

Let Us Lay Aside All Earthly Cares That We May Receive The King of All

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

As is my usual question at this time: What did we go over last week? I find it amusing we keep coming back to the *when* as that was a week I missed.

We discussed the Readings and the homily. Who remembers the two sections of the Liturgy? Yes, the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The last section and culmination of the Liturgy of the Word are the readings.

The first event of the Liturgy of the Eucharist is the Great Entrance. In this Entrance the priest places the Holy Gifts upon the altar to begin the sacrifice of the Eucharist. We'll examine what is occurring in the Great Entrance and how it prepares us to receive Christ in Holy Eucharist.

The Cherubic Hymn

As the priest is preparing in the altar for the Great Entrance, the choir and congregation sing the first part of the Cherubic Hymn.

Who remembers it? "Let us, who mystically represent the cherubim and sing the thrice-holy hymn to the life-giving Trinity, now lay aside all earthly care..." Every time I hear this, I am reminded how I've been focusing on

worldly things and not giving my full attention to the Divine Liturgy. St John Chrysostom noted in his homilies on Genesis,

The soul that has not learnt to despise the petty concerns of earthly life will not be able to marvel at the things of heaven.

But the Lord is merciful and we are reminded that *now* is the time to pivot and turn to him. Compare this to the phrase in the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, “Now the powers of heaven invisibly worship with us...” As we spoke several weeks ago, in the Divine Liturgy we are taken up into God’s time, which is always *now*.

Why do we lay aside all earthly cares? We conclude the hymn after the gifts are placed on the altar, “so that we may receive the King of all, invisibly escorted by the angelic hosts. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.” The hymn we use on Holy Saturday (from the Liturgy of St James) gives a fuller sense of this.

Let all mortal flesh keep silence and stand with fear and trembling and ponder nothing worldly within itself, for the King of kings and Lord of lords cometh forth to be slain and given as food for the faithful. Before him come the choirs of the angels, with all the principalities and authorities, the many-eyed cherubim and the six-winged seraphim covering their faces and crying aloud the hymn: Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

While we don’t see it, the holy bodiless powers enter in with the Lord and we should ponder heavenly things and quiet our minds recalling the Prophet Habakkuk’s instruction for the earth to keep silent.

The Prayers

While the congregation is singing the first half of the cherubic hymn, the priest prays to be made holy; as we’ve often said we do not come to God on account of our righteousness but his grace. He prays:

No one who is bound with the desires and pleasures of the flesh is worthy to approach or to draw nigh or to serve thee, O King of Glory, for to serve thee is a great and fearful thing even to the heavenly powers. Nevertheless through thine unspeakable and boundless love

toward mankind thou didst become man...and deliver[ed] unto us the ministry of this liturgic and bloodless sacrifice....Wherefore I implore thee who alone art good and art ready to listen: look down upon me, the sinner and thine unprofitable servant, and cleanse my soul and my heart from an evil conscience, and by the power of the Holy Spirit...enable me to stand before this thy holy table and perform the sacred Mystery...for thou thyself art he that offereth and art offered...

In that last line, Christ is the one offered but also the one who offers the gift; reiterating that he is the true celebrant of every Divine Liturgy. Through his grace, we are taken into the sacrifice he offered once for all. He is the author of the mystery of our salvation.

The Triumphal Entry

After the prayers, the priest censes the altar, the servers, the icons, and congregation and he and the deacon go to the Table of Preparation and cense the Gifts. The priest then takes up the outer veil covering the gifts and places it on the deacon's shoulders and gives him the paten. He takes up the chalice saying, "God is gone up in jubilation, the Lord with the voice of the trumpet." Who knows where this line is from? Psalm 46/47.

Surrounded by altar servers, the priest and deacon process from the altar for the Great Entrance through the nave of the church. As the deacon leaves the sanctuary he prays, "All of you, the Lord God remember in his kingdom, always, now and ever, and unto ages of ages." He then offers various petitions asking the Lord God to remember all sorts of people, the living and the departed in his kingdom. We give the 'Amen' to each prayer.

This litany reveals what the Great Entrance is, for where in the Scriptures have we heard the petition for the Lord to remember someone in his kingdom? The repentant thief on the cross. (Luke 23.39-43)

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he

said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."

The Great Entrance is the Triumphal Entry to Jerusalem that we celebrate every Palm Sunday. The Lord comes forth to be slain and given as food to the faithful. This is why instead of cloaks and palm branches we bow ourselves before the Gifts, asking to be remembered in the Kingdom of God. We lay aside all earthly cares, that we may receive the King of All.

The Doors

The deacon then leads us in the Litany of Supplication, "Let us complete our prayer to the Lord" which we covered in an earlier lesson. At the conclusion of this litany, the priest blesses us with the peace from God, showing us that all this is 'good and profitable for our souls' and a gift from God.

The deacon calls us to love another that we may confess, the people respond "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Trinity, one in essence and undivided." The priest proclaims "Christ is in our midst" and we respond. "He is and ever shall be." We then exchange the kiss of peace, the kiss of love. For as Christ commands: (Matthew 5.23–24)

So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

And as the beloved disciple admonishes: (1 John 4.19–21)

We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

"If Christ is not among us, he is not going to enter within us," writes the priest-monk Gregorios. "So the communion of love among the faithful

comes first, in order that Holy Communion may follow.” Love is lived out in the community God has placed us in; the Church is the Body of Christ.

Before we recite the Creed expressing our faith, the deacon cries out, “The doors, the doors. In wisdom let us attend.” St Nicholas of Thessaloniki explains this as a call to receive and express the wisdom given to us by God by reciting the Creed. “It is in this wisdom that the priest asks us to open all the doors—that is, our mouths and ears.” Likewise as in days past, this exclamation served to ensure no catechumens or unbelievers remained or came into the service past this point, we too need to guard the doors of our senses so earthly thoughts do not enter. Liberated from vanity, we may attain to the things of God.

We then recite the Creed, the Symbol of Faith, recounting God’s blessing to us. The deacon leads us into the next section calling us again to stand aright and the priest enjoins that our hearts be on high while respond our hearts are with the Lord.

Conclusion

And so we see that the Great Entrance is nothing less than our participation in the Triumphal Entrance of Christ into Jerusalem, where he goes to be slain for the faithful. In order to receive this mystery, by God’s grace, we must focus on the Kingdom of God and not this world. We offer ourselves to Christ and live in love with our brothers and sisters, the Body of Christ. For we cannot receive the Body of Christ within us if we are not dwelling in love amid the Body of Christ. But God is gracious and reminds us that *now* is the day of salvation, so let us lay aside all earthly cares, that we may receive the King of All.

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

Thank you, let us close with prayer.

Our Father...

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