy” is *Kyrie, eleison*, that is to say: “Lord, soothe me, comfort me, take away my pain and show me your steadfast love.” Thus mercy does not refer so much to justice or acquittal in a court of law but to the infinite loving-kindness of God, and his compassion for his suffering children! It is in this sense that we pray “Lord, have mercy,” with such great frequency throughout the Divine Liturgy.

Commentary – The word “Blessed”

The word “blessed” is used throughout the Liturgy, beginning with its very first word. Jim Forest, in his book *The Ladder of the Beatitudes*, has written: “The typical Jewish prayer begins: “Blessed are you, Lord our God . . .” This has been taken into Christianity, in particular into Orthodoxy, where no service can begin without saying, “Blessed is our God...” Different Hebrew words have been translated as “blessed,” beginning with *baruk*. *Baruk* is linked to kneeling – a blessing would be received while kneeling, a posture of respect and submission. *Ashre* is another Hebrew word which has been translated as “blessed.” The root meaning is “to go straight, to advance.” The person who is blessed in this sense is one for whom things are on the right track, going along a straight way, making headway. The Gospels were written in Greek. In those passages where “blessed” is a verb, the Greek is *eulogeo* (“to bless”) – an action associated with praise, thanksgiving and consecration, and therefore used in liturgical contexts.”

THE DISMISSAL

Priest: Let us depart in peace.

**Priest:* Let us pray to the Lord (*Acts 8:24*).

People: Lord, have mercy (*cf. Deuteronomy 4:31; Daniel 9:9; Matthew 15:22; 20:30*).

Priest: Lord, bless those who bless You (*cf. Numbers 24:9; Genesis 12:3*) and sanctify those who trust in You. Save Your people and bless Your inheritance (*Psalms 28:9*). Protect the whole body of Your Church. Sanctify those who love the beauty of Your house (*Psalms 26:8*). Glorify them in return by Your divine power, and do not forsake us who hope in You (*cf. Psalms 39:7; 71:5; 1 Timothy 1:1; 1 John 3:3*). Grant peace to Your world, to Your churches, to the clergy, to those in public service, to the armed forces, and to all Your people. For every good and perfect gift is from above, coming from You, the Father of lights (*James 1:17*). To You we give glory, thanksgiving, and worship, to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (*Matthew 28:29*), now and forever and to the ages of ages (*1 Timothy 1:17*).

People: Amen (*1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalm 106:48*).

Blessed is the name of the Lord, both now and to the ages (*Psalms 113:2*) (3x).

(The priest proceeds to the Prothesis and prays in a low voice) Christ our God, You are the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets (*cf. Matthew 5:17*). You have fulfilled all the dispensation of the Father. Fill our hearts with joy and gladness always, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen (*1 Timothy 1:17*).

**Priest:* Let us pray to the Lord (*Acts 8:24*).

People: Lord, have mercy (*cf. Deuteronomy 4:31; Daniel 9:9; Matthew 15:22; 20:30*).

Priest: May the blessings of the Lord (*cf. Psalms 129:8; Proverbs 10:22*) and His mercy come upon you through His divine grace and love always, now and forever and to the ages of ages (*1 Timothy 1:17*).

People: Amen (*1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalm 106:48*).

Priest: Glory to You, O God, our hope, glory to you.

Priest: May Christ our true God who rose from the dead, as a good, loving, and merciful God, have mercy upon us and save us, through the intercessions of His most pure and holy Mother; the power of the precious and life-giving Cross; the protection of the honorable, bodiless powers of heaven, the supplications of the honorable, glorious prophet and forerunner John the Baptist; the holy, glorious and praiseworthy apostles; the holy, glorious and triumphant martyrs; our holy and God-bearing Fathers (*name of the church*); the holy and righteous ancestors Joachim and Anna; of Saint (*of the day*) whose memory we commemorate today, and all the saints.

People: Amen (Psalm 106:48).

People: Lord, grant long life to him who blesses and sanctifies us.

Priest: Through the prayers of our holy fathers, *Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 11:17; 15:26; 16:31)*, our God, *have mercy on us (Psalm 51:1)* and save us.¹

People: Amen (Psalm 106:48).

Priest: (blessing the people) May the holy Trinity protect all of you.

(While distributing the antidoron or blessed bread, the priest says)

May the blessing and the mercy of the Lord be with you.

¹*(During the Paschal period, for the 40 days from Easter to the celebration of the Ascension of Christ, the priest says instead “Christ is risen . . .”)*

Commentary

St. John Chrysostom – On Leaving the Divine Liturgy

Let us leave the Divine Liturgy like lions breathing fire, having become fearsome even to the devil, because we have received the holy Body and Blood of the Lord. By this we have been given great power! This Blood chases demons away and brings the angels near us. This Blood is the salvation of our souls; with this Blood the soul is washed clean and made beautiful. This Blood makes our minds brighter than fire!

So, encourage our brothers and sisters who are absent to come to Church! Exhort those who are deceived by demons and stay away to return. Teach whoever doesn't attend Church that you sung hymns with the Seraphim, that you belong to Heaven even now and that you met with Christ and spoke with Him. Counsel them not only with words, but also with how you live. However, even if you don't say anything, but merely come out of the Divine Liturgy showing those who were absent from worship the gain you have received from Church simply by your appearance, by your gaze and your voice, by the way you walk, and with all the spiritual power you have received—this is enough for exhortation and counsel, because the truth is that we should come out of Church as if we were descending from Heaven itself. If we live the Divine Liturgy thus, we will not have to say anything to those who were absent. But seeing how we have benefited, they will learn what they have missed and will quickly run to Church to delight in the grace and philanthropy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To Him, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, belongs all glory to the ages of ages.

Amen!

Commentary – The Liturgy after the Liturgy: Sharing His Presence with the World

What is the last thing that we do at the Divine Liturgy? It isn't coming forward to venerate the cross, nor is it to receive the *antidoron* or to sing a hymn. Then what is it? It's to leave the Church. We, as God's people, assemble to enter into His Presence and even eat and drink with Him at the Mystical Supper that He has provided us. Then we disperse – in order to take God's Presence into the world. In a very practical way, this means that we're supposed to be missionaries of God's Presence and Kingdom in the world. This is the heart of being *evangelical* – a Greek word meaning that we are a Gospel-centered and Gospel-sharing community. We have received His divine gifts – and so we must share them freely with everyone. The Divine Liturgy sums up our entire Christian life. We are empowered to bring the gift of God's loving and compassionate Presence – Christ in the Holy Spirit – to a lost and hurting world torn apart by human cruelty, lust and greed. This is our mission in life: to serve others by sharing with them the gift of communion with the one, true and living God; and loving everyone whom God sends us as ourselves. Only then will we discover the true meaning and purpose of our lives. The final act of receiving is giving.

Father Anthony Coniaris writes that in the Book of Genesis (12:2) God blesses Abraham so that he, in turn, will be a blessing to the world. “We are blessed in order to bless others. We are forgiven in order to forgive. We are loved in order to love. We are comforted in order to comfort others. We are saved to help others find salvation. Christ came to serve in order to teach us to serve others. Christ confesses us before His father in heaven as His very own so that we will confess Him before the world. We are His people. He is in us and we are in Him. The Liturgy continues after we leave Church. We return to the world as “other Christs” and the Liturgy we experienced in Church continues when we make real His love through our acts of mercy in the world.” The Lord Jesus is very clear about our mission as believers: we are to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit those who are sick and welcome strangers, always recognizing that in our care for others we are caring for Him (Matthew 25:31-46). If, in fact, we are not doing these things we are explicitly told in the Scriptures that our faith “is dead” (James 2:17). Connecting worship and serving the poor, St. John Chrysostom, said: “Do you wish to honor the Body of Christ? Do not ignore Him when He is naked. Do not pay Him homage in the Liturgy, only then to neglect him outside where He is cold and ill-clad. He who said: “This is my body” is the same person who said: “You saw me hungry and you gave me no food,” and “whatever you did to the least of my brothers you did also to me...” What good is it if the Eucharistic altar is overloaded with golden chalices when your brother is dying of hunger outside. Satisfy the hunger of your brother and then with what is left you may adorn the altar as well.” And Archbishop Anastasios (Yiannoulatos) of Albania has written: “The Liturgy must be continued in the personal situations of everyday life. Each of us is called upon to continue a personal Liturgy on the secret altar of his or her own heart, to become a living proclamation of the Good News for the sake of the world. Without this continuation, the Liturgy remains unfinished. In the Eucharist, because we are incorporated into Him who came to serve the world and be sacrificed for it, we have to express concretely, in community life, our new being in Christ, the Servant of all. The sacrifice of the Eucharist must be extended in personal sacrifices for those people who are in need, our brothers and sisters for whom Christ also died.”

*Appendix 1***Worship, Beauty and the Desire for God**

by Frederica Mathewes-Green

Our worship is beautiful. Beauty is that which opens our eyes to the majesty of God and moves us to desire Him. Worship is not just an intellectual grasping of truths but a process of falling in love. Beauty opens us to adoration and a craving for God begins to take root. Without this, our love for Him may be polite, respectful and even theologically accurate, but it lacks the headlong abandonment that should characterize a relationship between lover and beloved. Orthodox worship is quite elaborate, even voluptuous with beauty. Extravagant but not formal, fancy but not fussy, our worship is like a big family Christmas dinner, with the best linens and finest dishes and everyone having a wonderful time.

Worship was always meant to be gloriously, delightfully beautiful. This was true even in the time of Moses. Although His people were wandering the desert in tents, God commanded them to construct a tabernacle for worship that was staggeringly elaborate. The directions given in the Book of Exodus require gold, silver, precious stones, blue and purple cloth, embroidery, incense, bells and anointing oil. The pattern continues in the visions of the prophets, where God appears in glorious settings. Isaiah sees Him “high and lifted up,” wearing a robe with a voluminous train, while soaring angels chant a hymn and the smoke of incense fills the Temple (Isaiah 6). Daniel pictures the entrance of the Son of Man into the throne room of the Ancient of Days (Daniel 7:9-14). In the last book of the Bible, St. John has a vision of heavenly worship that includes precious stones, gold, thrones, crowns, white robes, crystal and incense (Revelation 4). From the beginning to the end of Scripture, worship is accompanied by great beauty. As a result, Orthodox worship engages all the senses: we touch and kiss those things we venerate, smell incense and beeswax candles, taste bread and wine, and hear chanting and hymns. The sense of vision has the most to savor: we see the priest moving through the congregation carrying the brocade-draped gifts, preceded by a cross and candles carried in procession, surrounded by icons, and our friends and fellow worshippers bowing and praying as the smoke of incense swirls around us. The body is good and we worship with our whole bodies.

However, beauty is not an end in itself; mere ceremonialism would be a circular exercise and ultimately dead. But when entered with expectant joy, nothing opens the heart to deeper worship like beauty. In his *Confessions*, St. Augustine – the fourth century bishop of Hippo in North Africa – wrote of the passage through beauty into passionate love for God: “Late it was that I loved You, Beauty so ancient and so new, late have I loved You! You were within me, yet I sought for You outside; in my ugliness I plunged into the beauties You had made. You were with me but I was not with You. You called, You cried out, You shattered my deafness, You flashed, You shone, You scattered my blindness. You breathed perfume and I drew in my breath and I pant for You. I tasted and I am hungry and thirsty. You touched me and I burned for Your peace.”

The emotions I find prompted by walking the path Orthodoxy teaches are complex and hard to describe: the overwhelming and deliciously terrifying riptide of God’s love; the

rapturous joy of weeping over my sins; the sweet, stinging desire to bring others to see the beautiful face of Jesus. We are and will be ourselves: redeemed, exulting and charged with light, fulfilling the task we were created for, “destined and appointed to live for the praise of His glory” (Ephesians 1:12).

Appendix 2

Commentary – The meaning and spiritual beauty of icons

The word icon is a transliteration of the Greek word *eikon* and is found throughout the New Testament, particularly in the letters of the apostle Paul. For example, St. Paul calls the Lord Jesus “the *icon* of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15) and “the icon of God” (2 Corinthians 4:4). While most Roman Catholic and Protestant Christians are familiar with the biblical theme of Jesus as the Word of God made flesh (John 1:1-14), Orthodox Christians also celebrate the biblical theme of Jesus as the Icon or Image of God. The icons found in Orthodox Churches are a celebration of the fact that Jesus Christ is indeed the Word of God made flesh and that anyone who has seen Jesus has seen the Father (John 12:45 and 14:8-12). As the 7th Ecumenical Council held in the city of Nicea in 787 AD proclaimed, icons are in color what the Scriptures are in words: witnesses to the incarnation, the fact that God has come among us as a person whom we can see, touch and hear. Christianity is, therefore, the revelation not only of the Word of God but also the Image of God in the face of Christ.

Icons are a uniquely liturgical art form; their most proper setting is the Church. Icons are meant to inspire prayer. The icon is a door through which we enter Reality. The purpose of an icon is to take us into the realm of the Spirit. In this sense, the icon is not merely art. It is a work of Christian witness. It offers us Truth as a vision. An icon is therefore an image of the invisible, a reflection of the Beyond. It is an expression of spiritual experience, of mystical life, of worship and surrender. It is a reflection of divine Beauty. It points us beyond itself and is a window upon eternity, a point at which the present world intersects with the Kingdom that is to come. Every icon is intended to be a marriage between the terrestrial and the celestial. And, through this window, not only do we look from this world into the Kingdom: our gaze is met by the eyes of another who looks out from the Kingdom and holds us in his or her gaze. To gaze at an icon in the correct attitude of devotion is to acquire the proper orientation of our vision, thought, desire and will: the face of God in the face of Christ, the splendor of the Kingdom, the divine destiny that is the vocation of every living soul. An icon radiates joy and peace. First and foremost, icons are an expression of the Church’s faith and only secondarily of the artist’s “talent” and abilities as a painter. Metropolitan Kallistos Ware has written: “Because the icon is a part of Tradition, the icon painter is not free to adapt or innovate as he pleases; for his work must reflect, not his own aesthetic sentiments, but the mind of the Church. Artistic inspiration is not excluded, but it is exercised within certain prescribed limits. It is important that an icon painter should be a good artist, but it is even more important that he should be a sincere Christian, living within the spirit of the Tradition, preparing himself for his work by means of Confession and Holy Communion.” An icon is dogma and theology in colors. It is a celebration of God’s victory over sin and death.

Appendix 3**The Kissing Part**

by Frederica Mathewes-Green

Orthodox eagerness to kiss things and people during the Liturgy probably looks obsessive. For I must admit, we kiss a lot. We kiss icons, crosses, and Gospel Books; we kiss the edge of the priest's garment and kiss his hand; we kiss the chalice and kiss each other. Only practical concerns, I'm sure, deter us from kissing the censer. It reminds me of being a little girl of three or four, barefoot in my white nightgown, going around at my parents' party to kiss all of the guests goodnight. I could hear someone chuckling, "She's a regular kissing bug!" There is exuberance and generosity in the way we Orthodox scatter kisses around, cherishing the things and people that bear God to us. St. John Chrysostom makes the charming assertion that, because we receive the holy Eucharist through our lips, our lips are most blessed, and we honor them by giving kisses.

I first encountered this ancient form of devotion a few years back at the Walters Museum in Baltimore. A selection of ancient Greek icons was on display, well-mounted and covered with protective glass. On looking closer I could see that the glass sheets over the icons were covered with many overlapping marks of kisses and lipstick. Viewing these icons is not like admiring a delicate Renaissance Madonna. Something in their dignity and startling immediacy demands a more personal response; Orthodox Christians refer to icons as "windows into heaven." Of all the things a Protestant Christian might feel in their presence, probably the last response that would occur is kissing them. But for Orthodox Christians it is the obvious response, the only response that conveys the tenderness, gratitude, and humility that these mysteries demand. The Walters Museum must not have entirely approved of these intimate devotions. When they mounted an exhibition of Russian religious art a few years later, the icons were uncovered but safely back against the wall, while barriers and electronic alarms kept anyone from coming within two feet. Patrons behaved themselves accordingly, but I'm sure that many an Orthodox Christian was, in his heart, leaning against the barriers and smacking forlornly.

How can we honor wood and paint this way? My Mennonite friend Nancy scoffs: "If Jesus is right there with you in worship, why do you need icons to remind you?" My husband laughs, "Because we need icons to remind us!" We are like the lover in the old hit song, who complains that his girl went "leaving just your picture behind/and I've kissed it a thousand times." It's not the paper photo that he's in love with, but the person it represents. But because it does represent his love, he cherishes and honors the photo, wearing it out with kisses. The holy, invisible Lord surrounds us and we grasp for His elusive presence, kneeling down awestruck with our foreheads to the floor, tasting heaven on the Eucharistic spoon, laying kisses on His image and each other and most anything else we can get hold of. An outsider might expect Eastern Orthodoxy to be stuffy, esoteric, and rigidly ritualistic. But once inside, it turns out to be a box full of kissing bugs. We feel such gratitude to God for saving us, such awe at His majesty and such joy in the fellowship of the saints that we respond from the heart. It is not superstition that requires us to relinquish formal, ritual kisses. We find ourselves in our true home in the Church, astonished and overjoyed to be welcomed at this glorious feast. Like a child in a nightgown, secure in her Father's house, we go scattering our kisses with simplicity and love.

*"If one were to put
all of the world's most precious treasures
on one side of a scale
and the Divine Liturgy on the other,
the scales would tip completely
in favor of the Liturgy.*

*There is nothing upon the face of the earth
that is holier, higher, grander, more solemn
and more life-giving than the Divine Liturgy."*



St. John of Kronstadt
(1829-1908)