

# Introduction Part 1: The End of the Liturgy

## *Prayer*

Illumine our hearts, O Master Who lovest mankind, with the pure light of thy divine knowledge, and open the eyes of our mind to the understanding of thy gospel teachings; implant in us also the fear of thy blessed commandments, that trampling down all carnal desires, we may enter upon a spiritual manner of living, both thinking and doing such things as are well-pleasing unto thee. For thou art the illumination of our souls and bodies, O Christ our God, and unto thee we ascribe glory, together with thine unoriginate Father, and thine all-holy, good, and life-creating Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

## *Preface*

Thank you all for attending, I appreciate it very much.

{Remarks on Typika just served.} Interestingly, we start this series on the Divine Liturgy on a Sunday where atypically, a Typika was just served. There's probably something to say about this, but it escapes me.

Toward the end of the Sunday School year, one of the parents approached me in coffee hour and suggested I teach a series on the Divine Liturgy for the middle and high schoolers. A few weeks later, Fr Gabriel asked me to help organize a catechumenate program and we decided to start with a series on the Divine Liturgy. So thank you very much for testing out the high school Sunday school series. {If high school students in attendance:} (I see we have a few of my high school students here, to which I adapt St Paul's words to the Philippians: To [say] the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.)

I've structured this series as 15 or so short talks, lasting around 15 minutes apiece, on various aspects of the Divine Liturgy. The topics will approximately follow the order of the Divine Liturgy. However, I also

want to be responsive to your desires. So, what questions do you have about the Liturgy?

Thank you very much. I will try to address these questions as we go through the series. There will also be opportunities to ask questions at the end of each talk. If you prefer, you can also send me questions via email. I also will try to include a handout with the main points, Scripture references and other quotes, as well as a source list. If you want an extended edition; I will make that available through email.

One last note about the sources I'm using. I'm dependent on St Nicholas Cabasilas' *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, (written in the 14th Century) which I cannot recommend highly enough. If you buy one work on the Divine Liturgy, let it be this one, and acquire his other work *The Life in Christ*. As an aside, I love that we have very profitable commentaries on the Divine Liturgy that are several centuries old. Additionally, I am reliant on Fr Emmanuel Hatzidakis' *The Heavenly Banquet: Understanding the Divine Liturgy* which draws extensively on St Nicholas' *Commentary*. For this reason, let us take St Nicholas Cabasilas of Thessaloniki as our heavenly patron and pray he guides us into understanding.

Well, that is probably enough preface to the series, as the writer of Second Maccabees writes, "At this point therefore let us begin our narrative, without adding further to what has already been said; for it is foolish to lengthen the preface while cutting short the [content] itself."

### *Introduction*

While we have all heard the very excellent advice that 'the very beginning [is] a very good place to start', for this series we shall start at the end. After all, when the Divine Liturgy begins, the Matins service has just ended and the services of the Preparation, Vesting, and Opportune Time have been offered before that. And Vespers was said the night before. Moreover, as we shall see, when we offer worship in the Divine Liturgy, we join with the

worship of the angels, and those holy ones have been offering the Triune God worship since their creation.

By 'the end' I do not mean the dismissals of the Divine Liturgy; we will discuss those in time. I mean the goal or purpose of the Liturgy. *Why* do we gather together at least once a week to celebrate the Mysteries? To this end, we will also examine the Scriptures on worship and discuss why preparation is such a part of the Orthodox services, and indeed our entire ethos.

### *Purpose and Goal*

St Nicholas Cabasilas begins his *Commentary* with these words:

The essential act in the celebration of the holy mysteries is the transformation of the elements into the Divine Body and Blood; its aim is the sanctification of the faithful, who through these mysteries receive the remission of their sins and the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven.

What awesome words from the saint! The elements of bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, and we the faithful are transformed into holy ones. We are given the Body and Blood of Christ for our sanctification, to make us holy, to unite us with the Church, the Body of Christ. In the Divine Liturgy, through the grace of God, we are given forgiveness of sins, and the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven.

### *Scriptures*

The Divine Liturgy assumes familiarity with the Scriptures. Much of the words are directly out of Scripture or allude to the scriptures. Since we encounter the True God in the Divine Liturgy let us look at a few passages where humans have met God in worship.

In the Old Testament, we find a passage the Divine Liturgy draws on heavily, where Isaiah comes into the Throne Room of God.

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory!”

And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! For I am [undone]; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”

And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.”

Isaiah comes into the presence of the Lord and sees the angels worshipping him. Upon seeing the greatness of God, Isaiah he immediately recognizes his sin and unworthiness, calling down a curse upon himself. But God, through a seraph, cleanses him with a coal from the altar of incense, and commissions him to give his word to the people.

In the New Testament, the two most liturgical books are the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Revelation to St John. In passing, note that St John received his vision while ‘in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day’. Reading the Apocalypse as liturgical helps us understand the meaning of the work. The whole Epistle to the Hebrews is a sermon on the Scriptures and how the New Covenant is superior to the Old. This culminates in

chapter 12 where the author compares our worship to the giving of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 19-20.

Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God....

For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear." But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom

that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

Let us attend to where we have come: to the mountain of the Lord where the angels and saints are gathered, where the Lord who redeemed us is worshipped. And we are given a new covenant and a kingdom that cannot be shaken when all that is of this age will fall away. The proper response is to offer God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe.

### *Preparation*

In the Hebrews passage, we see our need for preparation. Immediately after the opening quote of St Nicholas' *Commentary* we read:

As a preparation for, and contribution to, this act and this purpose we have prayers, psalms, and readings from Holy Scripture; in short, all the sacred acts and forms which are said and done before and after the consecration of the elements. While it is true that God freely gives us all holy things and that we bring him nothing, but that they are absolute graces, he does nevertheless necessarily require that we should be fit to receive and to preserve them; and he would not permit those who were not so disposed to be thus sanctified. It is in this way that he admits us to Baptism and Confirmation; in this way that he receives us at the divine banquet and allows us to participate at the solemn table. Christ, in his parable of the sower, has illustrated this way that God has of dealing with us. "A sower went forth," he says, "to sow" — not to plough the earth, but to sow: thus showing that the work of preparation must be done by us. Therefore, since in order to obtain the effects of the divine mysteries we must approach them in a state of grace and properly prepared, it was necessary that these preparations should find a place in the order of the sacred rite: and, in fact, they are found there.

Because we come to Christ in his majesty, we must prepare ourselves, lest we find ourselves cast out without a wedding garment. But see the provision given to us, in the Scriptures and in the Liturgy itself. All of the Christian life is preparation, and we see manifold examples of that. Our private prayers and the services of Vespers and Matins prepare us for the Divine Liturgy; in the Divine Liturgy itself, the first portion, the Liturgy of the Word, prepares us to partake of the Eucharist. Likewise, in the annual calendar, Pascha is preceded by Holy Week, which the 40 days of the Great Fast prepare us for. Moreover, there is a three week period to prepare us for the Great Fast. Truly, all of our life is to prepare us for our death, when we shall meet the Lord. As St Isaac of Syria said, "This life is given to us for repentance; do not waste it in empty pursuits." Or, as St Paul writes, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

Because the end of the Liturgy is our union with God, to prepare throughout the week we should read the Holy Scriptures and follow our rule of prayer. Let us not neglect such preparation, for when we enter into the Divine Liturgy, we come to worship the Triune God, to receive Christ in his Holy Supper, and are given remission of sins and the Kingdom of Heaven.

Having thus detailed why we offer the Divine Liturgy, next time we will focus on what the Divine Liturgy is.

Are there any questions? [{Questions and maybe answers.}](#)

Thank you, let us close with prayer.

Our Father...

Through the prayers of our holy fathers, especially St Nicholas of Thessaloniki, O Lord Jesus Christ, our True God, have mercy upon us and save us. Amen