

WEEK 1 INTRODUCTION TO DIVINE LITURGY, DIVINE SERVICES

Over the last few months during my Adult Education Presentation I have spoken about our vocation or life work as Orthodox Christians. I have explained that by virtue of our Baptism and Chrismation, we have been commissioned to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in a way that is unique to each of us, based on the talents and gifts that God has given us. Last month, I spoke about What the Church has to offer its members that cannot be found anywhere else, Holy Communion the Medicine of Immortality. I pointed out that the reason we come to Church each and every Sunday is so that we can receive Holy Communion which serves as Bishop Gregory is fond of saying as a Spiritual booster shot that gives us the spiritual energy to survive the struggles of everyday life, and to grow stronger, and peaceful and joyful. When this, the coming to Church to receive Holy Communion, becomes the high point of our week becomes the goal we strive to obtain above all else, each week, then everything else turns around in our life for the better. It puts everything else into proper context. When an entire parish shares this common goal and vision, that when we in the words of our Lord, “Seek first the Kingdom of Heaven, truly all else is added,” that parish moves from survival mode to growth mode where no challenge or obstacle is too big to overcome.

With this understanding in mind, and at the suggestion of a parishioner, I am going to shift gears a little bit and beginning today, I would like to start explaining to you about the history and meaning of the Divine Liturgy where the miracle of the Transformation of Bread and Wine into the Body and Blood of Christ takes place.

I have a confession to make. When I was a very young boy, I didn't really like the Liturgy. It was long, and in those days it was in a language I did not understand. The priest was scary looking with a long beard and when he preached he would get very emotional and loud and I would end up screaming and my Mom would have to take me out of Church.

Thankfully this changed when I began to understand the Liturgy. When I was 8 years old we started going to a church where the Liturgy was in English. This helped out a lot. What helped even more was when I learned about it in Sunday School. But what really made it come alive to me was when I attended Seminary, and went to Church every day, and almost every Sunday experienced the full celebration of the Divine Liturgy with a Bishop, multiple priests and deacons and subdeacons and a trained choir. What a difference this made, experiencing it in this way, and studying about it in real depth in the seminary classes.

What I am hoping to do, in some small way over the next few months is to hit some of the highlights of the Liturgy,,, to give you a better understanding of how really inspired the Divine Liturgy is and how it really has the power to lift us up, strengthen us and help us to be more alive and happy and at peace!!!

It has been said and it is true that the Orthodox Church is a worshipping Church. We don't just talk theology or talk about God we experience it. Our Church services are designed to give us a taste of what heaven is like. Just think about how beautiful especially the Easter and Christmas Divine Liturgies are when the Church is packed and the singing, and flowers, and the whole atmosphere of the Church is so spirit filled.

And you know you can't put into words what you are experiencing, you just know it is special and awesome.

So church services, for the Orthodox Christian are not just something we go to, but something that we experience. The purpose of the Church's services is to take us away from the problems and struggles we face in everyday life and bring us to heaven. Our services have been accurately described as heaven on earth. This is what the Liturgy really is if you think about it. This is why the Church is so beautifully decorated with lots and lots of icons. Because it reminds us as St. Paul writes we are surrounded by an invisible cloud of

witnesses. The saints are here today as are the angels who hovered around the altar and the chalice during this morning's consecration. Baby's see them in Church. when you think they are just fussing they are really talking to the angels, they see them.

So our services are heaven on earth and are designed to help us to see with our physical eyes the reality of heaven here and now. So when we attend Church Services, and especially the Divine Liturgy, there is more than what meets the eye going on. When we take part in Orthodox Worship, we step outside of time, as they become like in that classic movie Back to the Future a time machine. The Purpose of these services is to unite mankind to God, to sanctify time, to make world holy, reclaim it for God Did you know that literally when you take the various time zones into effect that prayers for the entire world are being said around the clock by various monks and nuns in churches throughout the world? The Orthodox Christian Fellowship, college ministry does this for 24 hours straight on the first day of Great Lent. Orthodox College Students on 24 Campuses, take one hour shifts in praying so literally on that day in the USA and Canada, there is 24 hours of un-interrupted prayer being offered.

With this in mind, let me talk about how worship works in the Orthodox Church and what principles are behind them.

A. First the Church has a Daily Cycle of Services. There are nine daily services: (1) Vespers, (2) Compline, (3) Midnight Office, (4) Matins, (5) First Hour, (6) Third Hour, (7) Sixth Hour, (8) Ninth Hour, and (9) the Divine Liturgy.

Following the example of Moses, who, describing the creation of the world by God, began the "day" with evening, the Orthodox Church begins the day with the evening service, Vespers.

Vespers is the service celebrated towards the end of daylight, in which we express our gratitude to God for the day which has passed.

Compline is composed of the reading of a series of prayers, in which we ask the Lord God for the forgiveness of sins. We also ask that He grant us repose of body and soul as we retire, and to preserve us from the wiles of the Devil as we sleep.

The Midnight Office is to be read at midnight in remembrance of the prayer of the Saviour during His night in the Garden of Gethsemane. This service summons the faithful to be ready at all times for the day of the Dread Judgment, which will come unexpectedly like "the bridegroom in the night" in the parable of the ten virgins.

Matins is celebrated in the morning prior to the rising of the sun. In this service we give thanks to God for the night which has passed, and we ask Him His mercy for the approaching day.

In Old and New Testament times, an "hour" meant a "watch" that lasted for three of our modern hours. Each service of the daily cycle corresponds to one of these three-hour divisions.

The First Hour covers the time from 6 A.M. to 9 A.M. The First Hour sanctifies the already breaking day with prayer.

The Third Hour covers the time from 9 A.M. to 12 P.M. It reminds us of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles.

The Sixth Hour covers the time from 12 P.M. to 3 P.M. It reminds us of the Passion and Crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Ninth Hour covers the time from 3 P.M. to 6 P.M. It reminds us of the death on the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

If we were to strictly observe the daily cycle of services we would be in Church a good part of day. Practically Church often groups services together. During the First Week Lent and Holy Week at Seminary, we observed the complete cycle of services. Images pelted at my head, sometimes very profoundly reached me, I

especially remember a verse from Psalm 20 that literally jumped out at me during a very long Matins service *Be still and know that I am God.*

Now you may be wondering I talked about every service of the Church except for one, the Divine Liturgy. Why is that missing. Why is there no time given for that. The reason is it not part of the daily cycle its considered outside of time.

B. In addition we have a weekly cycle, each day of the week is dedicated to certain saint or event. Sunday recurring Paschal celebration of the Resurrection: (Lord's Day) On Monday - Angels, Tues - St. John the Baptist. Wed Cross & Theotokos, Thurs - Holy Apostles and St. Nicholas and the Last Supper. Friday, day of preparation, the Cross and the Theotokos; Saturday - Martyrs and the Dead, the Day of Rest , the Blessed Sabbath.

C. There is also the Yearly Cycle (Solar Calendar) (Menaion) 12 Great Feast days, each day of year is dedicated to a number of Saints

D. There is also a cycle of Movable Feasts, Pascha, which follows the Lunar Calendar.

Another very important thing to keep in mind is that the hymns of the Church all are in the present tense. Today, Christ rose from the Dead. Christ IS Risen. This demonstrates that in Orthodox Worship we re-experience, not re-enact the events commemorated on feast days. During our liturgical celebration the Past, Present and Future merge. I want to read to you a section of the prayer I read silently before the Elevation of the Holy Gifts in Liturgy. “ Remembering the Saving Passion and all of the things You have done for us, the Cross, the Tomb, the Resurrection, the Ascension into Heaven, the Sitting at the Right Hand of the Father and the Second and Glorious Coming.”

The cycle of daily services, offers a beautiful rhythm, that helps those attending the services to make their lives more Christ centered. While I was at Seminary, I had the opportunity to experience these services. I especially loved attending Vespers everyday, where I had the opportunity to learn about the Saints of the day through the hymns and just have a half hour to shut down my brain, and enjoy the quiet, candlelight evening service in the beautiful monastery Church. At Seminary, truly our lives revolved around the Church calendar, the Holy Days of

the Church were special as we had no classes and after services we had free time and could leave the seminary grounds. And the meals were more fancy and tasty.

This is the genius of the Orthodox Church, that the church services and the Scripture readings are given to us to help us keep our minds and hearts focused on God, and to find the inner strength and peace to take on the burdens of every day life.

What is really interesting to know is that because you and I were created in the image and likeness of God, we were created with a need in our hearts to worship God. Why do you think young people especially, are always downloading and listening to music? Its because music is an integral part of worship it reaches us deep down inside, it speaks to us. So whether we know it our not we are hard wired to need to worship God and when we don't we replace this with other activities and never feel satisfied.

So how did worship as we know it today in the Orthodox Church come into being?

The answer is it began in the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve walked with God in Paradise in Coolness of night, praising and glorifying him. After their Fall in paradise they were directed by God to offer sacrifice – set up priesthood,

Leviticus. And at first they worshipped in all places, there was no set place, until the building of the Old Testament temple. Our Lord himself worshipped in the temple and in Synagogues, as did the early Christians until the first century persecutions. Then they worshipped in caves and in the tombs and secretly in homes until the Emperor Constantine in 4th century issued the Edict of Milan which tolerated Christianity. At that time the Church began to flourish. The worship of Christian church followed that of Judaism with prayer being offered 8 times daily. Our Worship is a continuation of Synagogue, Christ came not to abolish the Law but fulfill it. Very similar, as seen in the way we sing, use of antiphons, Cantors, and how we decorate the Church. The Holy of Holys where Ark of Covenant was kept in Temple in Jerusalem corresponds to our altar. Also consider the fact that Churches Face the East where Jerusalem is. Also the Layout of the Church is similar to that of the temple. The Liturgical life developed slowly. After the Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan and the practice of Christianity was then permitted both the decoration of the Churches and the Divine services became more elaborate. How our Churches are set up and designed follows closely the description of heavenly worship in Chapter 4 of the Book of Revelation. Vestments evolved, borrowed some from that which the emperor wore. This all took place by the providence of God and was not merely historical coincidence or accidental. It developed through Holy Spirit. Over time

the Liturgy flowered . Today it is much the same as was in 9th century and pretty much identical to that of the 14th-15th centuries. There was no need for a Vatican II in Orthodoxy, to bring fresh air to the Church, to modernize the liturgical services. While it is pretty much the same, that is not to say that some minor evolutions have not taken place nor will not continue to take place in the future, because the Holy Spirit is not stagnant , but is alive and acting in history. But in Orthodoxy, we never make changes simply for change sake. It is said in the Orthodox Church there are two paths of change: slow and quick. Quick is centuries slow is eternity.

At this point I think I will stop. Next month we will begin our discussion of the Divine Liturgy in particular, and I will start with explaining the significance and meaning of the vestments and speak about the first part of the Liturgy, the Liturgy of Preparation.