

Let Us Go Forth in Peace

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.

Introduction

Last time we spoke of our participation in the Holy Eucharist and in the Life of Christ. This week is our last in the series and we'll discuss the dismissal of the Liturgy.

Let us go forth in peace

We pick up right after the thanksgiving prayer. The priest starts this section with 'Let us go forth in peace' and we respond 'In the name of the Lord'. The Divine Liturgy ends as it began, with peace. Right after the initial proclamation, the deacon began the Litany of Peace with: 'In peace, let us pray to the Lord.' Truly the peace of the Lord has been a refrain throughout the Liturgy. Priest-monk Gregorios writes:

The Divine Liturgy is a journey whose purpose is man's encounter and union with God. This goal has now been reached, we have seen the Lord transfigured on the Mount Tabor of the Liturgy, we have partaken of His holy Body and most pure Blood. And as we venture to utter to our exalted Visitor, *Lord it is good to be here*, our Mother Church reminds us that the end of the liturgical journey must become the starting-point for our spiritual journey: *Let us go forth in peace*. We have to leave the Mountain of Transfiguration in order to return to the

world and tread the way of martyrdom of our lives. This journey becomes our *martyria*, our witness to Christ — the Way and the Life — who has become our guest.

As we received Christ in the Divine Liturgy we are to share him with the world in love and service. Remember also, in the passage we have looked at so many times in this series; after the Prophet Isaiah is ushered into the throne room of God and eats the heavenly food, he hears the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go to this people?” To which he responds, “Here I am, send me!”

After the command to go forth in peace, the priest then prays:

O Lord, who blessest those who bless thee and sanctifiest those who put their trust in thee: Save thy people, and bless thine inheritance, preserve the fullness of thy Church, sanctify those who love the beauty of thy house, glorify them in recompense by thy divine power, and forsake us not who hope on thee. Give peace to thy world, to thy churches, to the priests, to the civil authorities, to the armed forces and to all thy people; for all good giving and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from thee, the Father of lights, and unto thee we ascribe glory, thanksgiving, and worship to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages.

This prayer is replete with Scripture, showing forth Christ’s blessings to his people. Note it again asks for God’s peace, and as St Paul enjoins St Timothy, the priest for all people and those in high positions.

Blessed be the name of the Lord

We respond with the prayer, “Blessed be the name of the Lord, henceforth and forevermore.” This is drawn from Psalm 112. In the Psalter, this is the first of six psalms there were sung by the Jews after the Passover meal, and thus were likely sung after the Last Supper by Jesus and the disciples.

How wonderful is the name of the Lord; in the Jesus prayer, we strive to constantly keep it in our minds. St John Chrysostom reflects upon it:

Through this name, death was abolished..the doors of Paradise opened wide, the Holy Spirit descended upon us, slaves became free men, enemies became sons, strangers became heirs, humans became angels. Angels, did I say? God became man, and man god. Heaven received the nature that came from earth. The earth received him who sits upon the cherubim together with angelic host. The dividing wall [between God and humanity] has been destroyed, the barrier has been removed, what was separated is united, darkness has been abolished, light has shone forth.'

As we sing this, the priest blesses the deacon to consume the remaining gifts, saying "O Christ our God, who art thyself the Fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, who didst fulfill all the dispensation of the Father: fill our hearts with joy and gladness, always, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen." Again we are reminded that Christ is both the subject of Scripture and our Saviour, doing everything to unite us with God.

The great cloud of witnesses

After we praise the holy name of the Lord, we ask for the blessing of the Lord, which the priest gives "The blessing of the Lord and his mercy come upon you through his divine grace and love toward mankind, always now and ever, and unto ages of ages." And we again praise the Triune name of God. We then receive the final blessing, which starts, "May he who rose again from the dead, Christ our True God, through the intercessions of..." and then gives a list of the saints, starting with the Mother of God. We are not saved alone, but in community, and those who have gone on before us pray for us in the Church. Indeed the Lord is pleased to use the prayers of his holy ones in working out our salvation. In commenting on this prayer, concluding his commentary St Nicholas Cabasilas writes:

What is this prayer? It is that we may be saved through obtaining mercy, for we have of ourselves nothing that merits salvation, but we look only towards him who loves mankind and is able to save us. Therefore at this point he makes mention of many intercessors who can help us, and especially the all-holy Mother of God who was the vessel whereby Mercy was first brought to us. The prelude of this

prayer is “Christ our True God.” There is no longer any question of those false gods, those sham divinities, whom we once worshipped in such numbers, but “our true God”, whom we have now found after great struggles. And so it is that we owe all glory, honor, and worship to him alone, as to God, together with his Eternal Father and his most holy and good and life-giving Spirit, now and always for ever and ever. Amen.

The Liturgy after the Liturgy

St John Chrysostom famously said “If you cannot find Christ in the beggar at the church door, you will not find Him in the chalice.” As we draw this talk to a conclusion, let us be reminded of the peace of God we receive in the Liturgy each Lord’s Day, and take that peace with us into the world, striving to improve it, following the example of the Prophet Isaiah. For we also have been to heaven and dined with God, receiving the very flesh and blood of Christ. Likewise we have been given a commission. May we respond in kind, “Here I am, send me.” To the glory of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Conclusion to series

This talk concludes the series on the Divine Liturgy, and I hope I have been able to show in some measure why we worship and what we receive in worship. As I started the series with a quote from 2 Maccabees it seems appropriate to end with one as well. “So I will now end my story. If it is well told and to the point, that is what I myself desired; if it is poorly done and mediocre, that was the best I could do.” Or to quote Blessed Augustine who concludes *The City of God* with these words.

I think I have now, with God’s help, discharged my obligation in writing [and giving] this large work. Let those who think I have said too little, or those who think I have said too much, forgive me; and let those who think I have said just enough join me in giving thanks to God [Father, Son, and Holy Spirit]. Amen

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

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