

## SESSION 2 - THE ORTHODOX LITURGY - LITURGICAL VESTMENTS

Last month, I indicated that the theme of our Monthly Adult Education presentation was shifting from Christian Stewardship, to Divine Worship and in particular the Divine Liturgy. I mentioned that this was a natural progression, as the entire thrust of Christian stewardship is directed towards our living our vocation or calling as worshippers of God. I mentioned that everything we do in Church life, especially in the pragmatic and financial realm has as its sole purpose, making it possible for us to have a Church in which to offer divine services and especially the Medicine of Immortality, Holy Communion. We are at our best and highest purpose when together we celebrate the Divine Liturgy. A Divine and human work. It is something that requires, clergy and laity to work together in beautiful spiritual harmony. The beauty of Orthodox Worship and especially our Diocesan Tradition of congregational singing, is that everyone participates with all of our senses. When I offer a blessing, when I offer the blessing of Peace for instance when I say Peace be Unto All of You, You catch or accept that blessing when you make the sign of the Cross and you in return bless me as well, by responding And to your Spirit or in other words, To you also, Father! I mentioned last week, that according to the Canons or laws of the Church, I am not permitted to celebrate Divine Liturgy, if I am the only one in Church. There has to be another person for it to be permitted. So the attendance and participation of the

laity is absolutely essential and important. The more there are in Church, the more powerful the prayer. And that why we are here today and every week, because we believe in the power of prayer to heal, and strengthen, to lift us up and all whom we remember in prayer. This life of prayer does not end with the Sunday Liturgy, only to be picked up again the next Sunday. As we discussed last month, there is a daily cycle of services that takes place 8 times a day, in Orthodox Monasteries and Convents throughout the world and many parishes as well, to some extent or another. Taking into account different time zones prayer is being offered around the clock. So make no mistake, the Church always has your back so to speak.

So today; as we now move into a discussion of the history and meaning of the Divine Liturgy, I would like to begin today by explaining, about the significance of the vestments that Orthodox Clergy wear, which I think will help us to better understand the inner essence of what is taking place in the Divine Liturgy.

Visitors to an Orthodox church service may ask why it is that our clergy wear such seemingly strange clothing. If you go to many mainline protestant Churches, the preacher may not wear vestments at all but perhaps a nice suit. As used to seeing our priest wearing his Sunday vestments, it is probably true that we might have a hard time adequately explaining what each garment is and what it means. While it is not necessary for us to become experts on this subject, I believe it would be

helpful if I took some time now to give you some background on their historical origin and their significance. This not only will help you to be able to answer questions, that our non-Orthodox friends might have, but also to help ourselves enter more deeply into the services.

The historical origin and development of church vestments is somewhat complicated. Some scholars might make a case that the vestments of the early Christian Church were modeled after those of the Jewish priesthood, and others, who might say that it evolved from the ordinary dress of the Roman citizens in the first few centuries of the Church.

The Old Testament clearly demonstrates that the office of the priesthood was meant to be set apart in its form of dress. God commanded that when the priests enter the gates of the inner court of the temple, "they shall put on linen robes... and when they go out into the outer court to the people, they shall put off their robes in which they minister and they shall lay them up in the chamber of the sanctuary" (Ezek. 44:17). Linen was considered to be a fine material in comparison with wool which was generally coarser and more commonly used. Besides a linen tunic, the Jewish priests were also to wear linen mitres upon their heads and "linen drawers upon their loins" and "they shall not tightly gird themselves" (Ezek. 44:18).

It would be wrong to assume that before Christianity was openly practiced, only the simplest form of vestment was used. The dress commonly worn by men and women in the Roman Empire at that time was the tunic, a long garment with sleeves, which reached to the ground. The preferred color for celebrants was white as a symbol of that holiness and purity which the Lord commanded; as recorded in Psalm 132 "Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness" (Ps. 132:9). The garments set aside for Church services were decorated with crosses to distinguish them from ordinary garments. To this day the tunic or as we would say sticharion remains as the vestment common to all three orders of clergy-bishops, priests and deacons-the only difference being that the deacon's tunic or *sticherion* has wide sleeves, while that of the bishop and priest has tight-fitting ones. Because this garment has its origin in earliest times it is a reminder of how is a reminder of the universality of the Church and the immutability of the Faith.

Another item of clerical wear which had its origin in the early centuries of the Church was the orarion or *stole*. It is likely that it developed from the towel or scarf which was an indispensable part of the Roman wardrobe and was generally worn over one shoulder. A fourth century law required that government officials wear a sign of office. In the realm of the Church, the stole served this function as well as having more purely spiritual, significance as a symbol of the grace of the holy Spirit flowing down upon the clergy. In the case of priests, the stole is worn

over both shoulders as sign of the double measure of grace and is called the *epitrachelion* which means "what is worn around the neck." For convenience sake it is sewn or buttoned down the front. Although the bishop also wears - an epitrachelion, his distinctive sign of office is the *omophorion*-a long, broad strip arranged on the shoulders in such a way that one end comes down the front and the other his back. The word 'omophorion' means "shoulder covering" and originally referred to a piece of sheepskin worn over the shoulders by the aged and in firm for warmth. Later it was made out of the same material as the rest of the vestment, but its origin still recalls the parable of the lost sheep which the good shepherd found and lay on his shoulders. So too the bishop is entrusted to safely guide his flock and take thought for the conversion of the erring.

The rise of the Byzantine Empire and the close relationship of the Church and State had a great influence on the further development of Orthodox vestments which have for the most part remained the same to this day. The mitre, for example, -worn by all those in the episcopal office-is modeled after the crown of the Byzantine emperors. It is highly unlikely that it was modeled after the Old Testament mitre since it was not adopted by bishops of the Church until the 15th century. The mitre represents both the crown of thorns and also the power entrusted to bishops as the leaders of the Church. In more recent centuries the Russian Church has given the mitre to some archimandrites and archpriests as an

honorary distinction. During the Byzantine era vestments came to be made of very beautiful fabrics such as brocaded silks, and were adorned with embroidery and jewels. With the priests and especially the bishops clothed in such beautiful vestments, and the Divine services being similar to the majestic - court ceremonies were a very visual reminder that the worshippers were in the presence of the King of kings, Christ Himself.

We can tell a lot about the spiritual significance of all the various liturgical vestments by the prayers read while vesting.

When the priest or deacon puts on the sticharon, he says: *"My soul shall rejoice in the Lord, for He has clothed me in the garment of salvation and he has covered me with the robe of gladness. (Is. 61:10).*

When putting on the *epimanika* or cuffs, first on the right hand and then on the left, the priest or deacon he prays: "Your right hand, O Lord, is glorified in strength; Your right hand, O Lord, hath vanquished the enemy, and in the multitude Your Glory, You have crushed the adversaries (Ex. 15:6). "Your hands have made me and fashioned me..." (Ps. 118:73). The cuffs are symbolic of the bonds of Christ and serve as a reminder that a minister of the Church must rely not on his own strength, but on the help of God.

When vesting in the epitrachelion, the priest makes the sign of the Cross over it and prays: "Blessed is God Who poureth out his grace upon His priests, like unto the oil of myrrh upon the head, which runneth down upon the beard, upon the beard of Aaron, which runneth down to-the fringe of his raiment" (PS. 132:2). I'd like you to take a look for a moment at this stole or Epitrachilion. Notice the crosses on in. How many do you see? (7) This of course reminds us of the seven mysteries or sacraments of the Church. Notice as well, the fringe – the fringe represents the souls entrusted to the priest, there are a lot of them. Notice there are two rows, as the priest ministers and prays for the living and the departed.

When putting on the *zone* or belt, worn by both bishops and priests, he says: "Blessed is God, Who girded me with power, and has made my path blameless..." (Ps. 47:32-33). The zone denotes the priest's readiness to serve the Lord and is also a sign that he is bound to Christ. Those priests honored to wear the thigh-shield and also the *epigonation* (in Russian-palitsa), then put these on with the prayer: Gird Your sword upon Your thigh, O Mighty one.. "(Ps. 44:3) And indeed, these evolved from the "knee-protectors' suspended from the belt and worn on the thigh by soldiers under their swords. The thigh-shield represents the spiritual sword denoting the celebrant as a soldier of Christ. The epigonation also represents the word of God, that is, the spiritual sword (Eph. 6:17) used to fight against all the wiles of the enemy. Over every thing the priest puts on the *phelonion* or chasuble a

long, circular and sleeveless garment, shorter in front to allow the hands freedom of movement. It is symbolic of the robe Christ wore during His Passion; the ribbons, or trim which decorate it are reminders of the flow of blood on Christ's garments. The phelonion is also a token that the priest is "clothed with righteousness" (Ps. 131:9) and thus hedged off from all iniquities. For centuries it was also worn by bishops until it became customary for them to wear the saccos, a garment like a short tunic with half-sleeves, fashioned in all likelihood after the vestment of the Byzantine emperor. Symbolically it serves as a reminder that the bishop must rise to holiness of life. The term "saccos" means a "sackcloth garment" or "garment of humility"

The pectoral cross is worn by both priests and bishops as a reminder that they should not merely carry Christ in their hearts, but also confess Him in the face of all men. The round or oval image of the Saviour or Mother of God, which is worn by bishops, is called a Panagia, meaning 'All-holy.' When putting on the cross, the priest or bishop blesses it with his hand and repeats the words of the Lord "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross after him and follow me."

During the Divine Services bishops use a staff indicating that they are shepherds of Christ's flock. The top of the staff is made to resemble two serpents'

heads, recalling the Saviours' words: "Be ye wise as serpents". As a serpent each year forces its way through thorny plants to shed its old skin, so also must the bishop lead others and follow himself along the thorny path which leads of the renewal of our souls.

The *orlets* is a small round or oval rug bearing the design of an eagle flying above a city. Bishops stand on such rugs as a reminder that they should rise high above the things of this world; through the example of their life and teaching, they are to inspire their flocks also to ascend from earth to heaven.

Although in the early Church the preferred color for vestments was white, it was not long before a wide array of colors was used. While there are no set rules as to when to use what colors, certain colors have come by tradition to be connected to particular feasts. White vestments, for example, are associated with the Paschal period (although in some churches the tradition for Paschas is to use red), as the brightest and most radiant celebration of the vanquishing of death. It is a visual reminder that, "He that overcomes, the same shall be clothed in white raiment" (Rev. 3:5). Green, the color of life and spring, is used at Pentecost to symbolize the beginning of the life of the Church. It is also used on feasts of certain saints, particular monk saints, who dwelt in the wilderness. Red is used at Nativity, on the Feast of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and for Martyrs. Blue is the traditional

color of the Mother of God, as she is the Queen of Heaven. Deep purple is used during Lent as a reminder of the purple robe which the soldiers put on Christ to mock Him before His Passion. Outside of festal periods gold is used to remind us of the heavenly Jerusalem: “and the city was pure gold” (Rev. 21:18).

The use of vestments, then, not only adds to the visual beauty of the church; they have a far greater significance in transforming the celebrants, even young acolytes, into representatives of the Kingdom on high, reflecting that otherworldliness which is the essence of Orthodoxy.

So you see the vestments reflect an important truth about Orthodox worship that they have the spiritual power to transform us. As a successful businessman will often dress for success and might even have special tailored suits, so too our clergy vest for spiritual success and victory in glorious robes to inspire the faithful and to cover their sinfulness with the garment of holiness. If we understand what they mean, they provide us again another opportunity to learn more about the faith and the nature of worship and ministry in the ordained and royal priesthoods, is to love and serve others, and to show the world the beauty of the Kingdom of Heaven and the power of holiness.

I would like to conclude with a sidebar that whether we are priests or not, there is something to be said for us to have a portion of our wardrobe set aside as

Sunday, Liturgy clothes. They need not be expensive, but at the same time they should be special, a little above the ordinary, as a sign of respect for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and as a reminder, that we too at our baptism were clothed in the robe of holiness, and are to strive to love, honor and serve the Lord. We dress not to impress God, but to honor him, to show by our dress we recognize the majesty of his house and the respect and love we have for Him. In doing so, we show those around us how seriously we take our faith, and that we are committed enough to the Lord, to go the extra mile in honoring him, by our outward and inward appearances.

Thank you for your attention.