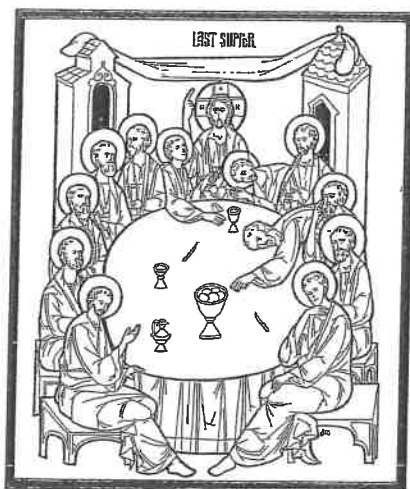


Chapter 11



The Divine Liturgy: Reality Not Symbol

A couple was leaving church after Sunday services. "Did you see that designer suit on the woman in front of us?" the wife asked. "And the hat on that woman across the aisle? And the frilly blue dress on the woman sitting to your left?"

"Well, no," the husband was quick to confess. "I'm afraid I dozed off." She gave him a sharp look. "A lot of good church does you!"

In "The Screwtape Letters" C. S. Lewis shows how temptation comes anywhere, anytime, but especially when we are at prayer or worship. Screwtape was one of hell's under-secretaries who had agents on earth. He would write letters to his agents, informing them how they should keep their charges from worshipping God. One day an angel wrote telling him that his charge had joined a church, and wondering how he should handle the situation. Screwtape wrote back to his agent suggesting that he never leave him, that he go with him to church. There he was to try by all means to distract his charge from true worship by whispering to him that the usher is a hypocrite, by getting him to concentrate on what people are wearing, by daydreaming, by thinking of possible business deals, etc. "Above all," said Screwtape, "never let him

see the Church with all its banners flying. For at that sight all of hell trembles.”

~

Ignorance A Distraction

I submit that another way the devil uses to distract us from true worship is ignorance. Coming to the liturgy we see a lot of processions, vestments, icons. We hear Byzantine hymnology. We smell incense. We are told to sit, stand, cross ourselves. All of this is good. The Orthodox liturgy, we are told, captures and expresses the mystery of God. But if we are ignorant of what is going on in the liturgy, the whole thing, including God, will remain a great mystery to us. The devil will actually be coming to church with us and using our ignorance, among many other means, to prevent us from truly worshipping God.

The Arena of Renewal

The liturgy is a great source of renewal since it brings to us today the Christ Who alone makes all things new. The meaning of the breaking of the bread and the offering of the cup in the liturgy lies in the fact that the very life of God Himself flows into us. The life that streams forth from the source of the life-giving Trinity comes to abide in us. In Christ we are renewed. We pass from slavery to freedom, from darkness to light, from death to life. The arena where this renewal happens is the liturgy and the sacraments.

The Centrality of The Liturgy

It is no wonder, then, that the liturgy occupies such a central place in Orthodox worship.

A Russian Orthodox priest said to a visitor in Moscow in 1976, “Our sufferings have brought us back to the essentials. Now, as never before, we understand that the Church exists in and for the Eucharist. So much else has been taken away from us, but the celebration of the liturgy remains; and in this one thing we have everything.”

When the envoys of Prince Vladimir arrived in Constantinople to inquire about the Christian faith, they were not offered a verbal explanation. Rather, they were taken to the Church of the Holy Wisdom to witness the celebration of the liturgy. It was the action of the Liturgy that converted them.

The other sacraments, such as baptism and marriage, were originally performed in conjunction with the celebration of the Liturgy. In the Orthodox Marriage Service today, the couple drink from a cup of wine. In earlier times, the cup was actually the chalice. They both received Communion. They partook of the Eucharist which truly united them, making them one in Christ. The Liturgy has been the source and font of the other sacraments.

Professor Ion Bria writes, "It has rightly been said that the best way of access to the heart of the Orthodox Church is the 'divine liturgy,' the celebration of the holy mysteries (Eucharist). If people would like to know what Orthodox Christians believe in, whom they worship, and how they live, they should penetrate the form and substance of the liturgy."⁴⁹

Nicholas Kabasilas calls the liturgy the final and greatest of the mysteries, "since it is not possible to go beyond it or add anything to it. After the liturgy there is nowhere to go. There all must stand, and try to examine the means by which we may preserve the treasure to the end. For in it we obtain God Himself, and God is united with us in the most perfect union" (The Life of Christ 4. 1, 3).

Speaking on the centrality of the liturgy, Fr. John Meyendorff writes:

*"Byzantine Christianity is known for the wealth of its liturgy, a wealth which reflects indeed a theological . . . position. Through the liturgy a Byzantine recognized and experienced his membership in the Body of Christ. While a Western Christian generally checked his faith against external authority (the magisterium or the Bible), the Byzantine Christian considered the liturgy both a source and an expression of his theology . . ."*⁵⁰

The centrality of the liturgy in the Orthodox Church is helping it survive one of the greatest persecutions in history. Speaking of a visit to the Soviet Union, Lesslie Newbigin wrote:

"Some years ago I had the privilege of sharing in the worship of one of the great churches in Moscow. It was an unforgettable experience. The Russian Church has lived for more than half a century under extreme pressure. One of the most powerful governments in the

world has deliberately sought to destroy it. Every kind of outward activity in teaching, preaching or service has been forbidden. The one corporate activity which is left to the Church is its worship. Into that worship the faithful of Russia throw everything they have. Because of that worship the Russian Church is still a reality, continuing to draw men and women to faith in God, even in the midst of an aggressively atheistic culture . . .'⁵¹

It is no wonder that, when asked what the Orthodox Church is, Patriarch Alexei of Moscow said, "It is the Church that celebrates the divine liturgy."

Fr. John of Kronstadt

Speaking on the centrality of the liturgy in Orthodox worship, Fr. John of Kronstadt wrote:

"The divine liturgy is truly a heavenly service on earth, in which God Himself, in a particular, immediate and most close manner is present and dwells with men, for He Himself is the invisible celebrant of the service; He is both the offerer and the offering. There is on earth nothing higher, greater, more holy, than the liturgy; nothing more solemn, nothing more life-giving.

Great is the liturgy. In it there is recalled the life, not of some great man, but of God incarnate, who suffered and died for us, who rose again and ascended into heaven, and who shall come again to judge the whole world.

The liturgy is the continually repeated enactment of God's love to mankind, and of His all-powerful mediation for the salvation of the whole world, and of every member of the human race separately. It is the marriage of the lamb, the marriage of the King's Son, in which the bride of the Son of God is every faithful soul, and the giver of the bride the Holy Ghost.

The liturgy is the supper, the table of God's love to mankind. Around the Lamb of God on the paten all

are at this time assembled—the living and the dead, the holy and the sinful, the Church above and the Church below.

God has opened for us, in His Body and Blood, the source of living water, flowing into life eternal, and gives himself to be our food and drink, that we might live through Him.”⁵²

What Is The Liturgy?

Let us consider now what the liturgy is.

Fr. Schmemmann said, “The liturgy is, first of all, the Paschal gathering of those who are to meet the Risen Lord and enter with Him into His kingdom.”

Nicholas Gogol wrote, “The liturgy is the eternal repetition of the great act of love for us.”

The central event of the liturgy is the descent, the appearance, and the divine presence of the resurrected Christ. A person is frequently reminded of this presence. For example, at one point in the liturgy the priest says, “Christ is in our midst.” The co-celebrant priest responds, after exchanging the kiss of peace, “He is and will ever be.”

Paul Evdokimov wrote, “During the liturgy, through its divine power, we are projected to the point where eternity cuts across time, and at this point we become true contemporaries with the events we commemorate.”

The Eucharist is the Biblical wedding supper at which the celestial Bridegroom—Jesus—weds the pure bride, the chosen congregation, you and me. It is the consummation of the love relationship between God and man.

The liturgy is the place where one can “lay aside all worldly care,” as the Cherubic Hymn invites us, “to receive the King of all.”

The liturgy is where the saving deeds of Christ are made present to us today so that we may participate in them. Christ becomes our contemporary; Christ Who is “the same yesterday, today and forever.”

To participate in the liturgy is to experience the kingdom of God. This is aptly expressed by the Trisagion which is the hymn of the Seraphim as they eternally glorify the Trinity before the

heavenly throne. "Man is, as it were, transported into heaven itself," writes St. John Chrysostom. "He stands near the throne of glory. He flies with the Seraphim. He sings the most holy hymn" (XLVIII, 734c). In the words of Jean Danielou, "We are no longer on earth but . . . in heaven. Restored by Baptism to the angelic creation from which he fell by sin, the newly-baptized once more can unite his voice with that of the angels. He is admitted to the official worship of creation, of which the angels are representatives. And at the center of this worship is the priestly action of Christ in His Passion and Resurrection."

St. Gregory Palamas writes that through the liturgy "by this flesh (of Christ in the Eucharist) our community is raised to heaven; that is where this Bread truly dwells; and we enter into the Holy of Holies by the pure offering of the Body of Christ" (Homily 56).

Fr. Alkiviadis Calivas defines the liturgy as follows, "The Divine Liturgy celebrates the inrush of eternal life into our perishable, mortal existence and the abolition of our deaths. . . . The future life is infused into the present one and blended with it, so that 'our fallen humanity may be transformed into the glorified humanity of the new Adam, Christ.' . . . Each Divine Liturgy is a continuation of the mystery of Pentecost. It is the renewal and the confirmation of the coming of the Holy Spirit Who is ever present in the Church" (*The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, Winter, 1984).

The liturgy has also been defined as the sacrament of Christ's permanent saving presence among us in the age of the Church.

Non-Orthodox liturgical scholars tell us that the Orthodox Church has preserved the liturgical spirit of the early Church and continues to live by it and to draw life from its source.⁵³

Because the East looks upon the Church as "heaven on earth," a view that the Greek Fathers loved to stress, the liturgy became an icon of the celestial liturgy described in the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Apocalypse. In the words of Fr. Robert Taft, "The Westerner sees the liturgy as a means of preparing the militant Christian 'to fight the good fight.' . . . The Easterner looks to the liturgical community's transfiguring participation in the eternally triumphant God-man's Passover from death to life." The Gothic Cathedrals of the West were built to resemble fortresses to which the Christian flees for protection and strength. The Eastern

cathedrals, like Sancta Sophia, were built to resemble palaces where one comes to experience the kingdom of God on earth.

I'm not saying one is better than the other; I think we need both. Both the fortress and the palace concepts are valid expressions of what the church of Jesus should be for us.

The liturgy is THEOPHANY, the manifestation or appearance of God. The icon screen with the opening of the Royal Gates witness to this. The Royal Gates are opened and the presence of God is revealed in the word of God (the Gospel Book) which sits enthroned upon the holy table and in the tabernacle which contains the Presanctified Gifts: Jesus the Lamb of God and the Bread of Life.

Fr. Robert Taft has written, "The purpose of God's saving revelation is to render man capable of the life of God, and the liturgy is the privileged ground of this encounter. It is the place of theophany, where man is introduced into the divine life by participating in the mystery of redemption."

In the Orthodox Church the doctrine of the atonement is a liturgical doctrine. What our Savior did for us on Calvary and at the tomb is not left in the distant past. It is made present again in the Liturgy (Eucharist) and the Sacraments.

In the first part of the liturgy, the liturgy of the word, Christ comes to us as the LOGOS, the Word of God. In the second part of the liturgy, the liturgy of the faithful, He comes to us as the LAMB OF GOD Who takes away the sins of the world. He comes to us in every liturgy as both the Word and Lamb of God, speaking to us and uniting Himself with us.

It is unfortunate that through the centuries for many reasons preaching and the people's communion were gradually and largely divorced from the liturgy. Both have always been an integral part of the Orthodox liturgy and we are pleased to see that a form of liturgical revival is now occurring in some of our churches. Both the preaching of God's word and the people's communion are being restored to their proper place in the liturgy.

The liturgy is Pentecost as well as Easter. The epiclesis prayer is an invocation to the Holy Spirit that He come upon us first, and then upon the gifts of bread and wine to change them into the Body and Blood of our Savior. Listen to the words of the epiclesis:

"We offer unto Thee this spiritual and bloodless service; and we pray, we beseech and implore Thee:

Send down Thy Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts here set forth.'

The liturgy is more even than Easter and Pentecost. It is a calling to remembrance and making present again of all the sacred events in the history of our salvation. As the prayer of the liturgy says:

'Remembering therefore . . . all those things which came to pass for our sakes; the cross, the tomb, the resurrection on the third day, the ascension into heaven, the sitting on the right hand, the coming again a second time in glory.'

In the liturgy, by sharing the Body and Blood of Jesus, we become partakers of divine nature (2 Peter 1:4) and experience a foretaste of the kingdom, which was inaugurated at the incarnation in Bethlehem and manifested at Pentecost in the Upper Room.

— A Personal Encounter With the Living Christ —

The Divine Liturgy is not simply a sacred drama, a mere representation of past events, or a symbolic depiction of the life of Jesus. More than anything else, it is a personal encounter with the living, resurrected Christ. It is the place where the Christian meets Christ in the fullness of His redeeming activity, the place where Christ is made present, or better still, makes Himself present. This personal encounter with Christ effected through the Holy Spirit in the liturgy is beautifully expressed in the private pre-communion prayers where the soul enters into a lovely personal dialogue with the Master expressing unworthiness, penitence as well as joy at the coming union. The *Nunc Dimittis* or *Nyn Apolyis* of St. Symeon, repeated by our Church at every Vesper service, and by the priest to himself at the end of every liturgy, serves to reassure us that in every liturgy, we see the Savior Jesus with the eyes of our soul, as Symeon saw Him with his physical eyes; we speak to Him; He speaks to us; we receive Him not into our arms but into our soul through the Eucharist, and we leave filled with peace and joy.

*'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant
depart in peace,
according to thy word;
for mine eyes have seen thy salvation*

*which thou hast prepared in the
presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory of thy people Israel'' (Luke 2:29-32).*

St. Maximus the Confessor has written:

The grace of the Holy Spirit, which is always invisibly present, [is present] in a distinctly special way during the hours of the holy liturgy; each person who is found present there, grace transforms, remolds, and truly remodels into a more divine image, conformed to the Spirit Himself; it guides him into the meaning of the mysteries celebrated, even if he himself may not notice it (Chapter 24).

Pervading Joy

A spirit of joy pervades the liturgy. Peter Hammond wrote, "Her liturgy (the Orthodox Church) still enshrines that element of sheer joy in the Resurrection of the Lord that we find in so many of the early Christian writings."

Professor Edmund Schlink, a Lutheran theologian, describes the joy that pervades the Orthodox liturgy as follows:

"In praising Christ's victory on the cross and in the resurrection and in the adoration of the Holy Trinity, the glory that is to come is experienced as a present reality. The worshippers are translated into that glory, and the menace of the material world grows dim. In no other church does the liturgy so triumphantly unfold the victory of Christ with its implications for the whole cosmos, or laud or magnify in such a rapturous way the presence of the New Creation that is to come. The liturgy of the Eastern Church resounds with the eschatological exultation with which the early Christians celebrated the Lord's Supper."

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann also describes the liturgy in terms of joy:

"The Eucharist is the entrance of the Church into the joy of its Lord. And to enter into that joy, so as to be a witness to it in the world, is indeed the very

calling of the Church, its essential leitourgia, the sacrament by which it 'becomes what it is . . .' The liturgy is, before everything else, the joyous gathering of those who are to meet the risen Lord and to enter with Him into the bridal chamber. And it is this joy of expectation and this expectation of joy that are expressed in singing and ritual, in vestments and in censuring, in that whole 'beauty' of the liturgy, which has so often been denounced as unnecessary and even sinful.'"⁵⁴

Two Other Liturgies

One of the purposes of the liturgy is to activate an inner liturgy in the mind and heart of the worshipper where God will be kept in constant remembrance so that prayers and intercessions may be offered to Him ceaselessly. As the heart, for example, prays the Jesus Prayer, the "inner liturgy" is being celebrated in the chapel of the soul. The Church Fathers speak of a *krupti ergasia* "a secret work," going on constantly in the mind and heart of the true believer. By this they mean that the mind and heart were constantly tuned to God, praying psalms and practicing His presence even while the outer person was engaged in manual labor. The Divine Liturgy serves to initiate and foster the inner liturgy that takes place in the mind and heart of the believer.

An example of the inner liturgy celebrated in the mind and heart of the believer is provided by Anatoli Levitin who was in a Soviet prison for carrying out an informal religious program for young people. He tells how he celebrated the liturgy in his heart each day:

The greatest miracle of all is prayer. I have only to turn my thoughts to God and I suddenly feel a force bursting into me; there is new strength in my soul, in my entire being. . . . The basis of my whole spiritual life is the Orthodox liturgy, so while I was in prison I attended it every day in my imagination. At 8:00 in the morning I would begin walking around my cell, repeating its words to myself. I was then inseparably linked to the whole Christian world. In the Great Litany I would always pray for the Pope and for the

Ecumenical Patriarch, as well as for the leaders of my own church. At the central point of the liturgy . . . I felt myself standing before the face of the Lord, sensing almost physically his wounded, bleeding body. I would begin praying in my own words, remembering all those near to me, those in prison and those who were free, those still alive and those who had died. More and more names welled up from my memory. . . . The prison walls moved apart and the whole universe became my residence, visible and invisible, the universe for which that wounded, pierced body offered itself as a sacrifice. . . . After this, I experienced an exaltation of spirit all day—I felt purified within. Not only my own prayer helped me, but even more the prayer of many other faithful Christians. I felt it continually, working from a distance, lifting me up as though on wings, giving me living water and the bread of life, peace of soul, rest and love.⁵⁵

In addition to the inner liturgy of the heart, the Divine Liturgy leads to the so-called liturgy after the liturgy. This is the liturgy of *diakonia* and *martyria* that is celebrated in the world after we leave church. The liturgy feeds our action in the world. It becomes the font of our energy enabling us to become other Christs in the world. Jesus prayed, "As Thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18). Thus, we see that there are really not one but three liturgies: the one celebrated at the holy table; the inner liturgy where the heart prays to God especially in the chapel of the soul; and thirdly the liturgy we celebrate in the world.

Erasmus said once, "I think there are far too many who count up how many times they attend the liturgy and rely almost entirely upon this for their salvation. They are convinced that they owe nothing further to Christ. Leaving church they immediately return to their former habits. I certainly do not hesitate to praise them for getting to the liturgy, but I am forced to condemn them for stopping at this point."

The liturgy continues when we leave church. After the dismissal the congregation moves out the church door into the world to be apostles for Christ, to continue the liturgy of *martyria* (witness) and *diakonia* (service).

The ancient form of the liturgy concluded with the words "Let us go forth in peace." We see clearly in these words of dismissal that the liturgy concludes with mission. These words are not an ending but a beginning. They invite us to mission and service in the world. As Jesus commanded us to *GO INTO ALL THE WORLD TO PREACH AND BAPTIZE*, so the liturgy concludes with the call for us to go back into the world as apostles (ones who are sent) with a mission. Thus, the liturgy shows us that the Eucharist is the beginning, the alpha point, of a cosmic transfiguration. It nourishes, feeds and sustains us as we fight against poverty, disease, and injustice. The liturgy concludes with a call for us to go out into the world and build up the kingdom. In peace, *go*—we are told—and begin the "liturgy after the liturgy."

I once asked during the children's sermon, "What do you like about church?" One little boy replied honestly, "Leaving." Though I hadn't expected that response, the boy started me thinking. In a way, leaving could really be the highlight of each liturgy. At the end of the liturgy the church is sent into the world, to serve, to love, to minister. What if we opened the church doors and a bunch of ready-and-willing-to-serve, chomping-at-the-bit Christians rushed out joyfully to proclaim the gospel and to love those around them to Christ? Leaving really is the best part of the liturgy—not leaving to go home and watch television and lie around, but leaving to go out and to enlighten, enliven, involve, encourage, uplift and love in the name of Christ.

I like what Fr. Calivas says, "Sharing in the life of Christ and energized by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Church becomes *an epiphany of love*." Nowhere can this be more evident than in "the liturgy after the liturgy" when we are sent out into the world to look for the suffering Christ in people, especially the poor, the sick, the unbelieving, etc. The Church may not be *of* the world but she is very much *in* the world and *for* the world. Did not Jesus give Himself "for the life of the world" (John 6:51)?

A priest told of a little deaf and dumb girl to whom he had tried to be especially kind. Using sign language she asked him, "Are you so nice to me because you really love me, or because you are supposed to be nice?" If the Church is the epiphany of God's love in Christ, then it needs to speak in the only language the world understands: love—the love we receive in sharing the life of Christ.

A priest tells of a family whose house was destroyed by fire. They had no insurance. That Sunday he said to his people from the pulpit: "True worship is giving ourselves to God fully, offering ourselves as a living sacrifice. I want us all to go home and round up food, clothing, blankets, and money and meet back here in an hour. We'll take the liturgy to our friends." An hour later they piled into the little house, each carrying food and clothing. The church presented a check. Someone in the congregation loaned a trailer. They took the liturgy to this needy family. They, in effect, celebrated "the liturgy after the liturgy." The real liturgy of love and service in Christ's name begins when we leave church.

Liturgical Living

The word *leitourgia* is derived from the two Greek words *laos* (people, especially the people of God) and *ergon* (act). Thus, a very proper translation of liturgy would be "the people of God performing God's work." When the divine liturgy is concluded in church, I "depart in peace" to do God's work in the world, to live liturgically. In liturgical living as in liturgical worship, we yield ourselves to Christ to be used by Him as His instruments in the world today. Truly, He has no hands but ours to do His work in the world today. As Mother Teresa says, "In the liturgy we have Jesus in the appearance of bread, while in the slums we see Christ and touch Him in the broken bodies, in the abandoned children." The broken bread that we receive in the liturgy must be transformed into a bread we break for the millions of starving. As Fr. Walter Burghardt so well says, "If I am to be a eucharist for the life of the world, my feeding on the flesh of Christ must take me from church to world, to wash the feet of my brothers and sisters." The "real presence" of Christ in the Eucharist must become in me a real presence to those about me who hunger for food or freedom, for peace or truth, or for a better understanding of God. As the epiclesis prayer says, "We offer unto Thee this reasonable worship, for the whole world." It is for the needs of the whole world that we are sent out to perform each week "the liturgy after the liturgy," offering hospitality to strangers, care for the distressed, liberation for the oppressed, healing for the sick, and compassion for all, enduring death daily (2 Cor. 11:23-24).

Taking Jesus Into the World

A certain church had burned to the ground. Only a statue of Jesus was salvaged. It was placed by the firemen on the sidewalk in front of the church. An unchurched neighbor observed the statue and said, "This is the first time that those people have ever taken Jesus out of that church." May that be never said of us! One of our main tasks in "the liturgy after the liturgy" is to take Jesus out of church and into the world.

Dead Sea Souls

The Dead Sea is dead because it has no exit, no overflow. The Jordan River flows into it but not through it. It just stays there and becomes stagnant. There are also Dead Sea souls today. They come to the liturgy, receive the many blessings of the Holy Trinity, but keep them locked up in themselves. They do not share with others the blessings they receive. Their faith has no exit. It was never intended to be that way. The liturgy is not finished in church. It begins in church and is completed in the world. "When does the liturgy begin?" someone phoned to ask. The pastor replied, "It begins when we leave church." We not only go to the liturgy, we are the liturgy wherever we go. We become the real presence of Christ in the world. In the words of the Apostle James,

"If anyone thinks that he is a worshipper of God, and yet does not bridle his tongue, his worship is an empty thing. This is pure and undefiled worship, as God the Father sees it, to visit the orphans and the widows, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world". (James 1:26-27).

Ascension Leads to Mission

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann put it this way, "This is the meaning of the Eucharist; this is why the mission of the Church begins in the liturgy of ascension, for it alone makes possible the liturgy of mission."⁵⁶ We ascend to the throne of God in the liturgy that we may descend to minister to God's people in the valley of this world. If the Orthodox Church prides itself on its liturgy, it must never forget that the liturgy that begins at the holy table does not end there. It is consummated in the world through our ministry of *diakonia* (service) and *martyria* (witness).

The Huddle

The liturgy is much like the huddle in a football game. The players gather in a circle before each play, and the quarterback gives them the next play, making sure each player knows his assignment. But the huddle is not the game. The game is played when the players line up in their positions on the field and carry out their assignments. The liturgy is much like a huddle. It prepares us for our service, "for the life of the world." As one communist visitor to the U.S.A. said when he saw hundreds of people leaving church after liturgy one Sunday, "What do they do now?" The answer is that they now go out to perform another liturgy, a liturgy which, if performed well, would eliminate the glaring inequities and injustices which gave birth to Communism.

The Criticism of Other Worldliness

The Orthodox Church has been criticized as being too other-worldly. Its liturgy is magnificently beautiful and inspiring but unfortunately it has often locked Jesus in the liturgy. It is so easy to forget that the liturgy continues when we leave church. How much we need to be reminded of the magnificent prayers in the liturgy of St. Basil wherein he remembers and prays for almost every need in the world:

"Nourish the infants; instruct the young, succour the aged; comfort the faint-hearted; gather together into one them that are scattered, bring them back which went astray and unite them in Thy Holy . . . Church. Set free them that are vexed with unclean spirits. Sail with them that sail; journey with them that journey. Defend the widows; shelter the orphans; deliver the captives; help the sick.

Remember, O God, them that stand trial, that are in prisons, that live in exile; and all that are in affliction and tribulation . . ."

— Our Job Description For the Liturgy in the World —

This magnificent prayer in the liturgy of St. Basil establishes a job description for what we are called to do in "the liturgy after the liturgy." Certainly the liturgy does not end with just a prayer

for the infants, the young, the aged, the faint-hearted, the scattered, the widows, the sick, the imprisoned, and the exiled. It proceeds from prayer to practice. Otherwise, we are like those condemned by the Apostle James: "What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" (James 2:14-17).

Thus, the Divine Liturgy, far from ending when we leave church, actually gives birth to two other liturgies that we celebrate after we leave church, i.e., the inner liturgy of prayer and praise offered ceaselessly in the chapel of the soul, and the liturgy of service and witness that we celebrate in the world for the orphans, the aged, the sick, the widows, the imprisoned and the starving. Would you call this "otherworldly?"

A Brief Walk Through the Liturgy

Have you ever wondered why there is repetition in the liturgy? For example, how many times is the petition "Again and again let us pray to the Lord" repeated, calling on us to pray the same petitions all over again? Many may be irritated by this repetition or consider it superfluous and time-consuming. Yet listen to how Tito Colliander, the great Finnish literary figure, explains the need for such repetition in the liturgy:

"But how often does it happen that the birds of inattentiveness which are spoken of in the Parable of the Sower and which are sent by the Devil come and carry away the seeds which have just been sown. We have neglected to follow with our hearts the words of the prayers as they were pronounced by the priest; we had ears but we did not hear. In that case, he who is praying in church has a chance to be more attentive the next time the same prayer is repeated during the service. And then he feels the immense warmth of thanksgiving. In this way our Church has taken care of us weaklings and given us the opportunity again and again to enter into prayer's life-creating com-

munion with the Lord and to practice perseverance in prayer, just as the athlete trains himself in running and throwing. Or to be watered over and over again, just as a plant growing in arid soil is watered in order to take root."

The Little Entrance Not Symbolic

Many believe that the little entrance of the liturgy when the priest carries the Gospel book in procession out to the people is a beautiful symbolic ceremony. It symbolizes the beginning of Christ's preaching ministry at age thirty. But this procession is anything but symbolic. It is real. Christ actually comes today to address us personally with His words of everlasting life. It is a real personal encounter with the Lord of life. To listen to His words as spoken through the Gospel lesson is to gain life; to fail to listen is to choose death.

Thus, as the multitudes went to hear Jesus on the Mount of Beatitudes; as they flocked to Him to be fed the five loaves and two fish; as the dying thief on the cross implored Him for mercy, and as the disciples sat with Him at the Last Supper, so we may approach Jesus today through the liturgy. In fact, in the early Church the small entrance marked the entrance of the clergy and the people into the Church to be with Jesus Who comes to us as He came to the multitudes of His day: to teach us His word, to feed us the Bread of Life, to forgive us as He forgave the penitent thief, to give us His Body and Blood as He did to His disciples at the Last Supper. All this is not symbolic but real. In this case, to concentrate on symbolism is to miss the reality of Christ's presence in our midst here and now.

The Great Entrance: Our Ascension to God

In like manner the Great Entrance of the liturgy when our gifts of bread and wine, representing us, are carried in procession into the altar and laid on the holy table, is not symbolic. It is a real entrance—our entrance to the throne of God. For in Christ we have been given access to heaven. We are united to God and made participants of Christ's entrance into the kingdom. When the Church sings the hymn which the angels sing eternally before the throne of God: "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Sabaoth" "

and when the priest prays, "Holy God, Who art praised with the thrice holy voice of the Seraphim, glorified by the Cherubim and adored by all the hosts of heaven . . ." the angels, as Fr. Schmemmann so well said, are not "for decoration and inspiration." They are not symbolic. They are really there and we are really in heaven. The liturgy is our real entrance, passage, ascension to heaven, to the throne of God. To use again the words of Fr. Schmemmann, "*Holy* is the word, the song, the 'reaction' of the Church as it enters into heaven, as it stands before the heavenly glory of God."

Fr. Stanley Harakas calls our attention to the danger of symbolization in the Liturgy:

"Liturgiologists almost unanimously criticize the tendency which developed in late Byzantium to give—'mystical interpretations'—to everything conceivable connected with the conduct of the Liturgy. Thus, the decorative tassles on the priestly stole were interpreted to mean the souls of the faithful which were dependent upon the priest's ministrations! The historians of the Liturgy pointed out that such—'symbolization'—served to distract attention from the true meaning of the Liturgy as a sacramental action uniting the believer with Christ and manifesting the Church as a reality in the world. However, there was another consequence which was equally serious. It created an attitude in the attendees which might be appropriately characterized as that of the—'tourist-observer'—. . .

It is a 'this-means-that' approach which places the worshipper in the position of an outsider who receives a tourist's description of the event. At most, he or she can—upon a return to the site—remember what means what. Remarkably, this is also true of the approach of the historical liturgiologist. If he explains the historical origins of the Great Entrance and connects it with ancient Byzantine imperial practices, for example, the worshipper is still a—'tourist-observer.' Barring a radical rewriting and revision of the text of the Divine Liturgy (a highly unlikely event in the

*Eastern Orthodox Church), the generally accepted and taught symbolisms can be retained, but they must be approached in a devotional manner which emphasizes the conscious and heart-felt participation of the Christian worshipper. . . . The Divine Liturgy seems to call for that kind of participatory involvement in its symbolism."*⁵⁷

The late Fr. Alexander Schmemmann warned us against the symbolization of the liturgy: "In my own tradition, the Byzantine, this has meant the appearance of endless symbolic explanations of worship, and so the eucharistic Liturgy that is at the heart of the Church has been transformed in effect into a series of audio-visual aids. Symbolism is discerned everywhere. I tried once to collect all the meanings of the exclamation before the Creed, 'The doors! The doors!,' and I found about sixteen different and mutually exclusive explanations. Or else the seven episcopal vestments were identified with the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is not that I deny episcopacy as a source of grace. But certainly those seven items of vesture were not originally intended to illustrate that. . . . If we are to recover the real meaning of the liturgy, we need to go back, behind the commentaries with their symbolic explanations, to the actual text and celebration of the Eucharist itself. We are to see in the Liturgy the fulfillment of the Church at the table of the Lord in the kingdom."⁵⁸

--- A Journey to The Kingdom ---

The liturgy begins with a doxology that announces its destination: "Blessed is the kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit now and forevermore." The liturgy is a journey that will take us to the kingdom of God not symbolically but in reality, as Fr. Schmemmann has emphasized. As a bus driver announces at the beginning where the bus is going, so the priest announces at the very beginning that the goal of the liturgy is to take us to the kingdom of God. We hear this and we reply by saying, "Amen." This means, "O.K. This is where we want to go." The word "Amen," writes Fr. Schmemmann, "is indeed one of the most important words in the world, for it expresses the agreement of the Church to follow Christ in His ascension to His Father to make this ascension the destiny of man. . . . Upon this

Amen the fate of the human race is decided. It reveals that the movement toward God has begun.”⁵⁹

Doxology

The dominant theme of our Orthodox Christian faith is doxology and praise. Most often the liturgy in the Orthodox Church is preceded by the singing of the great Doxology which sets the tone for the entire liturgy which is one of complete *efcharistia*: gratitude and praise. “Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit . . .” “Blessed be the kingdom of God the Father . . . Son . . . and Holy Spirit.” This is the major theme of Orthodox worship as it was the dominant motif of the early Christians. What do we find in the New Testament? Tribulation, demons, suffering, crucifixion—yet always with a doxology because Christ has taken the worst of man and overcome it. “In the world you have tribulation, but be of good cheer I have overcome the world.” said Jesus. Not crucifixion but resurrection has the last word! Not death but life! Is it any wonder that thanksgiving and praise and doxology are not only the dominant theme but also the whole life style of the Christian?

The liturgy never ceases to glorify and thank God for all He has done and is doing for our salvation as we see in this beautiful prayer of the liturgy: “Thou didst bring us from non-being into being; and didst raise us up that were fallen away; and left nothing undone till Thou hadst lifted us to heaven, and hadst bestowed upon us the kingdom to come. For all these things we give thanks unto Thee . . . for all whereof we know and whereof we know not; for benefits both manifest and hid which Thou hadst wrought upon us . . .”

Prayer and Faith

One of the principles of Orthodox theology is expressed in the Latin saying, “*Lex orandi est lex credendi*” which means, “How we pray reflects how we believe.” The theology of the Church is to be found in the hymns of the Church. The hymns of the liturgy accomplish this in a superb manner. For example, only a very obtuse worshipper can sing aloud the famous O MONOGENIS hymn every Sunday and lack a sense of what we believe as Orthodox Christians:

"O only begotten Son and Word of God, though You are immortal You condescended for our salvation to take flesh from the holy Mother of God and ever-virgin Mary and, without undergoing change, You became man. You were crucified, Christ our God, by Your death trampling upon death. You Who are one of the Holy Trinity and are glorified with the Father and the Holy Spirit, save us!"

Who can sing the Cherubic hymn Sunday after Sunday and not know that he is in the presence of God's glory:

"Let us who mystically represent the Cherubim and sing the thrice-holy hymn to the life-giving Trinity now put aside all earthly care, so that we may welcome the King of all who comes escorted by invisible hosts of angels. Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia."

Or who can sing the following Cherubic hymn on Holy Saturday and not know that he is present before the King of Kings:

"Let all mortal flesh keep silence and in fear and trembling stand, pondering nothing earthly-minded. For the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords cometh forth to the faithful. Before Him go the ranks of angels, with all the principalities and powers; the cherubim full of eyes and the six-winged seraphim covering their faces and chanting their hymns. Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia."

Truly the hymns and prayers of the liturgy proclaim the real theology of our Church. No wonder the Church Fathers believed that the real theologian is one who prays.

Metropolitan Emilianos Timiadis has written concerning the hymns of our Church: "No church so lavishly employs poetry as does the Eastern Orthodox. The fact that poetry constitutes three-fourths of the Divine Liturgy accounts in a large part for its powerful emotional and aesthetic appeal. In the early centuries those poetic sermons called *Kontakia*, set to music and sung, displaced prose sermons and were, therefore, delivered by the deacons from the pulpit after the Scripture readings."⁶⁰ Superb poetry was used to sing out the theology of the Church in its magnificent hymns.

The Call To Commitment

The call to commitment is heard several times in each liturgy. The words used are: "Let us commit ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ as God." This call to commitment is built into the liturgy and is repeatedly directed to us. It reminds us that Christianity is a love affair between God and us. God first gave Himself to us, and we respond by giving ourselves to Him. The bread and wine we offer to God in the liturgy represent us. They stand for us. We are called to place ourselves on the paten with the altar bread. It is our *prosphora*, our offering of self-surrender to God. We offer Him our mind and heart, our soul and body, all that we have and are. We must, as it were, pour our heart out into the chalice with the wine, and put into it all our hopes and fears, our joys and sorrows, our love and adoration, our obedience and commitment—our whole self. For all this is to go to God in the shape of a gift.

That is our portion in the sacrifice of the liturgy: we are to invest meaning into the gifts by offering ourselves. If we do not offer ourselves to God under the elements of bread and wine, then we are not really offering the liturgy as we should. We are not "in on it." The bread and the wine may mean somebody else. But they don't mean us because we haven't done anything to make them mean us. Every liturgy is an invitation to commit ourselves totally to Christ as God.

"Thine Own of Thine Own We Offer to Thee"

In raising the chalice and paten above the holy table the priest offers us to God through our offering of bread and wine. He says, "Thine own of thine own we offer to Thee," "ta sa ek ton son Si prosferomen." This prayer is taken from I Chronicles 29:14 where we read, "hoti sa ta panta kai ek ton son dedokamen soi." The background here is interesting. King David had gathered an enormous amount of materials in donations for the construction of the temple. In order to discourage any feeling of false pride in the greatness of their gift to God, he acknowledges publicly that what they have contributed to God for the construction of the temple is already God's own gift to them. They are merely giving back to God what He has already given to them. So David says, "But who am I, and what is my people that we should be able thus to offer

willingly? For all things come from Thee, and of Thy own have we given Thee." We kneel humbly after this prayer, acknowledging that even in the giving of ourselves to Christ as God, we are merely giving back to Him what He has already given to us.

The Bible and the Liturgy

There has been a tendency among some of our people to separate the Bible and the Liturgy. According to this school of thought, the Bible is Protestant and the liturgy is Orthodox. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Bible is an integral part of the Liturgy and the Liturgy of the Bible. Studies have shown that the liturgy itself has 98 Old Testament quotes and 114 New Testament references. The liturgy is firmly anchored and deeply rooted in Scripture. For, what is the liturgy but a making present again of the events of Scripture? The liturgy unfolds the Scriptures in action. In the Orthodox Church the doctrine of the atonement as we have said, is a liturgical doctrine. Calvary is made present in Baptism and the Eucharist. For example, the passing through the Red Sea becomes real for us today when we pass through the waters of baptism from death to life, from darkness to light, from slavery to freedom. The Ascension becomes our ascension to the throne of God in every liturgy. The manna God provided for His people in the wilderness, He continues to provide for us in the the Eucharist. The Last Supper becomes real for us in every liturgy and we are there with Christ. Thus, the liturgy becomes a bridge, as it were, bringing the events of the Scriptures to us today so that we may participate in them personally, for our salvation and union with God.

In fact, the whole first part of the liturgy is called the Liturgy of the Word since it consists of the reading of the epistle and gospel and their explanation in the sermon. In the early Church the whole first part of the liturgy was dedicated to the preaching of the Scriptures to the unbelievers and the preparation of the catechumens for baptism. Since preaching begets and builds up faith for the faithful also, it continues to be an essential part of the liturgy. According to the Church Fathers, there are two communions in the liturgy. We commune first with Christ as the word of God (Liturgy of the Word), and then with Christ as the Bread of Life (Liturgy of the Faithful). In both communions, we partake of Christ. First we

break the word of God, then we break the Bread of Life. The Bible and the liturgy are wedded together inseparably in the services of the Orthodox Church. Through the liturgy the Lord Jesus continues to address His saving word to us. He continues to offer Himself to us completely as both the Word of God and the Bread of Life.

— The Kiss of Peace: Forgiveness and Love —

In the Orthodox liturgy love precedes confession of faith. Before we make our confession of faith by reciting the Nicene Creed, we are called upon to "love one another that we may with one mind confess." After the mutual confession of sins the priest says, "Christ is in our midst" and the deacon replies, "He is and ever will be." Commenting on these words Nicolai Gogol writes in his "Meditations on the Divine Liturgy:

"Formerly all those assembled in the church used to kiss one another, men the men and women the women, saying: 'Christ is in the midst of us!' and answering: 'He is and will be!' That tradition persists, though in a modified form, for every communicant summons to his mind all Christians, not only those in the temple at the time, but the absent ones also, not only those close to his heart, but also those who have remained remote from it; hastening to reconcile himself with all those toward whom he has felt envy, hatred or discontent, he gives them all a kiss in spirit, saying to himself: 'Christ is in the midst of us,' and answering on their behalf: 'He is and will be!' Unless he does this he will be dead to all the holy acts that follow, after the words of Christ Himself: 'Leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift,' and after the words of Christ's apostle: 'If any one says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.'"

This call to love that precedes the recitation of the Creed shows that there can be no confession of faith in the Trinity unless it is preceded by mutual love. The true confession of faith must be animated by love.

The Holy Gifts For the Holy

As the priest lifts the consecrated Bread he says, "The Holy Gifts to the holy (people of God)." He does not say, "The Holy Gifts to the *sinless*" or "The Holy Gifts to the *perfect*" because none of us is sinless or perfect. He says ". . . to the *holy* (people of God)." "Holy," of course, means those who are in the process of separating themselves from the sinful world around them and conforming their lives to the will of the One Holy God. Such holiness can never be achieved without the power of the precious Body and Blood of Jesus in us.

Fr. Schmemmann emphasizes the word GIFTS: "The holy GIFTS to the holy people of God" and writes,

*"No one has been 'worthy' to receive communion, no one has been prepared for it. At this point all merits, all righteousness, all devotions disappear and dissolve. Life comes again to us as a Gift, a free and Divine gift. This is why in the Orthodox Church we call the eucharistic elements Holy Gifts. Adam is again introduced into Paradise, taken out of nothingness and crowned king of creation. Everything is free, nothing is due and yet all is given. And, therefore, the greatest humility and obedience is to accept the gift, to say yes—in joy and gratitude. There is nothing we can do, yet we become all that God wanted us to be from eternity, when we become eucharistic."*⁶¹

The Long Services

The Orthodox worship services are noted for their length. By contrast, the services of the Western Churches are far shorter. Commenting on this, one anonymous observer wrote:

"And the piling up of service after service, repetition, psalm after psalm, has the same effect on the worshipper's awareness of time. The service ceases to be long; it becomes eternal. One ceases to be at a certain place in it, it is simply continuing, as the service of God by the angels and the saints has always continued from the beginning of time and continues now and forever and to ages of ages. Thus beyond

space and time the worshipper is given . . . the experience of what he believes to be reality—the unending worship of God.”

Eucharist — A Sacrifice of Thanksgiving

The prayers of the liturgy reflect the spirit of *thanksgiving* that pervades it:

“It is meet and right to sing praises unto Thee, to bless Thee, to magnify Thee, to give thanks unto Thee, to worship Thee in all places of Thy dominion. . . . Thou didst bring us from nothingness into being; and didst raise us up that were fallen away; and left nothing undone till Thou hadst lifted us to heaven, and hadst bestowed upon us Thy kingdom to come . . .”

We offer thanks to the most Holy Trinity “for all things of which we know and of which we know not, whether manifest or unseen” that God has done for us. Especially do we offer thanks “for this Liturgy, which Thou dost deign to receive at our hands, though there stand by Thee hosts of archangels and tens of thousands of angels waiting upon Thee, the many-eyed cherubim and the six-winged seraphim that soar aloft.” We continue our eucharist to God praying, “Holy and most holy art Thou, and Thine only-begotten Son, and Thy Holy Spirit . . . Who so loved the world that Thou didst give Thine only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Thus, remembering all that God has done for us from creation when He brought us from non-being into being, through the Incarnation and all the way to the Second Coming of Christ, the Church offers thanksgiving in the anaphora of the liturgy.

The Creed

In the liturgy Christ is Present to speak to us the same words of eternal life He spoke to His apostles. How well this is brought out in the prayer preparatory to the reading of the gospel in the Coptic liturgy:

“Lord Jesus Christ our God, who didst say to the saintly disciples and holy apostles, ‘Many prophets and righteous people have desired to see the things

which you see and have not seen them, and to hear the things which you hear and have not heard them; but you, blessed are your eyes for they see and your ears for they hear': make us worthy to hear and to do thy holy gospel through the prayers of the saints.'

In every liturgy we are summoned to renew our baptismal pledge and commitment to Christ. This is the meaning of the Nicene Creed which was introduced into the liturgy in the early sixth century. It was introduced into the liturgy from the baptismal service. Dr. Geoffrey Wainwright says, ". . . The faith confessed in baptism is now being professed again. . . . It expresses the faith which the church proposes for the world's belief and salvation, and its acceptance signifies membership of the saved and saving community. The address of the Creed is to the world, at least in the sense that it reminds believers of the faith by which they entered the church and which they are now charged to spread among humanity.'" ⁶²

It is this faith alone that can save humanity. As Dr. John Turkevich, a distinguished Orthodox scientist and priest, wrote, "This is where man stands now after twenty billion years of physical time; after four billion years of biological time; after forty thousand years of theological time; and after two thousand years of Christian time. He stands at the brink of nuclear destruction. Science cannot save him. His only salvation is a miracle based on faith." That miracle is the faith of the Nicene Creed that we confess in each liturgy. It alone offers the way of the salvation and the transfiguration of the cosmos.

The Anaphora

Three of my favorite exhortations from the liturgy are: "Let us love one another," "Let us lift up our hearts," and "Let us give thanks to the Lord." These are part of the anaphora, the upward movement of the soul to God that occurs in the last part of the liturgy. Everywhere around us there is movement. There is constant movement among the celestial bodies in the universe. The multitude of cells and organs in our bodies are constantly moving. The direction of this movement is either up or down, either up to God or away from God. The anaphora is the great thanksgiving prayer of the liturgy that lifts us up to God, climbing Mt. Tabor

with Jesus to experience the Transfiguration, reminding us that we are pilgrims passing through this life on our way to heaven. "Let us lift up our hearts." All the movement in our lives—both physical and spiritual—should be toward God. "If you are risen with Christ, seek the things that are above," writes St. Paul. When I lift up my arms and look at the Pantocrator Christ during the anaphora to say, "Let us lift up our hearts," I consider the moment when I shall appear before Him either at my death or at the Second Coming and I pray the prayer of the anaphora with a contrite and joyful heart:

We therefore, remembering this saving commandment and all the things that were done for us; the cross, the tomb, the resurrection on the third day, the ascension into heaven, the session at the right hand, the second and glorious coming again; offering you your own from your own, in all and through all; we offer you also this reasonable and bloodless sacrifice, and we beseech and pray and entreat you, send down your Holy Spirit on us and on these gifts set forth; and make this bread the precious body of your Christ, changing it by your Holy Spirit, and that which is in the cup the precious blood of your Christ, changing it by your Holy Spirit, so that they may become to those who partake for vigilance of soul, for forgiveness of sins, for fellowship with the Holy Spirit, for the fullness of the kingdom, for boldness towards you and not for judgement or for condemnation.

One Body

The liturgy takes us as a human body and transforms us into the mystical body of Christ—the body through which the Risen Christ is present and works in the world today. This is accomplished at the epiclesis when the Holy Spirit comes to abide in us making us Temples of His Presence, and changes the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus so that, partaking of them, we may become the Body of Jesus in the world today. We literally become His hands, His feet, His ears, His eyes in the world today. "And grant us with *one* mind and *one* heart to glorify and praise Thy sublime and wondrous name . . ." These words remind us that

through the Eucharist we indeed become one mind, one heart and one body.

The Inrush of Eternal Life

The liturgy is the inrush of eternal life into us. We receive divine life—God's life—within us here and now. It is the Messianic banquet in which we shall participate fully at the end of time. It introduces us to the kingdom of God.

More than a sacred drama, the liturgy is the experience of the risen Christ in our midst. We celebrate the whole mystery of God's love from creation to the Second Coming. We experience the presence of the reigning Christ. He comes to make His home in us. The words of Jesus are fulfilled: "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:23).

In the words of Dr. Geoffrey Wainwright: "Christ's coming to us in communion is the sacramental response to the cry of *Maranatha*, 'Our Lord, come;' it is the anticipation of his final parousia. Those who admit him in faith, who receive him into the very marrow of their bones, are being made 'partakers of divine nature'" (2 Peter 1:4).

The Holy Gifts

"The holy gifts for the holy people of God" says the priest as he invites us to the holy table. The people respond immediately to the words, "The holy gifts to the holy people of God"—No, Lord, we are not holy: "One only is holy, One only is Lord. Jesus Christ to the glory of God the Father. Amen." Regardless of all our human efforts, salvation remains God's gift to us. In the end we simply receive the Eucharist as a gift of God's grace. As the post-communion hymn says,

"We have seen the true light,
We have received the heavenly Spirit,
We have found the true faith,
We worship the undivided Trinity;
This has been our salvation."

Our Daily Bread

The Eucharist is God's response to our petition in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread." Many church Fathers identify "the daily bread" with the bread of life in the Eucharist.

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst . . . your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which comes down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh. . . . He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I live in Him" (John 6:35, 49-51, 56).

A devout Christian who had missed receiving Communion one Sunday thought to himself: "There was a cup set for me at the Lord's Table today, just like the place set for me at the family table at home. The cup was there for me even when I didn't come. When I don't come, my place at the Lord's Table, reserved especially for me, remains empty. And the Lord Jesus, the Host, Who prepares the table for me, must be truly disappointed that one of His invited guests did not show up." As he thought about this, he said, "My place at the Lord's Table will never be empty again—not if I can help it."

A wonderful little pamphlet published by Conciliar Press emphasizes the importance of the liturgy in its answer to the request we so often hear: "Give me one good reason why I should go to church":

"There is one reason above all others why you should go. It is the only place where you can receive Holy Communion.

"Communion? Why on earth do we need Communion?

"For one thing . . . faith in Christ will not work and cannot work the way it's supposed to for you or anyone else, without Holy Communion. It is a fact of life that none of us has the strength to fulfill our part in being a Christian without receiving the grace God gives us in Communion.

"Call it Communion, the Eucharist, or the Lord's Supper, you need to be there front and center with faith to receive this indispensable element for a stable Christian life—the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. It is wishful thinking to attempt living

successfully as a Christian without it. Jesus Christ never intended you or anyone else to attempt Christian living without being dynamically united to Him. . . .

“Communion is *the* constant you get from Church. Granted, you can go away with nothing from a bad sermon. But it is totally, completely and irrevocably impossible to receive the body and blood of Jesus Christ and go away with nothing. Quite to the contrary, what could be more life strengthening than receiving the Son of God who became a human being for our sakes so that we could be energized by Him! That’s what you do in Communion. You can only get that in Church.”⁶³

———— *Getting Something Out of the Liturgy* ————

“I DON’T GET ANYTHING OUT OF THE LITURGY.” As a priest, I have heard this complaint countless times. The truth is that we do not come to church primarily to get something out of the liturgy. We come to the liturgy to give ourselves, our possessions, our whole being to God. This is what we do when we place ourselves on the holy table through the prosphora, or altar bread, which expresses the giving of our life to God. Only if we first give ourselves to God, shall we be able to get something out of the liturgy. What we will get is the presence of the Lord Jesus within us. We shall carry Him out of the church with us to bring Him as Christ-bearers to others. What we get out of the liturgy is the inestimable privilege of glorifying God and confessing Him among men and women in the world.

Saying, “I don’t get anything out of the liturgy” is like showing up at a savings bank and trying to draw out some money when you have not deposited any. What we get out of the liturgy is directly related to what we put into it. The liturgy will be far more meaningful if we participate in the prayers and the singing, the reading of the Gospel beforehand, praying the pre-Communion prayers, the real surrender of ourselves to Christ as God.

———— *Come To the Right Address* ————

The world today is seeking spiritual fulfillment at the wrong address. It seeks fulfillment in alcohol, in drugs, in sex, in work, in hedonism. But it seeks them at the wrong address. The apostles on Pentecost came to the right address: the Upper Room, the same

room where Jesus instituted the Eucharist. In that same room on Pentecost—they were so filled with zest that they were accused of being drunk. But they weren't drunk. They were intoxicated. They were intoxicated with God's indwelling Spirit. They were filled with the Spirit Christ had promised to send. We come to the liturgy to receive what gives us life, not what, like drugs, deprives us of life. In coming to the liturgy, we come to the right address if we are seeking the fulfillment that comes only from the fullness of God's presence in us.

Participating in the Liturgy

Through Response and Song

When a famous football coach was asked what the contribution of football was to physical fitness, he replied, "Absolutely nothing. I define football as twenty-two men on the field desperately needing rest and sixty thousand people in the stands desperately needing exercise."

This pretty much describes much of the Orthodox worship. Even though the word "liturgy" means "*the work of the people*," it has become a work no longer of the people but of a few choir members and the priest. The prayers of the liturgy are all in the plural "we." *We* are all offering the liturgy—the whole people of God—not just the priest and the choir. *We* offer, *we* thank, *we* pray, *we* adore, *we* receive.

The Amen of God's People

Fr. Schmemmann found a wonderful illustration of the co-celebration of the liturgy by priest and people in the word *Amen*: ". . . it is a crucial word. No prayer, no sacrifice, no blessing is ever given in the Church without being sanctioned by the Amen (of the people) which means an approval, agreement, participation. To say *Amen* to anything means that I make it mine, that I give my consent to it. . . . And *Amen* is indeed the word of the laity in the Church, expressing the function of the laity as the People of God, which freely and joyfully accepts the Divine offer, sanctions it with its consent. There is really no service, no liturgy without the *Amen* of those who have been ordained to serve God as community, as Church."⁶⁴

Personally Involved

The word *amen* means, "I am personally involved in this worship. It is my worship. These are my prayers to God." When we beseech God the Father during the anaphora (the consecration of the bread and wine) to "make this bread the precious body of thy Christ" and "that which is in this cup the precious blood of thy Christ," it is the lay people who must respond with the *Amen* three times. In describing the "Amens" used in the church gatherings of his time, St. Jerome mentions that they were so powerful coming out of so many mouths that when they were pronounced "they sound like thunder and thunderbolts under the existing roofs of the churches." When the priest prays this prayer today, there is almost total silence. In other words, the people of God are not sanctioning this prayer request with their own *Amen*. They are either indifferent or so absorbed in their own private prayers that they are not participating in the prayers of the liturgy.

Praying Together As God's People

Let me share with you what Fr. Thomas Hopko wrote on this subject:

"When we go to church to pray, we do not go there to say our private prayers. Our private prayers should be said at home, in our room, in secret, and not in church (Matthew 6:5-6). This does not mean that we do not bring our personal cares, desires, troubles, questions and joys to the prayer of the Church. We certainly can, and we do. But we bring ourselves and our concerns to church to unite them to the prayer of the Church.

In church we pray with others, and we should therefore discipline ourselves to pray all together as one body in the unity of one mind, one heart and one soul. Once again this does not mean that our prayers in church should cease to be personal and unique; we must definitely put ourselves into our church prayer. In the Church, however, each one must put his own person with his own personal uniqueness into the common prayer of Christ and His Body. . . . The

*difficulty of many church services is that they are prayers of isolated individuals who are only physically, and not spiritually, united together. . . . The church services are not designed for silent prayer. They exist for the prayerful fellowship of all God's people with each other, with Christ and with God."*⁶⁵

Put Yourself Into the Liturgy

The liturgy is so structured that it leaves room for people to bring into it their entire existence so that it may be gathered and offered up in praise to God. For example, when the priest asks us to pray for "the peace of the world" we may personalize this prayer and pray briefly at this point for God's peace to prevail in our personal unpeaceful relationships with our wife, husband, children, etc., and then respond with the "Kyrie, eleison." The fact of the matter is that in the petitions of the liturgy, the priest is not addressing himself to God when he says, "Let us pray for the peace of the world . . ." He is speaking to the congregation. He is asking God's people to pray for peace, for unity, for the suffering, etc. If God's people do not pray for those things when the priest directs, but are thinking of something else, then nobody is praying, nothing is being done in the liturgy. That is why we emphasize that the liturgy is not for private prayer. It is the people of God praying together—uniting their requests and offering them up to God in unison, with one mind and one heart.

Here is another example. When we are all kneeling at the anaphora and praying for the Holy Spirit to fill us with His powerful presence and to change our gifts of bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus, we must not at that time be absorbed in our own personal prayers. This is not the time for private prayer. It is the time for us to pray specifically for the infilling of the Spirit, time for us to shout our *Amen* as we hear the words: "And make this bread the precious body of thy Christ." *Amen!* "And that which is in this cup the precious blood of thy Christ." *Amen!* "Changing them by Thy Holy Spirit." *Amen! Amen! Amen!* What we are in effect saying is: "So be it, Heavenly Father. This is my prayer, my fervent request. Let Your Holy Spirit come upon us and upon these gifts to change them into the precious body and blood of Jesus." If we really pray this prayer,

the result will be a new Pentecost, a new and powerful experience of God's presence in us.

In fact, the Emperor Justinian in the fifth Century A.D., decreed that the clergy pray the usually silent prayer of the anaphora or consecration with a louder voice so that the worshippers may be able to hear and respond with the triple *Amen*.

Participate By Singing

Another way by which we are invited to participate in the liturgy is by singing the hymns—not all, of course. There are some hymns that require a specialized choir. But from the earliest years the faithful have always sung the “Amens” and the other dialogue responses such as “Lord, have mercy,” “To Thee, O Lord,” “Grant this, O Lord,” “And with your spirit,” etc.

Theophan the Recluse, the great 19th Century bishop and spiritual writer, said:

“The purpose of church songs is precisely to make the spark of grace that is hidden within us burn brighter and with greater warmth. This spark is given by the Sacraments. Psalms, hymns, and spiritual odes are introduced to fan the spark and transform it into a flame . . .”

That is the purpose of singing: to fan the spark of faith and turn it into a flame! St. Augustine said, “He who sings prays twice.” Why shouldn't man sing? Is he not “the cantor of the universe” in the words of Abraham Heschel? Is it not the entire universe that praises God when man—the masterpiece of God's creation—stands up to sing praises to God? Doesn't all music begin with God? Who placed those beautiful songs in the birds? Who created the joy of our salvation? Doesn't our baptismal prayer say, “All creation *sang* to Thee when Thou didst appear among us?” Who places a song in our heart when He releases us from the burden of guilt? Why is it that we sing? Is it not because the joy God pours into our hearts through His resurrection is so great that we cannot merely say it with words; we have to sing it out? When Joseph Haydn, the great composer, was being criticized for the gaiety of his church music, he replied, “I cannot help it. I give forth what is in me. When I think of God, my heart is so full of joy that the notes fly off as from a spindle . . .”

— *We Participate By Hearing the "Secret" Prayers* —

Archbishop Paul of Finland writes:

"In the early Church all the prayers of the Liturgy were read aloud. The whole congregation participated in them. But as early as the sixth century some of the prayers of the Liturgy began to be read in a low voice by the celebrating priest. Although there were attempts to oppose this change, it gradually became the general practice, so that the handbook still indicates which parts of the prayers in the Liturgy are to be read 'secretly,' by the priest alone. However, insofar as there has been an effort to deepen the congregation's understanding of the Liturgy, it has now been found necessary to go back to the practice of reading the prayers of the Liturgy aloud."

*"How can the whole assembly of God's people participate in the sacrament of redemption with full understanding and true feeling and realize that they are a royal priesthood bringing spiritual offerings, if they hear only fragments or closing sentences of the common prayers without being aware of their meaning as a whole?"*⁶⁶

— *The Devil Has Nothing to Sing About* —

It is no wonder someone said once, "Christianity came into the world on wings of song. Infidelity never sings. Unbelief has no music, no anthems, no hymns, no oratorios or symphonies." When Robert Ingersoll, an agnostic, died, the printed notice of his funeral stated, "There will be no singing." Atheism and agnosticism have nothing to sing about. One great Christian said, "The devil hates music because he cannot stand gaiety. Satan can smirk but he cannot laugh; he can sneer but he cannot sing." He has nothing to sing about!

Kirchoff said of the beautiful hymns of the Eastern Church:

"As in heaven the singing of the angels rings out and soars around the exalted majesty of God . . . in the same way the Eastern Church is convinced that the service she offers God's majesty is the same as that of

*the angels . . . that her hymns are modeled on those of the angels, an echo of the everlasting song of the cherubim."*⁶⁷

Who Sang in the Early Church?

But who sings these beautiful hymns of the angels? Fr. Alexander Elchaninov answers, "Few 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 *their own faith* . . ." We sing to testify, to express our own faith, and to fan that spark of grace into a flame.

We sing as the apostles sang. After hearing of their Lord's imminent suffering and death, we read in Matthew that "they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives." There was no choir there to sing for them. They were the choir. And as they left the Upper Room that night and crossed the brook Kidron, again they sang a hymn. The Apostle Paul sang in prison at midnight. The apostles sang in joy and they sang in sorrow. They sang because God had put a song—the song of the resurrection—in their hearts.

We Heard No Music

There is a story of some monks in France who were known and loved for their great sympathy and kind deeds; but not one of them could sing. Try as they would, the music in their services was a failure, and it became a great grief to them that only in their hearts could they "make melody to the Lord."

One day a traveling monk, who was a great singer, asked for lodging. They were overjoyed, for now they could have him sing for their services, and they planned to keep him with them always.

But that night an angel appeared to the abbot in a dream, "Why was there no music in your chapel tonight? We angels always listen for the beautiful music that rises from your services."

"You must be mistaken!" cried the abbot, "Usually we have no music worth hearing; but tonight we had a trained singer with a wonderful voice, and he sang the service for us. For the first time in all these years our music was beautiful." The angel smiled. "And yet up in heaven we heard nothing," he said softly.

A Personal Testimony

May I conclude by sharing with you the personal testimony of a Presbyterian mother who visited the Soviet Union in 1984:

“I must admit to you that I set out on this journey for selfish reasons—to satisfy a life-long desire to see the Soviet Union to dispel some myths for my children when they ask. It’s funny how the Holy Spirit works (remember I was worshipping in the center of the Russian Orthodox Church on Pentecost!). I came home with a deeper spirituality and sense of inner peace than I have been consciously aware of. I attended Orthodox liturgy daily and each day my involvement became more intense.

“For Russian Orthodox Christians, the Divine Liturgy is a meeting place between heaven and earth; an area of life in which men and women commune with God. It is celebrated with a fervor that is uninhibited, yet not hysterical. The liturgy is performed in the Old Church Slavonic—a language the average Russian can neither theologically nor linguistically understand (nor could I!). The image of God is powerfully communicated by a synthesis of poetry, paintings, drama and music. It totally encompasses all 5 senses. Imagine, if you will, standing body to body with hundreds of people, immobilized for 2-3 hours. Smell the sweet incense surrounding you as the image of God. Hear the crackling tapers tended by babushka. There are birds chirping outside and sunbeams streaming through the onion dome. Feel the intense gaze of the icons sharing in the worship with you. How melodious Russian congregations sing without any musical accompaniment. Massed soprano voices, pure without training. You are hearing the angels sing! Imagine whispering in English the Creed, Gloria and Lord’s Prayer while the congregation chants them in the Old Church Slavonic. I cried everytime.

“I was anointed with a delicately fragranced oil to reconfirm my Baptism at Our Lady of Kazan Cathedral in Volgograd. As non-Orthodox, we were unable to receive the Holy Eucharist. That was very painful not to participate in a full union with my Orthodox brothers and sisters.

“Soviet society can offer no comparable calm or beauty to the Orthodox liturgy. I suggest the same is true for our society. Peace is invoked, requested and exchanged several times during the Divine Liturgy. Peace is not merely the absence of conflict, but

the presence of that Divine Person whose very being is order, harmony, joy, life, creation; and whose absence is emptiness, nothingness and chaos. This is made present in sight, sound, touch, taste, word and action each time the liturgy is celebrated. Through this, Orthodox Christians discover and receive the peace of God which passes all human understanding.”

