

Divine Liturgy - Most Ancient Service

The Divine Liturgy is considered the most significant ancient Christian service, not so much for its phrasing and words as for its meaning. In fact, the Divine Liturgy was in practice right after the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Disciples of Christ on the 50th day after His Resurrection, as the sacred writer of the Acts of the Apostles records (Acts 2:46 ff). The Divine Liturgy in its swaddlings at the beginning of the Christian era consisted of free hymns and prayers for the officiating of a certain framework of faith. It was officiated long before the beginning of the writings of the New Testament. The Divine Liturgy as such was the center of the inspiration of the first Christians in their communion with God and with one another.

In upper rooms and catacombs the Apostles and later the Presbyters and Bishops of the primitive Christian Church offered the Divine Liturgy for its sacred Mysteries. It seems that relics and reminiscences of that time were preserved in the Divine Liturgies of the 2nd century and especially of the 4th century when the Liturgies took their final form. But whatever were the various forms of the Divine Liturgy of the primitive Church, as well as of the Church of the final formation of the Divine Liturgy, the meaning given to it by both the celebrants and the communicants was one and the same; that is, the belief of the awesome change of the sacred Species of the Bread and Wine into the precious Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, the Lord.

The Apostle Paul refers to the meaning of the Divine Liturgy (1 Cor. 11: 23-30) quoting the words of the Lord, saying, "This cup is the new testament in my blood; this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." And the Apostle admonishes, saying, "For as often as ye eat this Bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come" (v. 25, 26). He also stresses the point that he who draws near the cup "unworthily" will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord (v. 27), and orders a thorough examination before receiving Holy Communion because otherwise the Holy Communion will be "damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (v. 29). It leaves not the slightest doubt that the Apostle Paul stated in his writings that the strongest belief of the primitive Church was that of the awesome change of the Species, which initiated new members into the sacred Mysteries of the Christian religion, that is, the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

It is not our purpose in this pamphlet to refer to all the witnesses and practices of the Apostles and the Church in order to prove this great truth of the Church. It is inscribed in stone, and it is written on sheepskins and papyri so as to leave no doubt as to the meaning of the belief of the Church. Our purpose in this pamphlet is to introduce the faithful reader into the Divine Liturgy consisting of:

1. the original Act of the Holy Eucharist,
2. its enactment by the Church which formulated the words and order of the Divine Liturgies, and
3. the established Divine Liturgies of today, and the full participation of the faithful ones.

The Eucharist Reenacted

The Institution of the Eucharist, that is, of the Mystic Supper by the Lord, is recorded by St. Matthew 26: 26-28; St. Mark 14: 22-24; St. Luke 22: 19-20, and the Apostle Paul, 1 Cor. 11: 23-25. The Eucharist took place after the "Last Supper." This "Last Supper" was not the ritual passover. Furthermore it seems to have been eaten only by the Disciples of Christ. Matthew and Mark read: "And as they (the Disciples) did eat" (*esthionton afton*), which stresses distinctions indicating that Jesus Christ was doing something else at that moment; "He reclined at the table" and was telling them indirectly and directly of His betrayal, arrest and crucifixion which was to take place soon afterwards, but He did not eat any Supper. He came to this moment, the last moment of his free life on earth, to create the Holy Eucharist and leave His own Being to the Church.

"It is a hard saying" the people had said on another occasion long before this moment, but this is what He did, and the Apostles and the Church accepted, preserved and cherished for centuries the visible Gifts of His presence in the Church. It seems that He did not eat even from the Bread nor drink from the Cup He gave to His Apostles. In the form of these Species He has given Himself: "This is my Body"; "This is my Blood." That is what He said then, and the Church believes it and has practiced it ever since.

What did the primitive Church and especially its first leaders do to embody and enact the deep meaning and belief of the Holy Eucharist? They appointed certain days and places, selected the Species to be used, formulated meaningful prayers and hymns, and determined the order as to the service, the celebrants and the communicants.

In the Acts (2: 46-47) St. Luke writes that the believers "daily ... (were) breaking bread from house to house" in relation with the practice of the *Agapae*, the loving-feasts, in the very first Christian years. The African Apologist Tertullian (3rd Century; Apol. 39; Migne PL 1, 538-541) describes the *Agapae* as an act of Christian brotherhood, worship and sobriety, thus defending the Christian standard of life. The *Agapae*, the common supper, took place after the Lord's Mystic Supper. Later, however, they were separated from each other because of discrepancies. Clement of Alexandria (3rd Century; in *Paidagogos* 3,1; Migne 8, 384) uses austere language to criticize and condemn the practice of *Agapae*, loving-feasts, as a parody and desecration of the Christian *Agape* - love. Basil the Great states in the 31st oration that, "neither the common supper (*Agapae*) to be eaten and drunk in the Church, nor the Lord's Supper (the Divine Eucharist) to be desecrated in homes." He stresses the same opinion of the Synod in Laodicea (364 A.D.) that issued the canon 28 that "not in the Lord's Supper nor in Churches the so-called *agapae* take place".

The Ancient "Order" of the Liturgy

The most ancient description of the order and time of the Holy Eucharist (Divine Liturgy) is preserved in the 1st Apology by Justin the Martyr, Ch. 67, written in 138 A.D. (Migne 6, 429-432). The space in this pamphlet does not allow the text to be printed here in its entirety. In brief, he refers to the day, which he calls the day of

the sun (the Lord's Day, the day of *Kyrios*, that is *Kyriake*, Sunday, the first day of the week, in memory of the Resurrection of the Lord.) On this day the Christians gathered together to participate in the Divine Liturgy.

As to the order of the diagram of the Liturgy, Justin refers to:

1. the reading of the Scriptures,
2. the exhortation by the Notable, Proestos,
3. the offering of prayers,
4. the offering of bread, wine and water
5. the long thanksgiving, eucharistic, prayer of sanctification by the Notable,
6. the partaking of Holy Communion, and
7. the collection for charity.

It is the same order that St. Chrysostom follows in his Liturgy used today. Justin the Martyr gives us only a diagram and not the actual prayers and words. At that time, although the meaning and significance of the Divine Liturgy had been determined as to the change of the Species into the Precious Body and Blood of Christ, the prayers were recited freely by the Notable.

"We pray," writes Tertullian, "without a prompter, *sine monitore*, praying by heart" (Apol. C, 30 Migne PL 1,504). "It was allowed to the prophets (the Notables) in whatever way they would like to give thanks (to God)." Only the *Dedache* of the Apostle, (a writing contemporary to Justin; cpt. 9-10) cites two Eucharistic prayers and a prayer after the Holy Communion. In these prayers Jesus Christ is called "the Vineyard of David," and it is stated that "the Lord is near ... let the Grace come and the world may disappear."

The Various Divine Liturgies

The Free Eucharistic Prayers used at the beginning by the Notable for the Divine Liturgy formed in later times the various types of the established Liturgies. They are many.

Some of them were created in the East, others in the West. But there are similarities which reflect one original source, that of the Apostles. There are the Syriac, Egyptian, Persian, Byzantine, Spanish and Roman types of Liturgies. Among them are those which are ascribed to Clement (see Decrees of Apostles, Book 8, Chpt. 5-15) and St. Jacob (James, very ancient), both in Greek.

Another, ascribed to St. Mark, is that of the Presanctified Gifts by St. Mark. Of the Byzantine type are those of Basil the Great, of St. Chrysostom, and that of the Presanctified Gifts. In Alexandria, the Liturgy of Mark was used yet in the 12th century as Theodore Balsomon instructed in the 32nd canon of the Synod in Troulo.

The Liturgy of the "Brother of God," James, is very ancient. The Penthecte Synod (Quinisext 692 A.D.) decreed that James handed down the mystic service (Divine Liturgy). It is true least in its basic prayers and diagram, which are in line with the

same thoughts the 5th catechism of Cyril of Jerusalem. In the Eastern Orthodox Church this Liturgy of James is seldom officiated.

St. Basil's Liturgy is attested to not only by the Penthecte Synod (692 A.D.) but also by his friend Gregory of Nazianzos, who in his Funeral Oration said that Basil wrote "provisions of prayers, decencies of the Altar;" also by Leontios the Byzantios who put the Prayer of Oblation of Basil together with that of the Apostles; thirdly by the letter of the Monks of Skythia to the African Bishops (520 A.D.) reporting that almost the entire East repeated the Liturgy of St. Basil. Those are a few documents, among many others, establishing St. Basil's Liturgy as a genuine work. St. Basil's Liturgy is celebrated about 10 times a year, including the Sundays of Lent.

The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is very ancient, "known to the Church before the initiators Basil and Chrysostom" as Patriarch Michael (12th century) infers. It is ascribed rather to Apostle James or Peter. The information that Pope Gregory, the Dialogos, wrote this Liturgy is untrue for many reasons, among them that he did not know the Greek language. As for the use of this Liturgy the 52nd canon of the 6th Ecumenical Synod refers to it, decreeing that "in all the fasting days of Lent, save Saturday, Sunday and the day of Annunciation, the sacred celebration of the Presanctified Gifts should take place." This Liturgy is celebrated in connection with the vesper service during the evenings. It keeps its venerable character even now when it is officiated during the mornings. It is called that of the Presanctified Gifts because the Sacred Gifts have been sanctified previously in the Liturgy of St. Basil or St. Chrysostom. This Liturgy is not officiated for the awesome change of the Gifts, but rather for the partaking of the Presanctified Gifts by the faithful Christians.

St. Chrysostom's Liturgy is well known and very common in the Eastern Orthodox Church. It may be celebrated every day of the year except the ones of St. Basil and those of the Presanctified Gifts, and on Good Friday. It is shorter than that of St. Basil and much reduced compared to St. James'. St. Chrysostom's Liturgy put an end to the free prayers and hymns in the officiation of the Holy Eucharist. This Liturgy placed a seal on the free forms of the re-enactment of the Mystic Supper of the Lord, depicting it in its finest form with a destiny of enduring far into the future. Despite the addition of hymns at later times, the St. Chrysostom Liturgy remains the same majestic religious masterpiece with grandeur and dramatic appeal matching the human expression and the divine act. St. Chrysostom (345-407A.D.) was an eloquent preacher, writer and one of the Fathers of the Orthodox Church, whose writings have been translated into many languages and have nourished the Christian Church throughout the centuries.

The Celebrant and Communicants during the Liturgy are bound to participate and respond to each other and among them selves in the name of the Lord. It is not a scene of a vigorous actor with an inactive audience. All of them have an important part in the Divine Liturgy, both for its officiation and for their participation in it. It is a corporal worship of the whole body of Christ - His Church. Each member has an active part in it. The faithful should be there prepared to act. Self-examination and purity of the body and soul constitute the good "soil" of the parable for accepting the seed of the word and the communion, and for giving hundredfold in one's response. The Divine Liturgy is not a mere prayer offered to God; it is a real communion with God. At this moment takes place an exchange of human and divine personalities, whatever the great difference between them.

Officiating the Divine Liturgy

Such being the importance of the active participation of the faithful in the offering of the Divine Eucharist, the knowledge of the Divine Liturgy as to its meaning and form usually is adequate. For this reason, we will refer in brief manner to various phases of the performance of the Divine Liturgy as it is seen today.

The Office of Preparation

The office of Preparation of the Divine Liturgy, the Prothesis, is now a separate service. Originally it constituted a part of the Liturgy when the deacon exclaimed: "Let us attend, that we may offer the Holy Oblation in peace," and where the prayer of the Oblation continues "to enable us to offer Thee Gifts." In the Liturgy of St. James the prayer of the Preparation is read during the Liturgy. In the Liturgy of Clement the prayer of Preparation took place after the dismissal of the Catechumens. St. Athanasios found untimely the practice of the preparation before the Divine Liturgy. St. Chrysostom put the Oblation and its prayer in the Liturgy after the kiss of peace and the exhortation, "Let us love one another," probably to remind us of the Bible's determination that "if thou bring thy gift to the altar and there remembrest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, then come and offer thy gift" (Matt. 5: 23-24).

Later in the 6th century the office of the Preparation was set apart, elaborated, and officiated before the Divine Liturgy, as it is now. At the same time the Cherubic hymn was inserted into the Liturgy against the protest of Patriarch Eutychios (582). Symbolism and allegory entered this office of Preparation and somehow confused the coherence of the thoughts of the Liturgy by prescribing them in anticipation. The office of Preparation took its final shape in the 14th century.

The Priest wears vestments - *sticharion* (robe), *epitrachelion* (stole), girdle, *epimanica* (cuff) and *phelonion* (the outer cape); he washes his hands and reads the prayers of Preparation. On the table of Preparation are the sacred utensils: Paten (disc), Cup (Chalice), spoon, spear, asterisk, two small covers, and one large overall cover (Aer). Also on the table are the sacred Species - the loaf of Bread and the Wine and water to be mixed in the Chalice.

The Bread is impressed in the center with the stamp "IC-XC, NI-KA", on its left has nine small elevations for the Saints, and on its right a portion for the Virgin Mary. All these portions are cut with the spear and placed on the Paten with prayers and commemoration. Portions also are added in the name of the faithful, both the departed and the living. Both the Paten and Chalice are covered with the two small covers and over all is placed the Aer. The Priest censes them and reads the prayer of Preparation.

The Diagram of the Divine Liturgy

The Divine Liturgy of St. Chrysostom consists of readings from the Scriptures and of solemn hymns and prayers. Its spoken words are chanted by the priest and sung

by the "people", who are now replaced by the cantor or the choir. Besides the spoken words, the main part of the Liturgy is read inaudibly by the priest, a custom which now prevails. It is a matter of fact that most of the "exaltations" of the priest are the ends of the prayers inaudibly read, and have not a complete meaning apart from the prayers. It is to be remembered that the Divine Liturgy is offered to enact the Holy Eucharist. Eucharist, from the Greek verb, Eucharistein, and the noun, Eucharistia, has not only the meaning of thanksgiving but, more so, that of sacrifice.

Whenever Holy Communion is offered, the partaking by all the faithful is intended. As a prelude there are petitions, Bible readings, exhortations and the confession. They open the awesome drama in which all the faithful participate. This participation includes singing, reading, listening, some gestures and the partaking of Holy Communion.

The following is a diagram of the Divine Liturgy:

- **Beginning:** The Liturgy starts with a blessing of the Kingdom of God, which includes the Sacred Body of Christ on earth; His Church.
- **Petitions:** They are small prayers which the priest offers especially for the peace of the world, with the people responding, Kyrie eleison; Lord, have mercy.
- **Antiphons:** These are readings from the Old Testament, especially from Psalms 102 and 145, with refrains of Christian meanings and specifically references to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- **Entry with the Gospel:** This entry represents the ancient practice when the priest took the Gospel by the light of torches from the crypt, an underground safeguard to protect the Gospel from destruction by the pagans, bringing it up to the Church. The priest lifts up the Gospel and exclaims: "Wisdom," which means Christ, and calls the people to worship and bow down to Christ.
- **Trisagion:** A short prayer praising the Holiness of God.
- **Readings from the New Testament:** (1) A part of the Book of Acts or the Epistles of the Apostles read by the reader. (2) Another section from the Gospels read by the priest. (The specific sections read are determined by the Church and are the same every year.)
- **Sermon:** It is incorporated as an exhortation from the priest to the people on the Good News of salvation. (The part of the service for the Catechumens is now omitted).
- **Cherubic Hymn and Entry with the Holy Gifts:** This is a procession with the yet unsanctified Species taken from the table of Preparation and brought to the Altar during which the Cherubic hymn is sung: "Let us put away all worldly care so that we may receive the King of all." (An addition made in the 9th century)
- **Ectenia of the Oblation:** They are small prayers completing "our supplications to the Lord". To these supplications the people respond, "Grant this, O Lord". The Prayer of Oblation is now inaudibly read by the Priest saying: "Enable us to offer to Thee gifts and spiritual sacrifices for our sins."

- **A Short Creed:** This is a proclamation of the Holy Trinity in connection with brotherhood. It is chanted now before the Nicæan Creed.
- **Creed:** This is the concise and accurate confession of the Christian faith in 12 articles formulated by 1st, 2nd Ecumenical Synod at Nicæa in 325 A.D. (The Nicæan Creed is recited during every Liturgy, an addition made in the 9th century; prior to that time it was recited only during the Liturgy at Easter).
- **Prayer of Sanctification:** It includes dialogues of excerpts from the long prayer of sanctification which is now read inaudibly by the priest and which, in fact, is the very heart of the significance of the Divine Liturgy. The dialogues start with the offering of the Oblation (the Species, Bread and Wine), continues with blessings and the actual words of the Lord, "this is my body ... this is my blood," and climax in the sanctification of the Species. Now the Bread and Wine are lifted by the priest, who exclaims, "Thine own of Thine own we offer to Thee, O Lord." At this time, generally the people kneel, and the choir sings: "We praise thee... we give thanks to thee, O Lord". In continuation, the priest commemorates the Saints and especially the Virgin Mary, as well as the faithful ones.
- **Petitions:** These are small prayers referring to the spiritual welfare of the city, the nation, the Church and the individual.
- **Lord's Prayer:** It is recited by the people; the priest follows it with the exaltation.
- **Breaking the Lamb:** At this point the priest elevates the Lamb (the consecrated Bread) saying: "The Holy things for those who are holy," and breaks it in commemoration of the actual Eucharist. Also at this time the priest pours warm water, zeon, into the Chalice, a reminiscence of the very primitive Church (see, Justin the Martyr).
- **Prayers before Holy Communion and Partaking of the Holy Gifts by the Priest:** Now the doors of the Altar are generally closed and the priest partakes of the Holy Gifts separately and then combines both Elements into the Chalice; a later practice of the Church.
- **Holy Communion:** Both the Holy Body and Precious Blood of Christ, combined in the Chalice, are given to the prepared faithful when the priest calls them to "draw near with reverence." In ancient times the Holy Gifts were given to the faithful separately, first the Body and then the Cup, from which the faithful drank in turn, as is the continued practice for the clergymen today.
- **Thanksgiving Prayers:** These are prayers of gratitude to Almighty God for the privilege which is given to the faithful to commune with Him.
- **Dismissal Hymn:** The priest calls the people to depart with a prayer by which he asks the Lord to "save Thy people and bless Thine inheritance." In conclusion he blesses the people, saying, "May the blessing of the Lord come upon you." The people seal the Liturgy by responding, "Amen." Blessed bread, antithoron, which means "instead of the Gift," is given to all at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy.

The Divine Liturgy - Cherished Heritage

The Spoken Words of the Divine Liturgy are 15 minutes of reading material which perpetuate the most cherished thoughts of our Christian heritage. They should be studied literally once and for all in the life of the faithful. There are books with the Divine Liturgy in the ecclesiastical languages - Greek, Slavonic, etc., and with translations into English to help the English-speaking people learn and follow the Divine Liturgy in its ecclesiastical language. There is no dogma forbidding the translation of the Divine Liturgy or even the Bible into vernacular language; for many centuries, however, the ecclesiastical language carried on the traditional thoughts and meanings of the Divine Liturgy to the extent that a translation into English may not render the full meaning and grandeur of the ecclesiastical language.

Whatever the language and form of the Divine Liturgy, the subject matter re-enacted in it is one and the same, that is, the awesome change of the Sacred Species into the Precious Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, the Holy Communion which nourishes and strengthens the faithful's communion with God in his remission of sins and promise of everlasting life.