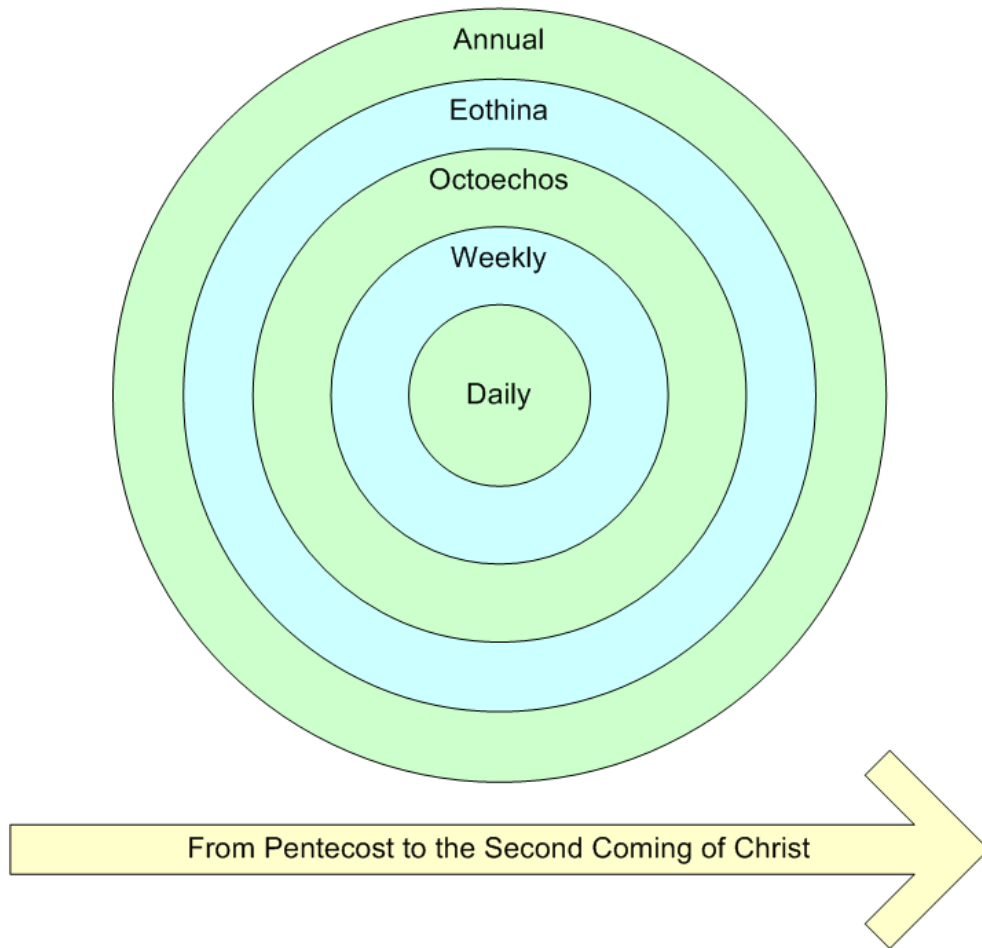

The Liturgical Cycles in Orthodox Worship



Robert S Andrews, Jr.
November 16, 2021

The Liturgical Cycles

Cycles of Orthodox Worship

The Orthodox Church is composed of many cycles of various durations. These cycles repeat themselves while traveling along a linear time progression which leads to the second coming of Christ. The services of the Orthodox Church are both a part of and exist within these cycles and are modified according to the influences of each cycle at a given point in time. To better understand the significance of the liturgical cycles on Orthodox Worship, it is first necessary to understand the cycles themselves.

The Daily Cycle

A day in the Church begins at sunset. For this reason, the first service in the daily cycle is Vespers. This means that a Vespers service held on a Saturday evening is actually associated with Sunday (since in the eyes of the Church, Sunday begins at sunset on Saturday). The remaining daily liturgical offices are: Compline, Nocturn, Matins, First Hour, Third Hour, Sixth Hour, and Ninth Hour.¹

The complete daily cycle is implemented today primarily in monasteries. Very few, if any, local parishes currently follow the complete daily cycle of services. When all services are performed, they can be grouped into times of day. Ninth Hour (of the previous day), Vespers and Compline are celebrated in the evening hours. Nocturn, Matins and the First Hour are celebrated prior to sunrise. The Third Hour, Sixth Hour and Divine Liturgy are celebrated prior to midday.²

Each of the daily services has a theme, and in some cases many themes. Vespers has four themes: Creation, Fall of Man, Covenant with God, and the End Times. Compline has two themes: Keeping the night without sin and Sabbath rest. Nocturn and Midnight office share the themes of the second coming of Christ and vigilance. Matins has the same four themes as does Vespers, however the order is reversed: End Times, Covenant with God, Fall of Man, and Creation. The First Hour deals with keeping the day without sin. The Third Hour commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The theme of the Sixth Hour is the crucifixion of Christ, and the Ninth Hour remembers Christ's death on the cross.³

Weekly Cycle

The weekly cycle is composed of the days of the week, beginning with Sunday and ending with Saturday. Each day of the week has its own theme or themes. Although the themes can change based on other cycles, the basic themes for each day of the week are as shown:⁴

Sunday	Resurrection
Monday	Bodiless Powers, Angelic Hosts, and Incorporeals
Tuesday	John the Baptist and the Prophets
Wednesday	The Cross and Christ's Betrayal
Thursday	The Apostles
Friday	The Crucifixion
Saturday	Saints and Martyrs

Octoechos Cycle

The Octoechos is an eight week cycle. During each phase (week) of this cycle a different tone is the primary tone used in chanting components of the liturgical services to be held during that week. Each week the tone increments beginning with Tone 1 and continuing through Tone 8. Many hymns will change based on the Tone of the Day. Two examples of hymns which will change following the Octoechos cycle are

¹ In some texts, the Divine Liturgy is inserted between the Sixth and Ninth Hours.

² Russian Church Singing by Johann von Gardner, page 71.

³ Introduction to the Liturgical Cycles (tape) by Archdeacon John Finley.

⁴ Ibid.

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“Lord I have cried...” in Vespers, and “The Praises” in Matins. After the eighth week, the cycle repeats with Tone 1 again. Other than a few specific Sundays (e.g., Palm Sunday, Pascha, Thomas Sunday and Pentecost) this cycle continues without interruption.

Eothina (Sunday Matins Gospel) Cycle

The Eothina is an eleven week cycle. During each phase (week) of this cycle a different gospel is read during Matins. Each week the eothina increments beginning with Matins Gospel 1 and continuing to Matins Gospel 11. After the eleventh week, the cycle repeats again. This cycle remains consistent except during the period between Pascha and Pentecost where the cycle jumps around (no doubt based on the fact that Pascha occurs on a different date each year).⁵ In addition to the Gospel reading during Matins, some of the other hymns that change based on the Eothina include the Exaposteilarion and the Glory following the Praises - also known as the Doxastika (both of which refer to the Gospel).

Annual Cycles of Feasts

Rank of Feasts

There are five ranks of feasts:

Rank 1	Great Feasts of the Lord
Rank 2	Great Feasts of the Theotokos Nativity and Beheading of the Forerunner Saints Peter and Paul Patron Saint of a Church
Rank 3	Great Saints Archangels Some Apostles
Rank 4	Well Known (but not “Great”) Saints
Rank 5	Lesser Known Saints

The higher the rank of the feast, the more the liturgical services will be modified to reflect the feast. For example, a Rank 1 feast will replace almost all components of the regular services for that day. In a Rank 5 feast, perhaps only one or two hymns would change to commemorate the Saint.

⁵ Based on the Church Calendar for the Year 1996 as published by the Antiochian Archdiocese.

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Fixed Feasts

There is a set of feasts that occur on the same date each year. This cycle repeats each year but is fixed to the calendar, that is the dates of the feasts remain constant. There are commemorations each day of the Church year based on the cycle of fixed feasts. Each commemoration will be of one of the ranks indicated above. The most popular of the fixed feasts are the ten “Major Fixed Feast Days” of the Church. They are summarized as follows:

Sept 1	Ecclesiastical New Year
Sept 8	Nativity of the Theotokos
Sept 14	Exaltation of the Cross
Nov 21	Presentation of the Theotokos in the Temple
Dec 25	Nativity of Christ
Jan 6	Theophany
Feb 2	Presentation of Christ in the Temple
Mar 25	Annunciation
Aug 6	Transfiguration of Christ
Aug 15	Dormition of the Theotokos

Moveable Feasts

There is a set of feasts that occur on a different day each year, based on the lunar cycle which influences the calculation of Pascha. This cycle repeats each year but the actual dates of the feasts will change each year. The cycle begins with Pascha and continues through the year until Holy Saturday (the day before the following Pascha). Feasts on this moveable cycle include:

Pascha, Ascension of Christ and Pentecost (Pentecostarion)
The Pre-Lenten and Lenten (Triodion) Period
Holy Week (Ending with Holy Saturday)

In addition to these specific feasts, the movable cycle also determines the lectionaries (that is the schedule of readings) for the Epistles and Gospels read during the year.

Cycle of Life

In addition to the various liturgical cycles identified above, we can also include the cycle of the lifetime of an Orthodox Christian into the set of cycles.⁶ The cycle of life is, just as it sounds, the sequence of sacramental events that a person participates in during a lifetime. In chronological order, this cycle includes: Baptism, Chrismation, Confession, Communion, Unction, Marriage, Ordination, Funeral, and Memorial Services. Just as the above cycles repeat over a time continuum which extends to the second coming of Christ, the cycle of our life continues throughout our lifetime.

⁶ Introduction to the Liturgical Cycles (tape) by Archdeacon John Finley.

The Divine Liturgy

Based upon "...In Remembrance of Me" by Robert S Andrews, Sr.

The Divine Liturgy in the Orthodox Christian Church is truly a heavenly service upon earth. In a particular manner, God Himself is presented and dwells with men; being Himself the invisible celebrant of the service both offering and being offered.

Liturgy is a word of Greek origin (litourgia) meaning service or common action of all. Christians gather together, in common, as a body. As St. Paul writes: "Now you are the Body of Christ, and individually members of it." (I Cor 12:27). As the faithful unite to worship God and to come into communion with Him, they also unite in communion with one another, and with their fellows throughout the Church. They are especially aware that this communion includes not only the Christians who are on earth at that moment, but all those who have gone before, as well as all Christians who would follow them in the future. This fellowship of the whole community of the Saints, all sharing the redemptive work of Christ, is the theme that runs through all of the Divine Liturgy.

Certainly we can pray at home, but not in a more perfect or complete fashion as at church, together with the assembly of the faithful where the prayers of the worshipers and the clergy are offered together in one great prayer to Heaven.

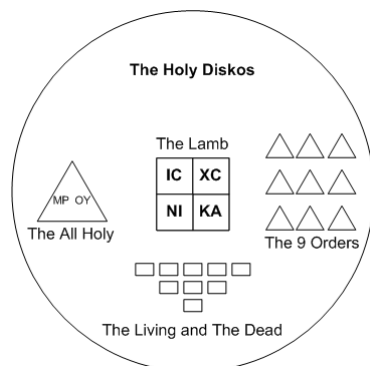
The Divine Liturgy is composed of the Preparation, the Liturgy of the Catechumens and the Liturgy of the Faithful. Each part is important, none of which can stand alone.

The Preparation

The Preparation section is called Proskomide, which means "the bringing of gifts." This first part of the Divine Liturgy consists of the preparation of the elements – the bread and the wine – used in the Sacrament of Communion.

The Priest, after necessary prayers, hymns and reverence, puts on appropriate vestments blessing each of them by reciting prayers. He approaches the Prothesis, that is the Table of Preparation, which is a small table to the left of the altar, representing the site where Christ was born. The side table is hidden from view of the congregation just as the early years of Christ were hidden from the world.

The altar bread itself is called Prosphorn (offering). This bread must be made of pure wheaten flour, mixed with water, salt and yeast; carefully prepared and well baked. The bread is offered by the faithful parishioners wishing to be remembered in the preparation of the Sacrament, or wishing to have their loved ones, living or dead, remembered. From the bread offering five loaves are selected for the sacrifice, in token of the miraculous feeding of the five thousand by Christ.



For the Sacrament of the Eucharist, the Priest cuts out the large stamped center portion of the first loaf from the rest of the loaf and places it on the diskarion. This portion represents Jesus Christ (the lamb). This is the portion of the loaf that will be consecrated. Christ's death and resurrection is proclaimed by the characters of the stamp IC XC NIKA grouped around a cross, which stands for "Jesus Christ Savior Conquers". Every loaf of the altar bread bears this stamp.

The wine must be made of pure grapes, red or black, and sweet. The Priest pours sufficient wine with a little water into the Chalice. This signifies the blood and water that came forth when one of the soldiers pierced Christ's side on the cross.

The Priest cuts a triangular piece from the second altar loaf, in honor of the Virgin Mary who sits at the right hand of her son. This is placed on the right side of the center portion of the diskarion. The Priest cuts nine smaller triangular pieces from the third altar loaf in commemoration of Angels and Archangels, all the Martyrs, Apostles, all Saints, the Holy Fathers, etc. These are placed in three rows on the left side of the center portion of the diskarion.

The Priest removes particles from the fourth altar loaf while praying for all the living, for all Orthodox Patriarchs, Archbishops, Bishops, and their Holy Synods; for all Orthodox Christians and for all whom he desires to mention by name, or has been requested to remember; and for all who participate in the Holy Liturgy by attending.

From the fifth altar loaf, the Priest removes particles in memory of all the departed, praying at the same time for the remission of their sins. He also mentions those departed ones he has been requested to remember. At the end, he prays for the forgiveness of his own sins. He removes a particle in behalf of himself, from the fourth loaf.

All these particles, in memory of the living and the dead, are placed in the diskarion under and beside the lamb. In this way, all the members of God's Church gather together. They make the Church the Body of Christ. The Priest censes the elements so prepared and prays that the Lord will bless the gifts and accept them "as an odor of sweet spiritual fragrance" on behalf of those who made the offering.

The final prayer of the Priest is that he might be kept worthy to celebrate this holy mystery. The elements so prepared and censed are left on the Prothesis Table. This completes the commemoration. The pieces and particles taken from the second, third, fourth and fifth loaves will be put into the chalice after the communion of the people. What remains of the loaves becomes the blessed bread (Antidoron) that will be distributed to the parishioners after communion and at the end of the Divine Liturgy.

The Liturgy of the Catechumens

The second section of the Divine Liturgy is known as the "Liturgy of the Catechumens" and is primarily instructive in nature. In ancient times a catechumen (learner) was one who had not been baptized but was being prepared for baptism. These people were permitted to witness and take part only in the Liturgy of the Catechumens, being required to leave the nave of the Church at the end of this teaching portion of the service. Today, catechumens are permitted to remain through the entire Divine Liturgy, but may not partake of the Sacrament of Communion until after their baptism and Chrismation.

The Liturgy of the Catechumens begins with the opening of the Holy Doors reminding the worshiper that Christ is the door to God's presence. The Priest raises the Gospel book, indicating that the Word of God, Jesus Christ, dwells above the realm of man and is supreme. The Priest, standing in front of the Holy Altar, like one standing between heaven and earth, exclaims: "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; now and ever, and unto ages of ages." The Kingdom of God is the real theme of the Liturgy. It is the reality of communion between God and the faithful. The choir responds "Amen" to the Priest's exclamation. Amen is a solemn ratification of a spiritual confession, signifying "may it be so".

The Great Ektenia

The Great Ektenia is a series of petitions for peace to which the choir responds, "Lord, have mercy." The worshiper solemnly responds with private prayers in keeping with each charge. The petitions constitute the beginning of the official prayer of the Church as they reflect Christian ethical teaching. The Deacon leads the petitions of the Great Ektenia, holding his stole aloft, representing the uplifted wing of the angels inciting the people to pray.

The words “Lord, have mercy,” (Kyrie eleison) is a plea for divine mercy upon the whole creation rather than merely on those who are at that moment making the supplication. This phrase asks that God may make Himself recognized, respected and loved as Master and King of the whole universe.

Prayers and Refrains of the Antiphons

The Great Ektenia is followed by the Prayers and Refrains of the First, Second and Third Antiphons. An Antiphon is a joyful psalm or hymn composed of verses from Scripture sung (in the early church) by multiple choirs or chanters positioned on the left and right side of the Church. As the choirs sing the refrains of the antiphons, the Priest recites the prayers of the antiphons quietly. The first prayer confesses the incomprehensible glory and power of God, who made it possible for us to know and to worship him. In the second prayer, the priest affirms that this community is His people and inheritance. In the third prayer, the priest asks God to give us, in this life, the knowledge of truth; and in the world to come, life eternal. A shorter form of the Great Ektenia (called the Little Ektenia) is recited between the Prayers and Refrains of each of the Antiphons. Their purpose is to help to inspire the faithful to righteous prayers.

The Little Entrance

The entrance of the Priest from the “North” door symbolizes the coming of Christ from His earthly life to the beginning of His public ministry. The public elevation of the Gospel book shows the victory of Christ’s doctrine. The Priest, standing before the Holy Doors, blesses the Entrance with the words, “Blessed is the entrance of thy Saints...” Then he says, “Wisdom! Attend!” In order for Christ to penetrate our mind and soul, the faithful are compelled to listen attentively.

After the Entrance, the choir expresses this heavenly dimension of the Divine Liturgy with the joyful hymn, “Come let us worship...” This expresses the joy of the human race in accepting the glad tidings of the Gospel and of our faith in the Savior. This hymn is followed by the Troparia and the Kontakion of the day. These short hymns of praise express the theme of the day (be it the resurrection, the commemoration of an event, or the commemoration of a Saint).

The Trisagion Hymn

The people are then invited to praise the Trinity in their prayers during the singing of the Trisagion (Thrice Holy) Hymn. “Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal; have mercy on us.” This hymn signifies that the human race, having learned the secret of the Holy Trinity through the Gospel, began to glorify God with one melody. The emphasis is again on unity, the oneness of all believes in Christ Jesus on whom the Church is founded.

The Apostle

The Reader, the person appointed to read the Epistle for the day, brings the Epistle book before the people. He recites the Prokeimenon (a verse from the Book of Psalms appropriate for that particular day) announcing the proclamation of the Word of God in the Epistle. He announces the title of the prescribed reading (based upon the lectionary). The solemn reading or singing of the Epistle signifies the preaching of the doctrine of Christ by the Apostles. If a Bishop is present, he sits during this time as an indication of his equality with the Apostles in Christian preaching.

The first censuring after the Epistle reading previews the important things to come. Censing is a natural symbol of the fervent prayers of the faithful, ascending towards Heaven as the smoke ascends upward. When the Deacon swings the censer towards the congregation, it expresses the wish of the Priest that, since our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, his censuring blesses God in us all.

As the Prokeimenon introduces the Epistle reading, so the Alleluia introduces the Gospel. The choir sings “Alleluia” to announce the approach of the Lord who is coming to reveal His Divine teaching in the Gospel.

The Gospel

The Gospel Book is always kept on the Holy Table. Its front and back covers depict icons of the Lord’s crucifixion and resurrection. The Priest exclaims: “Wisdom! Attend! Let us hear the holy Gospel. Peace be to all.” The faithful, reverently bowing their heads, listen to the Word of the Sacred Text as though they were listening to Christ Himself. The sermon is presented immediately following the Gospel reading. The text and subject of the sermon comes from the Apostle and Gospel readings.

The Ektenia of Fervent Supplication

This begins the final preparation of the elements, and the faithful, for reception of the Sacraments. The Priest again charges the people to pray and asks God to make the community worthy of offering the Holy Sacrifice. Earlier, in the Great Ektenia, the individual was requested to pray with the Church, to conform his needs to those of the Church. Here, the Church prays with each individual, mentioning his particular needs and offering to him Her material care.

The Liturgy of the Faithful

The third section of the Divine Liturgy is the Liturgy of the Faithful. In the early Church, only the baptized were in attendance at this section of the Liturgy. The Liturgy of the Faithful is divided into three parts: 1) The offering of the Sacrifice; 2) The preparation and partaking of Holy Communion; 3) Thanksgiving for Communion and the conclusion.

The Cherubic Hymn

“We who mystically represent the Cherubim...” This is the hymn of the offertory, the bringing to the altar of the gifts of bread and wine. It is the offering to God of our food, and therefore, of our life and for the life of the whole world. This hymn solemnly requests preparation for Holy Communion for all who are to partake.

While the choir is singing the Cherubic Hymn, the Priest quietly says the Prayer of the Cherubic Hymn, beseeching the Lord to make him worthy to approach and to serve the King of Glory. While censuring the altar, the icons and the people, the Priest says the 50th Psalm. This is a supplication of the Lord to have mercy upon us and to forgive and cleanse us for our sins.

After censuring, the Priest turns toward the Altar, making three low bows, beseeching forgiveness and worthiness. He kisses the Antimens (the rectangular cloth consecrated by the head of the church without which no sacrament can be performed on the altar) and the Altar as a symbol of his humility, subjection and service to the Lord. Then, the priest turns toward his congregation, bowing his head before them and saying: “Forgive me for my transgressions, O my brothers.” At this point the worshippers bow their heads as a sign that they have truly forgiven their spiritual leader for any offense which he may have committed against them, whether voluntary or not, whether with knowledge or through ignorance.

The Great Entrance

With all reverence, the Priest proceeds around the Temple. He is preceded by the Cross and the candle bearers and the censor. He is followed by the fans, representing the Cherubim and Seraphim, the highest order of angels. Immediately upon the appearance of the Holy Gifts, the faithful bow their heads reverently as a sign of respect. The people face the Holy Gifts throughout the procession, remembering the prayer of the robber on the cross, “Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom.”

During the Great Entrance, the Priest invokes the Lord's help for fellow men of all stations: the worshippers and servers in the Church; the hierarchs of our Church; our civil leaders and armed forces everywhere; those who offered gifts and those for whom they were offered. The transferring of the Holy Gifts in procession from the Prothesis Table to the Holy Altar symbolize the Lord's willing journey to His suffering and death, which began by Our Lord's entrance into Jerusalem, on the first Palm Sunday.

The Cherubic Hymn, the censing of the Altar and the congregation, and the transfer of the Holy Gifts to the Altar, all constitute the Offertory. We speak very often of the sacrifice of Christ, but we often forget that the sacrifice of Christ requests and implies our own sacrifice. We present ourselves to God, as we unite ourselves to the sacrifice of Christ in a movement of love and adoration.

The Ektenia and Prayer of the Prothesis and The Peace

This Ektenia is a prayer for a holy life and a peaceful, Christian death. The Prayer of the Prothesis asks that God's grace make us worthy to present a sacrifice acceptable to God. After completion of this prayer, the Priest blesses the people with the words, "Peace be to all." He then instructs the people to "love one another." This instruction is followed by the kiss of peace. In some parishes, all present exchanged a kiss as a sign of love and goodwill expressing a true union with Christ among the people of God. The kiss of peace is used in conjunction with the greeting "Christ is in our midst – He is an always shall be."

The Creed

The creed contains twelve articles which represent our confession of faith as taught by the Orthodox Church and practiced by Orthodox Christians. The Creed was formulated by the First Ecumenical Council in 325 A.D. and was completed at the Second Ecumenical Council in 381 A.D.

Before the recitation of the Creed, the Priest cries aloud, "The Doors! The Doors! In Wisdom, let us attend!" In the early days of the Church, sentinels were appointed to guard the doors of the Church so no persecutors or un-baptized persons might enter the nave at this time. During the recitation of the creed, the Priest waves the Aer (the cloth that covers the offering) over the Holy Gifts representing the earthquake that took place at the Crucifixion of Christ. At the words, "He ascended into heaven..." the Priest folds up the Aer typifying the rolling away of the stone from the tomb of Christ.

The Anaphora

When the faithful have ended their confession of faith, the Priest invites them to listen closely and reverently so that they may be worthy to "...offer the Holy Oblation in peace." On every occasion, the Priest moves the people to peace. This indicates that the only sacrifice that we may offer to God is a peaceful and repentant spirit. The Priest lifts up his hands and invites the worshippers to free themselves of earthly care, so that they may be free of secular thoughts and cares in the presence of God. At this point, we begin the prayers of thanksgiving and the consummation of the Holy Sacrament.

We give thanks to the Lord, just as our Savior gave thanks to God before breaking the bread at the Last supper. We then proclaim the joyful message that was stated at the first Palm Sunday, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord".

At this point, the Priest no longer acts as a mere man. Taking the place of our Lord, he speaks and acts in His sacred person. He repeats the same words our Lord said to His disciples in the upper room: "Take, eat; this is my Body..." and "Drink ye all of this; this is my Blood...". The Deacon, in humble adoration, crosses his hands and raises the Holy Gifts. This signifies the raising of Christ on the Cross for our salvation. He the Priest proclaims: "Thine own of thine own we offer unto thee, in behalf of all and for all." The sacrifice offered is Christ Himself. Also, it is Christ Himself who in the Church performs the act of offering. The offering is in behalf of both the living and the dead. At this moment,

the Priest is no longer a person who, in form and name is like yourself, but at this holy moment, he is the medium through which the Sacrifice is being accomplished.

The Epiclesis

While the hymn “We praise thee...” is being sung, the Priest prays that the Lord will send down His Holy Spirit on the Elements, “Changing them by thy Holy Spirit...” The Holy Spirit is called down by God the Father to change the Elements of bread and wine into the True Body and the True Blood of Jesus Christ. This is the focal point of the Liturgy. The word Epiclesis means “calling upon God.”

The change or transformation of the Elements into the very Body and the very Blood of Christ takes place on the heavenly altar silently. All attempts to explain what happens in terms of substance (the Western doctrine of transubstantiation) or in terms of time (the moment of transformation) are inadequate and futile. They apply to the objective categories of this world, where the bread remains bread and the wine remains wine.

After the Prayer of Consecration, the Priest commemorates the members of the Church, in whose behalf the Holy Elements have been offered, for the living and the dead and especially for the Mother of God. The Mother of God is then commemorated in hymnography. After this hymn, the priest prays to the Lord for the hierarchy of the church and all the people, ending the commemoration remembering the members of the entire parish community. This is followed by a blessing of the people by the Priest.

The Ektenia Before the Lord's Prayer

In order to help the worshiper prepare himself for the Sacraments, the Deacon recites this Ektenia which begins, “Calling to remembrance all the Saints, again and again in peace let us pray to the Lord.” We should remember the example of the great Saints who lived and died for Christ. We should pray for strength and guidance that we might be like them.

The Lord's Prayer

The Priest asks that we might boldly and without fear and condemnation call upon God as Father and to say the Lord's Prayer. It is the Lord's Prayer that constitutes the preparation for Holy Communion in the deepest sense of the word. The Lord's Prayer is the prayer of the Church. Following this prayer, the Priest turns towards the people and bestows his blessings of peace. Each worshiper responds in his heart, “And to thy spirit,” wishing their spiritual leader the same blessings of peace. The Priest then asks the faithful to bow their heads before the Lord to submit to God and to accept Him as our Lord and Master. With humility, we should lower our head and all our worldly thoughts, thus humbling both reason and heart to God.

The Elevation

The Elevation announces the coming of the time for Holy Communion. The Priest faces the Altar, elevates the Body of Christ from its place on the diskarion in careful remembrance of our Savior's resurrection and says: “Let us attend! Holy things are for the holy.” As the Priest lowers the Body of Christ, he makes with it the sign of the Cross three times above the diskarion.

The Communion

The Priest begins his preparation of the Sacrament by breaking the Body of Christ into four parts. This is in memory of Christ, who at the Last Supper broke bread with His Apostles. The Priest arranges the pieces on the rim of the diskarion in the form of a cross. He then takes the portion with the letters “IC” and drops it into the Chalice. This symbolizes the descent of Christ into Hades after His death on the Cross. The warm water the Priest pours into the Chalice signifies the “fervor of the Saints.” The Priest takes the portion with the letters “XC” from the diskarion and places it in the palm of his right hand and

eats the Body with humility and piety. Then the Priest wipes his fingers with the sponge, and raises the Chalice with its veil and drinks from it the Precious Blood. The Priest wipes his lips and the Chalice with the veil and kisses the Chalice. Then the Priest divides the particles “NI” and “KA” and places them inside the Chalice for the Communion of the People, covering the Chalice with the Communion Veil.

The Priest turns toward the people signifying the appearance of Christ to His Disciples after His resurrection. He elevates the Chalice before the people saying aloud: “With fear of God, and faith and love, draw near.” As the faithful approach to receive Holy Communion, they humbly acknowledge their many faults. In their prayer they beg Heaven’s aid that they might find forgiveness at the mercy seat of God. When the priest administers the Body and Blood of Christ to the people, he says to each of them: “Unto the remission of sins and unto life everlasting.”

Following Holy Communion, the proclamation: “O God, save thy people and bless thine inheritance.” signifies the blessing of Christ’s Disciples on the Mount of Olives before his Ascension into Heaven. Then the choir sings: “We have seen the true light...” The Orthodox Christian has been exposed to the true light by listening to the teachings of the Bible at the beginning of the Divine Liturgy; by confessing the faith in the true God, the Holy Trinity, in the Creed; by offering Holy Oblation; by worshiping God; and in receiving Holy Communion.

The Priest then raises the Holy Elements slowly facing the people and saying aloud, “Always: Now and ever, and unto ages of ages.” This blessing symbolizes the promise of the Savior as He ascended into heaven, “I am with you always even unto the end of the world.”

The Prayers of Thanksgiving

The Priest blesses the worshippers and indicates that as they go out into the world they should maintain the same peace they have found within the holy walls of the Church during the Divine Liturgy. “Let us go forth in peace,” exclaims the Priest indicating that we should go in Christ and with Christ.

The Prayer Behind the Ambon

The Priest stands before the icon of Christ (Antiochian tradition) or literally behind the placement of the Ambon (in our Cathedral, that’s the podium from which the Deacon often reads the Gospel) and reads the prayer which is the summary of the entire service. The priest stands on a level with the people to indicate that Christ, after He had finished the act of Salvation, was united to His people. The choir responds to the prayer with the hymn, “Blessed be the name of the Lord...”

The Dismissal

The Divine Liturgy ends with the benediction; a prayerful wish that the Lord will have mercy on us, through the prayers of the Holy Mother of God, and of all the Saints. The people leave the nave quietly after reverencing the Cross and receiving the Antidoron (blessed bread).

After dismissing the congregation, the Priest returns to the Sanctuary and consumes the remainder of the Holy Gifts, cleans the Chalice properly, and puts away the holy vessels. He removes his vestments and says the prayers following Holy Communion followed by the prayers prior to leaving the Church.