

A Worshiper's Guide to the
DIVINE LITURGY



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WHAT IS THE DIVINE LITURGY?



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 into English and French, Slavonic and Swahili, Korean and Arabic.

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, *Liturgy* referred to worship in the Temple in Jerusalem. 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

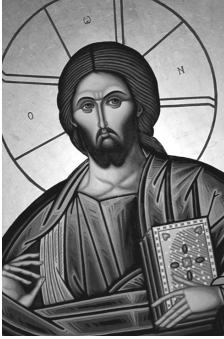
passive spectators. The laity con-celebrate with the officiating clergy as baptized believers and members of the "royal priesthood...a people belonging to God" (1 Peter 2:9).



WHO WAS ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM?

St. John Chrysostom (347-407 AD), 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. 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 407 AD 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.

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 our pilgrimage toward His Kingdom and a participation in His Kingdom. This announcement brings out the ultimate choice that the Lord Jesus asks everyone to make: Do I “seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness” (*Matthew 6:33*)? 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.

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. The very first thing we pray for in the Great Litany is for “the peace of God that surpasses all understanding” (*Philippians 4:7*) to be given to us, a state of inner peace, the ridding of our minds and hearts of every obsession and anxiety, all hostile feelings and fear, in order to worship the living God in a state of inner calm, trusting attentiveness and quiet joy. 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 civil leaders like our bishops and priests as well as our national and local political leaders as we are commanded to do in the Bible (*1 Timothy 2:1-3*); 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 our God” before praising the Holy Trinity.

WHY DO WE SAY “LORD, HAVE MERCY” SO OFTEN IN THE LITURGY?

The short answer is: because we take the words of the Bible seriously as a model for our prayer, whether we’re praying together as a community or personally. “Lord, have mercy” is based on the cry of the blind man sitting

along the side of the road near Jericho: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." (*Luke 18:38*); the cry of the 10 lepers for healing: "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." (*Luke 17:13*); and the prayer of the tax collector in the parable that the Lord Jesus told "to some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else" about the tax collector and the Pharisee: "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." (*Luke 18:14*). "Lord, have mercy" is a prayer that engenders humility, enables us to see ourselves more clearly - and therefore be less harsh and judgmental of others.

"Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life." (Jude 1:21)

COMMEMORATING....ALL THE SAINTS

Throughout the Liturgy we are asked to "commemorate...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." 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*).

"To know the saints is to deepen our relationship with their Master and ours — the Lord Jesus."

When we speak of Saints Peter and Paul and the apostles, Saints Katherine, Irene and Barbara the martyrs, Saints Basil, John Chrysostom and Nektarios the bishops, we are speaking of people who chose to live their lives in complete dedication to God, never betraying their innermost beliefs and striving to live with integrity and honesty, no matter what the cost. To know the saints is to deepen our relationship with their Master and ours — the Lord Jesus.

WHY DO WE “COMMEMORATE” THE VIRGIN MARY AND CALL HER THEOTOKOS?



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 for Mary lies in the fact that in the womb of this teen-aged Jewish girl the Word of God, who was with God and was God from all eternity, and through whom all things were created, became flesh and dwelt among us (*John 1:1-3, 14*). *Theotokos* as a title for the Virgin Mary is found in ancient Christian writings and is used for the first time in surviving documents by an early Christian scholar named Origen (185-254AD). *Theotokos* was officially proclaimed as a title to be used by Christians to describe the Virgin Mary at the Third Ecumenical Council held in the ancient city of Ephesus in 431AD.

WHERE DOES THE WORD “AMEN” COME FROM AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

The word "Amen" is an ancient Hebrew word used throughout the Liturgy. It is always an affirmation of the certainty and truth of what has just been said. Most simply, it means "Yes!" Amen is our "Yes" to God. The Hebrew root means "to be firm, confirmed, to be reliable." We find the word "amen" used by the apostle Paul to end two of his letters (*Romans 15:33; Galatians*

"...in saying 'Amen!' our whole life and being are engaged in an act of faith and ardent trust."

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 reaffirm our commitment to Christ.

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 chanter, each verse then followed by a refrain that was to be sung by the congregation as a whole. The two refrains are: "Through the intercessions of the *Theotokos*, Savior, save us" and "Save us, O Son of God, risen from the dead, we sing to You: Alleluia!"

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.

"PRAISE THE LORD, O MY SOUL..." (PSALM 146:1)

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 in 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 “ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON AND WORD OF GOD...”



The second Antiphon is followed by the singing of a kind of mini-Creed, the hymn ‘Only-begotten Son and Word of God...’ The opening words of this hymn are taken from John 1:14, 18 and John 3:16. It is an excellent summary of the essentials of the Christian faith in the Holy Trinity, the one God in three Persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—and in the incarnation, crucifixion and

resurrection of Christ Jesus, who is the immortal and eternal Word of God made flesh in the womb of the *Theotokos* and ever-Virgin Mary. 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 (482-565AD), the man responsible for the construction of the Great Church of the Holy Wisdom in Constantinople. This hymn, which ends the second Antiphon, was originally the Entrance Hymn 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 entering the Church from the narthex, through the main doors of the building, together with the laity.

THE ENTRANCE WITH THE GOSPEL BOOK: “THE LITTLE ENTRANCE”

Father Alexander Schmemmann (1921-1983) wrote: “We meet the expression ‘Little Entrance’ (as distinct from the *Great Entrance*) for the first time in manuscripts of the 14th century. We know that for a long time this Entrance was the *beginning* of the Liturgy. However, 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 area 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. Therefore the entrance, this 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” (*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 us to bear 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 BOOK OF THE GOSPELS

Adorned in gold or silver out of reverence and kept on the altar, it contains only the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. It is a sacramental embodiment of Christ and in the Liturgy and is kissed and treated like an icon of Christ, an icon written in words, not paint. Traditionally, the Entrance with the Gospels is said by St. Nicholas Cabasilas (1322-1391), to represent the entrance of Christ into the world. 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 signifies 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 come to 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."

THE TRISAGION OR THRICE HOLY HYMN

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 book 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, it is completely idolatrous and wrong. Yet, this utterly transcendent and holy

“human beings and angels form one Church and one choir.”

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, 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 heard by Isaiah the prophet (*Isaiah 6:3*), St Nicholas Cabasilas (1322-1392) says 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 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.”

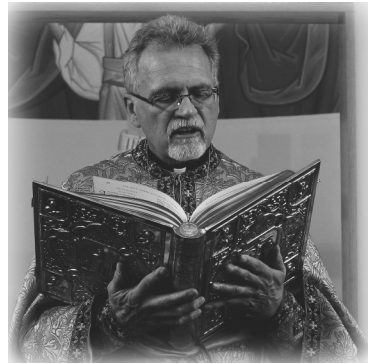
THE EPISTLE READING

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 the 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 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*).

THE GOSPEL READING

At every Liturgy we read from one of the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, all of which convey the life, teachings, crucifixion and 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-spell," meaning in more modern English, "good news." It is a 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 in old photos on the faces of the men and women in Times Square celebrating the end of World War II. For us, the Good News is that in Jesus Christ "the

Word of God" (*John 1:14*) and "the King of kings and Lord of lords" (*Revelation 17:14*), the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (*Acts 3:13*), 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*).

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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!



“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.”

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 directly from the Old Testament, particularly from the books of Exodus, Leviticus and the Psalms – and, as the New Testament *Letter to the Hebrews* teaches, all of these ancient elements of worship in the Temple and the synagogue which we still use to this day in the Liturgy, have now been brought to fulfillment in the life and teaching, crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, always pointing to Him.

THE GREAT ENTRANCE



Following the censuring of the interior of the Church by the celebrating clergy, the Great Entrance is the solemn procession during which the gifts of bread and wine are carried by the clergy from the special side altar (called the *Prothesis*) where the gifts have been prepared before the beginning of Liturgy to the main altar of the Church.

WHY DO WE USE INCENSE IN OUR WORSHIP? BECAUSE IT’S BIBLICAL!

Incense has always been intimately connected with worship in the Bible. Both in the Tabernacle during their wandering in the desert for 40 years,

“...the offering of incense represents the prayers of the saints ascending before Him (Revelation 5:8; 8:4).

and later in the Temple in Jerusalem, God commanded the people of Israel to offer incense in the morning and in the evening as part of their daily worship of Him (*Exodus 30:7-8; Psalm 141:2*); and in Malachi, the last book

of the Old Testament, it is prophesied that there will come a time when incense will be offered to the Name of the Lord even among the Gentiles (*Malachi 1:11*). And in the very last book of the Bible, the Apostle John



describes the use of incense as an integral part of the worship of God in His heavenly Kingdom, and that the offering of incense represents the prayers of the saints ascending before Him (*Revelation 5:8; 8:4*).

WHERE DOES THE WORD “ALLELUIA” COME FROM AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

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*). Meant to be a joyful 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.

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 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.

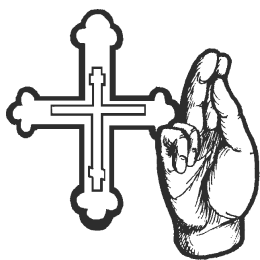
The Liturgy speaks over and over again about the reality of angels and archangels, the cherubim and the seraphim. The Scriptures witness to the



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 often serve as God’s messengers during 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 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. A simple custom, it is a statement of Christian faith which incorporates the entire body. Like many ancient customs, it has been done in a variety 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 both 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 time 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.

FOR A CHRISTIAN END TO OUR LIVES...

This is a petition prayed at every Liturgy. The Liturgy confronts us with the fact that death is something that awaits all of us. 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*).

THE KISS OF PEACE

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*). St. Cyril of Jerusalem, writing in the 4th century, discusses the exchange of the kiss of peace in his *Catechetical Orations*. This kiss, he says, is not 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 and forgiveness that bind Christians together. The customary greeting is “Christ is in our midst” and the response is “He is and will always be!”

CONFESSING THE CREED

Do you know what you believe? The Creed is a brief summary of the essentials of the Christian faith. 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 currently espoused by American society.

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; 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*).



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.

“IT IS PROPER AND RIGHT TO... WORSHIP YOU IN ALL PLACES OF YOUR DOMINION”

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.

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 patient, more compassionate towards others, more forgiving, more grateful, more peaceful, more faithful, more joyful. 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.

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. 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. Christ is present in the Divine Liturgy by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, making the Eucharist



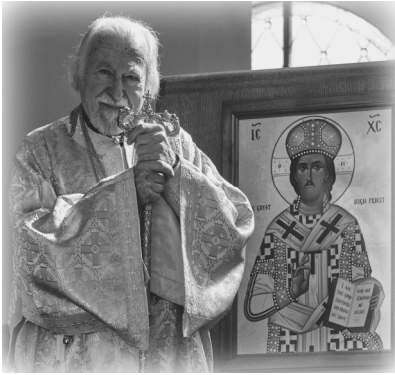
the source and summit of the Christian life, what St. Maximos the Confessor (580-662AD) called "the mystery of mysteries." And when we are receiving the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion, we are also participating in what St. Paul and the text of the Liturgy calls "the communion of the Holy 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 Liturgy.

...SEND UPON US DIVINE GRACE AND THE GIFT 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 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?

REMEMBERING OUR ARCHBISHOP....



The leadership office of bishop is mentioned in the Bible by St. Paul (*1 Timothy 3:1-7; Philippians 1:1*). 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, in some ways, a family of Churches that share the same faith and sacramental life. It is composed primarily of fourteen autocephalous (or self-governing) Churches: Constantinople, Moscow, Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem, Georgia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Cyprus, Albania, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Among these, in accordance with the canons of several Ecumenical Councils, the Patriarch of Constantinople (in modern Istanbul, Turkey) is ranked as "first among equals." 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 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 Archdiocesan District 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"): Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Denver, Detroit, New Jersey, Pittsburgh and San Francisco. Together they form a governing synod of bishops, chaired by the Archbishop of New York, under the auspices of the Patriarchate of Constantinople (located in the modern city of Istanbul, Turkey). However, Orthodox Christians – while honoring and continually praying for our spiritual leaders – must always bear in mind that it is Christ Himself who is *the only* true Head of the Church (*Ephesians 5:23*) and the chief Shepherd of our souls (*1 Peter 5:4*).

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 the 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.

By the words, "*Our Father*" the Lord Jesus teaches us to pray not merely as individuals but as members of His community, the Church. St. Paul writes: "because we have received adoption as God's children, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying out 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. "Hallowed" is the old English word meaning "to make holy" or "to sanctify." How do we sanctify God's holy name? We sanctify God's name by how we live our lives as believers, by being holy ourselves. The words "*Thy Kingdom*

*The purpose of life cannot be found in what I want.
It can be found only in what God wants.*

come" should make us tremble because here we pray for the end of the 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 give an account for how we have lived. In saying “*Thy will be done*” we recognize that we 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. The saints of the Church have interpreted the petition for “*our daily bread*” 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 that is His Body that we will receive in the mystery of Holy Communion (John 6:53-58). Next, *we ask God to forgive us as we have forgiven others “who have trespassed against us.”* 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. The petition, “*Lead us not into temptation...*” could be wrongly taken to imply that God Himself tempts us. Nothing could be further from the truth. 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).

RECEIVING HOLY COMMUNION: THE BODY AND BLOOD OF THE SAVIOR



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 the Old Testament sacrifices of the Temple in Jerusalem. It is about partaking in what St. Ignatius of Antioch (c.115AD) called "the medicine of immortality," which we, who are sick and dying, need for eternal life.

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 preparation for and 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 a person must be Baptized and/or Chrismated in the Orthodox Church and that one's beliefs and lifestyle are in accordance with the teachings of the Church.

*We truly receive the Body and Blood of the Crucified,
Risen and Glorified Lord Jesus as He promises:*

*"I 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. 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. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is truly food and my blood is truly drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me, and I live in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who eats of me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who eats this bread will live forever." Jesus said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum" (*John 6:51-59*).*

The Apostle Paul wrote: "Is not the cup of blessing that we bless a participation in the Blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the Body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf"

(1 Corinthians 10:16-17).

In the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the Lord Jesus gives us everything, giving Himself completely to 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 celebration of the Liturgy. The word that best expresses this mystery of God's total offering of Himself to us in 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" (*Galatians 1:22 and 2:20; 1 Corinthians 15:22; Romans 8:1*).

LIVING A EUCHARISTIC LIFE IS LIVING WITH GRATITUDE

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 through Christ in the Holy Spirit, 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.



Living in a Eucharistic way has everything to do with seeing life as a gift, a gift for which we are forever grateful. It is, after all, not happy people who are grateful, but grateful people who are happy. 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 that we attend 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.

Our *communion* with Jesus in the Liturgy means becoming like Him. When, after the Liturgy, we leave the Church we must live what we've just celebrated as long and as fully as we can. Because Christ is holy, just, forgiving, merciful, and loving, Christians are called to participate in His holiness and express His love, mercy, forgiveness and justice in their everyday lives.

REPENTANCE: RE-ORIENTING OUR LIVES

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 at hand" (*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 Ninevah (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."

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 blessed bread. Then what is it? The last thing we do is leave the Church. 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. And as Christians, "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. 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 His love real 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*). Each of us is called to continue the Liturgy in the everyday circumstances of our personal lives, to become a living proclamation of the Good News for the sake of the world. We are to be missionaries of His Kingdom in the world. The final act of receiving is giving.



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