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Introduction

Before discussing the order and form of Orthodox worship it is important to note the radical shift in experiences when someone transitions from a Western style of utilitarian style of worship, whether Catholic or Protestant, to the Eastern Orthodox (Byzantine) rite. Orthodox author Hugh Wybrew captures this well this when he writes,

“The Western Christian is used to a form of service whose structure is simple and clear. The Eucharist is celebrated in Western churches in a variety of ways with a great diversity in style. Many congregations have embraced new forms and new ways with greater enthusiasm than others. Unnecessary movements or gesture is discouraged, lest the essential structure and movement of the service be obscured. The building tends to be simple in their design and restrained in decoration [as] it is emphasized that the building is only the place where the living church assembles...And little in Orthodox service astonishes Western Christians more than the relative silence of the Orthodox congregation¹.”

The multiple elements necessary for an Orthodox Divine Liturgy, the votives, candles, icons, clergy vestments, incense, processions, and Holy Communion require a total engagement of all the human senses, so much so that the entire experience, to include the church building is considered to be sacramental. *Far more than just a utilitarian shelter for the congregation it is an image of heaven on earth.*

This was precisely the image of the ambassadors of Prince Vladimir of Kiev who were sent to seek out a new religion to replace paganism. When their travels eventually led them to the glorious Hagia Sophia cathedral in Constantinople, they reported back to the prince saying;

“And we went into the Greek lands, and we were led into a place where they serve their God, and we did not know where we were, on heaven or on earth; and do not know how to tell about this. All we know is that God lives there with people and their service is better than in any other country. We cannot forget that beauty since each person, if he eats something sweet, will not take something bitter afterwards; so we cannot remain any more in paganism.”

1. Origin of the Liturgical Rite²

In Orthodox theology, the first divine service was offered by Adam and Eve together in the Garden of Eden. In Paradise, divine worship consisted of freely glorifying God, which came naturally to them because of their unblemished vision of God in His Divine Energies. After the Fall, this “vision” became clouded, and worship required effort on the part of Man. Now worship was accomplished in the form of codified and structured offerings, prayers, and rites according to Mosaic Law. The Torah prescribed specific liturgical days and feasts were instituted.

After the Resurrection of Jesus and Pentecost, the Early Church continued to participate in the rites of the Jewish Temple (Acts 2, 3, and 5) but added the celebration of the new form of the Eucharist in remembrance of the Last Supper event. This is evident in the letters of St Paul, when he reminds these

¹ [The Orthodox Liturgy: Development of the Eucharistic Liturgy in the Byzantine Rite](#), H. Wybrew, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003

² Ibid.

new Christian communities to “...hold to the traditions just as I passed them on to you...For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you...” (1 Cor 11:1,17)

After the Second Destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 AD, Christians began to develop their own distinct forms of worship but did retain some elements of Old Testament worship (chanting of the Psalms, use of incense, Scriptural readings, etc.) and specific times of the day for worship.

By the 4th century however Wybrew notes that the view of the Eucharist by the early Christians is reversed. St Paul’s writings affirm that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, but in St Cyril’s teaching “it is not we who are reconciled with God, but God who is propitiated by the sacrifice of Christ which we offer and is so inclined to hear our supplications³.”

Over the next several hundred years the Divine Liturgy continued to evolve both in form and substance slowly adding certain elements that form the Divine Liturgy we celebrate today. However, many of those original elements that were part of the liturgies celebrated by Sts. Basil and Chrysostom in the 4th and 5th centuries continue to connect us with those ancient divine Liturgies.

2. Liturgical Services

In the liturgical cycle of the church day there are three (3) categories of prayer, each associated with a particular time of the day, reflective of the Jewish custom of prayer at morning, noon and evening⁴. Sometimes the question is asked, “Does the Orthodox Church have required times of prayer as do the Jews and the Muslims?” The answer is yes, there are seven (7) times of prayer, Vespers, Midnight Office, Matins, Liturgy, Terce, Sext, and None⁵ (which correspond to the third, sixth and ninth hours). The Acts of the Apostles, the Didache of around 100 AD, and the Early Church Fathers make mention of these prayer times.

Though the particular services will differ slightly based on the feast day being celebrated, and the season of the liturgical year, the typical format is as follows:

Evening—Ninth Hour, Vespers, Compline

Morning—(Midnight Office), Matins, First Hour

Noonday—Third Hour, Sixth Hour, Divine Liturgy

While monasteries generally serve the entire cycle of services, in the parish not all these services are celebrated. The most common in the parish are Vespers, Compline, Matins, and Divine Liturgy. The Divine Liturgy is not technically a part of the daily cycle of services, since theologically, the celebration of the Eucharist takes place outside of time.

Vespers

Similar to the Jewish practice of reckoning the end of the day, the liturgical day begins at sunset, with Vespers being the first service of the day. The hymns of Vespers introduce the themes of the upcoming

³ Ibid., 36

⁴ Ref. Daniel 6:10

⁵ Terce, Sext, and None refer to the Latin terms third, sixth, and ninth.

day. There are three (3) forms of Vespers: Great Vespers, Daily Vespers and Small Vespers. Great Vespers is the form served on Saturdays in anticipation of Resurrection Sunday and on the eve of major feast days. This is the only recurring service in which there are readings from the Old Testament. While the Catholic Mass retained Old Testament readings, they have been removed from the Orthodox Liturgy.

Orthros or Matins

The morning service that immediately proceeds the Divine Liturgy is the Orthros, which in Greek means “daybreak”. The term Matins is from the Latin, matutinum, meaning “of the morning”. The major exception to this “morning” rule is during Holy Week when the Matins are celebrated at night in anticipation of the following day’s celebration.

Orthros is the last of the four (4) night offices, which also include vespers, compline, and midnight office. The Matins is the longest and most complex of the daily cycle of services. The intent of this service was as the original “religious education or Sunday School.” This is because the hymns are all focused on the saint or event of the particular day and in ancient times hymns were the best way to pass on the theology of the church to the people. The Matins also contain the Synaxarion which is a short narrative of the life of a saint or of the feast of the day.

It is during Matins that the priest prepares the gifts (bread and wine) for the Divine Liturgy while praying for those who have offered the bread, and the commemoration of names, both living and dead as requested by the laity.

Divine Liturgy

The term Divine Liturgy is composed of several Greek words; Θεία – that which is holy or divine, λειτός - public (derived from λαός – people) and έργο – work. The term λειτουργία, (liturgy) while still in use today to mean “the operation or working of a device,” in Greek antiquity described those services or acts that were performed for the benefit and common interest of all, including acts of worship. When used in an ecclesiastical sense this “service or work of the people for the benefit and common interest of all” is the worship of and Communion with God. The Divine Liturgy, in addition to the Christian expression of the worship of God is the only service where the sacrament of Holy Communion is distributed publicly⁶.

Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, Russia refers to the services of the Orthodox Church as a *school of theology* and the Divine Liturgy as this [*school par excellence*](#), describing the Divine Liturgy as,

“an icon of the Kingdom [of Heaven], the most complete, perfect reflection of the heavenly reality in our earthly conditions...In this sense it is correctly said that the Liturgy served on earth is but a part of the incessant Liturgy celebrated by people and angels in the Heavenly Kingdom.”

St John of Kronstadt⁷ explains the overarching purpose of the Divine Liturgy writing,

⁶ In the Catholic and Protestant churches Liturgy is referred to as Mass and Holy Communion as Eucharist.

⁷ John of Kronstadt, 1829-1909, Russian Orthodox Archpriest and Orthodox author canonized by the Moscow Patriarchate in 1990.

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“The Church and its divine services are an embodiment and realization of everything in Christianity. Here, in words and actions, are told the entire economy of our salvation, all of Sacred and Church history, all the goodness, wisdom, faithfulness and immutability of God in His deeds and promises, His truth, holiness and eternal might. Here we encounter a wonderful harmony in everything and an amazing logic both in the whole and in the parts. It is the divine wisdom, accessible to simple, loving hearts.”

While it was seen earlier that the Divine Liturgy has had a long evolution throughout the history of the Church, there are four categories of Liturgies which are currently performed.

- **St John Chrysostom** – standard liturgy performed on most Sundays.
- **St Basil** – celebrated on Christmas, Theophany, Holy Thursday and Saturday and on St Basil’s nameday.
- **St James**, Brother of our Lord – celebrated on St James’s name day.
- **Pre-Sanctified** – See Session 9, *Services of Orthodox Great Lent and Holy Week*

Order of the Divine Liturgy

Although certainly the words and prayers have evolved, the order of the Divine Liturgy today is similar to that which was given by Justin Martyr in the 2nd Century,

1. Opening Exclamation and Great Litany
2. The reading of the Scriptures, both Gospels and Epistles
3. the offering of bread, wine and water
4. the long thanksgiving and prayers of sanctification
5. the partaking of Holy Communion
6. the collection for charity and dismissal

Today’s Liturgy has added and formalized several elements such as the Antiphons, Small and Great Entrances, the Lord’s Prayer, the Nicene Creed, Anamnesis, Anaphora, prayers for the living and the dead, and Dismissal.

The Divine Liturgy, while offering the Body and Blood of Christ for our salvation, also transports us to be together with the Apostles in the Upper Room sharing the Last Supper with our Lord. The Orthodox Divine Liturgy can be broken down into two parts, *Liturgy of the Word* and *Liturgy of the Eucharist*.

In the first part, ***Liturgy of the Word***, the prayers are directed more universally and publicly. In this first part there are readings from the Letters or Epistles, along with a reading from one of the four Gospels, along with a sermon on the Gospel reading of the day, however readings from the Old Testament have fallen out of use unlike in a Roman Catholic Liturgy (Mass). The Liturgy of the Word was historically open to all, whether baptized or not, however the second part, ***Liturgy of the Eucharist*** was closed to only baptized Orthodox Christians. Today the entire service is open to all people, with only the receipt of Holy Communion being “closed” or restricted to only Orthodox Christians. A remembrance of this expelling of the unbaptized from the church is seen in the Liturgy today when the Deacon exclaims, just

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prior to the reading of the Creed, *"The doors, the doors..."* In the Church of the Byzantine era this was this signal to the deacons and subdeacons to remove all the unbaptized persons from the Liturgy and close the doors of the sanctuary signaling the beginning of the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

With reference to the bread used for Holy Communion, in the Orthodox Church the bread is leavened whereas for Catholics it is unleavened. For Catholics the unleavened bread is seen as a remembrance of the unleavened bread that Israel eats every year at Passover commemorates the haste of the departure that liberated them from Egypt; the remembrance of the manna in the desert will always recall to Israel that it lives by the bread of the Word of God.⁸ For Orthodox,



Christ is seen as the leavening agent who fulfills the final covenant. However, since either type of bread is valid matter for the Eucharistic sacrifice, this difference is not of significant dogmatic importance.



The Orthodox Church also continues the historic tradition of using altar breads (figure __) for the "host" as opposed to the thin wafers (figure __) used in the Roman Catholic rite⁹.

In the second part of the Divine Liturgy, (**Liturgy of the Eucharist**) there are two main components, the **Anamnesis** and the **Consecration** along with the receipt of Holy Communion by the faithful and dismissal prayers.

The **Anamnesis** (Greek ανάμνησις) meaning "remembrance" repeats Jesus' words in Scripture,

"And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.' (εις την εμην αναμνησιν). In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.'"

Luke 22:19-22

This "remembrance" has been retained by almost all Christian worship services, even in many non-denominational services but the act of consecration is preserved only in the Orthodox, Catholic and certain High Protestant rites. At the consecration the celebrant, either the priest or the bishop says,

"...we offer to You [God] this spiritual worship without the shedding of blood, we beseech and pray and entreat that You send down Your Holy Spirit upon us and upon the gifts here presented and make this bread the precious Body of Your Christ, and that which is in this Cup, the precious Blood of Your Christ, changing them by Your Holy Spirit."

⁸ Paragraph 1334 of the **Catechism of the Catholic Church**. Additionally, Canon 926 of the Catholic Church requires the priest to use unleavened bread in the eucharistic celebration whenever he offers it.

⁹ The earliest documentary evidence of altar-breads made in thin wafers is found in the Bull of Excommunication which Cardinal Humbert, legate of St. Leo IX sent to Michael Cerularius, Patriarch of Constantinople in the middle of the 11th century.

VIDEOS



Unlike the Catholic or Anglican Churches, Orthodox theology does not use any terms to describe the mechanism of consecration such as transubstantiation or consubstantiation but rather sees this transformation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ as a mystery, hence the Orthodox reference to the Eucharist as Ἁγιά Μυστήρια (Holy Mysteries). And unlike many protestant churches the Orthodox Church sees the partaking of Holy Communion as *essential for salvation*, thus it is expected that every baptized Orthodox Christian, adult, child, and infant will be regular communicants of Holy Communion. As the Orthodox Church sees Holy Communion as truly Body and Blood of Jesus it is also expected that each communicant will properly prepare to receive by fasting, confession and repentance¹⁰. This is based on St. Paul's teaching regarding the receipt of Holy Communion,

So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.

1 Corinthians 11:27-29

Who Can Receive Holy Communion?

As was stated earlier, in the Orthodox Church the receipt of Holy Communion is “closed” or restricted to only Orthodox Christians. This is because the Orthodox Church, unlike many Protestant Churches, “*does not view Holy Communion as an instrument to achieve Christian unity, but the very sign and crowning of that union based on doctrinal truths and canonical harmony already held and possessed in common. The Eucharist [for the Orthodox] is both a celebration and a confession of the faith of the Church and thus it is not possible therefore to approach Holy Communion by way of hospitality.*”¹¹

There is however a sign of hospitality which is the offering of ἀντίδωρον or blessed bread. This term mean “instead of the Gift” (the Gift being Holy Communion) and is given to all attendees, Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike as a sign of welcome and hospitality. This ἀντίδωρον or blessed bread is the bread that remains after the priest cuts out the “lamb” from the center of the prosphoron (bread of oblation). The acolytes will then cut this bread and other prosphora, as needed, into small squares that are handed out by the priest at the completion of the Divine Liturgy.



The Hours

In ancient times the Jewish people reckoned time in terms of “hours” which do not conform to our present-day notion of 24 hours in a day. The 24-day was divided into twelve (12) periods of time referred to as the “hours” and are shown in table 1.

¹⁰ An Introduction to the Divine Liturgy, Fr. Alkiviades Calivas, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1985

¹¹ Ibid

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In remembrance of the Passion of Christ the Orthodox Church has preserved four (4) of these hours as prayer services to commemorate the important events during His Passion week. Thus, the services of Hours are the First, Third, Sixth and Ninth. The services consist mostly of psalms which are generally related to the Passion events which took place at those particular hours of the day. The Third Hour also refers to the coming of the Holy Spirit to the disciples on Pentecost.

Hymns of the feast being celebrated are added to the Hours. During the first days of Holy Week as well as on certain major feasts, the Gospel is also read during the Hours. Other elements include the Beatitudes and the Creed which are typically read after the Ninth Hour.

Service of the Hours

First Hour *"To You I pray, O Lord; in the morning You hear my voice!"*

At this early hour when we awake, we ask God to guard us from everything that could harm us in either body or soul. Also we ask

for spiritual awakening through Jesus Christ who is the "true light who comes into the world." This is the time at which Christ was led into the Praetorium before Pilate. Here we read Psalm 5.

Third Hour *"Take not Your Holy Spirit from me."*

Tradition ascribes this hour to the time when the Holy Spirit came down upon the apostles on Pentecost. We give thanks to God for this gift and ask that He never deprive us of the fruits and graces of the Spirit. We also commemorate the condemnation of Christ by Pilate. The Psalm read here is the 50th which is the Psalm of repentance.

Sixth Hour *"There they crucified Him... It was now about the sixth hour"*

This is about 12 noon, the time when Pilate released Christ to the Jews, and they condemned Him and nailed Him to the Cross. For His suffering for our salvation, we give thanks for this sacrifice of God for His creation. (Luke 23: 33,44) Here we read Psalm 54.

Ninth Hour *"And at the ninth hour...Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last."*

At this hour (between 3 and 4pm) tradition holds that Jesus died on the Cross. It is when He promised His kingdom to the repentant thief. (Mark 15: 34,37) We give thanks singing hymns of these saving events. Here we read Psalm 84.

The Vigil

The Vigil service comprises the daily services of Great Vespers, Matins, and First Hour. In the monastery it is celebrated on the evening before each Great Feast, every Sunday, and for certain saints of the Church. Sometimes referred to as the "all-night vigil" since in the early Church it began at sunset and continued through the night until dawn. To this day in places like Mount Athos, the Vigil is served through the night (for up to eight hours), preserving the ascetical effort and eschatological anticipation of the service. However, in most parishes the vigil is much reduced beginning earlier in the evening and lasting two or three hours.

FIRST HOUR	DAWN - 8AM
SECOND HOUR	8-9AM
THIRD HOUR	9-10AM
FOURTH HOUR	10-11AM
FIFTH HOUR	11-12PM
SIXTH HOUR	NOON -1PM
SEVENTH HOUR	1-2PM
EIGHTH HOUR	2-3PM
NINTH HOUR	3-4PM
TENTH HOUR	4-5PM
ELEVENTH HOUR	5-6PM
TWELFTH HOUR	6PM-SUNDOWN

Table 1

While many Orthodox see the Vigil in terms of the quantity of time spent in the service, the primary importance is qualitative. In ancient times, “vigil” referred to time spent on guard duty, or ‘keeping watch’. In the Church, it means time spent in attentive preparation and ‘waiting on God’. Spiritual growth needs time for development but this spiritual growth is difficult, if not almost impossible, for Modern Man to accomplish due to his impatience and need to achieve quick results. Participation in a Vigil allows us to take time seriously. The Vigil takes us back to the idea of *καῖρός* or God’s time and prepares us for the end of time when all things will be fulfilled in the coming of Christ’s kingdom.

The concept of a vigil is given in the New Testament when Christ instructed His disciples to “watch and pray” so that, though they did not know the hour of His return, they might be ready for it. To keep vigil in the historical and ascetic sense is to deprive oneself of a measure of usual sleep to keep watch, waiting in readiness for the coming of the Son of Man at midnight. (Mark 13:35)

In parish practice, the two to three-hour service still represents a significant ascetical effort and gives us the time needed for spiritual cleansing and renewal after all the cares, struggles, and sins of the week. It gives us time to get our mind back on God, to honor Him and render thanks, to prepare ourselves for participation in the Holy Mysteries. It gives us time to soften our hearts before God if they have hardened against someone during the week. The Vigil helps us decompress from that pressure to conform to the world and to again offer ourselves to Christ. It allows us to free our minds from the cares and temptations of the week, to cleanse ourselves of the stains of sin, so that we may present ourselves at the upcoming Divine Liturgy with cleansed hearts, eager and ready to receive the Body and Blood of our Lord.

In accordance with this principle, singing also makes up an important part of the All-night Vigil. The opening psalm of Vespers, the Psalm of Creation (103), the kathisma Psalms (1-8) Blessed is the Man, and St. Symeon’s Prayer, all of which are read by the reader at daily Vespers are sung at the Vigil. Ten hymns for Sunday rather than the typical six of a weekday are inserted and sung at Lord, I Have Cried. At Matins, the Polyeleos and Evlogitaria, not a part of Daily Matins, are inserted and sung, as is the hymn Having Beheld the Resurrection of Christ at resurrectional Vigils, and the Magnification is sung on Great Feasts and for important saints. The Great Doxology is sung, replacing the read Lesser Doxology of Daily Matins, and the Praises are sung with eight hymns inserted.

4. Special Services

a) **Holy Week** - see Session 9.

b) **Blessing of the Waters** In Greek *Αγιασμός*, this service recalls the Baptism of our Lord and marks the first revelation of His place in the Holy Trinity.

‘And when Jesus was baptized, immediately He went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on Him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased”’ (Matthew 3:16-17).

Significance of Holy Water The blessing of the waters is as important as the blessing of food or the blessing a priest gives to those who approach him. Holy Water is not merely water of spiritual

significance but is renewed through an intertwining of heaven and earth and of grace and matter¹². This spiritual-material link between the Holy Spirit and holy water can be observed throughout both the Old and the New Testaments. The importance and power of the blessed water is clearly expressed in the prayer that is said by the priest before a candidate is baptized,

“O loving king, be present now also through the descent of your Holy Spirit and sanctify this water, giving it the grace of redemption, the blessing of the Jordan, a healing of sickness, unapproachable by hostile powers and filled with angelic might.”

For this reason, the Church considers holy water so beneficial for the faithful that those who have a canonical impediment (ie. are not able to receive Holy Communion for a time) can partake of it in place of Holy Communion for the health of body and soul.

Services for the Blessing of the Waters

There are two services in the Orthodox Church for the blessing of the water, the Great Blessing of the Waters and the Lesser (Small) Blessing of the Waters.

The Great Blessing of the Waters occurs two times in the year: the day before the feast of the Theophany (January 5) and on the feast of the Theophany (January 6). It is typically after this service that the parish priest will travel to the parishioner homes to celebrate the annual blessing of the homes.

The Lesser Blessing of the Water (Small Agiasmos) can take place any time throughout the year. This service is commonly celebrated in homes, workplaces, schools, etc. Many parishes, following the monastic tradition, will also celebrate this Lesser Blessing on the first of every month in the church.

The Holy Water Font



Once the Blessing of the Waters service has been celebrated the blessed water is kept in a small font from which the parishioners can partake or refill their holy water bottles when necessary.

This font is typically placed in the Narthex of the church to allow easy access by the parishioners.

However, it should be noted that this font is not used in the same manner as would be the Catholic Holy Water Font. In the case of the

Catholic Church locating the holy water fonts at the entrance of the church emphasizes the difference between ordinary space and sacred space. When a

Catholic parishioner enters the church, they will bless themselves by dipping their finger into the water and making the sign of the cross. Also, the placement of the font at the entrance of the church harkens to the time of the Early Churches when holy water was used for the ritual “washing” or “cleansing” as an initial step prior to formal worship.



Proper Use and Disposal of Holy Water

¹² Recall Jesus’ answer to Nicodemus, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.” John 3:5

Most Orthodox will keep a bottle of Holy (Blessed) water in the home to use until replaced at the next years' service. Many Orthodox will drink it in the morning when they wake up before eating breakfast or drink it when sick or recovering from an operation or illness. In addition to being consumed either by drinking the water directly or adding some of it to a meal being prepared. Also it can be used to bless or sanctify objects in the home such as an iconostasis, icons, crosses, or the home, when a priest is not available.

Holy Water should be replaced each year with new holy water from the Great Agiasmos. Bottles of holy water from the previous year should be consumed. If there is reason to suspect that the water is contaminated, it can be returned directly to the earth by pouring it on plants or in the back yard and not down the drain or poured on a sidewalk or driveway. For purposes of recycling and conservation, the existing holy water bottles should then be cleaned and reused.

It is Really Necessary to Bless Our Homes Every Year

Since God has already redeemed all matter through His life why do we continue to bless with holy water? Isn't the celebration and remembrance of Theophany once a year enough to tell us as Orthodox Christians that God's promise has already been fulfilled?

Priests have been blessing homes from the time of the Early Church. When Abbot de la Barre traveled the roads of Normandy to bless houses, he would write the following inscription in chalk on each door lintel,

"Blessing the house is a visible sign that, through his incarnation, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, 'lived among us' and acts in our souls every day, in the humility of everyday domestic life."

Unlike chalk, the holy water leaves no visible trace, but the home is still occupied by the family and friends who reside in the grace of the Holy Spirit, the same which sanctified the waters of the Jordan at Christ's baptism. The Blessing of the Home is a sign that testifies that this Christian house is "a living organism" within the body of the Christ. The annual blessing of homes with holy water maintains the spiritual association between the "family church" and the community church (parish). While not as elaborate as the blessing of the new home, the annual blessing should not be overlooked, for it is in this way that the grace of God is extended to family church¹³.

c) Artoklasia – Blessing of the Five Loaves

The Blessing of Five Loaves (αρτοκλασία) is a service of thanksgiving through which we express our gratitude for particular blessings God has bestowed on us. It is a two-part Greek word, αρτο – bread and κλαω – to break. The five loaves remind us of the miracle of the multiplication and breaking of the bread by which Christ fed the multitude. The service includes hymns, petitions and prayers for health, well-being and strength to endure all of life's difficulties.

Material items of Creations, specifically oil, wine, wheat, and loaves of bread are used in the service, representing the most basic elements necessary for life. This Blessing is usually offered during Vespers or after the Divine Liturgy on Feast days and other special occasions. After the Service, the bread is cut

¹³ [*Marriage and the Christian Home*](#) by Fr. Michael B. Henning

and distributed to the congregation. Typically, the bread is either the same as prosphoro that is used for Divine Liturgy or is a cake-like bread. The hymn sung at the end of the service recalls Psalm 35 from the Old Testament and the promise of Christ eternal kingdom.

"The rich have become poor and gone hungry but those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing."

d) Memorial Service

Why Do We Pray for the Dead?

This service is one of the more difficult concepts for a Protestant Christian to appreciate since in the Protestant expression of Christianity there is no efficacy seen in prayers for the departed. The Orthodox Church, like the Catholic Church, does believe that prayers for the departed influence God's mercy for the redemption of the soul of the departed.

The rejection of prayers for the dead by the Protestant faith is both a biblical and historical issue. Biblically, the claim is that there is no definitive Scriptural evidence of praying for the dead. Historically, the corruption of the indulgence practices of the Medieval Catholic Church ignited the Protestant Reformation which began with Martin Luther posting his 95 Theses.

Scriptural Support. The Orthodox Church recognizes the intent of prayers for the dead in several places.

Genesis 18:22-33 In the Old Testament the dialogue between God and Abraham, Abraham asks God to stay the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Orthodox interpret this passage as a demonstration that God can be moved to mercy through our entreaties as He was for Abraham.

The Book of Maccabees seems to indicate that the practice of praying for the departed was practiced among the Jews before Christ and that these prayers were reckoned praiseworthy and acceptable before God¹⁴.

"And the noble Judas ... took up a collection ... to provide for a sin offering. In doing this he acted very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection. For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore, he made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin." (2 Maccabees 12:42-45)

2 Timothy 1:16-18 In the New Testament in Paul's letter to Timothy he speaks of a prayer for his departed friend, *"May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me; he was not ashamed of my chains, ... may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that Day [for] the service he rendered at Ephesus."*¹⁵

¹⁴ It has been argued that this "atonement" or "sin-offering" was not a liturgical prayer for the dead since this would be contrary to Torah Law and as these services were conducted mainly by the Sadducees, prayer for the dead would not have been recognized.

¹⁵ Although considered apocryphal, The Acts of Philip (4th century) also makes reference to prayers for the dead, *"...[Bartholomew and Mariamme] took down [Philip's] body...and they did all that had been commanded them by him, offering an offering for forty days, praying without ceasing."*

Job 1:5 St John Chrysostom, in his homily 41, offers Scriptural evidence from the book of Job concerning memorials,

Let us then give them aid and perform commemoration for them. For if the children of Job were purged by the sacrifice of their father, why do you doubt that when we too offer for the departed, some consolation arises to them? Since God is wont to grant the petitions of those who ask for others. And this Paul signified saying, that in a manifold Person your gift towards us bestowed by many may be acknowledged with thanksgiving on your behalf. Let us not then be weary in giving aid to the departed, both by offering on their behalf and obtaining prayers for them¹⁶.

Memorial Prayer in the Early Church¹⁷

General prayers for the departed, within a liturgical context do appear prior to the 3rd century and are referenced by Sts. Cyprian, and Tertullian. An example of this is the instruction in the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus,

“If an anamnesis (memorial) is held for the dead, let the people receive the mysteries (Eucharist) before sitting down to partake of the memorial feast.”

However even when prayers were read for the departed in Church, *the language indicated that these prayers were offered on the assumption that the departed had truly “hoped and believed in God” and were now resting in Christ.*¹⁸

However, formal prayers for the dead *by name* do not appear until to the 3rd century. St. Cyril of Jerusalem, in explaining the order of the Divine Liturgy, states,

“...after invoking the Holy Spirit we entreat God for common peace of the Church, kings, soldiers...Next, we commemorate those who have fallen asleep, patriarchs, prophets, apostles...and for all of ours who in the past years have fallen asleep, believing that there will accrue to the greatest advantage the souls for whom the supplication is presented...”

To be clear though, the Church, Orthodox or Catholic, claims no power of absolving the departed from sins. It is only by way of prayers, both personal and intercessory, that the Church adds her official or corporate intercession to that of the person who beseeches God for His infinite love and mercy.

Finally, it is important to remember that as Orthodox Christians we obtain our faith and belief from two important and critical sources: Holy Scripture **and** Holy Tradition.

When are Memorial Prayers Read?

Divine Liturgy – The priest remembers the departed in the prayers 3 times; first during the Proskomide before the Liturgy, second, after the consecration of the Holy Gifts, and third after the faithful receive Holy Communion.

¹⁶ St John Chrysostom's Homily 41, commentary on 1 Corinthians 15

¹⁷ An excellent article which discusses the memorial prayers in the Early Church is entitled *Prayers of the Ancient Church for the Faithful Departed* by G.F. Hamilton, The Irish Quarterly, Vol. 9, No. 35, July 1916.

¹⁸ *Ussher's Answer to a Challenge Made by a Jesuit in Ireland*, 1631, pp. 194-275

SESSION 5

SERVICES OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

Memorial Service – service specifically designated in which the Church to remember the departed and is celebrated with koliva. According to tradition, the Memorial Service is offered in the church on the 40th day after a death, as well as on the yearly anniversary of the death.

Saturdays of the Souls¹⁹ – a Divine Liturgy with a Memorial service where the names of all the departed are read. The Saturday of Souls is conducted on four specific Saturdays; the two Saturdays preceding Great Lent; the first Saturday of Great Lent; and the Saturday before Pentecost.

Graveside – Any parishioner can request the priest to come to the cemetery to read the [Trisagion](#) prayer for their departed. This graveside memorial service is celebrated on the day of the funeral at the cemetery, at 9 days, 40 days and then at the discretion of the family. Koliva is typically spread over the gravesite at the completion of the Trisagion service.

Koliva – traditional dish of boiled wheat kernels and other ingredients such as sesame seeds, almonds, ground walnuts, anise and parsley. Koliva made during the first year of death does not include any sweet items to symbolize the bitterness of the mourning during the first year. After the first year sweet ingredients such as sugar, cinnamon, pomegranate seeds, and raisins are typically added. The koliva is symbolic of death and resurrection since the wheat kernel must be planted in the earth in order to grow to new life.



e) Churching – The 40-day Blessing

This Tradition hearkens to the Old Testament custom of parents bringing their baby to the Temple for the first time on the 40th day as Mary and Joseph took the Christ child to the temple. The Orthodox Church commemorates this event as the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord.

Those first 40 days, are a time of rest and bonding for the mother and child. Interestingly medical science has found that it takes approximately six weeks for a woman's body to heal after giving birth to a baby and that today, most jobs allow women to take 6 weeks (42 days) of maternity leave.

The prayers of the Churching are also for the mother as well as the child. This is because, according to the canons of the Church failure to attend church for three consecutive Sundays results in the excommunication of that parishioner²⁰. Since the 40 days constitutes more than three Sundays, the first prayer is to receive the mother back into communion with the Church,

"...we pray to You and implore You, cleanse this Your servant (Name), whom by Your Will You have preserved, and who now comes into Your Holy Church, from every transgression, so that she may be accounted worthy to partake of Your holy Mysteries without condemnation."

This is the reason why you might see the mother and child remain in the Narthex during the Divine Liturgy not entering the sanctuary until the prayers are read to receive her back into the church.

¹⁹ See also Session 9, *Services of Great Lent and Holy Week* for more details on Saturday of Souls service.

²⁰ Canon 80 of the Sixth (6th) Ecumenical Council, 680 AD.

Another tradition, no longer practiced, is that the baby would remain unnamed until the 40-day blessing and be given their name by the Godparents.

The closing prayer of the 40-day blessing is the same words of the righteous Symeon when he beheld the Christ child,

“Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared before the face of all people, a Light to enlighten the Gentiles, and the Glory of Your people of Israel.” ²¹

5. Devotional Services

- a) **Paraklisis** From the Greek (παράκλησις), it is a calling to one's aid, for encouragement and comfort; a holy urging. Although the hymns and prayers are addressed and directed toward the Virgin Mary and the saints, they are intercessory in nature and always point to Christ as the only Mediator.

The service was composed by Theosterictus the Monk in the 9th Century, and is sung in times of danger, tragedy, sickness, temptation, or discouragement and ask the Lord for salvation, deliverance, protection, guidance, and healing.

The [Paraklisis](#) is also traditionally chanted each Friday during the Dormition Fast (August 1 through 14). However, the Paraklisis can be requested at any time of need, and can even be sung by the faithful alone.

Can the *Theotokos* save us?

One aspect of the Paraklisis, Salutations to the Theotokos, and Akathist services which can be controversial for Protestants converting to Orthodoxy is the refrain of *Υπεραγία Θεοτόκε, σώσον ημάς* (Most Holy Theotokos save us) after each stanza which seems to contradict the idea of Christ as the only Mediator.

In response to this some Orthodox priests have replaced this refrain with *Υπεραγία Θεοτόκε, πρέσβευε υπέρ ημών* (Most Holy Theotokos be our ambassador [to Christ]) which undermines the intent of the refrain. There are typically two explanations offered to help understand the true intent.

Traditional - the refrain *Most Holy Theotokos save us* is the prayer the people of Constantinople prayed to intercede for them to Christ to literally save their beloved city of Constantinople during the siege of the Avars in 626 AD.

Theological - while the Orthodox Church asserts that none except for our Lord Jesus Christ can grant us salvation, His mother, the Theotokos can guide us as an instrument of salvation in that she is our model and example of Christian values and behavior²².

- b) **Akathist** – See Session 9, *Services of Orthodox Great Lent and Holy Week*

²¹ Luke 2:25-32

²² Source: [Πεμπτούσία](#) website

- c) **Compline** From the Latin *completorium*, meaning the completion of the working day. In Greek this service is referred to as “*απόδειπνον*” meaning “after-supper.” Compline is the final service of the day in the Christian tradition of canonical hours and is penitential in nature. This service can be done either in the church or in the home.

Compline takes two distinct forms: Small Compline and Great Compline and includes:

1. Psalms (50, 69, 142)
2. Small Doxology and Nicene Creed
3. Canon followed by *Axion Estin*,
4. Trisagion and Troparia for the day, & *Lord Have Mercy* -40x
5. Prayer of the Hours, the Supplicatory Prayer and the Prayer to Jesus Christ