

What is the Divine Liturgy

High School Lesson 2

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

{Names refresher.}

Who remembers what we went over last week?

That's right, *why* we offer the Divine Liturgy. And you all were very clever, and figured out the first few classes will answer why, what, when, who, and where.

Who remembers our two scripture passages? Isaiah 6 and Hebrews 12; these are important to remember, perhaps even memorize, because we'll be coming back to them again and again in our series.

Someone asked a very pertinent question last week, "What is the Divine Liturgy?" Of course, it's the service we just came out of, but what do the words mean? Who knows what *Divine* means? Right it's about God and Jesus as the Son of God. How about *Liturgy*? It comes from the Greek words for 'people' and 'work', so we have our own work to do in the liturgy, but what a privilege that we get to be fellow workers with God!

So, what's going on in the Divine Liturgy? What's the heart of what we do?

Sacrifice

We ended last week saying the Liturgy unites us to God. How does it do that? What's the primary thing going on in the Liturgy? What's the Eucharist? And what is the Eucharist an example of?

Last year, when we went through Genesis, we discussed sacrifice. We saw that it is fundamentally a meal shared between people and their God. It is an act of hospitality.

The Eucharist is the central act of the Divine Liturgy. Does anyone know the two sections of the Liturgy? The Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. You've all been in the Liturgy hundreds of times so you know that all the prayers, hymns, and readings prepare us to receive the Eucharist.

The Old Testament sacrifices of the burnt offering, sin offering, peace offering, thanksgiving offering, etc. were meals with the God of Israel. In the case of sin offerings, the sacrifice served as a meal to restore the relationship and reconcile with God.

Someone please look up Hebrews 10.3 & 4. "But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." As the sacrifices of the Torah were not sufficient to deal with the root of the issue and eradicate sin, God offered us himself. God the Son became man in order to live a life pleasing to God in a fallen world and offer it to God for the life of the world. As Hebrews continues [10.12 & 13], "But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God."

The Gospels use image of the Passover in describing the sacrifice of Jesus. What happened in the Exodus story?

In the Passover, God judges the gods of Egypt, displaying his power over them, and rescuing his people. In celebration of this event, the Israelites are instructed to keep the Passover each year. This meal defined the children of Israel and their covenant with God. It was so important that the prophets likened the return from exile in Babylon to the Exodus and Ezra made sure

the returned Hebrews kept the Passover. Moreover, the prophet Jeremiah envisioned a new covenant enacted between God and his people.

Likewise, Jesus gave the Eucharist to his disciples before his death telling them to keep it as his memorial sacrifice of the new covenant. He tells them that he will not drink of the fruit of the vine until he drinks it in the kingdom of God. St Paul in 1 Corinthians writes Christ is our Passover Lamb, sacrificed for us, and we should keep the feast in sincerity and truth.

How is the Eucharist a sacrifice? First, the elements of the Eucharist are food because as physical food essential to sustain life and strengthen those who eat of it, the Eucharist is spiritual food to sustain our Life in Christ. While grain and grapes are given by God, grown with his sunlight and rain, it also takes human labor in order to transform them into bread and wine. This cooperation of humans with the Divine is especially suited for the Eucharist; it points to our whole life being offered to God as sacrifice. The transformation of grain into bread and grapes into wine involves crushing the raw material—reminding us of our sanctification and death to sin—and uniting many individual elements into one loaf or cup—reminding us of the union we have in Christ.

When we keep the feast of the Eucharist, having properly prepared, we receive Christ and are united to him in his kingdom. We participate in the one sacrifice he offered for our salvation. Just as God rescued Israel in the Passover, Christ after the Last Supper defeated sin, death, and the Devil and rescued us from their grasp. He did this in a most unexpected way, through entering death on the Cross. Death, of course, could not hold the Author of Life and Christ defeated it. As St John Chrysostom says in his Pascal Homily,

“[Hades] took a body, and face to face met God! It took earth and encountered heaven! It took what it saw but crumbled before what it had not seen! “O death, where is thy sting? O Hades, where is thy victory?”

Conclusion

So to sum up we offer the Divine Liturgy to worship God and be united to him. The Divine Liturgy prepares us to partake of the Eucharist where we receive Christ's body and blood. Christ both gives us the Eucharist and is given in the Eucharist. He is both the priest and the offering. Just as grains of wheat are united and transformed to form bread and likewise with grapes and wine, so are we united together and transformed to be the Body of Christ, dying to ourselves and offering our whole life to Christ.

Therefore, let us join with the deacon in prayer:

O Christ, great and most holy Pascha, O Wisdom, Word and Power of God: Grant that we may more perfectly partake of thee in the never-ending day of thy Kingdom.

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

Thank you, let us close with prayer.

Our Father...

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