

Teaching Liturgy Text – Part 1 – Liturgy of the Eucharist

Introduction

This Teaching Liturgy is presented in three parts and begins with introductory comments on the origins and purpose of the Divine Liturgy, and the various types of Liturgies celebrated throughout the year. Each of the three parts will be presented as follows.

PART 1	PART 2	PART 3
Opening Proclamation – Blessed is the Kingdom...	Great Entrance	Commemorations
Litanies of Peace	Cherubic Hymn	Litany and Lord’s Prayer
Antiphons	Litanies of Completion	Pre-Communion Prayers
Small Entrance – Procession with the Gospel	Creed	Invitation to Commune
Trisagion Hymn	Anaphora (Prayers of Sanctification)	Partaking of the Holy Gifts
Epistle and Gospel readings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Apostolic Blessing	Thanksgiving Prayers
Homily	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Institution	Prayer of the Ambo
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anamnesis	Dismissal Prayer
	Epiclesis (Consecration)	

The intent of this Teaching Liturgy is not to provide a complete and in-depth analysis of the history and meaning of every aspect of the Divine Liturgy but through introducing the practical and symbolic meaning of each of the major parts of St. John Chrysostom’s Divine Liturgy we may be better able to appreciate what a powerful and inspiring “work” (ἔργο) of the “people” (λαοί) the Divine Liturgy is. And also to show that the development of the Divine Liturgy, even for the Orthodox, has throughout the centuries, undergone many modifications some of which were added to not only enhance the beauty of the Liturgy but also to make clear Who is being worshipped and why.

Resources for Further Information

The following books are an excellent resource for more detailed information on explaining each part of the Divine Liturgy.

- A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy by Nicolas Cabasilas
- The Liturgical Commentaries by St Symeon of Thessaloniki
- The Divine Liturgy – Analysis, Exegesis, and Commentary by Foteny Economon Ninos
- The Heavenly Banquet. Understanding the Divine Liturgy by Fr. Emmanuel Hatzidakis

A wonderful resource on the need for and process of Liturgical renewal is *The Liturgy in Dialogue – Exploring and Renewing the Tradition* by Fr. Alkiviadis Calivas.

Origins of the Liturgy

Biblical Acts 20:7

Now on the first day of the week the disciples came together to break bread.

Didache – Chapter 8-10, 14

And on the Lords Day gather yourselves together and break bread and give thanks, first confessing your sins that your sacrifice may be pure.

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St Justin the Martyr

Earliest description of the Liturgy; 1st Apology, chapters 65-67

Purpose of Liturgy

1. Proclaims the Trinitarian presence of the living God with his people in the Body of Christ and the Holy Spirit. “Glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit now and forever.”
2. Memorial of Christ’s love for His people “Who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son – John 3:16
3. Thanksgiving to the Father – “*We thank You also for this Liturgy, which You have deigned to receive from our hands...*” Prayer of the Holy Anaphora
4. Observance of Christ’s command - “*Do this in remembrance of Me.*” Luke 22:19 and 1 Cor 11:24,25
5. Commemoration of Christ’s sacrifice for us on the cross “This is my Body which is broken for you and this is my blood which is shed for you.” Prayer of the Holy Anaphora and Mark 14:24
6. Communion between us and God “*λαβετε φαγετε...τουτο ποιειτε*” (Take, Eat, Drink) because there is only one Bread from which we all partake (1 Cor 10:17 and 11:24,25)
7. Continuous Pentecost “Send down Your all Holy Spirit upon us and upon these Gifts” Prayer of the Epiclesis
8. Foretaste of the Kingdom of Heaven

Types of Liturgies

1. Liturgy of St James – celebrated on Feast of St. James, Brother of our Lord, 23 October
2. Liturgy of St Mark – the original liturgy of the Church of Alexandria. Today celebrated by the Coptic Orthodox Church
3. Liturgy of St Basil – celebrated on Christmas, Holy Week, and Feast of St Basil
4. Liturgy of St John Chrysostom – Typical Sunday liturgy
5. Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts – celebrated during Great Lent

Exegesis of the Divine Liturgy

The Divine Liturgy is divided into two (2) sections, the ***Liturgy of the Word*** and the ***Liturgy of the Eucharist (or Faithful)***. This text certainly does not provide all the details of each portion of the Divine Liturgy but does provide a solid overview of each portion to gain a working knowledge of how each portion forms a complete worship service that the Orthodox Church, throughout her history feels is pleasing to the Lord and provides that which is essential for our salvation.

It must be understood that the Liturgy is written as a dialogue between the deacon, priest and the people. In the Early Church each of these participated equally.

In the Ancient Church the catechumens were allowed to attend the first part of the Liturgy, Liturgy of the Word, up until the hearing of the Apostolic writings and the words of Christ (Gospels) as part of the catechism and was thus also referred to as the *Liturgy of the Catechumens*. After these readings the catechumens were taken out of the church. This is still remembered in the announcement by the deacon, just prior to the reciting of the Creed when he exclaims, “The Doors, the Doors!” indicating that the doors were to be guarded to prevent entry of those who were not full members of the Church. As this practice of removing catechumens has long since fell out of use the Liturgy of the Catechumens became known as the *Liturgy of the Word*.

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The second part, the Liturgy of the Eucharist was only for those who were fully catechized and baptized members of the Church.

Liturgy of the Word

Opening Proclamation - Blessed is the Kingdom...

A proclamation of the majesty of the Triune God and our entry into the temporal reality of the coming Kingdom of Heaven. Also reminiscent of the prayer of the Jews – *“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”* Mark 11:10

When the Lord sent out the 72 disciples, He commanded that when they enter a house, to first say, ‘Peace to this house... and tell them, “The kingdom of God has come near to you.”’ Luke 10:5-8

Litanies of Peace (Ειρηνικά) – Nine petitions for peace. These petitions are not addressed to God but to us here on earth, parish, city, country, and the world that we be delivered from all afflictions, wrath, danger, and necessity.

The opening litany, *In peace let us pray to the Lord*, is a plea from the priest that we all need to be at peace if we are to properly pray.

Antiphons and Small Litany

Now follows the 3 Antiphons (Greek αντι – φωνη) meaning to respond opposite one another. These traditionally are sung by alternate chanters on the left and right side of the church. Each of the antiphons end with the doxology of *Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.*

When the Divine Liturgy is celebrated in the monasteries these Antiphons include verses from the Book of Psalms and are joyful praises to God. Today in the parishes these verses from the Old Testament are typically only heard during the great Feast Days of the Church.

- Prayer of the 1st Antiphon Psalm 103 Bless the Lord O my soul.
- Prayer of the 2nd Antiphon Psalm 146 Praise the Lord O my soul.

This 2nd antiphon also includes the earliest Creed of the Church and was composed in the 6th century by the Emperor Justinian who commissioned that this be sung as part of the Small Entrance.

Only-begotten Son and Logos of God, being immortal, You condescended for our salvation to take flesh from the holy Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary and, without change, became man. Christ, our God, You were crucified and conquered death by death. Being one with the Holy Trinity, glorified with the Father and the Holy Spirit: Save us.

- Prayer of the 3rd Antiphon Beatitudes of Christ’s sermon on the mount

Small Entrance Procession with the Holy Gospel

The Small Entrance is a procession done in remembrance of the practice of the early Church. Due to the persecutions of the Christians of the early Church, the Gospel was kept hidden for safety. At the end of the 3rd Antiphon the Deacon would go to the σκευοφυλάκιο (covered room of protection) where all the church valuables were kept. He would bring the Gospel to the clergy for the daily reading. Because of

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this, the “entrance” should be seen as *into* the sanctuary and not *out* of the sanctuary. It was not until the 14th century that the Gospel was placed on the Altar as it is today. According to St Maximos the Confessor the Small Entrance symbolizes the first coming into the world of the Son of God, Christ, in the flesh.

In the earliest liturgy (St James) and up until the 7th century, the Gospel was read at the beginning of the liturgy after “Blessed is the Kingdom...” and was read from the center of the Church after the priest, deacon and the people processed in from the Narthex.

Prayer of the Entrance – this prayer validates that the liturgy is celebrated with both the **Church Militant** (those who are still alive struggling for the faith) and the **Church Triumphant** (those who have died and are now perfected in faith).

Master, Lord our God, Who has established the orders and hosts of angels and archangels in heaven to minister to Your glory, grant that holy angels may enter with us, that together we may celebrate and glorify Your goodness.

The Priest, carrying the Gospel aloft and standing in front the Iconostasis, exclaims “Wisdom, Let us be attentive!” In this, the priest is declaring what is stated in Proverbs 2:6 “For the Lord gives wisdom, from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.” As Christ claimed to be the living Torah, so the Gospel proclaims Him as the Living Word as John states in the opening of his Gospel, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” And this is what we need to be attentive to.

Trisagion Hymn

The word trisagion is a transliteration of the Greek τρεις-άγιος, meaning three Holies. This is the first doxology of the Early Church, and is traced back to the words of Isaiah.

*I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: “**Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.**”*

The introduction of the Trisagion Hymn into the Divine Liturgy is told in the Synaxarion as the **Miracle of the Trisagion** which is celebrated in the Orthodox Church on September 25th.

During the time of Proclus, Patriarch of Constantinople (434-446) and Emperor Theodosios II great earthquakes were occurring in Constantinople for four months continuously. One day, at about the third hour, when the earth was shaking all the people were continuously crying out the 'Kyrie eleison' suddenly and in sight of all a young child was taken up into the air, and a divine voice was heard around it announcing to the bishop and the people to process while chanting, 'Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us'. Our father among the Saints, Proclus, accepting the decision, processed the people chanting thusly and the earthquake immediately ceased. The blessed Pulcheria and her brother, supporting the miracle, established that this divine hymn be chanted throughout the entire city; and from that day all the churches sing to God each day."

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In the earliest liturgy this hymn was the entrance hymn into the church. The remnant of this can be seen in the Orthodox funeral service where the deceased, family and attendants process into the church led by the priest chanting the Trisagion hymn. The Trisagion hymn is mentioned in the Council of Ephesus (431 AD)

Also, there was an attempt to add an additional verse to the Trisagion hymn

Prior to the last recital of “Holy God...”, the priest command the chanter or the Choir to proclaim this with power (Δυναμῆς!) so that all recognize that the Triune God is truly Holy, Mighty, and Immortal.

Epistle and Gospel Readings

Reading from Holy Scripture is a tradition that has been practiced since the time of synagogue worship as a Torah reading has been and still is part of every Jewish worship service. In imitation of our Lord teaching in the synagogue (Matt 4:23) the Divine Liturgy includes this most important and central part of the Liturgy of the Word. Just Martyr, in his Apology, confirms this.

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read.

While readings in the Early Church included Hebrew Scriptures, these have now been moved to the previous evenings Vesper service, although the remnant of this is present in the reading of Old Testament Scripture in the Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts. Today the readings in the Divine Liturgy include only the writings of the Apostles and the Gospels. These reading serve to “*prepare and cleanse us in readiness for the great sanctification of the Holy Mysteries to come.*”

The silent prayer that is read prior to hearing the reading of the Holy Gospel brings this point home.

Shine in our hearts, O Master Who loves mankind, the pure light of Your divine knowledge, and open the eyes of our mind that we may comprehend the proclamations of Your Gospels. Instill in us also reverence for Your blessed commandments so that, having put down all carnal desires, we may lead a spiritual life, both thinking and doing all those things that are pleasing to You. For You, Christ our God, are the illumination of our souls and bodies, and to You we offer up glory, together with Your Father, Who is without beginning, and Your all-holy, good, and life-creating Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Nicholas Cabasilas, in his Commentary on the Divine Liturgy gives us the reason for why the Epistle is read before the Gospel since, as he says, the words of the Lord should constitute a more perfect manifestation than the words of the apostles. To answer his own question Cabasilas explains that “*The Lord did not display to all men the extent of his power and goodness at once, thus if we wish to illustrate the gradual revelation of Himself, it is better to read the Epistle before the Gospel.*”

What is the proper language of the Gospel?

The Gospel was written in κοινή (common) Greek which as the name implies was the everyday form of language, together with Latin (the vulgus), that was spoken by the common people. Today, in America, we struggle with what language the Gospel should be read. Fundamentalists claim that we must preserve the ancient and original language while

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contemporary voices claim that it should only be read in the current “common” language of the people, English.

The answer is a more moderate approach that embraces both the importance of preserving the original language while still using the language common to the country in which the Liturgy is being celebrated.

Lastly, it is important to remember that the tradition of the Orthodox Church is that those who are not present to hear the words of Christ, i.e. the Holy Gospel should not partake of Holy Communion for “*we have not properly prepared and cleansed ourselves in readiness for the great sanctification of the Holy Mysteries to come.*”

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The second half of the Divine Liturgy is the Liturgy of the Eucharist or Liturgy of the Faithful as it is sometimes referred to. In this part 2 of the Teaching Liturgy, will cover the first half of the Liturgy of the Eucharist which includes the following.

1. Great Entrance
2. Cherubic Hymn
3. Litanies of Completion
4. Creed
5. Anaphora (Prayers of Sanctification)
 - a. Apostolic Blessing
 - b. Institution
 - c. Anamnesis
6. Epiclesis (Consecration)

As was mentioned previously, the most ancient description of the order of the Holy Eucharist (Divine Liturgy) is by Justin Martyr in his 1st Apology, chapters 65-67 and reflects roughly the same order of the St. Chrysostom Liturgy used up through today.

- Homily (following the reading of the Gospel)
- Exhortations by the Προεστώς (leader of the Eucharistic Celebration, i.e. bishop or presbyter)
- the offering of prayers
- the offering of bread, wine and water
- the long thanksgiving, eucharistic prayer of sanctification by the Προεστώς
- the partaking of Holy Communion by the faithful
- the collection for charity

1. GREAT ENTRANCE

This is a procession with the unconsecrated Gifts which are taken from the table of Preparation and brought ceremoniously to the Altar. Historically, just as in the Small Entrance, when the Gospel is brought to the Altar, the Deacon would once again go to the σκευοφυλάκιο (covered room of protection) to bring the bread, wine and the Δισκοπότηρα (liturgical items) into the church in formal procession.

But we no longer have a Skeuophylakion so why not just bring the Gifts (offerings) directly to the Altar after the completion of the Proskomide service? Cabasilas asks this very question and provides the answer. (pg. 31)

This practice follows the two types of sacrifices that were conducted under the Law of the Old Testament. There were the sacrifices of animals with the shedding of their blood and there were also sacrifices of gifts such as precious metals like gold and silver.

Clearly, we all recognize Christ's sacrifice on the cross for our salvation and for the glory of His Father. However, Christ was also dedicated to God the Father from the beginning, from being the firstborn, to His dedication in the Temple, to His baptism where God spoke saying, "This is My Son in Whom I am well pleased."

[In the Liturgy] the sacrifice comes at the end. The elements of Bread and Wine are first dedicated as precious gifts offered to God evident multiple times in the prayers of the liturgy.

- For the precious Gifts here presented, let us pray to the Lord.

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- ...accept from us sinners our supplication, and bring it to Your holy Altar of sacrifice.
- Let us stand in awe! Let us be attentive, that we may present the Holy Offering in peace.
- Your our own of Your own we offer to You, in all and for all.

It should be noted that in the Early Church liturgies, there were three litanies that were said by the priest prior to the Great Entrance; the *Litany of the Fervent Supplication*, *The Prayers for the Catechumens*, and *The Supplication of the Faithful*. While still said in some churches, such as the Russian and Antiochian, these petitions have mostly disappeared from the Liturgy. (although the Prayers for the Catechumens are still heard during the celebration of the Pre-Sanctified Liturgy during Great Lent.)

The Great Entrance **symbolizes** the journey of Christ to the Holy City of Jerusalem as He prepared for His Passion and the crowd's acknowledgement of Him as the Messiah and Son of David who is "*Blessed and comes in the name of the Lord!*"

We must also recognize that what is passing before us during the Great entrance is NOT the consecrated Body and Blood of Christ. Nicholas Cabasilas warns of this error saying,

If any of those who prostrate themselves before the priest who is carrying the offerings adores them as if they were the Body and Blood of Christ and prays to them as such, he is led into error, he is confusing this ceremony with that of the entry of the pre-sanctified, not recognizing the differences between them. In this entry of the offerings the gifts are not yet consecrated for the sacrifice... (Commentary on the Divine Liturgy, Cabasilas, pgs. 65-66)

But...St Symeon argues that it is in fact right for the faithful

"to prostrate themselves before the priests asking for their prayers and requesting to be remembered in the sacred service and also honoring the divine gifts. For even if they have not yet been consecrated, they have been offered to God in the Prayer of the Proskomide...and have been prepared for the consecration and are offerings to God and are the antitypes of the Lord's Body and Blood." (Liturgical Commentaries, pg. 129)

2. CHERUBIC HYMN

This hymn is sung while the celebrants of the Liturgy (deacon, priest, and bishop) prepare for the procession of the Great Entrance. In the Early Church during this procession, the people chanted Psalm 23, "*Let him enter, the King of Glory.*"

This hymn was inserted into the Liturgy during the reign of Emperor Justinian II, however around the year 573, the Patriarch of Constantinople, Eutyches, concerned that these words might lead the people to believe that the bread and wine had already been consecrated, introduced a new hymn into the liturgy which focused attention on the presence of the angels, thus encouraging the faithful to prepare for the receipt of Holy Communion. A final addition to this hymn in the 9th century resulted in the Cherubic Hymn we sing today.

Let us, who mystically represent the Cherubim and who sing the thrice-holy hymn to the life-creating Trinity, let us lay aside every worldly care. So that we may receive the King of all... Who is invisibly escorted by the angelic hosts. Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.

Two important points to recognize in this hymn.

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- a) The hymn calls us to mystically represent (μυστικώς εικονίζοντες) the Cherubim who are emboldened to chant the “*thrice-holy hymn to the life-creating Trinity.*”
- b) And to “lay aside all earthly cares.” Note that the hymn is not asking us to reject the world in which we live but only to set aside those “seeds” of anxiety and worry spoken of in the Parable of the Sower.

The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. (Luke 8:15)

Because only then, when we are at peace, can we be ready to *receive the King of all, who is the Eucharist.*

In the Early Days of the Church the Cherubic Hymn was sung during the Great Entrance. Today this hymn is sung as the priest prepares for the Great Entrance. He will open the Antimension, cense, while silently reciting the Psalm 50, and silently recite the words of the Cherubic Hymn while standing in front of the Altar. Then the deacon (or priest), wearing the **Aer**,¹ and carrying the paten (diskos) and chalice, exit the Altar to begin the Great Entrance cutting off the Cherubic Hymn after “...the King of all...” During the procession the priest intones, “*May the Lord God remember all of us in His Kingdom always, now and forever and to the ages of ages.*” As the priest and deacon reenter the Altar, the Cherubic Hymn is resumed with, “*Who is invisibly escorted by the angelic hosts. Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.*”

In the Greek tradition these are the only words said while in the Slavic and Antiochian traditions there is an added litany which is included along with the petition of “*May the Lord God remember all of us...*”

In the liturgical services of the Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts, the Liturgy of St. Basil on Great on Epiphany and Liturgy of Holy Thursday, and certain other feast days the Cherubic Hymn is replaced with other hymns.

The Great Entrance concludes with the priest placing the gifts on the Antimension on the Altar, removing the veils and, while covering the Gifts with the Aer, quietly says the troparion of the Vespers of Great and Holy Friday:

The noble Joseph took down your most pure body from the cross. He wrapped it in a clean shroud and with fragrant spices laid it in burial in a new tomb.

3. LITANIES OF COMPLETION

In Greek this litany is called the Αιτήσεις τα Πληρωτικά which translates to the Litanies of Completion. And this is not “completion” in the sense of an ending but an “adding on” to the initial litanies of Peace that were said earlier. This is clearly evident in the first of these petitions which states, “Let us complete our prayer to the Lord.”

In the next petition, the deacon, standing on the threshold of consecrating the gifts that have just been presented, entreats the congregation to “*Pray to the Lord for these gifts we are about to offer (προτεθέντων) [to God].*”

¹ Αηρ (**Aer**) (literally “air” indicating the lightness of the material of which it is made) is the largest and outermost of the veils covering the chalice and paten. It is typically matches the color of the priest’s vestments.

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These words are echoed silently by the priest who asks “...accept from us sinners our supplication and bring it to Your holy Altar of sacrifice. Enable us to offer You gifts and spiritual sacrifices for our own sins and the failings of Your people...”

These prayers of completion the people respond with, "Grant this, O Lord".

KISS OF PEACE The priest now asks each of us to “love one another, that with oneness of mind we may confess: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Trinity, are one in essence and undivided.”

This Christian love for one another was made real in the Early Church through the Kiss of Peace and was exchanged between the clergy and the laity. This practice extends back through the time of Jesus when he reproached Simon for not greeting Him with a kiss upon entering his house. (Luke 7:45) Tertullian in the 3rd century wrote about this tradition and it was recognized as a practice in the Synod of Laodicea in the 4th century. However, by the 11th century this practice was confined to only the clergy with the exchange between them of “Christ is in our midst” and “He is and always shall be.”

4. CREED

This is a concise confession of the Christian faith in 12 articles formulated by 1st, 2nd Ecumenical Synod at Nicaea in 325 A.D. These articles of faith are what the Orthodox Church commands are essential and salvific Truths and confession of these is a requirement to be able to receive Holy Communion and is one of the few prayers that begins with “I”.

5. PRAYERS OF SANCTIFICATION:

Also referred to as the **Anaphora**, this includes three (3) distinct parts, the Apostolic Blessing, The Institution, and the Anamnesis.

- **Apostolic Blessing** – This begins with a commanding call for all of us to “Stand aright! Let us stand with fear! Let us be attentive, that we may offer the Holy Gifts in peace.” For it is with fear and trembling that we stand before God (2 Cor 7:15). Note that it is not the priest alone who offers but the entire congregation. Continuing, the priest blesses the people using the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians, May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion (κοινωνία) of the Holy Spirit be with you all (2 Cor 13:14).

Why Does the Priest Wave the Aer? Although a popular idea is that this was done to keep away insects that was the purpose of the fans used during the Great Entrance. The fanning of the Holy Gifts with the Aer represents a type or image of the Holy Spirit of God Who, like a dove, hovered over and sanctified them as well as of the Holy Angels.

The next set of petitions is a wonderful dialogue between the priest and the congregation.

- Priest: Let us to lift up our hearts to the Lord
- People: Yes, we have lifted them up!
- Priest: Let us give thanks to the Lord.²
- People: It is proper and right to give thanks to the Lord
- Priest: It is proper and right to hymn You, to bless You, to praise You, to give thanks to You, and to worship You in every place of Your dominion.

² More than just thanking the Lord, a better translation might be, Let us give this offering of Thanksgiving to the Lord.

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And now the climax of the Apostolic Blessing when the priest says, *“Let us sing the triumphal hymn, exclaiming, proclaiming, and saying...”* to which the choir then sings the triumphal hymn

*Holy, holy, holy, Lord Sabaoth, heaven and earth are filled with Your glory.
Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.*

- **The Institution** This segment transports us to the Upper Room for us to recall the words of institution given to the disciples by Christ as the Last Supper. (Luke 22:19-20) The priest's words sets the stage for this remembrance.
 - *Take, eat, this is My Body*, which is broken for you for the remission of sins.
 - *Drink of this, all of you; this is My Blood* of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins.
- **The Anamnesis** This begins with a specific recollection of what Christ has accomplished for our salvation and redemption.

... the a) *Cross*, b) *the tomb*, c) *the Resurrection on the third day*, d) *the Ascension into heaven*, e) *the enthronement at the right hand*, and f) *the second and glorious coming again*.

6. Epiclesis

The action of the epiclesis or consecration of the Holy Gifts has been an integral part of the Divine Liturgy since the time St. Irenaeus, as recorded in his treatise Against Heresies.

“For we offer to Him His own, announcing consistently the fellowship and union of the flesh and Spirit. For as the bread, which is produced from the earth, when it receives the invocation of God, is no longer common bread, but the Eucharist, consisting of two realities, earthly and heavenly...”

Book 4, Chapter 5

The Consecration begins with the priest, lifting up the gifts, while proclaiming out loud, *“Your own of Your own we offer to You, in all and for all.”* Here we have a wonderful exchange between our work and the work of God. God provides the seeds, the soil, and the rain, we provide the planting, care, harvesting and transformation of the wheat into bread and the grapes into wine. We then offer that back to God for Him to transform those elements at the consecration.

The priest now asks God to send down His Holy Spirit down upon US and upon the gifts presented and transform them into the True Body and Blood of Christ for our redemption and salvation. Here we must understand that this act is not the Protestant idea of sacrifice performed as substitutionary atonement meaning that Christ is offered as a substitute for us as sinners as the scapegoat was offered during Old Testament times. Instead, we ask that the Holy Spirit transform the elements so that Christ, as our only Mediator before God, will re-establish the relationship between God and His people. (Hebrews 9:15)

Orthodoxy has always understood that the words of institution said by Christ Himself; *This is My Body...This is My Blood..”* are meant to be understood literally. Even if this could be argued as a metaphor, we are still left with Christ's words to the Jews in John chapter 6.

“Very truly I tell you, 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 them up at the last day.”

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Orthodoxy also does not use words such as transubstantiation or consubstantiation to describe this transformation, content to leave this as a mystery.

But why during the Consecration doesn't the priest invoke the name of Christ who is our High Priest?

Cabasilas answers this saying, *"It is to teach us that the Savior possesses this power of sanctification not in His quality as a man but because he is God, and because of the Divine power which He shares with the Father. The Lord showed us this when while instituting the sacrament He offered the Bread and Wine to His Father."*

Should we kneel or stand during the Consecration?

This has been a question of considerable debate both here in America and Orthodoxy abroad.

St Irenaeus wrote that *"The practice of not bending the knee on Sunday is a symbol of the resurrection through which we were delivered by the Grace of Christ both from our sins and from the death which was put to death by Christ Himself."*

Canon 90 of the 6th Ecumenical council states, *"We have received it canonically from our God-bearing fathers not to bend the knee on Sundays when we honor the resurrection of Christ."*

However in the meeting of the [Holy Synod of Greece in Oct 1999](#) this particular item was on the agenda with the following ruling.

According to the canons [of the Orthodox Church] Christians should not kneel on Sundays at the moment of "Your own of Your own we offer..." because it is characteristic of these days to stress the Resurrection. Nevertheless, kneeling can be tolerated by concession (κατά οικονομία) because it does not indicate any irreverence but rather indicates great reverence and conscientious recognition of the awe-inspiring sacrifice which takes place on the Holy Table at the invocation (Epiclesis) of the Grace of the Holy Spirit.

The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America recognizes that there may be appropriate times to kneel. Kneeling is seen as an expression of prayer that has two characteristics: penance and/or prayer. While the Archdiocese agrees that to commemorate the Resurrection each Sunday, the Canons of the Church prohibit kneeling. However, recognizing the sanctity of the descent of the Holy Spirit during the Consecration of the Holy Gifts, it is acceptable to kneel in prayer at the Consecration.

The best answer then seems to be that kneeling on Sunday is not required at the Consecration and is not imposed by the Church, it is simply tolerated.

Teaching Liturgy Text – Part 3 – Liturgy of the Eucharist

in Part 3 of the Teaching Liturgy, we will complete the second half of the Liturgy of the Eucharist. This third part of the Teaching Liturgy, will cover the following.

1. Commemorations
2. Litany and Lord's Prayer
3. Pre-Communion Prayers
4. Invitation to Commune and the Partaking of the Holy Gifts
5. Thanksgiving Prayers
6. Prayer of the Ambo
7. Dismissal Prayer

Commemorations

Immediately following the Consecration, the priest begins the commemorations beginning with the Old Testament, through the New Testament, Early Church and up to today. Silently the priest says, *"Again, we offer You this spiritual worship for those who have reposed in the faith: forefathers, fathers, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, preachers, evangelists, martyrs, confessors, ascetics, and for every righteous spirit made perfect in faith..."*

And then out loud announces, *"...and especially for our most holy, pure, blessed, and glorious Lady, the Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary."*

After which the people joyfully agree singing, "It is truly right (αξιον) to bless you, Theotokos, ever blessed, most pure, and Mother of our God."³

The commemorations that follow are first for the departed and then for the living.

DEPARTED *(second commemoration, the first done during the Proskomide)*

1. Those that recognize both the sacrifices made by all those both before and after Christ's appearance on earth such as patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testaments and apostles, martyrs, ascetics of the New Testament. This commemoration includes asking for their intercessions before God.
2. Our most fervent commemoration and supplications, however, are directed to the Mother of God, the Lady Theotokos who cooperated with the Holy Spirit to bring Christ into Humanity. It is truly right to bless the Theotokos since Scripture itself recognizes that "...all generations will call me blessed." (Luke 1:48)
3. The commemorations of "the holy, glorious, and most praiseworthy apostles and for all Your saints, through whose supplications, visit us, O God.
4. A remembrance of all who have fallen asleep in the hope of the resurrection to eternal life. It is here that the priest silently commemorates the names those departed who were given to him prior to the start of the Liturgy and prays that God will grant them rest.

LIVING

5. A remembrance of all canonical Orthodox bishops, the priests, the deacons and those in the monasteries who unceasingly pray for the whole world.
6. For all Orthodox Churches around the world and for those living pure and reverent lives.
7. For civil authorities and armed forces that they may govern in peace.

³ It is during this time that the priest will bless the αντιδώρων (instead of the Gifts) that will be presented to all in attendance after the completion of the Liturgy.

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8. For the Metropolitan of whom the parish is under, with a particular prayer that he govern his holy churches in peace, safety, honor, and health, unto length of days, rightly teaching the word of Your truth.
9. And lastly to recall to memory those whom each parishioner has in mind, and all the people.

Litanies of Grace, Protection, Remission of Sins, and a Life of Peace and Repentance

These litanies, which were introduced in the 4th century, for the purpose of intensifying our preparation to receive the Holy Mysteries.⁴ The litany which follows the commemorations, *For the precious Gifts here presented and consecrated, let us pray to the Lord* is confusing since it does not seem to make sense that we would pray to the Lord for Gifts that have already been sanctified by God during the consecration. Once again Cabasilas offers an explanation which is present in the next petition.

“...not that they may be sanctified but that their sanctification may be imparted to us. May God having accepted them at His holy and celestial and mystical altar...in return send down upon us the divine grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Let not these Gifts be rendered powerless to produce this Grace as occasionally happened when Christ was on the earth when His almighty hand could work no miracles due to their lack of faith. (Mark 6:5-6)

Included in this litany is a prayer that each of us may have an angel of peace, a faithful guide, a guardian of our souls and bodies. Not that one be given to us, since we received our guardian angel at our baptism, but that this angel may be active in our lives and fulfill his tasks to protect us leading us in the right path and not deserting us when we stray from this path into sin.

And to this end the priest prays for pardon and remission of our sins and transgressions, and for those things which are beneficial for our souls. In this way we may complete the remaining time of our life in peace and repentance so that may present a good defense before the awesome judgment seat of Christ.

Unity of the Faith

The last petition before reciting the Lord's Prayer is the asking *“for the unity of the faith (εὐότητα τῆς πίστεως) and for the communion of the Holy Spirit”* with the plea that *“we commit ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God.”* This call for the “unity of the faith” must be understood from the Orthodox standpoint. In some Christian expressions the confession that Jesus is Lord and Savior grants a person the ability to receive Holy Communion so that the chalice is the sign of Christian Unity. In Orthodoxy receipt of Holy Communion requires a unity in *faith*. This means that to receive Holy Communion one must confess the Orthodox Faith which is spelled out in the Nicene Creed that was recited earlier in the Divine Liturgy.

Throughout the history of the Church, pre and post Schism, the Orthodox Church has always held that only in the Church is there the fullness of faith and truth. (Eph 4:3-5). To this end the Orthodox Church sees herself as guardian of this fullness of faith and truth. Unity in the Church is based on a twofold bond – the ‘unity of the Spirit’ and the ‘bond of peace’ For those outside of the Orthodox Church this ‘bond of peace’ is broken and torn, but the ‘unity of the Spirit’ in the sacraments is not brought to an end...The holy and sanctifying Spirit still breathes in these...”⁵

The pursuit of “unity in faith”, i.e. the One Body of Christ is the goal of the Ecumenism Movement. For Anti-Ecumenists the presence and action of the Holy Spirit, and ergo salvation, is not and cannot be

⁴ Archbishop Lazar Puhalo, *Understanding the Divine Liturgy*, Synaxis Press, 1996

⁵ Florovsky, *The Limits of the Church*, Church Quarterly Review, 1933

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present beyond the limits of the Orthodox Church thus the only way unity can be achieved for those outside the Orthodox Church is their return to the Orthodox faith through repentance and conversion. For the Ecumenists the starting point of ecumenical dialogue is the recognition of the presence of Divine Grace in other churches in which salvation is possible.⁶

It would seem the best path towards unity is found in the words of St. Gregory of Nazianzen, “We seek not conquest, but the return of our brethren, whose separation from us is tearing us apart.”

Lord's Prayer

The petition just prior to the Lord's Prayer uses three verbs, ask, implore, and entreat (παρακαλω, δέομαι, ικετεύω) to a) make us worthy to partake of the Mystery of Holy Communion and b) to have the boldness to call upon God to recite the prayer instituted by Christ Himself. (Matt 6:9-13)

The Lord's Prayer, as part of the Liturgy does not appear until the 4th century where it appears in the Liturgical rite of Jerusalem and is also mentioned in the 23rd Catechetical Lecture of St. Cyril who comments on its use.

Then, after these things, we say that Prayer which the Savior delivered to His own disciples, with a pure conscience entitling God our Father, and saying, Our Father, which art in heaven. O most surpassing loving-kindness of God! On them who revolted from Him and were in the very extreme of misery has He bestowed such a complete forgiveness of evil deeds, and so great participation of grace, as that they should even call Him Father.

And also provides commentary on the phrase “...our daily bread...”

This common bread is not substantial bread, but this Holy Bread is substantial, that is, appointed for the substance of the soul. For this Bread goes not into the belly and is cast out into, but is distributed into your whole system for the benefit of body and soul.

As St Cyril states, the Lord Himself provided us this prayer in answer to His disciples who asked Jesus, “teach us how to pray...” (Luke 11:1). Thus, the insertion of the Lord's prayer here, so close to the receipt of Holy Communion helps prepare the faithful to receive Holy Communion, especially the command to “...forgive those who trespass against us...” Chrysostom comments on this saying,

...by reminding us of our sins, persuading us to be modest; by the command to forgive others, setting us free from all revengeful passion while by promising in return for this to pardon us also.

For St. Paul warns us that each of us “should 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 Cor 11:28-29)

Invitation to Commune

Now begins the first invitation by the priest for the laity to receive Holy Communion. The priest raises the consecrated Bread aloft showing it to the congregation with the words “The Holy Gifts are for the Holy.” St Symeon sees this elevation as symbolic of the elevation of Christ on the cross. But the

⁶ See also Paul Ladouceur, On Ecumenoclasm: Anti-Ecumenical Theology in Orthodoxy, St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly 61:3, 2017, pgs. 323-355

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important question here is, *Who are the Holy?* The people's response answers this question, *"One is Holy, one is Lord, Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen."*

This is different from the Roman Catholic invitation in which the words of the priest describe a different aspect of the consecrated Bread, *"Behold the Lamb of God, Behold Him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those who are called to the Supper of the Lord."*

The priest breaks the Bread into four segments in commemoration of the actual Last Supper event, *"And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them..."* While breaking the Bread the priest offers, silently, the theology of what is occurring, *"The Lamb of God is broken and distributed; broken, but not divided; forever eaten, yet never consumed; but sanctifying those who partake."*

An interesting note is that in this action of breaking the Bread is the first time in both the Orthodox and Catholic liturgies that Christ is referred to as the "Lamb" of God.

The priest sets aside on the paten, one of the segments for himself and any other clergy who will partake. The other three segments will be offered to the people, one of which the priest will place into the chalice. The final act is to pour warm water, ζεον, into the Chalice with the words, *"Blessed is the fervor of Your saints, always, now and forever and to the ages of ages."*

Why is Water Mixed with the Wine and Why is the Water Warm?

The mixing of the wine with water has been documented back to the 2nd century by Justin Martyr and St. Irenaeus and is mandated by the Canon 32 of the 6th Ecumenical Council. Symbolically there are several meanings attached to the warm water such as, the descent of the Holy Spirit, as Christ is the wine, so the water is the people, and a representation of the warm water which flowed from Christ's side.

Practically though, mixing water and wine was a common tradition that was practiced by the ancient Greeks who saw drinking only wine unmixed with water as a barbarian custom⁷. This custom was adopted by the Romans and would have been a normal practice (of mixing wine with water) by the time of Jesus. This practice was also part of Jewish ceremonies as alluded to in Proverbs 9:5, "Come, partake of my bread and drink of the wine I have mingled." The Talmud states that

"For religious ceremonies wine is preferable to other beverage hence no religious ceremony should be performed with beverages other than wine...and benedictions, according to R. Eliezer, are pronounced only when the wine has been properly mixed with water (Berakot 35a).

Reading of the Prayers Before Holy Communion

Prior to receiving Holy Communion, both the clergy and the laity will make the final preparation by reciting the "Prayers Before Holy Communion." These prayers were added later in the 14th century and are meant to be private, indicative by the 1st person pronoun used throughout the prayers. They begin with the same words that were said earlier during the Creed and are essential to be able to "worthily" receive Holy Communion. None of us are worthy to receive the Eucharist since we cannot be saved through "works" of our own, but this worthiness results from our absolute belief that...

⁷ Mnesitheus of Athens, a 4th century Greek physician states, "The gods has revealed wine to mortals, to be the greatest blessing for those who use it aright, but for those who use it without measure, the reverse. To those who mix and drink it moderately, it gives good cheer, but ... unmixed leads to bodily collapse. "

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“...You are truly the Christ, the Son of the living God, Who came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the first. I also believe that this is truly Your pure Body and that this is truly Your precious Blood.”

The prayers express our unworthiness to receive His Body and Blood and entreats God to allow Holy Communion to “burn away, as a lighted coal, our unworthiness” and let it be for “the purification and sanctification of both soul and body and the pledge of the life and Kingdom to come.” For the “Body of God both deifies and nourishes me.”

In some parishes, and especially in the monasteries, the doors of the Altar are now closed, and the clergy partake of the Holy Gifts separately, after which the priest will combine both Elements into the Chalice and the faithful will receive both the Body and the Blood comingled on a common spoon with the invitation of “With the fear of God, faith, and love, draw near.”

Why Do the Faithful Receive Holy Communion from a Common Spoon?

From the Apostolic age the receipt of Holy Communion was the same whether clergy or laity as indicated in the 1st century Didache. In fact, Canon 101 of the Quinisext Council or Council of Trullo mandated that everyone receive the Bread (Body) from the hands of the priest or bishop.

Wherefore, if anyone wishes to be a participator of the immaculate Body in the time of the Synaxis, and to offer himself for the communion, let him draw near, arranging his hands in the form of a cross, and so let him receive the communion of grace. But such as, instead of their hands, make vessels of gold or other materials for the reception of the divine gift, and by these receive the immaculate communion, we by no means allow to come, as preferring inanimate and inferior matter to the image of God.

And the canon prescribed a penalty for those clergy who used any vessels to impart Holy Communion.

But if anyone shall be found imparting the immaculate Communion to those who bring vessels of this kind, let him be cut off as well as the one who brings them.

Except for a brief interlude when Communion was distributed using tongs, the first clear evidence for the use of communion spoons appeared by the early to mid-12th century. We know that this practice had become commonplace as indicated by a disparaging comment made by the canonist Theodore Balsamon around 1195 regarding the abandonment of the apostolic practice mandated by the Council of Trullo.

Centuries later, in the early part of the 19th century a comment on the same canon by St. Nikodemos suggests that the introduction of the communion spoon came about because of the scarcity of deacons which made the administration of the eucharistic elements separately by a single priest both awkward and difficult, thus the introduction of the Communion spoon. St. Nikodemos also wrote that the placement of the holy Gifts directly into the mouth of communicants helped to curb abuses such as spillage when drinking from the Chalice or people carelessly drop particles of the Holy Bread.

Fr Calivas, in his 2020 article, [A Note on the Common Communion Spoon](#), notes that “the method by which Communion is administered is purely functional. It serves a practical purpose. And since the use of the communion spoon was not enacted by a synod, ecumenical or local, the Church, in Her collective wisdom and authority, is free to adapt, modify, and manage the method by which Holy Communion is distributed. Whatever method a Church chooses, the single most important concern is that it does not violate any dogmas and that it is appropriate; that it upholds and maintains the dignity of the sacred act of communing.”

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A more detailed history of the use of the spoon for Holy Communion is found in the article, *Byzantine Communion Spoons – A review of the Evidence* by Robert F. Taft.

After the priest, or deacon, has communed everyone the priest blesses the faithful with the chalice exclaiming, “Save, O God, Your people, and bless Your inheritance.” Next the priest will place the remaining particles from the paten into the chalice invoking the third and final commemoration of the departed.

Wash away, Lord, by Your Holy Blood, the sins of Your servants here remembered through the intercessions of the Theotokos and all Your saints. Amen.

While the priest is doing this, the people response once again with a hymn that recognizes what has just happened to them and highlights the Trinitarian nature of God.

We have seen the true light; we have received the heavenly Spirit; we have found the true faith, worshiping the undivided Trinity, for the Trinity has saved us.

Both Cabasilas and St Symeon indicate that the Liturgy ended here with the words, “Blessed is God now and forever. Amen” said by the priest to the people before he returns the paten and chalice to the Prothesis. While this action still occurs today there is the addition of several Thanksgiving Prayers which offer gratitude to Almighty God for the privilege of allowing the faithful to commune with Him.

Prayer behind the Ambo

In the Roman Catholic Mass, the deacon (or priest) will now end the Liturgy with the words, “Let us go forth in peace” as the command to go forth from the Church into the world to offer the Gift and the peace they have received to the whole world. (John 17:15) For the Orthodox, in the ancient church of Agia Sophia after this command by the deacon, the bishop would then offer a final prayer behind the Ambo (Ο Οπισθ-αμβωνος). In the 11th century a comment by Nicholas of Andida speaks to the concern regarding this prayer that was unheard by the faithful.

The Ambo prayer is the seal of all prayers and their recapitulation, worthy of the first and most honored of epilogues....For some of those who stand outside the sanctuary are often thrown into doubt and confusion, saying, ‘What is the point and what is the sense or force of the prayers whispered by the bishop...’

Thus, this prayer was brought forth as part of the Liturgy to be heard by the faithful, however the last part of the prayer is said silently by the priest while at the Prothesis, “*Christ our God, You are the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. You have fulfilled the Father’s entire plan of salvation. Fill our hearts with joy and gladness always, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.*”

Dismissal Hymn

A very late addition to the Divine Liturgy is this hymn of dismissal and the final prayer, “*Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us.*”

Ending the liturgy with these two prayers is a much later development, as it came to be included at the end of all services under the influence of the monastic tradition, specifically by a 14th century monk of the Mt. Athos, Philotheos. He published two Διάταξις της Θείας Λειτουργίας which outlined the rubrics or rules of conduct for a service and when Philotheos later became Patriarch of Constantinople he introduced to the Church at large. By the time of the advent of printing presses by the 16th century liturgical service books has essentially sealed the structure of the Divine Liturgy.

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It is however interesting to note that unlike the clear words of dismissal earlier such as, “We thank You, Lord, our God, for the communion of Your holy, most pure, immortal, and heavenly Mysteries which You have granted us for the benefit...” and “Let us go forth in peace” this final “dismissal” prayer offers no definitive or explicit end to the Divine Liturgy, since they involve only a request for God’s salvation for us and his divine mercy. Some see this absence of a specific dismissal as symbolic of the eschatological and “outside of time” nature of the Divine Liturgy.