

# Reflections on the Major Divine Services

Archpriest Seraphim Slobodskoy

## The All Night Vigil

The All Night Vigil is the divine service which is served on the evening prior to the days of specially celebrated feasts. It consists of the combination of Vespers, Matins and First Hour, during which the services are conducted with greater solemnity and more illumination of the church than on other days.

This service is given the name "All Night," because in ancient times it began in the later evening and continued through the entire night until dawn. Later, in condescension to the weakness of the faithful, this service was begun earlier, and certain contractions were made in the readings and chanting. Though the vigil is not as long as it once was, the term "All Night" is preserved.

## Vespers

Vespers recalls and represents events of the Old Testament: the creation of the world, the fall into sin of the first human beings, their expulsion from Paradise, their repentance and prayer for salvation, the hope of mankind in accordance with the promise of God for a Saviour, and finally, the fulfillment of that promise.

The Vespers of an All Night Vigil begins with the opening of the Royal Gates. The priest and deacon silently cense the Altar Table and the entire sanctuary, so that clouds of incense fill the depths of the sanctuary. This silent censuring represents the beginning of the creation of the world. In the beginning God created heaven and earth. And the earth was without form and void, and the Spirit of God hovered over the original material earth, breathing upon it a life-creating power, but the creating word of God had not yet begun to resound.

The priest then stands before the Altar and intones the first exclamation to the glory of the Creator and Founder of the world, the Most Holy Trinity: "Glory to the Holy, Consubstantial, Life-creating, and Indivisible Trinity, always, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages."

He then summons the faithful four times, "O come, let us worship God our King. O come let us worship and fall down before Christ, our King and our God. O come let us worship and fall down before Christ Himself, our King and our God. O come let us worship and fall down before Him." *"For All things were made by Him; and without him was not anything made that was made (John 1:3)."*

In response to this summons, the choir solemnly chants the 103rd Psalm, which describes the creation of the world and glorifies the wisdom of God: *"Bless the Lord, O my soul. Blessed art Thou, O Lord; O Lord my God, Thou hast been magnified exceedingly...In wisdom hast Thou made them all...Wondrous are Thy works, O Lord... Glory to Thee, O Lord, Who hast made them all."* During the chanting of this psalm the priest goes forth from the sanctuary. He completes the censuring of the entire church and the faithful therein, while a deacon precedes him bearing a lit candle in his hand. This sacred action calls to the mind of those praying the creation of the world; but it is to remind them primarily of the blessed life in Paradise of the first human beings,

when the Lord God Himself walked among them. The open Royal Gates signify that at that time the gates of Paradise were open for all mankind.

When man was deceived by the Devil and transgressed against the will of God, he fell into sin. Because of this fall, man was deprived of his blessed life in Paradise. He was driven out of Paradise and the gates were closed. To symbolize this expulsion, after the censuring of the church and the chanting of the psalm, the Royal Gates are closed.

The deacon then comes out from the sanctuary and stands before the closed Royal Gates, as Adam stood before the sealed entrance of Paradise, and intones the Great Litany: "In peace let us pray to the Lord." In other words, let us pray to the Lord when we have been reconciled with all our neighbors, so that we feel no anger or hostility towards them. "For the peace from above, and for the salvation of our souls, let us pray to the Lord." That is to say, let us pray that the Lord send down upon us "from on high" the peace of Heaven, and that He save our souls.

After the Great Litany and the exclamation of the priest, certain selected verses are usually sung from the first three psalms of the Psalter: "Blessed is the man that hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly." Blessed is he who has not lived or acted on the advice of those who are irreverent and impious. "For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, and the way of the ungodly shall perish." For the Lord knows the life of the righteous and the life of the impious leads to ruin. The deacon then intones the Little Litany, "Again and again, in peace let us pray to the Lord..."

After this litany, the choir chants the verses of certain psalms that express the longing of man for salvation and Paradise: "Lord, I have cried unto Thee, hearken unto me. Harken unto me, O Lord...Attend to the voice of my supplication, when I cry unto Thee...Let my prayer be set forth as incense before Thee, the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice. Harken unto me, O Lord." During the chanting of these verses, the deacon censes the church once more.

Up to this point, the divine service, from the beginning of the closing of the Royal Gates, through the petitions of the Great Ectenia and the chanting of the psalms, represents the miserable state of mankind was subject to by the fall of our forefathers into sin. With the fall, all the deprivations, pains and sufferings we experience came into our lives. We cry out to God, "Lord, have mercy," and request peace and salvation for our souls. We feel contrition that we heeded the ungodly counsel of the Devil. We ask God to forgive our sins and deliver us from troubles; we place all our hope in His mercy. Thus, the censuring by the deacon during the chanting of the psalm signifies both the sacrifices of the Old Testament and the prayers we are offering to God.

Alternating with the chanting of the Old Testament verses of the psalm "Lord, I have cried" are New testament hymns composed in honor of the saint or feast of the day. The last verse is called the Theotokion, or Dogmatikon, since it is sung in honor of the Mother of God. In it is set forth the dogma on the incarnation of the Son of God from the Virgin Mary. On the twelve great feasts, a special verse in honor of the feast is chanted in place of the Theotokion.

During the chanting of the Theotokion the Royal Gates are opened, and the Vespers Entry is made; a candle bearer comes through the north door of the Sanctuary, followed by the deacon

with the censer, and finally the priest. The priest stops on the ambo facing the Royal Gates and blesses the entry with the sign of the Cross; after the intoning of the words "Wisdom, let us attend!" by the deacon, the priest and the deacon reenters the Altar together through the Royal Gates. The priest goes to stand next to the High Place behind the Holy Table.

At this time the choir chants a hymn to the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ: "O Gentle Light of the holy glory of the immortal, heavenly, holy blessed Father, O Jesus Christ: having come to the setting of the sun, having beheld the evening light, we praise the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: God. Meet it is for Thee at all times to be hymned with reverent voices, O Son of God, Giver of Life. Wherefore, the world doth glorify Thee."

In this hymn, the Son of God is called the Gentle Light that comes from the Heavenly Father, for He came to this earth not in the fullness of divine glory but in the gentle radiance of this glory. This hymn also says that only with reverent voices, and not our sinful mouths, can He be glorified and exalted worthily.

The entry during Vespers reminds the faithful how the Old Testament righteous, in harmony with the promise of God that was manifest in prototypes and prophecies, expected the coming of the Saviour, and how He appeared in the world for the salvation of the human race.

The censer with incense used at the entry signifies that our prayers, by the intercession of our Lord the Saviour, are offered to God like incense. It also signifies the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church.

The blessing with the sign of the Cross shows that by means of the Cross of the Lord the doors into Paradise are opened again for us.

Following the chanting of the hymn "O Gentle Light..." we sing the prokeimenon, short verses taken from the Holy Scriptures. On Saturday evening, for the Vespers for Sunday, we chant, "The Lord is King; He is clothed with majesty."

After the chanting of the prokeimenon, on the more important feasts there are readings. These are selections from the Scriptures in which there is a prophecy or a prototype which relates to the event being celebrated, or in which edifying teachings are set forth, which relate to the saint commemorated that day.

Following the prokeimenon and readings the deacon intones the Augmented Litany, "Let us all say with our whole soul and with our whole mind, let us say." The prayer, "Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this evening without sin..." follows, and at the conclusion of this prayer the deacon reads the Supplicatory Litany, "Let us complete our evening prayer unto the Lord..."

On great feasts after the Augmented and Supplicatory Litanies the Litia, or Blessing of Bread and Wine, is celebrated.

"Litia" is a Greek word meaning "common prayer." The Litia, a series of verses chanted by the choir followed by an enumeration of many saints whose prayers are besought, is celebrated in the

western end of the church, near the main entrance doors, or in the Narthex, if the church is so arranged. This part of the service was intended for those who were standing in the Narthex, the catechumens and penitents, so they might be able to take part in the common service on the occasions of the major festivals.

At the end of the Litia is the blessing and sanctification of five loaves of bread, wheat, wine and oil to recall the ancient custom of providing food for those assembled who had come some distance, in order to give them strength during the long divine services. The five loaves are blessed to recall the feeding of the five thousand with five loaves of bread. Later, during the main part of Matins, the priest anoints the faithful with the sanctified oil, after they have venerated the festal icon.

After the Litia, or if it is not served, after the Supplicatory Litany, the Aposticha (Verses with hymns) are chanted. These are a few verses which are specially written in memory of the occasion.

Vespers ends with the reading of the prayer of St. Simeon the GodReceiver, "Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, O Master, according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples; a light of revelation for the gentiles and the glory of Thy people Israel." This prayer is followed by the reading of the Trisagion and the Lord's Prayer, and the singing of the salutation of the Theotokos, "O Theotokos and Virgin, Rejoice! or the troparion of the feast, and finally the thricechanted prayer of the Psalmist: "Blessed be the name of the Lord from henceforth and for evermore." The 33rd Psalm is then read or chanted until the verse, "But they that seek the Lord shall not be deprived of any good thing." Then follows the priestly blessing, "The blessing of the Lord be upon you, through His grace and love for mankind, always, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages."

The conclusion of Vespers with the prayer of St. Simeon and the angelic salutation of the Theotokos indicates the fulfillment of the divine promise of a Saviour.

Immediately after the conclusion of Vespers during an All Night Vigil, Matins begins with the reading of the Six Psalms.

### **Matins**

The second half of the All Night Vigil, Matins, is meant to remind us of the New Testament period: the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ in the world for our salvation and His glorious Resurrection.

The beginning of Matins immediately reminds us of the Nativity of Christ. It begins with the doxology or glorification of the angels who appeared to the shepherds in Bethlehem: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, goodwill among men.

This is followed by the reading of the Six Psalms, selected from those by the Prophet David (3, 37, 62, 87, 102 and 142) in which the sinful condition of mankind is depicted with all its weakness and temptations. The ardent expectation of mankind for their only hope, the mercy of

God, is expressed here. Those praying in church should be listening with special attentiveness and reverence to these psalms.

After the Six Psalms the deacon proclaims the Great Litany. The choir follows the Litany with the loud and joyful chant of this hymn with its verses: "God is the Lord and hath appeared unto us; Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." It is affirmed that God is Lord and has manifested Himself unto us, and He Who comes in the glory of the Lord is worthy of glorification.

The troparion or hymn that particularly honors and describes the feast or saint being celebrated follows, and then two kathismas are read, two of the twenty sections into which the Psalter is consecutively divided. The reading of the kathismas, as well as that of the Six Psalms, calls us to ponder our wretched, sinful condition and to place all our hope on the mercy and help of God. At the conclusion of each kathisma the deacon recites the Small Litany.

The Polyeleos, a Greek word meaning "much mercy," is then celebrated. The Polyeleos is the most festive and solemn part of Matins and the All Night Vigil, expressing the glorification of the mercy of God, which has been manifested to us by the coming to earth of the Son of God and His accomplishing our salvation from the power of the Devil and death. The Polyeleos begins with the triumphant singing of the verses of praise:

Praise ye the name of the Lord; O ye servants, praise the Lord. Alleluia. Blessed is the Lord out of Sion, Who dwelleth in Jerusalem. Alleluia. O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endureth forever. Alleluia. O give thanks unto the God of heaven; for His mercy endureth forever. Alleluia.

With the chanting of these verses all the lamps and candles in the church are lit, the Royal Gates are opened, and the priest, preceded by the deacon holding a lit candle, comes out of the altar and goes around the church censing as a sign of reverence for God and His Saints.

On Sundays, after the chanting of these verses, special Resurrection troparia, joyful hymns in honor of the Resurrection of Christ, are sung. They describe how the angels appeared to the Myrrhbearing women when they came to the tomb of Christ and told them of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. On other great feasts instead of these Resurrection troparia, the Magnification, a short verse of praise in honor of the saint or feast of that day, is sung before its icon.

After the Resurrection troparia or the Magnification, the deacon repeats the Small Litany, which is followed by the singing of the Hymns of Ascent, alternately by two choirs. There are three antiphons for each of the eight tones (the eighth tone has four); one group being used on each Sunday, depending on the tone of the week. Other feast days the first antiphon of the fourth tone is used. The deacon then says the prokeimenon and the priest reads the Gospel.

At a Sunday service the reading from the Gospel concerns the Resurrection of Christ and the appearances of Christ to His disciples, while on other feasts the Gospel reading relates to the events being celebrated or to the saint being glorified.

On Sundays, after the Gospel, the solemn hymn in honor of the risen Christ taken from the Paschal Matins service is sung, "Having beheld the Resurrection of Christ, let us worship the holy Lord Jesus..."

The Gospel is then carried into the center of the church and the faithful proceed forward to venerate it. On other feasts the faithful venerate the festal icon, and the priest anoints them on the forehead with oil and distributes the bread blessed during the Litia.

After the hymn, "Having beheld the Resurrection...", the 50th Psalm is read as well as other hymns asking for the mercy of the Lord, the Theotokos and the Apostles. The deacon then reads the prayer for the intercession of the Saints, "Save, O God, Thy people and the priest exclaims, "Through the mercy and compassion The chanting of the Canon begins.

The canon is the name for a series of hymns which are composed according to a definite order. "Canon" is a Greek word which means "rule." A canon is divided into nine parts or odes. The first verse of each ode is called the irmos, which means "connection" or "link" and is chanted. With these irmosi all the rest of the canon is joined into one whole. The rest of the verses for each ode, called troparia, are now usually read, although they were originally chanted to the same melody as the irmos. The second ode of the canons is included only during Great Lent due to its penitential character.

The most noted composers of these canons were Sts. John of Damascus, Cosmas of Maiouma and Andrew of Crete, who wrote the penitential Great Canon used during Great Lent. The hymnography of these composers was inspired by the prayers and actions of some of the great Old Testament saints. Though in common practice they are now chanted only during Great Lent, each ode should be preceded by the Biblical ode upon which each Canon ode is based. The figures commemorated for each Biblical ode, which are found at the end of the Psalter, are the Prophet Moses (first and second odes); the Prophetess Anna, the mother of Samuel (third ode); the Prophet Habbakuk (fourth ode); the Prophet Isaiah (fifth ode); the Prophet Jonah (the sixth ode); the three Hebrew children (seventh and eighth odes); and the Priest Zacharias, the father of St. John the Forerunner (ninth ode).

Prior to the beginning of the ninth ode, the deacon proclaims: "The Theotokos and Mother of the Light, let us magnify in song," and proceeds to circle around the entire church. The choir then begins the Song of the Theotokos, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God My Saviour." Each verse of this hymn terminates with the singing of the refrain, "More honorable than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim, Who without corruption gavest birth to God the Word, the very Theotokos, Thee do we magnify." Following this hymn to the Theotokos, the choir continues with the irmos and troparia of the ninth ode of the canon.

Concerning the general content of the canons, the irmosi remind the faithful of the Old Testament period and events from the history of our salvation and gradually lead our thoughts to the Nativity of Christ. The troparia recount New Testament events and the history of the Church, presenting a series of verses or hymns glorifying the Lord and the Mother of God, and also honoring the event being celebrated, or the saint glorified on this day.

On major feasts each ode is concluded by a katavasia, a Greek word meaning "descent," and the deacon proclaims the Small Litany after the third, sixth and ninth odes.

On Sundays, "Holy is the Lord our God" is then alternated with a few verses, and another special verse for the feast called the Exapostilarion, or "Hymn of Lights," is chanted.

Then the Lauds or "Praises" (Psalms 148,149,150) are chanted, along with the verses for the "Praises," in which all of God's creation is summoned to glorify Him: "Let every breath praise the Lord!" If it is a major feast special hymns in honor of the occasion are inserted between the final verses.

The Great Doxology follows the chanting of the Lauds. The Royal Gates are opened during the singing of the last hymn of the Lauds (the Sunday Theotokion) and the priest exclaims, "Glory to Thee Who has shown us the light." The doxology begins "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill among men. We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee, we give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory..." In early Church practice the singing of this hymn just preceded the first light of dawn.

In the Great Doxology we give thanks to God for the light of day and for the bestowal of spiritual Light - the light of Truth, Christ the Saviour, Who has enlightened mankind with His teachings. The Doxology concludes with the chanting of the Trisagion and the singing of the festal troparion. The deacon then intones the Augmented and Supplicatory litanies.

Matins for an All Night Vigil concludes with the Dismissal. The priest turns to the faithful and says, "May Christ our true God (on Sundays, "Who rose from the dead" through the intercessions of His Most-pure Mother, of the holy, glorious, and all-praised Apostles, of the holy and righteous Ancestors of God Joachim and Anna, and of all the saints, have mercy on us and save us, for He is good and the Lover of mankind."

The choir responds with a prayer that the Lord preserve the Orthodox episcopate for many years, as well as the ruling hierarch and all Orthodox Christians. The last part of the All Night Vigil, the First Hour, follows. The service of the First Hour consists of the reading of three psalms and of various prayers, in which we request that God hear our voices in the morning and that He guide our hands during the course of the day. The First Hour concludes with the victorious hymn in honor of the Theotokos, "To Thee the Champion Leader..." The priest reads the Dismissal for the First Hour, and the All Night Vigil comes to an end.

### **The Divine Liturgy**

The Liturgy is the most important divine service, for in it the most holy Mystery of Communion is celebrated, as established by our Lord Jesus Christ on Holy Thursday evening, the eve of His Passion. After He had washed the feet of His disciples, to give them an example of humility, the Lord gave praise to God the Father, took bread, blessed it and broke it, giving it to the Apostles, saying, Take, eat, this is My Body, which is broken for you. Then He took a cup with grape wine and also blessed it and gave it to them with the words, Drink of it all of you: for this is My Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins. And when

they had communed of these, the Lord gave them the commandment to always perform this Mystery, "*Do this in remembrance of Me*" (Matt. 26:26-28, Lk. 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24).

The Apostles celebrated Holy Communion according to the commandment and example of Jesus Christ and taught all Christians to perform this great and saving Mystery. In the earliest times the order and form of celebrating the Liturgy was transmitted orally, and all the prayers and sacred hymns were memorized. Eventually, written explications of the apostolic Liturgy began to appear. As time passed, new prayers, hymns and sacred actions were added in various churches so that the uniformity of its performance was lost. The need arose to unify all the existing orders of the Liturgy and to reintroduce harmony in their celebration. In the fourth century, when the persecutions of the Romans against Christians ended, it was possible to re-establish good order in the Church's inner life through Ecumenical Councils. St. Basil the Great wrote down and offered for general use one form of the Liturgy, while St. John Chrysostom composed a shorter version of St. Basil's Liturgy. These liturgies were based on the most ancient Liturgy, ascribed to St. James the Apostle, the first bishop of Jerusalem.

St. Basil the Great, who reposed in 379 A.D, was archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia in Asia Minor. He is called "the Great" because of his great ascetic endeavors and his literary contribution to the Church of numerous prayers and ecclesiastical writings and rules.

St. John Chrysostom was an archbishop of Constantinople. He was called "Chrysostom" (in Greek, "the golden tongued") for his unique rhetorical gifts with which he proclaimed the Word of God. Though he reposed in 402 A.D. in exile, many volumes of his sermons and letters remain to edify us spiritually.

The liturgy is described by various terms. "Liturgy" itself is a Greek word meaning "common action or service" and signifies that the Mystery of Holy Communion is the reconciling sacrifice of God for the sins of the entire community of faithful, the living and the dead. Since the Mystery of Holy Communion is called "Evharistia" in Greek or "the Thanksgiving Sacrifice," the Liturgy is also called the "Eucharist." It is also termed the "Mystical Supper" or the "Lord's Supper" since it is customarily celebrated around noon, and the Body and Blood of Christ offered in the Mystery of Holy Communion are called such in the Word of God (cf. 1 Cor. 10:21; 11:20). In apostolic times the Liturgy was referred to as the breaking of bread (Acts 2:46). In the Liturgy the earthly life and teachings of Jesus Christ, from His Nativity to His Ascension into Heaven, are recalled, as well as the benefits which He bestowed upon the earth for our salvation.

The order of the Liturgy is as follows. First, the elements for the Mystery are prepared, then the faithful are prepared for the Mystery, and finally the very Mystery itself is celebrated and the faithful receive Communion. The Liturgy is divided into three parts: 1) the Proskomedia, 2) the Liturgy of the Catechumens and 3) the Liturgy of the Faithful.

### **The Proskomedia**

"Proskomedia" is a Greek word meaning "offering." The first part of the Liturgy derives its name from the early Christian custom of the people offering the bread and wine, and all else that was needed for the Liturgy. Therefore the very bread which is used in it is termed "prospora," another word meaning "offering." This bread or prospora must be leavened, pure and made of

wheat flour. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself, for the celebration of the Mystery of Holy Communion, used leavened, not unleavened bread, as is clear from the Greek word used in the New Testament. The prosphora must be round and is formed into two parts, one above the other, as an image of the two natures of Jesus Christ, divine and human. On the flat surface of the upper part a seal of the Cross is impressed, and in the four sections are thus formed the initial Greek letters of the name of "Jesus Christ," IC XC, and the Greek word NIKA, which mean "Jesus Christ conquers."

The wine used in the Mystery must be red grape wine, as this color reminds one of the color of blood. The wine is mixed with water to remind us of the pierced side of the Saviour from which flowed blood and water on the Cross. Five prosphoras are used in the Proskomedie to recall the five loaves with which Christ miraculously fed the five thousand, an event which gave Jesus Christ the means to teach the people about spiritual nourishment, about the incorrupt, spiritual food which is bestowed in the Mystery of Holy Communion (John 6:22-58). For Communion only one prosphora is used (the Lamb), in accordance with the words of the Apostle: *"one loaf, and we many are one body; for all have partaken of only one loaf"* (1 Cor. 10:17). Therefore this one prosphora must correspond in size to the number of communicants.

### **The Celebration of Proskomedie**

In order to prepare, according to the ecclesiastical Typikon, for the celebration of the Liturgy, the priest and deacon read the "entrance prayers" before the closed doors of the Royal Doors and then enter the Sanctuary and vest. Then going to the Altar of Oblation the priest blesses the beginning of Proskomedie, takes the first prosphora, the Lamb, and with the spear makes the sign of the Cross over it three times, saying the words, "In remembrance of our Lord and God and Saviour, Jesus Christ." These words mean that the Proskomedie is celebrated according to the commandments of Jesus Christ. The priest then cuts a cube out of the center of this prosphora with the spear and pronounces the words of the Prophet Isaiah, *"He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and as a blameless lamb before his shearer is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth; in His lowliness His Judgement was taken away"* (Is. 53:7-8).

This cubical portion of the prosphora is called the Lamb (John 1:29) and is placed on the diskos. Then the priest cuts cruciformly the lower side of the Lamb while saying the words, "Sacrificed is the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world, for the life and salvation of the world." He then pierces the right side of the Lamb with the spear, saying the words of the Evangelist, *"One of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and forthwith there came out blood and water. And he that saw it bare witness, and his witness is true"* (John 19:34). In accordance with these words wine is poured into the chalice mixed with water. From the second prosphora the priest cuts out one portion in honor of the Mother of God and places it on the right side of the Lamb on the diskos. From the third prosphora, which is called "that of the nine ranks," are taken nine portions in honor of the saints, John the Baptist, the prophets, the apostles, the hierarchs, the martyrs, the monastic saints, the unmercenaries, the parents of God, Joachim and Anna, the saint who is celebrated that day, and finally the saint whose liturgy is being celebrated. These portions are placed on the left side the Lamb on the diskos in three rows of three. From the fourth prosphora portions are removed for the hierarchs, the priesthood and all the living, and are placed below the Lamb. From the fifth prosphora, portions are taken for those Orthodox Christians who have reposed, and these are placed just below those which were

removed for the living. Finally, portions are removed from those prosphoras donated by the faithful as the names of the living and the dead are read simultaneously for the health and salvation and the repose of the servants of God. These are placed together with those portions taken from the fourth and fifth prosphoras. The Russian tradition is to use five separate prosphoras at the Proskomedia. Other traditions such as the Greek use one or two large ones from which the portions are taken.

At the end of the Proskomedia the priest blesses the censer and incense, and after censuring the Star he places it on the diskos over the Lamb and the portions in order to preserve their arrangement. He covers the diskos and chalice with two small cruciform cloth covers, and over the two of them another larger veil called the "aer" is placed. Then he censes the Holy Gifts and prays that the Lord bless the offered gifts, remember those who have offered them and those for whom they are offered, and make the priest himself worthy for the solemn performance the Divine Mystery.

The sacred instruments used and actions performed in the Proskomedia have a symbolic meaning. The Diskos signifies the cave in Bethlehem and Golgotha; the Star, the star of Bethlehem and the Cross; the Covers and Veils, the swaddling clothes and the winding sheet at the tomb of the Saviour; the Chalice, that cup in which Jesus Christ sanctified the wine; the prepared Lamb, the judgment, passion and death of Jesus Christ; its piercing by the spear, the piercing of Christ's body by one of the soldiers. The arrangement of all the portions in a certain order on the diskos signifies the entire Kingdom of God whose members consist of the Mother of God, the angels, all the holy men who have been pleasing to God, all the faithful Orthodox Christians, living and dead, and in the center its head, the Lord Himself, our Saviour. The censuring signifies the overshadowing by the Holy Spirit, whose Grace is shared in the Mystery of Holy Communion.

The Proskomedia is performed by the priest in a quiet voice at the Table of Oblation when the sanctuary is closed. During its celebration, the Third and Sixth (and sometimes the Ninth) Hours are read according to the Horologion.

### **The Liturgy of the Catechumens**

The second part of the Liturgy is called the Liturgy of the Catechumens because the catechumens, those preparing to receive Holy Baptism and likewise the penitents who are temporarily excommunicated for serious sins, are allowed to participate in its celebration.

The deacon, upon receiving a blessing from the priest, goes out from the Altar to the Ambo, and loudly pronounces the words, "Bless, Master," that is, bless that the service begin and for the gathered faithful to partake in prayerful glorification of God. The priest in his first exclamation glorifies the Holy Trinity, "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto the ages of ages." The choir responds with "Amen" ("so be it"). The deacon intones the Great Litany in which are enumerated the various needs of Christians and our requests to the Lord, at which time the priest in the Altar privately prays that the Lord look down upon the church and those at prayer in it and fulfill their needs. The Great Litany begins by reminding us that in order to pray to the Lord one needs to be "at peace," that is, reconciled with all, having no resentment, anger, or hostility towards anyone. According to the teaching of the

Saviour we may not offer God any gifts, if we have anything against our neighbor (Matt. 5:23-24). The loftiest good for which one should pray is this peace of soul and the salvation of the soul: "for the peace from above (Heaven) and the salvation of our souls." This peace is that serenity of conscience and sense of joy which we experience when we have conscientiously been to Confession and worthily partaken of Holy Communion, or that sympathetic concern for the welfare of our fellow men when we have done a good deed. The Saviour bestowed this peace on the Apostles during His farewell conversation at the Mystical Supper (John 14:27). "For the peace of the whole world," asks that there be no disputes and hostility among nations or races throughout the entire world.

"For the good estate of the holy churches of God," is a prayer that the Orthodox Churches in every country might firmly and unwaveringly, on the basis of the Word of God and the canons of the Universal Church, confess the Holy Orthodox Faith, and "for the union of all," asks that all may be drawn into one flock of Christ (cf. John 10:16).

We pray "for this holy temple," which is the principle sacred object of the parish and should be the object of special care on the part of each parishioner, so that the Lord preserve it from fire, thieves and other misfortunes; and that those who enter it ("for them that enter herein") do so with sincere faith, reverence, and the fear of God.

We pray for the patriarchs, metropolitans, archbishops and bishops because they are entrusted with the overall supervision of the purity of the Christian faith and morals; "for pious rulers," who preserve the freedom of the Orthodox Faith and the general lawful order for the peaceful life of all citizens; "For this city (or monastery)," in which we live and work, and "for every city, country and the faithful that dwell therein" we also pray in a spirit of Christian love, and for all the other cities and their environs and all the faithful who live in them.

"For seasonable weather, abundance of the fruits of the earth, and peaceful times": we pray for good weather so that the earth might yield in abundance her fruits that are necessary for the nourishment of all the inhabitants of these countries, and for peaceful times, so that there be no enmity or conflicts among these citizens that will distract them from peaceful and honorable labors; "for travelers by sea, land and air, for the sick, the suffering, the imprisoned and for their salvation" - all those persons who more than others need divine aid and our prayers.

We pray "that we be delivered from every tribulation, wrath, and necessity." Then we beseech the Lord that He defend and preserve us not according to our deeds nor our merits, which we lack, but solely according to His mercy: "Help us, save us, have mercy on us, and keep us, O God, by The grace."

In the final words of the Litany, "calling to remembrance" the Mother of God and all the saints, we entrust and surrender ourselves and each other to Christ God so that He might guide us according to His wise will. The priest concludes the Great Litany with the exclamation, "For unto Thee is due all glory, honor, and worship, to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages," which contains, according to the example of the Lord's Prayer, the doxology or glorification of the Lord God.

After the Great Litany, Psalms 102 ("Bless the Lord, O my soul...") and 145 ("Praise the Lord, O my soul...") are chanted, separated by the Small Litany, "Again and again in peace let us pray to the Lord." These psalms describe the blessings to the human race bestowed by God. The heart and soul of the Christian must bless the Lord, Who purifies and heals our mental and physical weaknesses and fills our desires with good things and delivers our life from corruption, and thus one must not forget all His benefits. The Lord is merciful, compassionate and longsuffering. He keeps truth unto the ages, gives Judgement to the wronged and food to the hungry, frees the imprisoned, loves the righteous, receives the orphan and widow and punishes the sinner.

These psalms are called the "Typical Psalms" and are chanted "antiphonally," with the verses alternating between two choirs. These psalms are not sung on the feasts of the Lord but are replaced by special verses from other psalms which relate to the events being celebrated. After each of these verses the refrain is chanted, "Through the prayers of the Theotokos, O Saviour, save us." The verses of the second festal antiphon are dependent on the feast being celebrated. For the Nativity of Christ we chant "Save us, O Son of God, Who art born of the Virgin ..." "Who wast baptized in the Jordan" for the Theophany of the Lord, and "Who art risen from the dead" for Pascha. All are concluded with "save us who sing unto Thee. Alleluia."

The second antiphon is always followed by the hymn, "O Only-begotten Son and Word of God, Who art immortal, yet didst deign for our salvation to be incarnate of the Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, and without change didst become man, Thou Who art one of the Holy Trinity, glorified with the Father and the Holy Spirit, save us." This hymn sets forth the Orthodox teaching on the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son of God, Jesus Christ. He is the Only-begotten (one in essence) Son and Word of God, Christ God, Who being immortal, became human without ceasing to be God ("without change" - became incarnate) and accepted a human body from the Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary. By His crucifixion, He with His death conquered our death, "trampling down death by death," as one of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, and is glorified equally with the Father and Holy Spirit.

The Small Litany and the chanting of the Gospel Beatitudes follow (Matt. 5:3-12). The Beatitudes indicate the spiritual qualities necessary for a Christian seeking the mercy of God: humility of spirit (spiritual poverty) and contrition concerning one's sins, meekness when drawing near the righteousness of God, purity of heart, compassion for one's neighbor, seeking peace in all situations, patience amid every temptation, and a readiness to endure dishonor, persecution, and death for Christ, trusting that as a confessor for Him, and for such ascetic struggles, one can expect a great reward in Heaven. Instead of the Gospel Beatitudes, on the great feasts of the Lord the festal troparion is sung several times with various verses.

During the chanting of the Gospel Beatitudes the Royal Gates are opened for the Small Entry. As the Beatitudes are ending the priest takes the Holy Gospel from the Altar, gives it to the deacon and comes out with the deacon, who carries the sacred Gospel through the north door onto the ambo. This entrance with the Holy Gospel by the clergy is termed the Small Entry to distinguish it from the Great Entrance which follows, and it reminds the faithful of the first appearance of Jesus Christ to the world, when He came to begin His universal preaching. After receiving a blessing from the priest, the deacon remains standing in the Royal Gates and raising the sacred Gospel aloft, he loudly proclaims, "Wisdom! Aright!" He then enters the Sanctuary and places

the Gospel on the Holy Table. The exclamation, "Wisdom! Aright!" reminds the faithful that they must stand upright (in the literal meaning of the Greek word *Orthi* which is correctly, or straight) and be attentive, keeping their thoughts concentrated. They should look upon the Holy Gospel as upon Jesus Christ Himself Who has come to preach, and faithfully sing, "O come, let us worship and fall down before Christ; save us, O Son of God, Who didst rise from the dead (or, through the intercessions of the Theotokos, or Who art wondrous in Thy saints), who chant unto Thee: Alleluia!" The troparia and kontakia for Sunday, or the feast, or the saint of the day are then chanted, while the priest privately prays that the Heavenly Father Who is hymned by the Cherubim, and glorified by the Seraphim, receive from us the angelic (trisagion) hymn, forgive us our sins, and sanctify and grant us the power to rightly serve Him. The conclusion of this prayer, "For Holy art Thou, our God...", is uttered aloud.

The Trisagion Hymn, "Holy God" is then chanted, though for the Nativity of Christ, the Baptism of the Lord, Pascha and Bright Week, and the Day of the Holy Trinity, as well as on Holy Saturday and Lazarus Saturday, we chant, "As many as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ: Alleluia." This hymn is chanted because in the early days of the Church, the catechumens received Holy Baptism on these days. On the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross of the Lord (September 14) and on the third Sunday of Great Lent (when the veneration of the Cross is celebrated) instead of the Trisagion we chant, "Before Thy Cross we bow down, O Master, and Thy Holy Resurrection we glorify."

Following the Trisagion the Epistle for the day is read from either the Book of Acts or the seven catholic epistles of the Apostles or the fourteen epistles of the Apostle Paul, according to a special order. The faithful are prepared for the attentive hearing of the Epistle by the exclamations, "Let us attend," "Peace to all," "Wisdom" and the chanting of the *prokeimenon*, which is a special short verse which changes with the day. During the reading of the Epistle a censuring is performed as a symbol of the Grace of the Holy Spirit by which the Apostles proclaimed to the entire world the teachings of Jesus Christ. One should respond both to the censuring and to the exclamation of the priest, "peace to all," with a simple bow, without making any sign of the Cross. "Alleluia" is sung three times with the intoning of special verses, and the Gospel of the day is read, also according to a special set of indications. This is preceded and accompanied by the chanting of a joyous hymn, "Glory to Thee, O Lord, glory to Thee," since for the believing Christian there can be no more joyful words than those of the Gospel concerning the life, teachings, and miracles of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Epistle and Gospel must be listened to with particular attention, with a bowed head. It is good for people to familiarize themselves with the readings beforehand. Before the readings begin one ought to cross oneself and at their conclusion make the sign of the Cross and bow.

The Gospel is followed by the Augmented Litany, when the faithful are invited to pray to the Lord God with a pure heart and all the powers of their soul. "Let us say with our whole soul and with our mind..." In two of the petitions we fervently request the Lord to hear our prayer and to have mercy on us. "O Lord, Almighty, the God of our Fathers, we pray Thee, hearken and have mercy - Have mercy on us, O God..." Then follow the fervent petitions for the patriarchs, the metropolitans, the archbishops, the bishops, the ruling hierarch and "all our brethren in Christ" (all the faithful Christians), for pious rulers, for priests, priest monks and all the serving clergy of the Church of Christ, for the blessed and ever-memorable (always worthy of memory) holy

Orthodox patriarchs, and pious kings, and rightbelieving queens, and for the founders of the holy church parish, and all the Orthodox fathers and brethren who have reposed, and are buried in the vicinity and everywhere. It is necessary to pray for the dead in the spirit of Christian love which never fails, all the more since for the reposed there is no more repentance after the grave, but only requital: blessed life or eternal torment. Christian prayer for them, good deeds accomplished in their memory, and especially the offering of the bloodless Sacrifice can evoke the mercy of God, lighten the torment of sinners, and according to Tradition even free them entirely.

We pray too for mercy, that the Lord will be compassionate towards us, for life, peace, health, salvation and the forgiveness of the sins of the brethren of this holy temple (the parishioners). The last petition of the Augmented Litany refers to those who are active and do good deeds in the holy, local church (parish), those who labor for it, those who chant and the people present who await of God great and abundant mercy. Those who are active and do good deeds for the church are those faithful who provide the church with all that is necessary for the divine service (oil, incense, prosphoras, and so forth). and who contribute to the needs of the church and parish with their monetary and material goods for the beauty and decoration of the church, for the support of those who work for it, the readers, chanters, serving clergy, and those who help poor parishioners and provide help when other common religious and moral needs may arise.

The Augmented Litany is followed by the special Litany for the Departed, in which we pray for all the fathers and brethren who have reposed. We beseech Christ the immortal King and our God to forgive them all their sins, voluntary and involuntary, and to grant them a place of repose and serenity in the dwellings of the righteous, and, admitting that there is no man who has not sinned in his life, we ask the Righteous judge to grant them the Heavenly Kingdom wherein all the righteous find peace.

The Litany for the Catechumens is then recited, in which we ask the Lord to have mercy on them and establish them in the truths of the Holy Faith ("reveal unto them the Gospel of righteousness") and make them worthy of Holy Baptism ("unite them to His Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church"). During this litany the priest opens the Antimins on the Altar, and the litany ends with the exclamation, "that with us they also may glorify..."; in other words, that they (the catechumens) might together with us (the faithful) glorify the all-honorable and great name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Then the catechumens are requested to depart from the church building: "As many as are catechumens, depart..." Catechumens exist even today as people prepare to become Orthodox all over the world, pagans (in China, Japan, Siberia, Africa), Muslims, and Jews - as well as those coming into the Orthodox Church from the schismatic and heretical traditions of the Western denominations. They are all in need of the mercy of God, and therefore we are obliged to pray for them. These words for the catechumens to depart from the church building should also be a warning to us, even if there are no actual catechumens among us. We, the baptized, sin frequently and often without repentance are present in the church, lacking the requisite preparation and having in our hearts hostility and envy against our fellow men. Therefore, with the solemn and threatening words, "catechumens depart," we as unworthy ones should examine ourselves closely and ponder our unworthiness, asking forgiveness from our personal enemies, often imagined, and ask the Lord God for the forgiveness of our sins with the firm resolve to do better.

With the words, "As many as are of the faithful, again and again, in peace let us pray to the Lord," the Liturgy of the Faithful begins.

### **The Liturgy of the Faithful**

This third part of the Liturgy is so called because only the faithful are allowed to be present during its celebration - those already baptized. It can be divided into the following sections:

- The transferal of the honored Gifts from the Table of Oblation to the Holy Table
- the preparation of the faithful for the consecration of the Gifts
- the consecration (transformation) of the Gifts
- the preparation of the faithful for Communion
- Communion, and
- the thanksgiving for Communion and the Dismissal.

### **The Transferal of the Honored Gifts From the Table of Oblation to the Holy Table**

Following the request for the catechumens to depart from the church two short litanies are proclaimed, and the Cherubic Hymn is chanted: "Let us who mystically represent the Cherubim, and chant the thrice-holy hymn unto the Life-creating Trinity, now lay aside all earthly care, that we may receive the King of all, Who cometh invisibly upborne in triumph by the ranks of angels. Alleluia."

The words of the original Greek for "upborne in triumph" mean literally, "borne aloft as on spears." This refers to an ancient practice when a nation, desiring to solemnly glorify its king or war leader, would seat him upon their shields, and raising him aloft would carry him before the army and through the city streets. As the shields were borne aloft on the spears, so it would seem that the triumphant leader was carried by their spears.

The Cherubic Hymn reminds the faithful that they have now left behind every thought for daily life, and offering themselves as a likeness of the Cherubim, are found close to God in Heaven and, together with the angels, sing the thrice-holy hymn in praise of God. Prior to the Cherubic Hymn the Royal Gates are opened and the deacon performs the censuring, while the priest in private prayers requests of the Lord that He purify his soul and heart from an evil conscience and by the power of the Holy Spirit make him worthy to offer to God the Gifts which have been presented. Then the priest, with the deacon, three times quietly says the words of the Cherubic Hymn, and both proceed to the Table of Oblation for the transferal of the precious Gifts from the Table of Oblation to the Holy Table. The deacon, with the Aer on his left shoulder, carries the Diskos on his head, while the priest carries the Chalice in his hands.

Leaving the altar by the north door, while the choir chants "Let us lay aside all earthly care," they come to a stop on the ambo, facing the people. They commemorate the patriarchs, metropolitans, archbishops, the local ruling bishop, the clergy, monastics, the founders of the church (or monastery) and the Orthodox Christians who are present. They then turn and enter the altar through the Royal Gates, place the precious gifts on the Holy Table, on the opened Antimins, and cover them with the Aer. As the choir finishes the Cherubic Hymn the Royal Gates and curtain are closed. The Great Entry symbolizes the solemn passing of Jesus Christ to His voluntary suffering and death by crucifixion. The faithful should stand during this time with bowed heads and pray that the Lord remember them and all those close to them in His Kingdom.

After the priest says the words, "and all of you Orthodox Christians, may the Lord God remember in His kingdom," one must say softly, "And may the Lord God remember your priesthood in His Kingdom, always, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages."

### **The Preparation of the Faithful for the Consecration of the Precious Gifts**

Following the Great Entry is the preparation of the faithful so that they might be worthy to be present during the consecration of the Gifts which have been prepared. This preparation begins with the Intercessory Litany, "Let us complete our prayer unto the Lord" for the "Precious Gifts set forth (offered)," so that they might be pleasing to the Lord. At the same time the priest prays privately that the Lord sanctify them with His Grace. We then pray that the Lord help us to pass the entire day in perfection, that is, holy, peaceful, and without sin, and that He send us a Guardian Angel to be a faithful guide on the path of truth and goodness, keeping our souls and bodies from every evil. We ask that He forgive and forget our accidental sins as well as our frequently repeated transgressions, that He grant us all that is good and beneficial for the soul and not those things which gratify our destructive passions, and that all people might live and work in peace and not in enmity and mutually destructive conflict; that we might spend the remainder of our lives at peace with our neighbors and with our own conscience and in contrition for the sins we have committed; that we be granted a Christian ending to our lives, that is, that we might confess and receive the Holy Mysteries of Christ before our repose. We ask for an end to our lives which is peaceful, with peace of soul and reconciliation with our fellow men. Finally, we ask that the Lord deem us worthy to give a good, fearless account at His Dread Judgement.

In order to be present worthily at the celebration of the Holy Mysteries, the following are absolutely required: peace of soul, mutual love and the true (Orthodox) Faith, which unites all believers. Therefore, after the Litany of Intercession, the priest when blessing the people, says "Peace be unto all." Those praying express the same desire in their souls with the words, "And to Thy spirit." Then he exclaims, "Let us love one another that with one mind we may confess and the choir chants, "The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, One in essence and indivisible." This response indicates for us Who should be confessed in unanimity in order to recite the Creed in a worthy manner. Then comes the exclamation, "The doors! the doors! In wisdom, let us attend." The Symbol of Faith (the Creed) is then sung or read, in which briefly, but exactly, our faith in the Holy Trinity and the other main truths of the Orthodox Church are set forth. At this time the curtain behind the Royal Doors is opened and the celebrant lifts the Aer from the precious Gifts, and gently waves it over them in expectation of the descent of the Holy Spirit. The words "The doors! the doors!" in ancient times reminded the doorkeepers to watch carefully at the doors of the church that none of the catechumens or unbelievers enter. Today these words remind the faithful to close the doors of their souls against the assault of thoughts. The words, "In wisdom, let us attend," indicate that we should be attentive to the truths of the Orthodox faith as set forth in the Creed.

From this point on, the faithful should not leave the church until the end of the Liturgy. The Fathers condemned the transgression of this requirement, writing in the ninth Apostolic Canon, "an faithful who leave the church... and do not remain at prayer until the end, as being those who introduce disorder into the church, should be separated from the church community." After the Symbol of the Faith the priest exclaims, "Let us stand aright, let us stand with fear, let us attend, that we may offer the holy oblation in peace," directing the attention of the faithful to the fact

that the time has come to offer the "holy oblation," or sacrifice. It is time to celebrate the Holy Mystery of the Eucharist, and from this moment one ought to stand with special reverence and attentiveness. The choir then responds, "A mercy of peace, a sacrifice of praise." We offer with gratitude for the mercy of heavenly peace granted to us from above the only sacrifice we can, that of praise. The priest blesses the faithful with the words, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all." His next words, "Let us lift up our hearts," summon us to a reverent presenting of ourselves before God. The choir responds with reverence in the name of those praying, "We lift them up unto the Lord," affirming that our hearts are already striving and aspiring to the Lord.

### **The Consecration of the Gifts**

The act of the Holy Mystery of Communion comprises the main portion of the Liturgy. It begins with the words of the priest, "Let us give thanks unto the Lord." The faithful express their gratitude to the Lord for His mercy by bowing to Him, while the choir chants, "It is meet and right to worship the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, one in essence and indivisible." Praying silently, the priest offers a eucharistic prayer (one of thanksgiving), glorifying the infinite perfection of God, giving thanks to the Lord for the creation and redemption of mankind and for His mercy, in forms both known and unknown, and for the fact that He deems us worthy to offer Him this bloodless sacrifice, although the higher beings, the archangels, angels, Cherubim and Seraphim stand before Him "singing the triumphal hymn, shouting, crying aloud, and saying:." These last words of the priest are said aloud as the choir proceeds with the described hymn by singing the angelic hymn, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord of Sabaoth, Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory." Then the choir adds to this hymn, which is called the "Seraphic Hymn," the exclamation with which the people greeted the entry of the Lord into Jerusalem, "Hosanna (a Hebrew expression of good will: save, or help, O God!) in the highest, blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord, hosanna in the highest!" The words, "singing the triumphal hymn," are taken from the visions of the Prophet Ezekiel (1:4-24) and the Apostle John the Theologian (Rev. 4:6-8). In both their visions they beheld the throne of God surrounded by angels in the form of an eagle (singing), a bull (shouting), a lion (crying out) and a man (saying) who continually were exclaiming, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts."

The priest privately continues the eucharistic prayer which glorifies the benevolence and the infinite love of God, which was manifest in the coming upon the earth of the Son of God. In remembrance of the Mystical Supper, when the Lord established the holy Mystery of Communion, he pronounces aloud the words of the Saviour which He spoke upon instituting the Holy Mystery, "Take, eat; this is My Body, which is broken for you, for the remission of sins" and "Drink of it, all of you: this is My Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins." The priest then inaudibly recalls the commandment of the Saviour to perform this Mystery, glorifies His passion, death, and resurrection, ascension, and His second coming, and then aloud says, "Thine own of Thine own, we offer unto Thee, in behalf of all and for all," for all the members of the Orthodox Church and for the mercy of God.

The choir then chants slowly, "We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we give thanks unto Thee, O Lord, and we pray unto Thee, O our God," while the priest in private prayer asks the Lord to send down the Holy Spirit upon the people present and the Gifts being offered and that He might sanctify them. In a subdued voice he reads the troparion from the Third Hour, "O Lord, Who

didst send down Thy Most Holy Spirit upon Thine apostles at the third hour, take Him not from us, O Good one, but renew Him in us who pray unto Thee." The deacon pronounces the twelfth verse from the Fiftieth Psalm, "Create a clean heart in me, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." Then the priest again reads the troparion from the Third Hour, and the deacon pronounces the next verse from the same psalm, "Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy holy spirit from me." The priest reads the troparion for the third time. Blessing the Lamb on the Diskos, he says, "And make this bread the precious Body of Thy Christ." Blessing the wine in the Chalice, he says, "And that which is in this cup, the precious Blood of Thy Christ." After each blessing the deacon says, "Amen." Finally, blessing the bread and wine together the priest says, "Changing them by Thy Holy Spirit." Again the deacon says, "Amen, amen, amen." At this great and sacred moment the bread and wine are changed into the true Body and true Blood of Christ. The priest then makes a full prostration to the ground before the Holy Gifts as to the Very King and God Himself. This is the most important and solemn moment of the Liturgy.

After the sanctification of the Holy Gifts the priest in private prayer asks the Lord that, for those who partake the Holy Gifts, it might serve unto sobriety of soul (that is, that they may be strengthened in every good deed), unto the remission of sins, unto the communion of the Holy Spirit, unto the fulfillment of the Kingdom of Heaven, unto boldness toward Thee; not unto judgement or condemnation." He then remembers those for whom the Sacrifice is offered, for the Holy Gifts are offered to the Lord God as a Sacrifice of Thanksgiving for all the saints. Then the priest gives special remembrance of the Most-holy Virgin Mary and says aloud, "Especially for our most holy, most pure, most blessed, glorious Lady Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary," to which the faithful respond with the laudatory hymn in honor of the Mother of God, "It is truly meet." (During Holy Pascha and all the twelve great feasts, until their giving up, instead of "It is truly meet..." a special hymn is chanted, which is the ninth irmos of the festal canon from Matins with its appropriate refrains). The priest at this time privately prays for the reposed, and in beginning the prayer for the living says aloud, "Among the first, remember, O Lord, the Orthodox episcopate that is, the most holy Eastern Orthodox patriarchs and the ruling hierarchy. The faithful respond, "And each and every one." The prayer for the living ends with the exclamation of the priest, "And grant unto us that with one mouth and one heart we may glorify and hymn Thy most honorable and majestic name, of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages." After this he gives his blessing to all those present, "And may the mercy of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, be with you all."

### **The Preparation of the Faithful for Communion**

This section begins with the Supplicatory Litany, "Having called to remembrance all the saints, again and again, in peace let us pray to the Lord .... For the precious Gifts now offered and sanctified ... That our God, the Lover of mankind, Who hath received them upon His holy and most heavenly and noetic altar as an odor of spiritual fragrance, will send down upon us Divine Grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit..." Then come the usual requests of the Supplicatory Litany, which ends with the exclamation of the priest, "And vouchsafe us, O Master, with boldness and without condemnation to dare to call upon Thee, the Heavenly God, as Father, and to say." The choir chants the "Our Father..." and in some churches all those present sing this prayer together. Then follows the bestowal of peace and the bowing of one's head during which the priest prays to the Lord that He sanctify the faithful and enable them to partake without condemnation of the Holy Mysteries. At this time the deacon, while standing on the ambo, takes the orarion from his

shoulder and girds himself with it in a cruciform pattern, in order to 1) serve the priest unencumbered during Communion and 2) to express his reverence for the Holy Gifts by representing the Seraphim who, as they surround the Throne of God, cover their faces with their wings (Is. 6:2-3). During the exclamation of the deacon, "Let us attend," the curtain is closed and the priest lifts the Holy Lamb above the Diskos and loudly proclaims, "Holy things are for the holy." This means that the Holy Gifts may be given only to the "holy," that is, the faithful who have sanctified themselves with prayer, fasting and the Mystery of Repentance.

In recognition of their unworthiness, the chanters, in the name of the faithful, exclaim, "One is Holy, One is Lord, Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen."

The faithful who intend to come to Holy Communion must in advance attend the Vigil service in the church and read at home "The Order of Preparation for Holy Communion."

### **Communion**

Then follows the communion of the serving clergy in the Sanctuary. The priest divides the Holy Lamb into four parts, and communes himself and then gives the Holy Mysteries to the deacon. After the communion of the clergy, the portions intended for the communion of the laity are put into the Chalice. During the communion of the clergy various verses of the psalms termed "Communion verses" are chanted, followed by various hymns relating to the feast, or the Prayers before Communion are read. The Royal Gates are opened then in preparation of the communion of the faithful laity, and the deacon with the sacred Chalice in his hands calls out, "With the fear of God and faith draw near." The opened Royal Doors are symbolic of the open tomb of the Saviour, and the bringing forth of the Holy Gifts of the appearance of Jesus Christ after His resurrection. After bowing to the Holy Chalice as before the very risen Saviour Himself, the choir, as representatives of the faithful, chant, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord. God is the Lord and hath appeared unto us." Those of the faithful who are to commune, "with the fear of God and faith," make a preliminary bow to the Holy Chalice and then listen quietly to the prayer before Communion, "I believe, O Lord and I confess..." in which they confess their faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Saviour of sinners, their faith in the Mystery of Communion by which, in the visible form of bread and wine, they receive the true Body and Blood of Christ as a pledge of eternal life and the Mystery of Communion with Him. They beseech Him to deem them worthy of partaking without condemnation of the Sacred Mysteries for the forgiveness of sins, promising not only not to betray Christ, as did Judas, but even amid the sufferings of life to be like the wise thief, and to firmly and boldly confess their faith. After making a full prostration - if it is not a Sunday - the faithful step forward and go up to the ambo. To keep good order and out of reverence one should not leave one's place, nor is it proper to impede or embarrass others with a desire to be first. Likewise, one should not be overly cautious and fearful, but should step forward with gratitude and serenity of faith. Each should remember that he is the first among sinners, but that the mercy of the Lord is infinite. With one's hands crossed over one's chest one should step forward to the Royal Gates for Communion and, without making a sign of the Cross near the Chalice, receive Communion from the spoon in the priest's hands. After receiving, one kisses the side of the Chalice, again without making any sign of the Cross, so that the Chalice will not be accidentally hit.

Children are encouraged to take Communion often from their earliest infancy, in the name of the faith of their parents and educators in accordance with the words of the Saviour, Suffer the little children to come unto Me and Drink of it, all of you. Children under seven or so are allowed to take Communion without confession, as they have not reached the age of responsibility or discernment.

Following Communion, the communicants step away from the Royal Gates to the small table set out specially in the center of the church, upon which are a mixture of water and wine together with some small portions of prosphora, which they drink and eat so that none of the Holy Gifts remain in the mouth but are washed down. After the communion of the laity, the priest puts all the particles taken from the offered prosphora into the Holy Chalice with a prayer that the Lord purify with His Blood the sins of all those commemorated through the prayers of the saints. He blesses the congregation with the words, "Save, O God, Thy people (those who believe in Thee) and bless Thine inheritance," (those who are Thine own, the Church of Christ). In response the choir chants, "We have seen the true Light, we have received the Heavenly Spirit, we have found the true faith, we worship the indivisible Trinity: for He hath saved us." This means that we have seen the true light since, having washed our sins in the Mystery of Baptism, we are called the sons of God by Grace, sons of the Light. We have received the Holy Spirit by means of sacred Chrismation, we confess the true Orthodox Faith and worship the indivisible Trinity, because He has saved us. The deacon takes the Diskos from the priest, who hands it to him from the Holy Table, and raising it before him bears it to the Table of Oblation, while the priest takes the Holy Chalice and blesses the faithful with the exclamation, "Always, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages" and then likewise carries it to the Table of Oblation. This last elevating and presentation of the Holy Gifts to the congregation, their removal to the Table of Oblation, and the exclamation, are to remind us of the Ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ into heaven and His promise to remain in the Church for all time unto the end of the age; (Matt. 28:20).

### **Thanksgiving for Communion and the Dismissal**

Bowing to the Holy Gifts for the last time, as to the very Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the faithful express their thanks to the Lord for Communion of the Holy Mysteries. The choir chants the hymn of gratitude, "Let our mouth be filled with Thy praise, O Lord, that we may hymn Thy glory, for Thou hast vouchsafed us to partake of Thy holy, divine, immortal and life-creating Mysteries. Keep us in Thy holiness, that we may meditate on Thy righteousness all the day long. Alleluia."

Having exalted the Lord because He has deemed us worthy of partaking of the Divine and immortal and life-creating Mysteries, we ask Him to preserve us in the holiness which we have received through the Holy Mystery of Communion, that we may contemplate on the righteousness of God throughout the entire day. Following this, the deacon intones the Small Litany, "Aright! Having partaken of the divine, holy, most pure, immortal, heavenly, and life-creating, fearful Mysteries of Christ," and thus summons us to "worthily give thanks unto the Lord."

Having asked His help in living the whole day in holiness, peace, and sinlessness, he invites us to devote ourselves and our lives to Christ God. The priest, folding up the Antimins and placing it on the Gospel, exclaims, "For Thou art our sanctification, and unto Thee do we send up glory, to

the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages." And then he adds, "Let us depart in peace.

This indicates that the Liturgy has concluded and that one should leave the Church at peace with all. The choir in the name of all chants, "In the name of the Lord," that is, we go forth with the blessing of the Lord. The priest then comes out through the Royal Gates and stands facing the Altar in front of the Ambo and reads the "Prayer before the Ambo," in which he again requests that the Lord save his people and bless His inheritance, sanctify those who love the splendor of the church building, and not deprive all those who hope on His mercy, grant peace to the world, to the priests, to faithful rulers, and to all mankind. This prayer is a condensed version of all the litanies uttered throughout the Divine Liturgy.

After the conclusion of the prayer before the ambo the faithful devote themselves to the will of God with the prayer of the Psalmist "Blessed be the name of the Lord from henceforth and forevermore." Often at this point a pastoral sermon, based on the Word of God, is given for the spiritual enlightenment and edification of the people. The priest then offers a final blessing, "The blessing of the Lord be upon you, through His grace and love for mankind, always, now and ever, and unto ages of ages," and gives thanks unto God, "Glory to Thee, O Christ God, our hope, glory to Thee."

Turning to the people and signing himself with the sign of the Cross, which the people should also make, the priest utters the Dismissal, "May Christ our True God..." At the Dismissal, after the priest commemorates the prayers for us by the Mother of God, the saint of the church, the saints whose memory is celebrated on that day, the righteous ancestors of God, Joachim and Anna (the parents of the Mother of God), and all the saints, he expresses the hope that Christ the true God, will have mercy and save us since He is good and loves mankind. He steps to the bottom of the ambo and holds the holy Cross for the faithful to venerate and distributes the antidoron, the remainders from the prosphora which are cut into small pieces. In an orderly fashion the faithful proceed forward to kiss the Cross as a witness to their faith in the Saviour, in Whose memory the Divine Liturgy was celebrated. The choir chants a short prayer for the preservation for many years of the most holy Orthodox patriarchs, the ruling bishop, the parishioners and all Orthodox Christians.

### **The Liturgy of St. Basil The Great**

The Liturgy of St. Basil the Great in its content and order is almost identical with the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom. The only differences are the following:

- The prayers which the priest reads privately in the altar, especially that of the Eucharistic Canon, are significantly longer, and therefore the chanting for this Liturgy is of longer duration.
- The words of the Saviour by which He instituted the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist are as follows, "He gave it to His holy disciples and apostles, saying: Take, eat; this is My Body, which is broken for you for the remission of sins." And then, "He gave it to His holy disciples and apostles, saying: Drink of it all of you: this is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins."

- Instead of the hymn, "It is truly meet to bless thee," a special hymn in honor of the Mother of God is chanted, "In Thee rejoiceth, O Thou who art full of grace, all creation, the angelic assembly and the race of man"

In addition to these, when the Liturgy of St. Basil is celebrated on Great and Holy Thursday, the Cherubic Hymn is replaced by "Of Thy mystical supper, O Son of God," and on Great and Holy Saturday: "Let all human flesh keep silence."

The Liturgy of St. Basil is celebrated only ten times throughout the year, on the eve of the feasts of the Nativity of Christ and the Theophany (or on the feasts themselves if they fall on Sunday or Monday), the first of January (the day St. Basil is commemorated), on the five Sundays of Great Lent (excluding Palm Sunday), and on Great Thursday and Great Saturday of Passion Week.

### **The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts**

The distinguishing characteristic of the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is that the Eucharistic Canon is not served during its celebration but rather the faithful are communed with "Presanctified Gifts," gifts which were consecrated earlier at another Liturgy of either St. Basil the Great or St. John Chrysostom.

The Presanctified Liturgy originated in the first centuries of Christianity. The first Christians took communion frequently, some even on weekdays. However, it was considered improper to serve a full Liturgy on days of strict fasting, as they were days of grief and contrition for sins.

Since the Liturgy is the most magnificent of all the church services, in order to give the faithful the opportunity to receive Holy Communion on fast days in the middle of the week, without destroying the character of the divine services of Great Lent, they were provided with the Gifts consecrated earlier. For this reason the service of the Presanctified Gifts was introduced into the services of Great Lent. The definitive order of this Liturgy was put into written form by St. Gregory the Dialogist, the Pope of Rome in the sixth century.

The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is celebrated on Wednesdays and Fridays of the first six weeks of Great Lent, on Thursday of the fifth week, when the Great Canon of St. Andrew is commemorated, on February 24th, the commemoration of First and Second Findings of the Head of St. John the Baptist, sometimes on March 9th, the day commemorating the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, if it falls on a fast day, and not a Saturday or Sunday; and on the first three days of Passion Week (Great Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday).

The Presanctified Liturgy is served following the Lenten Hours and consists of Vespers joined to the Liturgy of the Faithful, with the omission of its central part, the sanctification of the gifts.

One kathisma is added to each of the Lenten Hours so that the Psalter might be read twice during the week rather than the usual once.

After the kathisma, the priest leaves the altar and reads the troparion of each hour in front of the Royal Doors with its corresponding verses, and makes appropriate prostrations while the choir chants this troparion three times.

In the troparion of the Third Hour we ask the Lord to not take from us, due to our sins, the Holy Spirit that He sent down upon His disciples.

In the troparion of the Sixth Hour we beseech Christ, Who voluntarily endured crucifixion on the Cross for us sinners, to forgive us our sins.

In the troparion of the Ninth Hour we beseech Christ, Who died for us, to mortify the sinful movements of our flesh.

At the end of each hour we read with prostrations the Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian: "O Lord and Master of my life"

During the Sixth Hour there is a reading from the book of the Prophet Isaiah.

The Ninth Hour is followed by the Typica, and the Beatitudes are read along with the prayer of the repentant thief on the Cross, "Remember us, O Lord, when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." Then various prayers are read, followed by the Prayer of St. Ephraim and the Dismissal.

Immediately after this, Vespers with the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts begins with the exclamation, "Blessed is the kingdom of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto the ages of ages."

Up to the Entry the service proceeds in the usual order. After the Entry and "O Gentle Light" the reader goes to the center of the church and reads two lessons, one from the Book of Genesis relating to the fall of Adam and his unfortunate descendants, the other from the Proverbs of Solomon which exhorts one to seek and love divine wisdom. Between these two readings the Royal Gates are opened and the priest, holding a lit candle and censer, proclaims the words, "Wisdom! Aright!," blesses the faithful with them and says, "The light of Christ enlighteneth all."

In response, the faithful, recognizing their unworthiness before Christ, the pre-eternal Light which enlightens and sanctifies mankind, make a prostration to the floor.

Following the second reading, the Royal Gates are again opened, and in the center of the church, choir members slowly chant these Psalm verses: "Let my prayer be set forth as incense before Thee, the lifting up of my hands be an evening sacrifice. Lord, I have cried unto Thee, hearken unto me; attend to the voice of my supplication." During the chanting of these verses, the faithful are kneeling prostrate and the priest, standing before the Holy Table, censes.

Vespers concludes at this point with the Prayer of St. Ephraim, "O Lord and Master of my life and the main portion of the Presanctified Liturgy begins.

On the first three days of Passion Week (Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday), after this prayer the Gospel is read. On other days the Augmented Litany and the Litanies of the Catechumens and of the Faithful are intoned as in a usual Liturgy.

During the Great Entry, instead of "Let us who represent the Cherubim..." the choir chants, "Now the powers of Heaven invisibly serve with us; for behold, the King of Glory entereth. Behold, the mystical sacrifice that hath been accomplished is escorted." During this hymn the Royal Gates are opened and the Altar is censured.

With the conclusion of the first half of this hymn, with the words "is borne in triumph," the Presanctified Gifts are transferred from the Table of Oblation to the Altar Table. The priest, with the Chalice, preceded by candles and the deacon with the censer, goes out through the north door on to the solea with the Diskos over his head, and silently bears them into the Sanctuary and places them on the Antimins which has been opened earlier on the Altar. Then the choir concludes the interrupted hymn, "With faith and love let us draw nigh that we may become partakers of life everlasting. Alleluia." Since the Sacred Gifts are already consecrated (transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ) the praying faithful fall prostrate during their transferal to the main altar. The priest then prays "O Lord and Master of my life..." after which the Royal Doors are closed.

Since at this Liturgy the consecration of the Gifts does not occur, all which relates to this sacred action is omitted. Thus, after the Great Entry only the three final portions of the Liturgy of the Faithful are celebrated: a) the preparation of the faithful for Communion, b) the communion of the clergy and the laity, and the thanksgiving for Communion with the dismissal. All are celebrated as during a full Liturgy with only minor alterations in accordance with the significance of the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts.

The Prayer before the Ambo differs in this Liturgy. The priest in the name of the faithful gives thanks to God, Who has deemed them worthy to reach the days of this fast for the purification of the soul and body, and requests that He give His help in accomplishing the good struggle of the fast, preserve them unchanged in the Orthodox Faith, manifest Himself as the conqueror of sin, and grant them uncondemned to worship the holy Resurrection of Christ.

**For more information on the Orthodox Church, please contact:**

**St. Vladimir Orthodox Church  
Ann Arbor, MI  
(734) 475-4590  
[www.stvladimiraami.org](http://www.stvladimiraami.org)  
[info@stvladimiraami.org](mailto:info@stvladimiraami.org)**