

EXPLANATION OF THE DIVINE LITURGY: PART I—“BARE-BONES” MYSTAGOGY FROM THE CATECHISM

*[We are going to begin our discussion of the meaning of the Divine Liturgy with sections 343-94 of **Christ our Pascha: The Catechism of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church**. These sections of the catechism present a “bare-bones” mystagogy (explanation of a mystery), which is a good place for us to start in learning the meaning of the Divine Liturgy generally. This “bare-bones” mystagogy is far from perfect, but in using it we must be aware of the aim of learning the service’s interpretation. **We are learning about the meaning of the Divine Liturgy, so that we can effectively raise our minds and hearts to the work of Christ as it is re-presented there.** This is the only way that the prayers and actions of the Divine Liturgy become our own through our real participation, and the salvation accomplished in the Divine Liturgy is applied to us. While it is hard to see how we could possibly accomplish this noble task (joining our minds and hearts to the work of Christ our Savior) with only what the catechism has to offer us, we start here with the knowledge that we can expand on this foundation with the help of St. Germanus of Constantinople, St. Maximus the Confessor and many others.]*

II. THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH COMMUNITY

A. The Divine Liturgy—the Foundation and Summit of the Christian Community’s Life

343 “Do this in memory of me; for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim my death and confess my Resurrection.”²⁸⁷ In Christ, human nature partakes of the divine nature (see 2 Pt 1:4). Christ grants to everyone who believes in him communion in divine life. Christ accomplished this mystery of Communion at the Mystical Supper, manifested it in his Paschal Mystery, and continues to actualize it in the Divine Services of the Church “now and for ever and ever.”

344 The summit of the Church’s liturgical life is the Divine Liturgy (from the Greek leitourgia, meaning a common work). It is the service of God to his people and of God’s people to him. In the Divine Liturgy the Father leads us into the fullness of his life by giving us his Son. The Son then gives himself to us as nourishment, in the banquet of the Word, and in the banquet of the Body and Blood. He does so in order that we might become one body and blood with him²⁸⁸ and partake of his Divinity. Receiving Christ’s gift in the Holy Spirit, the Church responds to him by offering herself. She does so in order that he might live and act in her as in his Body. And so, Christ, the head of the Church, together with the Church, which is his Body, brings to the Father in the Holy Spirit praise and **thanksgiving for the salvation that has already been accomplished.**

[It is interesting that in contemporary liturgical works and commentaries there is never any discussion about the previous use of the word leitourgia in the history of Greek language and culture. The Christian use of the term is assumed to be an isolate from any previous reference. This is surely a mistake. We should, rather, assume that the early Christians chose this word and chose it deliberately. The previous use of the word is in reference to the publicly-funded spectacles, which were part of the dramatic festivals. In other words, there was no ancient distinction between

leitourgia and drama. The modern reticence to even so much as comment on this connection is surely motivated by a desire to prevent the faithful from understanding Christian Liturgy as “drama” in its modern sense.]

286 See Leo the Great, Homily 74, 2: PL 54, 398.

287 Liturgicon, The Divine Liturgy of our Holy Father Basil the Great, The Anaphora.

288 Cyril of Jerusalem, The Mystagogical Lectures, 4, 1; 4, 3: PG 33, 1097-1100. ugcc-catechism-english-2016-6x9-September2018-second-edition.indd 121 9/14/2018 9:15:11 AM 122

345 The Divine Liturgy consists of (a) the Proskomide (from the Greek, meaning offering) or Prothesis (from the Greek, meaning setting forth), that is, the preparation of the gifts; (b) the Liturgy of the Word; and (c) the Liturgy of the Eucharist. **In the Divine Liturgy the mystery of salvation is accomplished.** This salvation is the bringing together of God and humankind in Christ (see Eph 1:10), the “building up of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12). Just as at the Mystical Supper [Last Supper] Christ first taught the apostles by his word and then led them into the mystery of his Body and Blood, so in the Divine Liturgy Christ teaches the community of the faithful, nourishes it by his Word, and then makes its members partakers of the Eucharistic banquet. The Christian enters into this mystery through listening to the Word of God and partaking of the Lord’s Body and Blood.

[At the end of 344, the catechism stated that salvation had already been accomplished. Here, it states that that same salvation is accomplished in the Divine Liturgy. There is, of course, no contradiction between these two statements. In the Divine Liturgy, salvation wrought in Christ is accomplished in reference to the assembled community. The Liturgy is anamnestic, that is, it consists of careful recollection and meditation on what Christ has done (anamnesis). It is this recollection that makes the Mysteries truly present. In just the same way, under the Old Law, the Jews, when celebrating the Passover, were to “remember” (zakar; zikaron) the events of the Passover as persons who had truly departed Egypt. Pace Alexander Schmemmann et al, but this anamnesis is the meaning of “drama” in the ancient sense. It is not play-acting. It is not spectating. It is participation in the deepest sense. By “remembering,” the Mysteries of Christ become truly present here and now. It goes without saying that our participation in the Mysteries of Christ and, thus, our share in the salvation that they reveal is going to be proportional to the quality of our personal recollection.]

1. Preparation for the Divine Liturgy

346 Before the beginning of the Divine Liturgy, the clergy recite the entrance prayers and put on the liturgical vestments. In the prayers before the iconostasis, they pray for the forgiveness of their faults. Aware of their human frailty, they beseech the Lord, by the prayers of the Mother of God, to strengthen them for this service.

347 The meaning and symbolism of all the liturgical vestments are well illustrated by the prayer for putting on the sticharion: “He has placed on me, as a bridegroom, a crown; he has adorned me, as a bride, with jewels.” At the Liturgy, the priest represents Christ the Bridegroom before the community and also the Church as the Bride before God.

[While the statement in 347 is undoubtedly true, the catechism is here inviting us to enter into a greater meditation on the significance of these symbols. The liturgical vestments do in fact represent the virtues of the Christian life, which are possessed by the one, who has “put on Christ” in Baptism.

What each of these virtues consists of is an appropriate subject of meditation for us to return to later.]

a. The Proskomide (Prothesis)

348 Vested in the liturgical vestments, the priest begins the celebration of the Proskomide. The Proskomide leads the faithful into the Divine Liturgy. The Proskomide takes its name from the ancient custom of the faithful bringing various gifts for the Liturgy. Bread and wine were used for the Eucharist, while other gifts were applied to the needs of those in want, and for the clergy. In this way, the Eucharistic assembly of the faithful also had a social dimension—the mutual exchange of gifts (see *ugcc-catechism-english-2016-6x9-September2018-second-edition.indd* 122 9/14/2018 9:15:11 AM 123 Acts 3-4). This is why the Lord’s Supper was also called the Supper of Love (in Greek, meaning agape; see 1 Cor 11).

349 The basic action of the Proskomide is preparation of the bread and wine, as these are the things used by Christ at the Mystical Supper. Bread and wine are God’s gifts and also the result of the work of human hands. In the Old Testament, bread signified that which was most indispensable for the maintenance of life, while wine signified festivity, the rejoicing of the soul before God. Bread and wine were the basis of the banquet at which Divine Wisdom offered herself as food to the faithful (see Prv 9:5; Sir 24). In the New Testament at the Mystical Supper, Christ offered bread and wine as the gift of himself for the life of the world. In response, we bring bread and wine as a sign of the gift of our life to Christ.

350 The Proskomide is performed with loaves specially prepared for the Eucharist, the prosphora (from the Greek, meaning offering). From the first prosphoron the priest cuts out the Lamb and places it on the diskos. The cutting out of the Lamb is accompanied by the words from the prophecy of Isaiah concerning the lamb led to slaughter (see Is 53:7). Christ is the Paschal Lamb who takes upon himself the sin of the world (see Jn 1:29). On the Lamb cut from the prosphoron there is an impressed seal with the words *ic xc nika* (Greek for ‘Jesus Christ conquers’). These words foreshadow the fullness of the “age to come,” about which Saint Paul wrote: “When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28). The wine and water poured into the chalice symbolize the blood and water that issued from the side of Christ when it was pierced with a lance (see Jn 19:34). Saint John Chrysostom teaches: “...there was a symbol of baptism and the [Eucharistic] mysteries in that blood and water. It is from both of these that the Church is sprung ... It is from his side, therefore, that Christ formed his Church, just as he formed Eve from the side of Adam.”²⁸⁹

*[It is interesting to note what the catechism does not say. While it brings to our notice the fact that the prophecy of Isaiah is recalled in the rite of the excision of the Lamb, it does not say why that **recollection** is being done in this place. Why here?]*

351 **The priest places the Lamb in the centre of the diskos to signify that the incarnate, crucified, and risen Christ is the centre of the universe and of history.** To the right of the Lamb he places a triangular particle cut out of a prosphoron in honour of the most holy Mother of God, and to the left, nine particles in honour of the angelic hosts and saints. Below the Lamb he places a row of particles as he commemorates various living persons, and lower still, a row for the deceased being

commemorated. In other words, the priest mentions by name those for whom the faithful have requested prayer. The placing of the particles around the Lamb on the diskos shows that Christ gathers to himself the whole Church.

*[Again, the central question here is “why is this kind of comprehensive recollection of the work of Christ appropriate at this point, before the curtain of the Doors of Paradise is even opened for the beginning of the public celebration of the Divine Liturgy?” Does this represent something of which the catechism is silent? What does it mean that “**the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world?**”]*

289 John Chrysostom, Baptismal Instructions, 3, 17: SCh 50, 161. ugcc-catechism-english-2016-6x9-September2018-second-edition.indd 123 9/14/2018 9:15:11 AM 124

352 During the covering and censuring of the gifts at the close of the Proskomide, the priest recalls the participation of all creation in Christ’s salvation and in the Liturgy: he mentions the incense, the star, the universe, the rivers and the waves of the sea, the heavens, all the earth, and all God’s world. All this is an expression of God’s beauty and power, it all receives God’s blessing, it all sings his praise.

[In connection with this, it is useful to recall that the Bible gives us two stories of Creation in Genesis 1 and 2. The consensus of the Fathers’ regarding the interpretation of these passages is critical to understanding the meaning of the above commemoration.]

b. The Participation of the Faithful in the Proskomide

353 The priest serves the Proskomide in the sanctuary behind the closed Royal Doors. Nevertheless, each member of the faithful also participates in it in a direct way. The faithful take part in the Proskomide by presenting requests for prayers for themselves and for others, and by bringing offerings. Placing of the named particles side by side on the diskos shows that all the faithful belong to the one Body of Christ. Their communion with God and with one another is thus expressed. Each of the faithful is a unique person, whom God knows by name, and at the same time no one is sufficient unto themselves. When we bring and offer to God “all the cares of our life,” we transcend our private lives and enter into a new and ecclesial, comprehensive and universal communion. Now the faithful are ready for the communal work—the Liturgy.

354 Blessing the incense during the Proskomide, the priest says: “Christ, our God, we offer you incense as a pleasing spiritual fragrance. Having received it upon your heavenly altar, send us in return the grace of your most holy Spirit.” As it rises to heaven, the smoke of the incense signifies our prayers rising to God, and as it fills the church building it is a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit. This is why at the beginning of the Liturgy of the Word, the deacon censes the Holy Table and the icons—as well as the faithful, who are the living bearers of God’s image (in Greek, eikon).

2. The Liturgy of the Word (Liturgy of the Catechumens)

355 After his baptism by John in the Jordan, Jesus began his preaching, crying out: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (Mk 1:15). He preaches the kingdom for three years and brings it to fruition in the Paschal Mystery. ugcc-catechism-english-2016-6x9-September2018-second-edition.indd 124 9/14/2018 9:15:11 AM 125 At the Mystical Supper, Christ gave the apostles a share in the kingdom—his divine life—through the Word and the Eucharist.

356 This joining of the Word and the Mystery is not a coincidence. As the Mother of God first received the Word into her heart and united herself to him, so also we receive the Word into our hearts and put it into practice when we join ourselves to him in the mystery of Communion: “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it” (Lk 8:21; see Mt 12:50 and Mk 3:35). This is why in the Divine Liturgy Christ feeds us first with his Word (in the Epistle, the Gospel, and the homily), and then with his Body and Blood (Communion).

357 We approach the Liturgy of the Word not as a simple recollection of Christ’s preaching long ago, but rather as the living Word. Christ continues to preach today, and we not only read this Word but also receive it as nourishment (see Lk 24:13-34). Through the proclaimed and preached Word in the liturgical assembly, Christ himself addresses the whole Church community and every member individually.

[355-7 suggest without suggesting that, in some way, the Liturgy of the Word in the Divine Liturgy is going to re-present to us Christ’s preaching ministry, first in Galilee and then in Jerusalem (especially at the Mystical Supper). 357’s language is the most puzzling. What is a “simple recollection?” As opposed to what? A complex recollection? If we are meant to understand that the Liturgy’s anamnesis (recollection) is making Christ’s work really and truly present here and now, then the point is well taken.]

a. The Exclamation “Blessed be the Kingdom” and the Litany of Peace

358 As the public activity of Christ began with the proclamation that God’s kingdom was at hand, so the Liturgy begins with the announcement that the kingdom is present. Signing the Holy Table with the Gospel Book cross-wise, the priest exclaims: “Blessed be the kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and for ever and ever.” To this the participants at the Liturgy respond: “Amen” (from the Hebrew, meaning let it be so). By this response they assert that the kingdom is truly among us and that they long for it to thrive and grow.

359 In the Litany of Peace we bring before the Lord the Church’s prayer for the whole world. This is the way the liturgical assembly affirms the manifestation of God’s kingdom. The Church’s prayer for the world is an expression of faith that all is in the hands of the Lord. It also expresses our readiness to accept from the Lord whatever answer he might wish to give. The name of the Litany of Peace indicates the need for inner peace and reconciliation with all. The first petition of the Litany indicates that Christ himself is our peace (see Eph 2:14) and that it is in him that we pray. The petitions of the Litany of Peace express concern for the good of the Church, of the country in which we live, and of all creation. The Litany of Peace teaches the faithful to place common needs before private ones. The prayer “Lord, have mercy,” repeated by the faithful as the community’s response to the petitions, includes both the request for God’s merciful love and the community’s faith that he unfailingly proffers that love.

b. The Antiphons of the Liturgy

360 The kingdom of God is the fulfilment of all the prophecies and promises of the Old Testament. In order to understand more fully and to accept more intensely the kingdom, we recall these prophecies and promises. We sing psalm verses that express them and a refrain that conveys their fulfilment in Christ. In the solemn hymn, “Only-begotten Son,” we profess that the fulfilment of all

that God promised is to be found in the Incarnation and Paschal Mystery of Christ. By singing the refrains “Through the prayers of the Mother of God...” and “Through the prayers of your saints...” we unite ourselves to those in whom this salvation has already been accomplished. This type of singing of the psalms with a refrain is called antiphonal because two alternating choirs (krylosy or scholae) sing them. In the Divine Liturgy there are three antiphons ending with the Little Entrance. In the prayers between the antiphons we profess God’s “love for mankind which is beyond expression” and Christ’s promise to “grant the request of two or three who join their voices in [his] name.”

[Like the discussion of the liturgical vestments above, 360 is an invitation to deeper, more expansive meditation. There is no discussion here, for example, of the history of the enarxis as a separate, stational service. There is room for much more discussion (based on the works of many traditional authors) about the way that this originally separate service re-presents to us the “promises of the Old Testament.”]

c. The Little Entrance, the Troparia, and the Thrice-Holy Hymn

361 While in the singing of the antiphons we experience anticipation of the kingdom and our drawing near to it, the Little Entrance shows that by following Christ we already enter the kingdom; we enter heaven, the fullness of God’s life. Thus, we pray: “Grant that as we make our entrance, the holy angels may enter too, serving with us and joining in the praise of Your goodness.” By the words “Wisdom! Stand aright!” the deacon calls us to direct our attention to the Word of God. The faithful respond by venerating his Wisdom, which is manifested in the Gospel Book. They prepare their hearts to receive the Word during its proclamation. Thus, bowing their heads, the faithful sing: “Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ.”

362 The priest enters the sanctuary with the Gospel Book. This is a sign that it is Jesus Christ, the only High Priest, who celebrates the Divine Liturgy. Christ is invisibly among us, and it is he who leads us to the altar (just as the Gospel Book carried by the deacon precedes everyone). The bishop or priest represents the eternal High Priest who offered the perfect sacrifice once and for all, ascended to heaven, and, having entered the heavenly sanctuary, sits at the right hand of the Father (see Heb 9:11-14, 23-28).

*[361-2 are inspired by the **Mystagogy** of Saint Maximus the Confessor. Though Maximus’s work is a highly coherent system that carefully explains the entire liturgical action (minus the enarxis, because it did not exist in his day), in the context of the catechism’s “bare-bones” mystagogy it is more than just a little confusing. The substantial interpolation created by 361-2 leaves us all wondering how we suddenly got from the promises of the Old Testament and a “simple recollection” of Christ’s preaching ministry to His ascension into Heaven. After a break presented by 363, the catechism is going to come back to Maximus-inspired material in 364-5. Once again, the problem is that there is no explanation of the fact that the Thrice-holy Hymn belongs to the enarxis or how it arose there. The Thrice-holy Hymn, according to Saint John of Damascus, arose in a time of national calamity for the Roman Empire. The imperial capital at Constantinople was violently shaken by an earthquake during the reign of the Patriarch Saint Proclus (434-446). The whole population joined in a procession in the wide-open parts of the city (where buildings would not fall on them). During this supplicatory prayer service, a small child was taken from the crowd up into Heaven. There, he was taught the words of the Thrice-holy Hymn, before being returned to the earth. After he had returned, he taught*

the whole crowd the chant that he had heard in the Heavenly places. They all began to sing the chant. Heaven was appeased and the total destruction of the city was delayed (for another thousand years).]

363 Then follow the troparia and kontakia. These are hymns in honour of a feast or saint, with invocations to Christ, the Mother of God, or saints, and they frequently reveal the theological substance of a feast or commemoration. Thus, the Church celebrates and manifests the unfathomable paths by which the Lord led, and continues to lead, each of the faithful into his kingdom.

[The question is, “what they are doing here?”]

364 We express our entrance into the kingdom, our being raised to heaven, and our contemplation of the Most Holy Trinity in the words of the Thrice-Holy Hymn: “Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy and Immortal, have mercy on us.” Thus, we join the heavenly choirs in their singing. In the Prayer of the Thrice-Holy Hymn “standing before the glory of [the] holy altar,” we entreat the Lord to “accept from the lips of us sinners the Thrice-Holy Hymn and visit us in [his] kindness.”

365 During the singing of the Thrice-Holy Hymn, the hierarch ascends the “throne on high.” As the Epistle is read, the bishop is seated on his throne (in Greek, cathedra), along with the priests to his right and to his left. They thus represent Jesus Christ among the apostles, and symbolize the authoritative teaching ministry of the Church.