

The Liturgy of the Faithful
Re-Catechism 3
Chrysostom Makropoulos

So far, in our catechism 3 we have discussed the preparation for the Divine Liturgy, the orthos, the readings of the epistle and the gospel, the small entrance and the supplication for the Catechumens. Today, with God's help, we will discuss the Liturgy of the Faithful.

If you remember, we had stopped at the part where the deacon had dismissed the Catechumens:

All Catechumens depart. The Catechumens depart. All Catechumens depart. Let not any of the Catechumens remain.

Then the deacon, or the priest if there is no deacon present, unfolds the Eliton and the Antiminsion on the Holy table and says:

All the faithful only, let us again in peace pray to the Lord, followed by the word **Wisdom.**

Why Wisdom? Because what is about to follow is part of God's wisdom.

Eliton is a silken cloth which is folded and is kept always under the Gospel. The burial of Christ is illustrated, as well as other illustrations like the crucifixion, the four evangelists and others, and it is blessed by a bishop at the dedication of the church. Only upon the Eliton the Holy Eucharist can be performed.

If the church is not dedicated, or if the Holy Eucharist is performed outside of a dedicated church, on a ship, in a park etc, then instead the Eliton the priest unfolds the **Antiminsion**, which looks like the Eliton, but it also has particle of holy relic sewed in one of its edges. The Antiminsion is handed to the priest by the Bishop who presided on his ordination.

The name Antiminsion comes from the Greek word **anti** which means instead of, and the Latin word **mensa**, which means table. The Antiminsion therefore is used instead of the Holy Table.

There is no need to have particle of holy relic on the Eliton, because holy relics are placed at the base of the Holy Table at the time if the dedication.

If the church has been dedicated, then we have both the Eliton and the Antiminsion.

After the priest unfolds the Eliton and/or the Antiminsion, then he reads in low voice the following:

We give thanks to You, O Lord of hosts, who has accepted us at this time to stand before Your Holy Altar and bow down before Your bountiful mercy for our sins and for the ignorances of the people. Accept our prayers, O God, make us worthy to bring to you prayers and supplications and sacrifices without blood for all people....

It is indeed an honor for the priest to stand in front of the Holy table and to offer our thanks and prayers to almighty God.

Note that the priest is asking for forgiveness of his sins and the forgiveness of the ignorances of the people.

The priest cannot claim ignorance. Being a priest, he should know better not to sin, but because he is also human like every one else, he is also a sinner. Therefore, he is asking God to forgive his sins in order to offer the gifts.

Now, why he is asking for the ignorances of the people and not their sins?

The people sin, mostly because they don't know exactly what God is expecting them to do. For that, both the people and the priest are responsible. The priest, because he is responsible for the spiritual

education of his flock; the people, because they should also seek and learn what God is expecting from them.

Now that he has asked God to forgive both himself and the people, the priest continues with the second prayer which he also reads in low voice:

Again, we bow before You and pray to You, O good and loving God, hear our supplications, cleanse our souls and bodies from every defilement of flesh and spirit, and stand before Your holy altar without guilt or condemnation. Grant also, O God, progress in life, faith, and spiritual discernment to the faithful who pray together with us. Grant them to partake of Your Holy Mysteries without guilt of condemnation, always worshipping You with reverence and love, and become worthy of Your heavenly kingdom. And then raising his voice:

So that always guarded by Your power we may give glory to You, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages.

Note that the priest is talking on behalf of himself and the congregation and that is because the Divine Liturgy is for both the clergy and the laity. The priest cannot perform the Divine Liturgy on his own. He has to have at least one lay person to represent the congregation.

Following these two prayers we are now ready to enter the part of the Divine Liturgy to offer our gifts to almighty God.

The Great Entrance

When we started catechism 3 we spoke about angels taking part in the Divine Liturgy. The chanter, representing the people, is chanting the following hymn:

We, who mystically emulate the Cherubim and sing the thrice holy hymn to the life-creating Trinity, let us set aside all the cares of life that we may receive the King of all....

We, all of us clergy and lay people, emulate the Cherubim which are one of the angelic battalions.

We are all asked to put aside all of our cares. In a few minutes we will have the Gate Entrance which symbolizes the road to the crucifixion. Imagine Christ carrying His cross going up the hill to be crucified. Some people are following Him with tears in their eyes and others shout. Crucify Him, crucify Him. We are called to follow Him as well. Which group do we belong?

That is why we should let aside all the cares of life. We cannot follow Christ and at the same time trying to remember what we will do tomorrow, or, what we had for dinner last night, or, who scored the winning goal on last night game.

Regardless how much important they are, nothing is more important than what is happening right now.

Father Stefanos Anagnostopoulos in his book “**Experiences from the Divine Liturgy**” writes: and I quote: “**No one that does not lay aside the daily cares during the Divine Liturgy can participate, or understand the heavenly miracles that take place right now**”. End of quote

The King of Kings and the Lord of Lords is headed to be crucified. Nothing should be more important right now in our lives. Some people kneel down and bow their heads in reverence. Some touch the priest’s garments, which is wrong at this moment. The

touching of the priest's garments, symbolizes the αιμοροούσα who touched Christ's garments and was healed instantly. That however should be done on the lesser Entrance when the priest comes out with the Gospel, not now.

While the Cherubic Hymn is being sung, the priest prays for **himself**:

No one bound by worldly desires and pleasures is worthy to approach, or draw near or minister to You, the King of Glory. To serve You is great and awesome even for the heavenly powers..... and continues.therefore, I implore You, look upon me, Your sinful and unworthy servant, and cleanse my soul and heart from evil conscience and enable me by the power of Your Holy Spirit, vested with the grace of the Priesthood, that I may stand before Your holy Table and celebrate the mystery of Your holy and undefiled Body and precious Blood.....

The priest recognizes that he is not worthy not even to come near to the **King of Glory**. He is asking therefore God to cleanse him through the Holy Spirit in order to approach and take part in the sacrifice of the Lamb, the one that bears the sins of the world. The one that is ready to give His life for me and you because we cannot pay for our own sins.

Some priests have actually seeing angels in the Holy Alter, or, have being taken in the spirit to heaven to the throne of God.

The priest censes the icons and the congregation and recites in low voice the 50th Psalm and other prayers. Then he asks the forgiveness from God and facing the congregation he is asking the people to forgive him **“brothers, forgive me the sinner”**, he goes to the prothesis and takes the holy gifts and proceeds from the north door

of the Alter from the north isle to the centre isle and through the Royal Gate while he is chanting:

May the Lord God remember all of you in His kingdom, now and forever and to the ages of ages.

The priest places the Holy Chalice and paten (**δισκάριον**) on the Holy table and covers both with the Air and starts a series of new petitions:

Let us complete our prayers to the Lord.

For the precious gifts here presented, let us pray to the Lord.

For our deliverance from all afflictions, wrath, danger and distress.

For forgiveness and remissions of our sins,

For a Christian end to our lives, and so on:

On each one of the petitions the chanter adds: **Lord, have mercy, or Grand this, O Lord.**

Let us love one another that with one mind we may confess.

We need to love one another with a Christian love in order to confess. If we hate one another it is impossible to be one person, one mind.

At this moment the early Christians exchanged a greeting of Christian love and reconciliation. Today, only the priest exchanges these greetings saying:

Christ is amongst us and the other priest replies: **His is and He will be.**

Ο Χριστός εν τω μέσω ημών. Και έστι και έσται

After the greetings the priest says:

Guard the doors, Wisdom. Let us be attentive, which is followed by the Creed.

At the early Christian days, from this point on, only the faithful were allowed to stay in church. The catechumens, the known sinners, the heretics, the idolaters, had to leave the church. Deacons were guarding the doors so no one will enter or exit the church for the remaining of the Divine Liturgy. Unfortunately today, we enter and exit the church when we feel like.

Today, guard the doors, means to guard our spiritual doors, our senses, our feelings in order to pay more attention to what is happening

While the Creed is recited, the priest raises the Air from the paten and Chalice and shakes it gently over the Holy gifts. This symbolizes the earthquake at the time of Lord's resurrection. The uncovering of the holy paten and chalice symbolizes the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I believe in one God, Father Almighty....

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God....

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the creator of life who proceeds from the Father....

I believe in one holy, catholic (universal) and apostolic church.....

I acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins...

I expect the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come.

In twelve verses we (both the clergy and the people) express our faith to three and yet one God, in His church, in the sacraments and the expectation of the resurrection of all.

This concludes the Liturgy of the faithful. Next in our study is the Holy Anaphora, the core of the Divine Liturgy, which will be explained by father Konstantinos two weeks from today.

Thank you for your passion. May God bless you all.

Amen.