

**The Liturgy of the Preparation**  
Re-Catechism 3  
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The Liturgy of Preparation, known in Greek as Prothesis (Προθησις meaning a setting forth) or Proskomedia (meaning an offering), is the name given in the Orthodox Church to the service of preparing the bread and wine for the Eucharist. The Liturgy of Preparation is done quietly before the public part of the Divine Liturgy begins, and symbolizes the "hidden years" of Christ's earthly life.

The ceremony consists of three parts. It begins with the Kairon, followed by the Vesting of the Clergy and concludes with the Proskomedia.

**The Kairon**

The Kairon can also be called the Entrance Prayer. Before the priest begins the preparatory part of the Liturgy, he goes before the Royal Doors and prays. In his prayer, he asks for God's forgiveness, and for His help to perform the Liturgy worthily. After bowing to the people for whom and in whose name he will serve, the priest enters the altar area praying the last half of Psalm 5: "I will enter Your house..." After bowing down and kissing the Holy Altar, he removes his outer garment and begins to vest, or put on the garments of the priesthood.

**The Vesting**

They then venerate the Holy Table and put on their vestments. Before putting on each vestment the priest will say a prayer, usually drawn from the Psalms, bless the vestment, and kiss the cross that is sewn onto it. If there is a deacon also assisting the priest, he will

bring his vestments to the priest for him to bless. He then kisses the priest's hand and withdraws to vest, saying the same prayers as the priest and kissing the cross on each vestment. Any alter servers who will be vesting must bring their sticharia to the priest for him to bless, before vesting. Though servers do not normally say the prayer of the sticharion, they will kiss the cross before vesting. If a bishop is present in the Altar, the clergy will bring their vestments for him to bless before putting them on.

Let us examine these articles of clothing more closely.

#### 1) The Sticharion (Tunic)

This is a long garment reaching to the floor, with long sleeves. The word “sticharion” means garment with lines, because in ancient times it was white with darker lines running through it. In time all articles of clothing worn by the clergy took on special meaning. The sticharion symbolizes today the spiritual cleanliness which the clergy must possess when officiating in the Eucharist and other services. It also signifies the white robe of the angel who announced to the Myrrh-bearing women the glad tidings of the Lord’s Resurrection in Mark 16:5. The following Bible passage from Isaiah 61:10 is recited: “My soul shall rejoice in the Lord, for He hath clothed me with the garment of salvation; He has covered me with the robe of joy ...”

#### 2) The Epitrachelion (Stole)

This garment is worn around the neck and usually, consists of two narrow strips encircling the neck, which are sewed or buttoned together in the front. At set distances it is decorated with gold-embroidered crosses. This vestment symbolizes the grace of the Holy Spirit that flows down abundantly upon the officiating clergy; it also symbolizes the spiritual yoke of the priesthood. Each tassel at the end of the epitrachelion represents the souls for whom the priest

is responsible for, and this is a burden that the priest always carries with him. The epitrachelion must be worn when the priest performs the sacraments of the church. It is a sign of his priestly office and authority. The bible passage read is from Psalm 33:2: “Blessed is God, Who Pours His grace upon his priests; it is as ointment on the head, that ran down to the beard of Aaron; that ran down to the fringe of his clothing.”

### 3) The Zoni (Belt)

The zoni is used to facilitate the movements of the celebrant. This is a symbol of the strength given to him by the Holy Spirit in order to perform the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. The symbolism of the zoni is signified by the following Bible passage which the celebrant recites while he fastens it over the Stichaion and Epitrachelion.: “Blessed is God Who rids me with strength, and makes my way blameless; who strengthens my feet as hinds’ feet, and sets me upon high places.” (Psalm 18:32-33).

### 4) The Epimanikia (Maniples)

The Epimanikia is a compound word from the Greek preposition “epi” meaning on, and the Latin noun “manus” meaning hand, thus denoting gloves. In ancient times the epimanikia looked much like modern gloves and were used by the Byzantine emperors when they took the Holy Communion so as not to touch the holy bread with their bare hands. Later when the clergymen began to use them, they took the shape they have today in order to facilitate the movements of the hands. Symbolically they represent the creative power of God, and the following bible verses are read. For the right hand, Exodus 15:6-7: They right hand, O Lord, has been glorified in strength; Thy right hand has broken enemies and in the abundance of Thy glory You have crushed your adversaries.” For the left hand Psalm 119:73: “Your hands have made me and molded me; instruct me that I may learn your commandments.”

5) The Epigonation, which means something upon the knee is only for the dignitaries. (In other words for the archimandrites, arch-priests, an oeconomos).

As an aside, there are technically three levels to the priesthood: bishop, presbyter (priest), and deacon. However, just as in the army there are ranks within: for example one, two and three star generals, so to, within the clergy there are ranks. The archimandrites are the highest level of priest and these priests are celibate and able to become bishops. The other two ranks are lower but can also be granted to both married as well as celibate presbyters. How or when a priest is raised in the ranks of the priesthood depends totally on the discretion of the bishop.

Now the Epigonatio is a rectangular piece of stiff cloth suspended from the belt and reaching to the knee. The epigonation is decorated elaborately sometimes depicting biblical scenes, and signifies the sword of the Spirit, that is the strength of the Word of God, the spiritual power, and the pastoral authority, by which the officers of the Church must smite the enemies of Christianity and all that is impure and vicious. As it is worn, the celebrant recites Psalm 45: 3-5: “Gird Your sword upon Your thigh, O Mighty One, in Your splendor and in Your beauty, and go forth and prosper and reign in the cause of truth and righteousness.”

The first five articles of clothing that I have described are common to both priests and bishops. The Bishops add 6 other articles of clothing that we will not get into this evening, but the priest has one more and it is called the Phelonion.

6) The Phelonion (Cloak)

The Phelonion is a sleeveless garment, a type of cloak shaped like a cone with an opening for the head. 2 Timothy 4:13 mentions that St.

Paul and other Apostles wore this garment. In olden times, it was also worn by the bishops. To make the distinction between priests and bishops, the bishop's phelonion was decorated with many crosses; therefore, it was called "Polystavrion Phelion" (or Phelonion with many crosses, and you will see in Byzantine iconography and paintings, the Fathers of our Church are usually portrayed with such polystavria phelonia. Later in our church's history, the bishops replaced the phelonion with the saccos but the meaning of the two garments is the same. Both the Priest's phelonion and the Bishop's saccos represent the red chiton of the Lord with which the Roman soldiers dressed the Saviour before His Crucifixion. It denotes that the priests are invested with truth and should be ministers of the truth. The Bible passage that the priest recites is from Psalm 132:9: "You priests, O Lord, shall clothe themselves with righteousness and Your saints shall rejoice."

After vesting, the celebrants wash their hands, while saying the Prayer of the Washing of Hands (Psalm 35:6-12). They then go to the Prothesis (Table of Oblation) where the Gifts are to be prepared. With the assumption that all alters face East (as they should face East) the Prothesis is located in the North/East corner of the Alter.

### **Eucharistic Elements**

Only very specific elements may be offered at the Divine Liturgy:

#### **The Bread**

The Bread that is offered and used for the Divine Liturgy referred to as prosphora. A prosphoron is a round loaf of leavened bread often but not always baked in two layers to represent the two natures of Christ. It has a square seal on the top side which has inscribed on it a cross and the Greek letters IC (an abbreviation in Greek for "Jesus") XC ("Christ") and NIKA ("Conquers"). The portion of the loaf that

is cut out along this seal is the Lamb, from which all are communicated, and therefore must be proportionately large for the number of communicants.

Prosphora must be made using only the finest wheat flour, water, salt, and yeast. The materials used to bake it should be used only for baking Prosphora and nothing else. The bread should be freshly baked and without blemish.

The Greeks use one large loaf for the Liturgy of Preparation (the Slavs use 5), with a large round seal on which is inscribed not only the square seal mentioned above (from which the Lamb will be taken), but also portions for the Theotokos, the Ranks, and the Living and Dead. The large triangle to the viewer's left of the Lamb is the particle for the Theotokos; to the right of the Lamb are the particles for the nine ranks of the saints; below the Lamb are the particles commemorating the living and the departed.

### Wine

The Wine used must be red grape wine, and it must be fermented. Orthodox tend to favor altar wine that is somewhat sweet.

These elements, the bread and wine, are referred to collectively as the Gifts, both before and after the Consecration. Unlike wheat and grapes, which are God's gift to us; bread and wine are made by human beings. God provided us with wheat, which we take, grind into flour, and bake into bread. God provides us with grapes, which we take, crush to extract the juice, and then ferment to produce wine. Thus, they become our gifts to God from the gifts He gave to us. Which is why during the Liturgy, we say, "Ta sa ek ton son."

In addition to the Gifts, the celebrating clergy requires certain sacred vessels in order to perform the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

These vessels, when first purchased for use in the church, are consecrated and can never be used for any other purpose, and are absolutely necessary in the performance of the Liturgy. I will make mention of them as I take you through the Proskomedie.

### **The Proskomedie**

If there are several priests concelebrating, usually only one—traditionally, the most junior—will celebrate the Proskomedie. Others may assist in taking out particles for the living and the dead.

### **The Lamb**

The priest first takes a prosphoron and blesses it three times, making the sign of the cross over it with the liturgical “Lonhi” or Spear. The Lonhi symbolizes the lance with which the Roman soldier pierced the side of Christ, on the cross, and from which blood and water flowed. The priest uses the Lonhi to cut the “Lamb” out of the prosphoron by cutting on all four sides of the square seal. He carefully removes a cube (the Lamb), taking from both layers of the loaf, and places it in the center of the “Aghion Diskarion” or Disk. The Diskarion has come to represent the manger of Bethlehem where Christ was placed after His birth.

The priest then cuts the underside of the Lamb, making a cross, and turns the Lamb right side up and pierces it with the spear, saying the words from the Gospel of John 19:34-35, “...but one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately there came out blood and water. And he who has seen has borne witness, and his witness is true.” A little water is mingled with the wine that is poured in the Aghion Poterion or chalice as the priest says, "Blessed be the union of Thy holy things, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen." The Poterion has always represented the cup from which Christ asked His disciples to drink during the Last Supper.

### The Theotokos/Ranks/ Living and Dead

Next the priest cuts a large, triangular particle from the prosphoron, which he places on the diskos next to the Lamb in commemoration of the Theotokos. The commemoration for the Theotokos was added early on in the Church's history at the time of her dormition. The Apostles who were there for her funeral celebrated the Liturgy and cut out a triangle to commemorate her. She then appeared to them and this was taken as a sign. She has been commemorated with a triangle piece during the Liturgy ever since.

Next, the priest cuts out the Nine Ranks. These are smaller triangular particles in commemoration of the various ranks of saints. The number nine was chosen because that is the traditional number of the ranks of angels. These nine particles are placed to the left of the Lamb.

Then the priest cuts the portion for the Living. He will take out a larger particle in commemoration of the Patriarch, and a second larger particle in commemoration of the Ruler. He then takes out smaller particles in commemoration of others among the living. He must always commemorate the Bishop who ordained him (if he is still among the living), the clergy who are concelebrating with him, and any living Orthodox Christian whom he wishes. Churches and monasteries will often have diptychs (memorial books) of the living and departed who should be commemorated at every Liturgy.

Finally, the priest cuts the portion for the Departed. The priest will take a larger particle as a general memorial of the departed hierarchs, rulers and the founders of the local church or monastery. He then takes out smaller particles in commemoration of departed Orthodox Christians. He will commemorate the Bishop who ordained him (if he is departed) and any of the departed whom he

will, as well as the names in the diptychs and those presented by the faithful.

All of the particles for the departed are placed in a line below the particles for the living.

Before the conclusion, any concelebrating priests who would like to make their own commemorations of the living and the departed may do so.

For the last commemoration, the priest takes out a particle for himself, saying: "Remember, O Lord, mine unworthy self, and pardon me every transgression, whether voluntary or involuntary."

### Conclusion

The priest blesses the incense saying the Prayer of the Censer, and then takes the Asterisk (star cover), holds it over the censer and then places it on the diskos, saying: "And the star came and stood over the place where the young child was." The "Asteriskos" or Asterisk is placed over the Diskarion to prevent the special cover from actually touching the "Lamb" and the smaller portions. The asterisk, as its name implies, represents the star of Bethlehem that appeared when Christ was born.

The Priest then holds each of the two smaller veils called "Kalymata" over the censer and places them on the discos and the chalice, respectively, saying appropriate prayers for each. The Kalymata symbolize the clothing and the shrouds, which were used for Christ's burial. The third and larger Kalyma is called the Aër. The priest wraps it around the censer and then covers the chalice and diskos together, over the other two Kalymata. This is to insure greater protection against dust and insects. This larger Kalyma is

called the Aer because, as it is shaken over the Holy Gifts, during the Creed it fans and cleans the air above them.

Finally, the Priest will take the censer and cense the covered Gifts while says the concluding Prayer of Oblation. Afterwards, he will perform a full censuring of the Prothesis, the Holy Table, the sanctuary, the entire church and the people while he recites the following hymn and Psalm 50 quietly to himself:

“In the Tomb with the body, and in Hades with the soul, in Paradise with the thief, and on the Throne with the Father and the Spirit, were you, O Christ, who art everywhere present and fillest all things. And this is the conclusion of the Liturgy of the Preparation.”

Yet, before I finish for this evening, I want to take two more minutes to talk about a few other sacred vessels that are necessary in the performance of the Liturgy, even though they are not used in the Liturgy of the Preparation.

The first is the “Lavis” or spoon. This is today, a long-handled spoon of gold or silver that the priest uses to administer Holy Communion to the faithful. In ancient times, when it was customary for the communicants to receive the Body separately from the Blood, this vessel had the shape of a nipper, a tool that resembles tongs. The Lavis symbolized the tongs by which one of the Seraphim took a burning coal from the Altar and touched Isaiah’s lips, thus taking away his guilt and cleansing his sins (Isaiah 6:5-7). In the same way the Holy Communion that is administered to the faithful today through the sacred spoon, burns away our sins and cleanses us.

The Lavis took the shape of a spoon when the Church established that the Body be mixed with the Blood in the Holy Chalice. This change was done for several reasons, the most important one being

that there was always danger of spilling the Blood as it was administered to the communicants directly from the Chalice. With a spoon there is more control.

The “Spongios” or Sponge is a small sponge which is used for cleaning the chalice after the Liturgy. It symbolizes the sponge which was dipped in vinegar and given to Christ to drink on the Cross.

The “Moussa” is used to transfer the “Lamb” and the portions from the paten into the chalice.

The “Zeon” is a metal utensil in the shape of a small pot, which is used to heat water. Zeon means the boiling water used for the Holy Communion. This water is poured by the priest into the chalice when he is about to take Holy Communion at the close of the Liturgy. This warm or boiling water is to remind us of the warm blood and water, which flowed from the pierced side of the Saviour. It also symbolizes the warm faith with which the believers should come forward to receive Holy Communion.

Main References:

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Fr. Panagiotis Avgeropoulos, Sermon on the Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos, August 15/2010.