

A Mercy of Peace, A Sacrifice of Praise: The Anaphora

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.

Opening

“Lift up your hearts.” “We lift them up to the Lord.” And so the anaphora begins, following after the conclusion of the Creed. The anaphora is the most sacred section of the Divine Liturgy and consists of the prayers of consecration of the Gifts into the Body and Blood of our Lord. This is why just before ‘Lift up your hearts’, the deacon commands us to ‘Stand alright, stand with fear, let us attend, that we may offer the holy oblation in peace.’ We respond, ‘A mercy of peace, a sacrifice of praise.’ And the priest gives the peace of God.

Now, it is well known that every Divine Liturgy is a celebration of Pascha, but it is also a celebration of the Ascension, the Transfiguration, Pentecost and indeed the entire economy of Salvation.

Prayers

The word anaphora means to lift up to God, and as we’ve discussed in previous weeks the whole service is an ascent starting with us literally walking up the steps into the church building as we made our pilgrimage this morning. We’ve seen the entrance of Christ into the altar with the Gospel, and the Triumphal Entrance of Christ and the Gifts alongside the angels. We stand now at the cusp of the most sacred part of the liturgy. The

priest declares 'Let us give thanks unto the Lord' and we remember the word Eucharist means Thanksgiving and sing in response 'It is meet and right, to worship Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Trinity, one in essence and undivided,' the priest starts a prayer that recalls what the Lord has done for us.

Up to this point Divine Liturgies of St John Chrysostom and St Basil the Great have been almost identical save for some quiet prayers of the priest. However, they differ the most here in the anaphora at the heart of the Liturgy. In St John's Liturgy this prayer begins, 'It is meet and right to hymn thee, to bless thee, to praise thee, to give thanks unto thee and to worship thee in ever place of thy dominion.' And where is the Lord's dominion? Everywhere he is, as we saw the last time we met:

In the grave with the body but in hades with the soul as God; in paradise with the thief, and on the throne with the Father and the Spirit wast thou, O Christ, filling all things, thyself uncircumscribed.

The prayer continues:

Thou it was who didst bring us from non-existence into being, and when we had fallen away didst raise us up again, and didst not cease to do all things until thou hadst brought us up to heaven and hadst endowed us with thy kingdom which is to come. For all these things we give thanks unto thee, ... for all things of which we know and of which we know not and for all the benefits bestowed upon us, both manifest and unseen.

It concludes with a references to the ministry of the Mystery was given to human priests even though the God is surrounded by the host of heavenly powers, including the

cherubim and the seraphim, six-winged, many-eyed, soaring aloft borne on their wings: singing the triumphal hymn, shouting proclaiming and saying:

and we join this choir in their song,

Holy, holy, holy, Lord of Sabaoth; heaven and earth are full of thy glory: Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

The first part of this song is taken from the passage we have referenced so frequently this series, the Throne Room vision of the Holy Prophet Isaiah. The second portion is from the Gospel According to St Matthew as he records what the crowds shouted during the Triumphal Entry. As we sing in the Feast of the Ascension, the celestials and terrestrials are united by Christ's ascent into heaven, and thus we sing the same hymn.

As we sing this hymn, the priest continues the prayer, from St John Chrysostom,

Holy art thou ... who so loved thy world as to give thine only-begotten Son, that all who believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life, who, when he had come and had fulfilled all the dispensation for us.

That is, Christ accomplished our salvation as it says in the prophets, 'Salvation belongs the Lord.' And like the Prophet Jonah, we also were rescued from the depths of Hades. St Basil expands upon what did to fulfill the dispensation by recounting the whole history of salvation and the divine economy. The prayer says in part:

And who is sufficient to speak of thy mighty acts, to make all thy praises to be heard, or to tell of all of thy wonders at every season? ... Holy art thou ... and there are no bounds to the majesty of thy holiness, ... for in righteousness and true judgment has thou ordered all things for us. When thou hadst fashioned man, taking him from the dust of the earth, and hadst honored him with thine own image, O God, thou didst set him in paradise ... promising him life eternal ... in keeping thy commandments. But when he disobeyed thee, ... and was led astray by the guile of the serpent and rendered subject to death through his own transgressions, thou didst banish him, in thy righteous judgement, O God, from paradise into this world, and didst turn him again to the earth from which he was taken, providing for

him the salvation of rebirth, which is in thy Christ himself. Yet thou didst not turn thyself away forever from thy creature...; but thou didst visit him in diverse manners, through thy tender mercies. Thou didst send forth prophets; thou didst perform mighty works by thy holy ones, who in every generation were well-pleasing unto thee; [by them] thou didst speak to us ... who foretold to us the salvation of which to come; thou didst give the Law as an aid; thou didst appoint guardian angels. And when the fullness of time was come, thou didst speak unto us through thy Son himself. ... For as by man sin entered into the world and by sin death, so it seemed unto thine only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of thee, the God and Father, to be born of a woman, holy Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary; to be born under the Law, that he might condemn sin in his flesh, that they who were dead in Adam might be made alive in him thy Christ. ... He released us from the delusion of idols and brought us into a knowledge of thee, the true God and Father...he gave himself a ransom unto death, whereby we were held, sold into bondage under sin. And having descended into hades through the cross, that he might fill all things with himself, he loosed the pains of death and rose again on the third day, making a way for all flesh until the resurrection from the dead ... Ascending into heaven, he sat down at the right hand of thy majesty on high; and he shall come again to render unto every man according to his works...

Words of Institution

Both these Trinitarian prayers then lead into a recitation of the words our Lord used with he instituted the Mystical Supper: 'Take eat. This is my Body which is broken for you, for the forgiveness of sins.' 'Drink of this all you, this is my Blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins.' As priest-monk Gregorios writes 'The Divine Eucharist...is not a formal repetition of [the Last Supper], but the Last, the Mystical Supper itself, for the same Christ offers and is offered.' In the Mystical supper we experience the same Supper that Christ offered on

the night in which he was betrayed, or rather gave himself up for the life of the world.

Epiclesis

After the Words of Institution, the priest says the Prayer of Remembrance while lifting up the paten and chalice from the Holy Table,

“Having in Remembrance, therefore this saving commandment and all those things which have come to pass for us: the Cross, the Grave, the Third-Day Resurrection, the Ascension into heaven, the sitting at the right hand, and the second and glorious coming: Thine own of thine own we offer unto thee in behalf of all and for all.”

Notice that we remember the second and glorious coming which has not happened yet as we experience time. This is because in the Liturgy we have entered into God’s Time, the Eighth Day which has no evening. For God all time is now. For as St Nicholas Cabasilas writes, ‘That life which is to come has in some way been poured into this present life and mingled with it... This Mystery transforms earth and heaven.’ The prayer concludes by reminding us that all we offer to God is from him originally, we cannot bring him anything good that is apart from him, as St Basil’s Liturgy states,

We, thy sinful and unworthy servants, who have been made worthy to minister at thy holy altar, *not through our own righteousness, for we have done no good deed upon earth*, but because of thy mercies and compassions which thou hast richly poured out upon us have now boldness to draw near unto thy holy altar...

We see also our Transfiguration and Pentecost here, for as the choir sings, ‘We hymn thee, we bless thee, we give thanks unto thee...’ The priest prays,

‘Send down thy Holy Spirit *upon us* and upon these gifts spread forth: and make this bread the Precious Body of thy Christ; and that which is in this cup, the Precious Blood of thy Christ; changing them both by thy Holy Spirit’

Just as the Gifts are transfigured into the Body and Blood of Christ so we by partaking of Christ are transfigured into his Body. Just as in the opening doxology, the faithful proclaim the 'amen'.

The priest concludes the prayer by asking us to be transformed and be remembered with those gone before us in faith to their rest, and especially our all-holy immaculate, most blessed and glorious Lady the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary. We then go into a series of prayers wherein we pray for all classes of people and conclude by praying for all humanity, for Christ who showed us true humanity and with him all are raised.

Conclusion

In the prayers of the anaphora, we experience that not only our hearts, but our whole selves are lifted up into the heavens, and all that Christ our God has done for us is shown before us. The Holy Spirit descends upon us as in the Annunciation and Pentecost, we hear the prayers showing forth Christ's life, death, resurrection, ascension, and glorious appearing and like the Gifts are transformed into the Body of Christ. Let us marvel at the work of the Lord. As the author of Hebrews states,

How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

Are there any questions? {Questions and maybe answers.}

Thank you, let us close with prayer.

Our Father...

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