

Divine Liturgy I: Overview & Offertory

RITUALS AND TRADITIONS

The Divine Liturgy is the heart of the Church. Everything else we have received — the Scriptures, the Fathers, the feasts, the rhythms of prayer — either prepares us for it, flows out of it, or draws us back to it. In this lesson we stand at the beginning of that great mystery. We trace it from the Upper Room of St. Mark to the altars of our own parishes. We look at the three Liturgies we have inherited — of St. Basil, of St. Gregory, and of St. Cyril — and at the long arc of prayer that leads from the Hour Prayers through the Offertory to the Distribution of the Mysteries. Finally we enter the Offertory itself: the vesting, the hand-washing, the choosing of the Lamb, the procession around the altar. What appears on the surface to be a long preparation is in fact the Church already kneeling at Calvary and already waiting at the empty tomb.

The First Liturgy: From the Upper Room to Alexandria

The Divine Liturgy was not invented by a committee of theologians. It was given. On the night in which He was betrayed, our Lord took bread in His hands, gave thanks, broke it, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." He took the cup and said, "Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:26–28). The house in which He spoke these words belonged, by a long tradition of the Church, to the mother of St. Mark the Evangelist. That same upper room would see the tongues of fire on the day of Pentecost. The first Eucharist and the birth of the Church happened under the same roof.

St. Mark himself was born in a devout Jewish household and was trained in the Scriptures from his childhood. Through his family he was bound to St. Peter by blood and by discipleship, and from Peter he learned the faith. When he traveled with Barnabas and Paul and eventually carried the Gospel into Egypt, he did not bring a loose memory of a meal. He brought an ordered prayer, a way of doing what the Lord had commanded.

"Do this in remembrance of Me." Luke 22:19

In Alexandria, after the conversion of Anianus the cobbler and the growth of a small but vigorous community, St. Mark set down the Liturgy that the Church of Egypt would pray after him. From that first Alexandrian Liturgy grew the Liturgy of St. Cyril. Alongside it, through the centuries, the Coptic Church received and kept the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great and the Liturgy of St. Gregory the

Theologian. These three Liturgies are not three religions; they are three voices of one Body, each reaching up to the one altar in heaven.

The Three Liturgies of the Coptic Church

The Coptic Orthodox Church celebrates the Eucharist from three Liturgies. All three are ancient, all three are Orthodox, and all three carry us to the same Body and the same Blood. They differ only in voice — in the way each Father leads the Church into the single mystery of the Cross.

The Liturgy of St. Basil was written by St. Basil the Great, Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia. It is the Liturgy we pray most often, measured and theological, shaped by the same mind that gave the Church the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The Liturgy of St. Gregory was written by St. Gregory the Theologian, Archbishop of Constantinople and the close friend of St. Basil. It is the one Liturgy among the three addressed to the Son rather than to the Father, and it burns with personal fire — the Church speaking to Christ face to face. The Liturgy of St. Cyril is the direct descendant of St. Mark's original, translated from Greek into Coptic by St. Cyril of Alexandria, the Pillar of the Faith. It is the oldest in spirit and the most austere, and it preserves the particular shape of the Alexandrian tradition.

	Liturgy of St. Basil	Liturgy of St. Gregory	Liturgy of St. Cyril
Author	St. Basil the Great, Bishop of Caesarea	St. Gregory the Theologian, Archbishop of Constantinople	St. Mark (in Greek), translated into Coptic by St. Cyril of Alexandria
Addressed to	God the Father	God the Son	God the Father
Placement of litanies	After the consecration	After the consecration	Before the consecration
Common usage	Prayed most days	Prayed on feasts and days of joy	Prayed on occasion, especially in Great Lent and the Feast of St. Mark; many tunes lost

The difference in the placement of the litanies carries a quiet theology. In the Liturgies of St. Basil and St. Gregory, the litanies come after the change of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ — as if to say, now that the Lord Himself is on the altar, we gather up every need of the world and lay it before Him. In the Liturgy of St. Cyril, the litanies come first — as if to say, let us clear every earthly concern out of the way now, so that when Christ is present on the altar our eyes and hearts are fixed on Him alone. Neither approach is a correction of the other. Both are Orthodox. Both teach us something true about what it means to stand before the Lord of glory.

"In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you."
John 14:2

The Structure of the Holy Liturgy

The Liturgy does not begin with the Offertory. It begins long before, in the quiet hours of prayer that bring the Church to the altar. To pray the Liturgy well is to enter at the door and not climb through the window. Our fathers have mapped the whole rhythm as follows:

- The 9th, 11th, and 12th Hour Prayers of the Agpeya
- Vespers Praise and the Vespers Raising of Incense
- The Midnight Hour Prayer and the Midnight Praises
- The 1st Hour Prayer, the Prime Praises, and the Prime Raising of Incense
- The 3rd and 6th Hour Prayers
- The Offertory
- The Liturgy of the Word
- The Liturgy of the Faithful
- The Distribution of the Holy Mysteries

Each stage has its own voice. The Hour Prayers stretch our day on the frame of Christ's Passion. The Praises join us to the angels who already stand around the throne. The Raising of Incense gathers the fragrance of our confession into one rising column. The Offertory lays the gifts upon the altar. The Liturgy of the Word opens the Scriptures so that we may know the One we are about to receive. The Liturgy of the Faithful consecrates the gifts. The Distribution places the Lord upon our tongues and within our hearts.

At the center of it all stands the Eucharist — from the Greek *eucharistia*, thanksgiving. A Sacrament, from the Latin word for that which is holy, corresponds to the Greek word *mysterion*, mystery. Our fathers have taught us that a Sacrament is a visible sign of an invisible grace: something we can see, and something we cannot. The bread we can see; the Body we cannot. The wine we can see; the Blood we cannot. The priest we can see; the Lord who works through him we cannot. The Liturgy is this whole structure of visible things opening onto unseen glory.

*"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?
The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?"* 1
Corinthians 10:16

Why So Much Repetition?

At first hearing, the Liturgy seems to circle back on itself. The Creed is prayed more than once. Graciously Accord is heard again and again. The priest says a petition in one language and the deacon answers with nearly the same words in another. To an untrained ear this can feel like unnecessary

repetition. It is not. It is the sediment of history laid down carefully, layer upon layer, so that no branch of the Church's tradition is lost.

The Vespers Raising of Incense and the Prime Raising of Incense are almost identical because they were born of different communities. Christians of Jewish background were accustomed to gathering on Saturday evenings, according to the older pattern of the synagogue. Christians from the Gentile world gathered on Sunday mornings, the day of the Resurrection. When the Church drew these two families into one, she did not ask either to forget what it had learned. She set the Liturgy on Sunday morning and kept the Saturday evening prayer as a vigil of preparation. What looks like repetition is in fact memory — the Church refusing to forget where her children came from.

The great echoes in the service come also from the joining of two streams of prayer: the Agpeya, which grew up in the monasteries, and the Psalmody, which grew up in the city churches. The monks prayed the Psalms by the hour; the city parishes trained their people in the faith through hymnody and theological verse. Over time these two rivers ran into one bed, and certain prayers — the Introduction to the Creed, the Creed itself, Hail to You, Graciously Accord — appeared in both and were kept in both. To lose them from one side would have been to amputate a living tradition.

The back-and-forth of priest and deacon has two explanations, and both are true. The priest, facing east, addresses God: "Remember, O Lord..." The deacon, facing the people, addresses the congregation: "Pray for..." One prays to the Father; the other calls the children to join their father's prayer. At the same time, many of these paired lines are given in Coptic by the priest and in Greek by the deacon, so that in the early Church no believer — whether a Coptic-speaking Egyptian or a Greek-speaking foreigner — was excluded from the prayer of the Body. What began as pastoral care for the whole people of God has become a small sign of our catholicity.

"That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me." John 17:21

The Offertory: Vestments, Preparation, and the Washing of Hands

The Offertory is the rite by which the bread and wine are brought to the altar to become the Body and Blood of Christ. Before anything is placed on the altar, the priest and the deacons are themselves prepared. They put on their vestments, they pray the canonical hours, and the priest washes his hands three times. Only then does he go out to choose the Lamb.

Every vestment says something. The stole laid across the deacon's shoulder evokes the wings of the angels who stand in constant readiness before God. The white garments of the priests and deacons recall the heavenly multitude that St. John the Theologian saw "standing before the throne... clothed with white robes" (Revelation 7:9). The altar is prepared with the same care that would be given to the Upper Room in Jerusalem. What was done once in a rented room in Zion is done again here, in our own church, because the Host is the same.

The washing of hands is no small matter. The priest washes three times, and the Scriptures he quietly prays are prayers of repentance rather than of hygiene:

"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice." Psalm 51:7-8

"I will wash my hands in innocence; so I will go about Your altar, O Lord, that I may proclaim with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all Your wondrous works." Psalm 26:6-7

Behind these prayers stands the whole priestly discipline of the Old Covenant, where the priests of the Temple were commanded to wash before they approached the sacrifice. St. Cyril of Jerusalem, preaching to the newly baptized in the fourth century, explains why the Christian hand-washing is not about dust on the fingers but dirt on the soul:

"You saw the deacon who offered the water for the washing of the hands of the celebrant and to the presbyters who encircled the altar of God. Not that he offered this water on account of any bodily uncleanness, for we did not enter the church unwashed; rather the ablution is a symbol of our obligation to be clean from all sins and transgressions. The hands symbolize action. So by washing them we signify plainly the purity and blamelessness of our conduct." St. Cyril of Jerusalem — Mystagogical Catechesis V

The priest is asking for a clean heart before he stretches out his hand toward the altar. Every member of the congregation is invited to make the same prayer their own. None of us approaches the Body of the Lord on the strength of our own worthiness. We approach on the strength of His mercy.

The Offertory: Choosing the Lamb

When the priest has washed his hands, he leaves the sanctuary to choose the Lamb. The bread that will become the Body of Christ is called the Korban — a Hebrew word meaning offering. Every element in the making of this bread carries Christ within it like a prophecy already fulfilled.

The Korban is made of wheat, for our Lord Himself said:

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain." John 12:24

The wheat is crushed to become flour, for Isaiah prophesied that the Servant of the Lord would be "bruised for our iniquities" (Isaiah 53:5). Yeast is added to the dough, representing the weight of the world's sin that the Lord bore in His own body; as the loaf is baked, the yeast dies in the oven, just as Christ put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Hebrews 9:26). The loaf is shaped like a circle with no beginning and no end, an image of the eternal Son who is "without father, without mother... having neither beginning of days nor end of life" (Hebrews 7:3). It is also the image of the Sun of Righteousness who rises with healing in His wings (Malachi 4:2).

Around the Korban the priest and the deacon see twelve small crosses stamped into the bread, with one larger cross in the center. The twelve are the twelve disciples; the center is the Lord. Three points of the cross are pierced in remembrance of the three nails; the Spadikon, the central square (Greek for master), is pressed down into the loaf as the Body that holds all the rest together. The loaf must be whole and without break, for the Body of the Lord on the Cross was broken for us but not broken from itself. "Not one of His bones shall be broken" (John 19:36).

When the priest selects the loaf, he rubs it gently with slightly wet hands. This may well be an echo of the ancient rite on the Day of Atonement, where the high priest would lay his hands on the head of the sacrificial animal, transferring the sins of the people onto the offering (Leviticus 16). The priest prays, "Grant, O Lord, that our sacrifice may be accepted in Thy sight for my sins and for the ignorance of Thy people." Like Aaron, he confesses first for himself and only then for those entrusted to him.

After the Lamb is chosen, the priest wraps it in a veil. Behind this silent action stands the memory of another evening:

"Joseph of Arimathea... took the body of Jesus. And Nicodemus... brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury." John 19:38–40

The Lamb is now ready to be carried to His tomb.

The Procession of the Lamb

The priest lifts the veiled Lamb and begins to walk around the altar. The deacons take up their tapers and go before him. The congregation lifts the ancient cry of Alel — Korban: "Praise the offering! Praise the great exchange!" For this is indeed the great exchange. The sinless Son of God takes upon Himself the sins of the world, and we in return receive the righteousness of Christ.

As the priest walks, he places his hand upon the Lamb and prays an inaudible prayer, naming before God those who have asked for prayers, those who are sick, those who are suffering. The congregation's own response is nothing other than the oldest cry of the human heart in the presence of God: "Lord, have mercy."

"God, be merciful to me a sinner!" Luke 18:13

The procession is no abstract choreography. It is the bearing of the Body of Christ to the tomb. The priest and the deacon stand in for Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, the two men who carried the Lord on that Friday evening at dusk. The deacons with their lit candles stand in for the angels who are always said by the Fathers to have attended the Lord throughout His passion, His death, and His burial. The priest places the Lamb upon the altar as upon a tomb hewn from rock.

Then comes the sealing. A cloth called the Procverin is laid over the chalice; this is the stone that was rolled against the door of the sepulcher. The triangular veil set upon it is the seal that was fixed to the stone. All of this is done in near silence, because we are now standing at the tomb of the Lord. The rest

of the Liturgy will unfold from this point forward as a slow, luminous movement from tomb to Resurrection.

The Signing, the Thanksgiving, and the Absolution of the Ministers

Three brief rites bring the Offertory to its close. First comes the Signing of the Offering: the priest traces the sign of the Cross over the bread and the wine, invoking God's blessing upon the gifts that will soon be changed into the Body and Blood of Christ. The Cross is set upon the gifts from the first moment, because the altar can never be separated from Golgotha.

Next comes the Prayer of Thanksgiving. The priest lifts the Church's heart to God in gratitude — for our creation, for our redemption, for the Son given for us, for the Spirit poured out upon us, for the gifts lying before us. The word Eucharist means thanksgiving, and every Liturgy begins with it because we come to this altar not as people who are owed anything by God, but as people who have been given everything.

Finally the priest prays the Absolution of the Ministers — a quiet, deliberate prayer for the forgiveness and purification of those who stand at the altar. None of them is worthy of what comes next. None of us is. The one standing at the altar confesses his weakness in front of God, and the whole congregation bows in its own confession. Only then is the Church ready to enter the Liturgy of the Word.

“For Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast.” 1
Corinthians 5:7–8

Everything up to this point has been preparation — hand-washing, vesting, choosing, wrapping, processing, sealing. None of it is ornamental. The Offertory is the Church learning, once again, how to approach the Most Holy. We do not rush toward the altar; we approach it slowly, with clean hands and a cleaner heart, bearing the Lamb in our own arms as Joseph bore Him once. We are not spectators at a ritual. We are pallbearers at the burial of the Lord — and, because of the empty tomb, we are also the first witnesses of the Resurrection.

Walking Through the Liturgy with the Whole Self

To know the shape of the Liturgy without entering it is to starve in a full house. The knowledge we have just laid out is meant to be carried back into our next Liturgy, and the next, and the next — not as information but as a disposition of the heart. When the priest vests, we vest ourselves in Christ (Galatians 3:27). When he washes his hands, we ask for a clean conscience. When he chooses the Lamb, we remember that we too have been chosen — in our baptism, in our chrismation, in every moment of repentance.

When the procession moves around the altar to the cry of Alel — Korban, we stop in our tracks and remember what is happening: the Body of the Lord is being carried to the tomb in our presence, and it is being carried for our sake. When the chalice is covered and the seal is laid, we wait in the silence of Holy Saturday, knowing that the next words of the service are already the first whispers of Easter morning.

In this way the Liturgy becomes not an hour among hours but the axis on which all our hours turn. Everything we do outside the church — our work, our study, our fasting, our friendships, our service — draws its strength from what is laid upon the altar, and returns to the altar at the next Liturgy to be laid there again.

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.” Romans 12:1

The Liturgy teaches us how to become what we receive. May we learn to stand at the altar with the reverence of Joseph and Nicodemus, the watchfulness of the myrrh-bearing women, and the joy of those who have seen the empty tomb.



Review Questions

1. Where was the first Eucharist held? (A: St. Mark's home with Jesus Christ-The Last Supper)
2. List the structure of the Holy Liturgy. (A: 9th, 11th and 12th Hour Prayers, Vespers Praise, Vespers Raising of Incense, Midnight Hour Prayer, Midnight Praise, 1st Hour Prayer, Prime Praise, Prime Raising of Incense, 3rd & 6th Hour Prayers, The Offertory, The Liturgy of the Word, The Liturgy of the Faithful, The Distribution of the Holy Communion)
3. What are the 3 Liturgies that the Coptic Orthodox Church prays from? (A: The Liturgy of St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Cyril)
4. What do the Liturgies of St. Basil and St. Cyril address? (A: God the Father)
5. The offertory consists of 6 parts, what are they? (A: Preparatory, Choosing the Lamb, Procession of the Lamb around the altar, Signing of the Offering, Prayer of Thanksgiving, The Absolution of Ministers)



Books & References

Scripture:

Further Reading:

- H.H. Pope Shenouda III, The Divine Liturgy (Introduction).
- Abu I-Barakat Ibn Kabar, Misbah az-Zulmah fi idah al-khidmah (The Lamp of Darkness in Clarifying the Service).
- St. Cyril of Jerusalem — Mystagogical Catechesis V (on the washing of hands and the Eucharist).
- St. Basil the Great — Liturgy of St. Basil (as prayed in the Coptic Rite).
- St. Gregory the Theologian — Liturgy of St. Gregory.
- St. Cyril of Alexandria — Liturgy of St. Cyril (translation of the Liturgy of St. Mark).
- • Fr. Athanasius Iskander, [Understanding the Liturgy](#).
- Fr. Tadros Malaty, The Divine Liturgy: An Introduction.
- https://www.suscopts.org/ssc/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/01-Raising_of_Incense.pdf

Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.

Divine Liturgy II: Liturgy of the Word

RITUALS AND TRADITIONS

Having laid the Lamb upon the altar in the Offertory, the Church now turns her ear toward heaven. In the Liturgy of the Word, the Scriptures are opened and the voice of the Lord speaks to His people. The Pauline Epistle, the Catholic Epistle, the Acts of the Apostles, the Synaxarion of the saints, and finally the Holy Gospel itself are read in succession, carried on clouds of incense and announced by the processions of the priest through the midst of the people. Everything the Church does in this hour is meant to do one thing: to prepare us to hear the Lord, to receive the Word before we receive the Body, to become "fifth Gospels" written not on paper but on flesh. This lesson walks through the incense circuits, the hymns, and the five readings that make up the heart of the Liturgy of the Word.

The Shape of the Liturgy of the Word

The Liturgy of the Word is built around a single pattern: incense rising, Scripture proclaimed, Scripture proclaimed again in the language of the people, and all of it converging on the reading of the Holy Gospel. Everything else — the hymns, the censings, the processions — is a frame around that central encounter. The Word who became flesh is about to speak to us in His own voice.

The movement begins with Logos — the Coptic for "word" — and a brief rite for the catechumens, a remnant of the days when those preparing for baptism heard this part of the Liturgy before being dismissed to continue their instruction. Then come the five readings: the Pauline Epistle, the Catholic Epistle, the Praxis (Acts of the Apostles), the Synaxarion, and the Holy Gospel. Between them, the priest processes through the nave with the censer, filling the church with the sign of our prayers rising to God.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." John 1:1, 14

The sections can be laid out as a single unbroken movement:

- **The Circuit of the Pauline Incense**

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- **The Hymn of the Censer (Entho te tishouri, Tishori, or Taisouri, according to the season)**
 - **The Hymn of the Intercessions**
 - **The Pauline Epistle — first in Coptic (Pavlos evok), then in the language of the people, with the hymn Apetjjk evol**
 - **The Catholic Epistle — first in Coptic (Katholikon), then in the language of the people**
 - **The Circuit of the Praxis Incense and the Praxis Response**
 - **The Praxis — first in Coptic, then in the language of the people**
 - **The Paralex on feasts and fasts, the Synaxarion on other days**
 - **The Trisagion**
 - **The Litany for the Gospel**
 - **The Coptic Psalm and Gospel, followed by the Psalm and Gospel in the language of the people**
 - **The sermon**

The First Circuit: Incense for the Pauline Epistle

The priest places five spoonfuls of incense in the censer. The number is not an accident. Five is the number of our senses, through which the world reaches our souls, and it is also the number of the wounds of Christ, through which salvation reaches the world. As the coals warm and the smoke begins to rise, the priest prays the three great litanies — for the Peace of the Church, for the Pope, and for the assemblies of the faithful. Only then does he carry the censer out from before the sanctuary into the midst of the people.

The procession is ordered. The Gospel is carried first, because it is the Lord Himself who precedes His servants. Then comes the Pope or the local bishop, then the priests, and finally the people. As Abouna moves through the church, he works hard. He walks the whole building, corner to corner, censuring altar and icon and people alike. This physical labor is not accidental either. It is an image of St. Paul, of whom the Church is about to read, who journeyed from city to city and sea to sea to preach the Gospel to every nation.

“Are they ministers of Christ? — I speak as a fool — I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often... in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles...” 2 Corinthians 11:23–26

While the priest censens, the congregation is called to repent. The rising smoke is the sign of what ought to be happening in the heart of every person in the church: the lifting up of prayer, the acknowledgment of sin, the turning of the face toward God.

“Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.” Psalm 141:2

The Hymns of the Censer and the Intercessions

The Church never censens in silence. As the priest moves, the congregation sings. The Hymn of the Censer is sung in three different forms according to the season of the year. Entho te tishouri — "Now the power" — is sung on the weekdays of Great Lent and during Jonah's Fast, when the tone is one of repentance. Tishori is sung on the weekends of Great Lent, on the Feast of the Cross, and on other fasting weekdays. Taisouri is sung on the rest of the days of the year. Each has its own tune and its own theological flavor, but all three have the same subject: the offering of our prayers to God through the sweet savor of the censer.

The censer itself is a living icon. Our fathers have taught us to see in it a small image of the Mother of God. The censer holds the burning coal without being consumed; so the Virgin held the fire of the Son of God in her womb without being harmed. The incense rising from the coal is the prayer of the saints carried up through her intercession to the throne of God.

“Rejoice, O Virgin, who received the fire of the Godhead and was not consumed; who conceived the Word of the Father in her womb, and gave Him birth without change.”
From the Coptic Theotokia

After the hymn of the censer comes the Hymn of the Intercessions. Here the Church calls upon the Theotokos, the angels, and the saints by name, asking them to carry our petitions with them into the presence of God. This is why, whenever the priest is censening through the church, our hymns are always directed toward the heavenly ranks — Verses of Cymbals, Doxologies, the Hittens. The priest moves in an arc from left to right, a circular path that has neither beginning nor end, an icon of the infinite God. The bishop remains within the sanctuary, in the place of Christ in heaven; the serving priest moves outside the sanctuary, in the place of the angels and saints who minister to the Church below.

The Old Testament already knows this pattern of incense and intercession. When Aaron ran into the midst of the people with a censer and the plague was stopped, the Church received a picture of what happens every time the priest walks among us with the censer and prays for us:

“Then Aaron took it as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the assembly; and already the plague had begun among the people. So he put in the incense and made

atonement for the people. And he stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped.” Numbers 16:46–48

When the priest finishes the Pauline circuit, he returns to the altar and prays the prayer of confession on behalf of the people — invoking the mercy shown to the thief on the Cross and asking that the same mercy be shown to us "not according to our sins, but according to Your mercy." This is the moment for every heart in the church to lay down its burden.

The Pauline Epistle and the Catholic Epistle

The first reading is from the fourteen Epistles of St. Paul — Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and Hebrews. The reader is not just any deacon; by ancient custom the Pauline Epistle is read by the Aghnostos, the deacon whose rank is specifically that of reader. The reading is given first in Coptic and then in the language of the people, so that no one is left behind.

After the Pauline comes the Catholic Epistle. Catholic is a Greek word meaning "universal." These seven letters — James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Jude — are called universal because they were written not to a single community like Corinth or Philippi, but to the whole Church. They carry the voice of the Lord's own brothers and first disciples. Peter himself writes as a witness:

“For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.” 2 Peter 1:16

Together the Pauline and Catholic readings give the Church the full voice of the apostolic witness — Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, speaking in the first voice; the pillars of the Twelve speaking in the second. Between them there is no contradiction, only the fullness of the Spirit.

The Second Circuit: Incense for the Praxis

After the Catholic Epistle, the priest begins a second incense circuit, known as the Praxis circuit. At the same time the congregation sings the Hymn of the Praxis, again directed to the saints, beginning with St. Mary. The pattern of incense, hymn, and procession now accompanies the reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

The direction of this circuit is the mirror of the first. The Pauline circuit goes from left to right, following the wide path that St. Paul walked across the Roman world; the Praxis circuit goes from right to left, following the shorter path of the Twelve Apostles as they returned from the Mount of Olives after the Ascension and began to preach in Judea and the surrounding cities. By giving each its own direction, the Church honors both journeys — the one centered on Jerusalem and the one that reached to the ends of the earth — and declares that neither is less than the other.

After completing the Praxis circuit, the priest does not immediately re-enter the sanctuary. Two reasons stand behind this custom. The first is that most of the Apostles did not return to Jerusalem; they died in the lands to which they were sent, martyrs in foreign soil. The priest's lingering outside the

sanctuary is a small sign of that scattering. The second is that by this point in the Liturgy the priest has made seven circuits of the altar — three in the Pauline circuit, one for the Mystery of the people's confession, and three in the Praxis circuit. Seven is the number of the days the children of Israel marched around Jericho before the walls fell.

"You shall march around the city, all you men of war; you shall go all around the city once. This you shall do six days... but the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times... and the wall of the city will fall down flat." Joshua 6:3-5

As the priest goes around the altar seven times and the incense fills the nave, the walls of sin and evil crumble in front of the Ark of the New Covenant. If ever there was a moment for the heart to open and cry out, this is it.

The Praxis and the Synaxarion

Praxis is a Greek word meaning "acts." The reading is from the Acts of the Apostles, the Spirit-inspired history of the early Church — Peter preaching at Pentecost, Stephen laying down his life, Paul setting out from Antioch, the Gospel reaching Rome. The Church reads Acts in the Liturgy because what happened in those pages did not end there. The same Spirit who drove Peter into the streets of Jerusalem and Paul into the streets of Athens drives us into our own streets, our own families, our own workplaces. We are meant to read Acts and to step into it.

By long tradition, the ordination of bishops takes place immediately after the reading of the Praxis. The reason is theological, and it is beautiful. Of all twenty-seven books of the New Testament, the Book of Acts is the only one that does not end with "Amen." It closes abruptly, with Paul preaching in Rome "with all confidence, no one forbidding him" (Acts 28:31). The open ending is deliberate. The work of the Apostles is not finished. Every ordination of a bishop is the next chapter of Acts being written. The apostolic succession is the continuation of a book that the Holy Spirit has not yet closed.

On feasts and fasts the Church inserts a Paralex — an additional reading tied to the theme of the day. On other days she reads from the Synaxarion. Synaxarion is a Greek word meaning "the news," and the Fathers have called it the continuation of the Book of Acts. Each day of the Coptic calendar carries the memory of the saints who fell asleep on that day, and their lives are read out loud to the congregation. The Synaxarion is suspended only during Holy Week and the fifty days of the Resurrection, when the Church allows nothing to distract from the Paschal mystery itself.

The saints read out of the Synaxarion are not displayed as curiosities. They are held up as possibilities. The Church is telling us, day by day, that the life they lived is a life we can live. Holiness is not a museum exhibit. It is a calling.

"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." Hebrews 12:1

The Trisagion and the Litany for the Gospel

The congregation now chants the Trisagion — "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us." This is one of the oldest hymns of the Church. Tradition teaches that a form of it was sung by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus at the burial of the Lord, and behind that stands the ceaseless song of the Seraphim that Isaiah heard in the temple:

"And one cried to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!'" Isaiah 6:3

The Trisagion sums up the whole life of Christ in a few words. "Holy God" is a confession of His divinity. "Holy Mighty" is a confession of His incarnation in power. "Holy Immortal, have mercy on us" is the Church's cry to the One who has conquered death. The hymn serves as an introduction to the Gospel, which is the written account of the life of this Holy One.

After the Trisagion, the priest prays the Litany for the Gospel. In the litany he asks God to open our hearts and our minds, to remove the film from our eyes and the wax from our ears, so that we may hear what the Lord is about to speak. He prays this because he knows what the Lord Himself said to His disciples:

"But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it." Matthew 13:16–17

The Psalm that follows is chanted as an announcement to the Word. The Psalms are full of Christ — His incarnation, His suffering, His resurrection, His reign. The Church reads them before the Gospel so that we hear the prophecy first and then the fulfillment. And when the Psalm is sung, the congregation responds with a single ancient word: Alleluia — "Praise the Lord."

Then the deacon lifts the Cross and sets it upon the Gospel, and commands the whole Church:

"Stand in the fear of God and listen to the Holy Gospel." From the Liturgy of the Catechumens

The Reading of the Holy Gospel

The priest stands facing east — toward the rising of the Sun of Righteousness — and reads the Gospel first in Coptic. Then the Gospel is read again, by a priest or archdeacon or reader, this time facing the people in the language they understand. The entire congregation stands. Slouching, hands in pockets, idle conversation — all of these are put aside. The Lord Himself is speaking to His Body.

Candles are held before the Gospel book. The light is not decoration. It is catechesis. The Psalmist had already said it:

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Psalm 119:105

While the reader proclaims the Gospel in Arabic or English, the priest remains at the altar in silent prayer, offering incense. He asks the Holy Spirit to open the ears of the faithful, because hearing the

Gospel is not the same as understanding it. Understanding is a gift that descends upon us as surely as the incense rises.

Two currents meet here. The Word is proclaimed to the senses, and the Spirit is invoked upon the heart. The bread of Scripture is laid on the table, and the Spirit is asked to make it nourishment rather than mere data. This is the first Communion of the Liturgy — Communion with Christ through His Word — and it prepares us for the Communion that will come through His Body and Blood.

The Sermon and the Dismissal of the Catechumens

When the Gospel is finished, the people sit and the priest gives a sermon. The sermon is not a speech; it is the breaking of the Bread of Scripture. The priest is given the task of taking the Pauline reading, the Catholic reading, the Acts, the Psalm, and the Gospel of the day, and showing how they fit together, so that the congregation leaves knowing what the Lord has said to His Church in this Liturgy.

This is why our lectionary is not random. On Sundays, the five readings of the day are chosen to illuminate a common theme. On weekdays they are aligned with the commemoration of the saints in the Synaxarion. The preacher's duty is to draw the threads together into a single cloth.

The sermon is also the ancient boundary between the two halves of the Liturgy. In the early Church, the Liturgy of the Word was open to everyone — the baptized, the catechumens, and even interested inquirers. But once the sermon was finished, the archdeacon would call out in a loud voice, and the catechumens would be dismissed. From that point on, only the baptized remained. The Liturgy of the Believers was for those who had entered the Body of Christ through the water and the Spirit, and only they could partake of the Body and Blood of the Lord.

The Coptic Church has kept the memory of this dismissal in her rubrics and in her heart. We no longer routinely send catechumens away at this point, but the theological truth remains: the Liturgy of the Word trains everyone, but the Liturgy of the Faithful feeds only the family. What we are about to enter is the Holy of Holies, and we do not enter it casually.

“Every listening and acting believer becomes a fifth Gospel.” Traditional Coptic saying

To hear the Gospel and not live it is to build a house upon sand. To hear it and live it is to let the Lord write His own life into ours, so that when the world reads our days they read Christ in them. The Liturgy of the Word is not finished until we leave the church looking more like Him than when we came in.

“You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ... written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.” 2 Corinthians 3:2–3



Review Questions

1. The Liturgy of the Word is broken down into which sections? (A: Logos, Catechumen, 5 Readings, Incense.)
2. What should the congregation be doing during the prayer of Incense for the Pauline Epistle? (A: The congregation should be repenting during this time)
3. What does the censer and hot charcoal represent? (A: St. Mary represents the censer and Christ is the hot charcoal in the bottom of the censer)
4. Why do we sing the hymn of the intercession? (A: We sing the hymn of the intercession because incense represents the prayers of the saints who take our requests up to heaven.)
5. True or False, the book of Acts ends with 'Amen'? (A: False)
6. What does the Synaxarion mean and what does it represent? (A: It is the Greek word meaning "The News" and it is the Chronicles of the Saints. Considered the continuation of the Book of Acts)
7. What does the Trisagion represent? (A: The life of Christ. This hymn serves as an introduction to the Gospel which is the written account of the life of Christ.)
8. What do the candles during the reading of the Gospel represent? (A: Candles are held in front of the Gospel to represent that God's word/life is a "lamp to our feet and a light to our path...")



Books & References

Scripture:

Further Reading:

- H.H. Pope Shenouda III, The Divine Liturgy (Introduction).
- St. Cyril of Jerusalem — Mystagogical Catechesis V (on the washing of hands and the Eucharist).
- St. John Chrysostom — Homilies on the Gospels and on the Pauline Epistles.
- Fr. Athanasius Iskander, [Understanding the Liturgy](#).
- Fr. Tadros Malaty, The Divine Liturgy: An Introduction.
- https://www.suscpts.org/ssc/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/01-Raising_of_Incense.pdf

Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.

Divine Liturgy III: Liturgy of the Faithful

RITUALS AND TRADITIONS

Having heard the Word, the Church now approaches the altar. The Liturgy of the Faithful is the holy of holies of our worship, the hour in which the bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, the hour in which Christ is once again "in the midst of us." From the lifting of the prosphorine at the empty tomb, through the Creed and the Holy Kiss, through the Anaphora and the Institution Narrative, to the Epiclesis, the Fraction, the Absolution, the Confession, and the Distribution, every movement bears us into the paschal mystery. This lesson walks through the whole arc.

The Three Long Litanies and the Empty Tomb

The Liturgy of the Faithful opens with the Three Long Litanies — for Peace, for the Fathers, and for the Assemblies. At the head of these litanies the priest lifts the prosphorine, the small cloth covering that has lain over the chalice since the sealing of the tomb, and he offers incense beneath it. This is no ordinary gesture. It is the first Easter morning.

"Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared."
Luke 24:1

The rising incense is the spice offered by the myrrh-bearing women at the tomb of the Lord. The lifted cloth is the first hint of the stone rolled away. The Church, standing in the person of those holy women, approaches the altar at dawn. What they found at the tomb, we will find at the altar — the Lord is risen. Before we pass through that door, however, we pray for the world that still walks in the darkness of Holy Saturday: for the peace of the Church, for the shepherds who feed us, and for the assemblies of the faithful gathered in every place on earth.

The Creed and the Washing of the Priest's Hands

Only the baptized remain at this point in the Liturgy; the Creed is the confession of those who are already inside the Body of Christ. The deacon lifts his voice: "Attend to God with wisdom. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Truly we believe in one God..." and the whole congregation joins in. The Creed is not recited in private; it is sung in unison, because it is the voice of the Church, not the voice of an individual.

Our fathers have taught us that two things are needed before we can stand at the altar: faith and love. The Creed is the Church's great act of faith. The Holy Kiss that follows will be the Church's act of love. Without both we are not ready to approach.

While the Creed is being recited, the priest washes his hands — not for the first time in this Liturgy, but now with a different weight. He washes three times, in honor of the Holy Trinity, and then faces west toward the people and shakes the water from his hands. Three things are being said at once.

First, the priest reminds the whole Church that Holy Communion must not be taken lightly. Hands must be clean. Hearts must be cleaner. Second, the priest "washes his hands" of the guilt of those who receive unworthily; he will not carry into his own soul what a communicant chooses to carry into his. Third, the priest's hand must be clean to touch the Body of Christ, because in a few minutes those very hands will lift the Lamb of God. What the priest does visibly, the rest of the Church is called to do invisibly.

"I will wash my hands in innocence; so I will go about Your altar, O Lord." Psalm 26:6

The Prayer of Reconciliation and the Holy Kiss

Reconciliation is the restoration of a broken relationship. In the Prayer of Reconciliation the priest asks, on behalf of all of us, for forgiveness. We confess ourselves sinners, and we ask to be made worthy of the Body and Blood we are about to receive. The grace of forgiveness does not stay in the sanctuary; it spreads through the whole church, and it gives peace to every heart.

At this moment the priest lifts the seal from the chalice. The triangular veil comes off; the stone is rolled away. The prosphorine is raised, and Christ rises in our midst. The deacon then cries out:

"Greet one another with a holy kiss." 2 Corinthians 13:12

This is no empty greeting. It is the sign that the whole Church has become one heart and one mind. Faith has been proclaimed in the Creed. Hope has been stirred by the open tomb. Love has been enacted in the holy kiss. Now, and only now, is the Church ready to enter the Anaphora.

The Anaphora — Lifting Up Our Hearts

Anaphora is a Greek word meaning "lifting up." The whole central prayer of the Liturgy bears this name, because it is the prayer in which priest and people together lift their hearts to heaven. Facing west, the priest proclaims, "The Lord be with you all," and the congregation answers, "And also with your spirit." He then crosses himself and turns: "Lift up your hearts." The answer is both an invitation and a confession: "We have them with the Lord."

This is not a figure of speech. The priest and the people are asked to set aside, as with a physical motion, every earthly concern. The anxiety about work, the fight that happened in the car on the way to church, the question of what we will eat after the Liturgy — all of it is set down at the door of the Anaphora. St. Paul gives the reason:

"If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth." Colossians 3:1–2

Then the priest crosses himself again and says, "Let us give thanks to the Lord." The word Eucharist means thanksgiving, and the whole Liturgy takes its name from these words. The people answer, "It is meet and right." The priest lifts his covered hands in the posture of the Seraphim who stand before the throne, and he prays three ancient prayers — "Meet and Right...", "Before Whom stand...", "You are He around Whom stand..." — drawing the Church up to the very doors of heaven.

The Church then breaks into the Agios, a hymn that is almost a small creed of its own. In three stanzas it confesses the faith we have just proclaimed:

- "Who formed us, created us, and placed us in the paradise of joy... when we disobeyed Your commandment... You visited us through Your holy prophets, and in the last days You manifested Yourself through Your Only-Begotten Son Jesus Christ, of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin St. Mary."
- "Was incarnate, became man, taught us the way of salvation, granted us the birth from above through water and Spirit, and gave Himself up unto death on account of our sins."
- "He rose from the dead on the third day, ascended into the heavens, sat at the right hand of the Father, and appointed a day for recompense."

Creation, fall, prophets, incarnation, cross, resurrection, ascension, judgment to come — the whole arc of salvation is gathered into three breaths.

The Institution Narrative

At the heart of the Anaphora stands the Institution Narrative — the telling of what Christ did and said on the night He was betrayed. The priest stops narrating about the Lord and begins speaking in the Lord's own voice. The deacons surround the altar with lit candles. The priest places two corporals on the altar, those small linen cloths that will hold the sacred fragments without loss. The deacon brings the censer, and the priest censes his hands three times, a final purification before he touches what is about to become the Body of Christ.

Then he takes the bread in his hands. The words are no longer an explanation; they are a re-enactment. The priest does not say, "Jesus took bread and said, take eat." He says, as Christ Himself said,

"Take, eat from it, all of you; for this is My Body which is broken for you and for many, given for the remission of sins. Do this in remembrance of Me." From the Liturgy of St. Basil, after Matthew 26:26 and 1 Corinthians 11:24

And over the chalice, he prays:

“Drink from it, all of you; for this is My Blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins. Do this in remembrance of Me.” From the Liturgy of St. Basil, after Matthew 26:27–28

In the Old Testament, when the high priest spoke the holy name of God on the Day of Atonement, the whole congregation prostrated themselves to the ground. Our Church has inherited something of that reverence. In these moments at the altar, the congregation does not crane its neck to see; it lowers its head to pray. What is happening is the working of the Holy Spirit, not a piece of liturgical theater.

The Epiclesis — the Descent of the Holy Spirit

The Epiclesis is the invocation of the Holy Spirit upon the gifts. It is the moment in which the Church asks God the Father to send His Spirit upon the bread and wine and upon the people, so that what lies on the altar may become what the Church confesses it to be: the Body and Blood of Christ. The priest bows low and prays:

“And we ask You, O Lord our God, we Your sinful and unworthy servants; we worship You by the pleasure of Your goodness: that Your Holy Spirit descend upon us and upon these gifts set forth, and purify them, change them, and manifest them as a sanctification of Your saints.” From the Liturgy of St. Basil (Coptic)

The Epiclesis asks for three things at once. The Spirit is asked to purify the gifts, to change them into the Body and Blood of Christ, and to manifest them as a sanctification for the faithful. The change is not a symbol, and it is not magic; it is the work of the Spirit of God, the same Spirit who brooded over the waters at creation, who overshadowed the Virgin at the incarnation, and who fell on the Apostles at Pentecost.

The Epiclesis is also the moment in which the Church itself is remade. The Spirit is asked to descend "upon us" before He is asked to descend "upon these gifts." The Eucharist does not sanctify the bread in isolation; it sanctifies the Body, and the Body is the Church. What is changed on the altar is changed in us.

“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body... and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.” 1 Corinthians 12:13

The Anamnesis and the Seven Short Litanies

Anamnesis is a Greek word meaning "remembrance," but it means far more than an act of memory. In the biblical sense, to remember is to make present. The priest declares:

“For every time you eat of this Bread and drink of this Cup you preach My death, confess My Resurrection, and remember Me till I come.” From the Liturgy of St. Basil, after 1 Corinthians 11:26

"As we too commemorate His Holy Passion, His Resurrection from the dead, His ascension into the heavens..." The Anamnesis is not a souvenir of Calvary. It is Calvary made present. What is offered on the altar is the one sacrifice, offered once and for all by Christ on the Cross, now brought into the here and now for the salvation of those gathered around it.

Having stood at Calvary and Easter together, the Church now begins to carry the world up to the altar. This is the work of the Seven Short Litanies: for peace; for the Pope and the bishops; for the clergy and the deacons; for the purity of the people; for the salvation of the world; for the waters, the seeds, and the fruits of the earth; and for the gifts just offered. Every need of creation is laid at the feet of the risen Lord who is now really present on the altar.

After the litanies, the Church makes her Commemoration of the Saints. She does not attempt to name them all; she names those who laid the foundation of the faith — the forefathers of the Church, the fathers and mothers of the monastic life, the pillars of every age. We name them because they are not absent. The Liturgy that we celebrate on earth is the same Liturgy that they celebrate before the throne.

The Introduction to the Fraction, the Fraction, and the Absolution

The Fraction is the breaking of the Holy Bread. Before it is done, the priest offers a sign of peace to the people, and then he steps aside — a small and significant motion. He is saying, in effect, I can do no more. The peace that comes next does not come from me. Christ is on the altar. Let Him give it.

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you."

John 14:27

Then the priest breaks the Bread. The Fraction has its own prayer for every season of the Coptic year — one for the Nativity, another for Great Lent, another for the Resurrection, another for the Apostles' Fast, and so on — so that the Body of the Lord is broken with the voice of the season around it. This is one of the holiest moments of the entire Liturgy. The congregation stands in reverence, silent and attentive. What the priest holds in his hands is the sacrifice of Calvary.

After the Fraction, the whole Church recites the Our Father, and the deacon bids the people bow their heads. The bow is not an act of worship but of reception; it is the posture for receiving absolution. While the heads of the Church are bowed, the priest prays the prayer of Absolution, asking Christ to forgive our sins and make us worthy of the Communion that is coming.

A note often missed: the Absolution is not a ritual for confession. Those who have serious sin are expected to have sought absolution through the sacrament of Confession before they approach the Liturgy. The Absolution at this moment is a final cleansing of small things, a final pouring of mercy before the Lord is placed on our tongues.

The Confession and the Distribution

The priest now raises his voice once more. He takes the Body in his hand and proclaims to the congregation what is about to happen. This is the Confession of faith in the Real Presence:

"This is in truth the Body and Blood of Emmanuel our God. Amen." From the prayers of the Confession in the Liturgy

The deacon answers on behalf of the whole Church: "We too believe and confess that this is the faith by which we partake of His Holy Body and Blood." This is no abstract theology. It is a question the Lord Himself once asked, and the Church's answer has never changed:

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you." John 6:53

No one should approach the chalice with a heart that does not confess this. A communicant who comes to the altar in doubt, in insincerity, or in unrepented sin does not diminish the Eucharist; he injures himself. This is why the Church insists that the Confession be made with the lips and with the heart together.

Then the congregation rises from its bowed worship and the Distribution begins. The choir sings Psalm 150 — "Praise God in His sanctuary... Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet... Let everything that has breath praise the Lord." The air of the church changes. We have passed through the Cross and the empty tomb; now we stand inside the Resurrection, and we sing.

The posture matters. The faithful stand to receive. They do not slouch, do not put their hands in their pockets, do not talk, do not rush. They receive the Body on their tongue and the Blood on their lips with the same reverence with which the myrrh-bearing women received the news of the Resurrection. This is the food that will carry us through the week. This is the medicine of immortality. This is what saves us from the evil of this world.

"He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him." John 6:56

The End of the Liturgy: Dismissals and Going Forth

When the Distribution is complete, the priest cleanses the vessels of the altar with great care. Not a single fragment of the Body of Christ may be left behind. After this comes a small and tender rite that is easy to miss. The priest uses water to dismiss the Angel of the Sacrifice. The Church teaches that every Liturgy has its own angel, assigned by God to watch over the altar and carry the prayers of the congregation. When the Liturgy ends, that angel is sent back to heaven with a blessing. Then the priest uses water to bless and dismiss the people themselves.

The two gestures belong together. The heavenly servants and the earthly servants are both released from their sacred duty with the same hand and the same water. The altar is cleared; the angel returns to the throne; the faithful are sent out into the world.

But "sent out" is not the same as "done." The Greek word from which our word "Mass" is sometimes derived, *missa*, is simply the word for dismissal. The Liturgy ends with a sending. We are not sent away

from Christ; we are sent with Christ, carrying Him within us to the streets, to the homes, to the offices, to the classrooms of our own week.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:19–20

The Liturgy of the Faithful teaches us how to become what we have received. We have stood at the tomb with the myrrh-bearing women; we have stood at Calvary with the Mother and the Beloved Disciple; we have stood in the heavenly throne room with the Seraphim; we have received the risen Lord Himself into our bodies. Now we step back out of the doors of the church as people who have met the Lord of glory, and we carry that meeting into every ordinary hour. Amen.



Review Questions

1. When the Priest lifts the prosphering and offers incense under it, what does this represent? (A: It is to commemorate when the 3 Mary's came early Sunday to Christ's tomb)
2. In our church the Creed is important because we need 2 things before we can continue with the liturgy, what are these 2 things? (A: Faith and Love)
3. The hymn Agios is a hymn filled with the basics of Christian dogma, what are they? (A: Formed us, created us...disobeyed his commandments, Was incarnate, became man, granted us the birth, He rose from the dead, ascended into the heavens, appointed a day for recompense.)
4. What is The Epiclesis? (A: The Epiclesis is a prayer that the Holy Spirit descends upon the Bread and Wine and changes them into the Body and the Blood of Christ and to sanctify the whole church members)
5. What is the Anamnesis? (A: It is a living proclamation for Jesus' death and resurrection and remembrance of Him until His Coming.)



Scripture:

Further Reading:

- H.H. Pope Shenouda III, The Divine Liturgy (Introduction).
- St. Cyril of Jerusalem — Mystagogical Catechesis V (on the washing of hands and the Eucharist).
- St. John Chrysostom — Homilies on the Gospels and on the Pauline Epistles.
- • Fr. Athanasius Iskander, [Understanding the Liturgy](#).
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