



## **Preservants' Class 1726 A.M. (2009/2010 A.D.)**

### **Commentary on the Divine Liturgy**

#### **Introduction and Overview**

##### **Structure of the Divine Liturgy**

It is important to recall the actions and sayings which took place during our Lord's institution of the Eucharist on Good Thursday, as this became the basis for every Eucharist.

During the Good Thursday Eucharist, our Lord fulfilled three important actions which are considered the general skeleton for the Eucharist. These three actions are composite and interwoven in each other to form one action which is the "Sacrifice of Thanksgiving" = Eucharist:

##### **First Action (a Rite):**

In this the Christ practiced the traditional rite which was known at that time in performing the "Love Meal" (Agape). This consisted of breaking the bread, then supper, then blessing (thanksgiving) the cup, followed by praise and dismissal.

##### **Second Action (Sacramental):**

In this action, Christ, after the blessing on the bread, breaking and distributing it, declared its transformation to His Body. Likewise, after giving thanks on the cup He declared the transformation of the wine mixed in the cup into His Blood. Then He commanded His disciples to perform this mystical action in every "Love Meal" to be a "remembrance" or "zakaroun" for Him. This is considered an eternal command for the Mystery of Christ.

### **Third Action (Explanatory):**

In this action, Christ explained to His disciples the New Mystery (Sacrament) instituted in the broken bread transformed into His Body and the Mystery of the mixed cup transformed into His Blood. This was not a mere speech over or after the supper, but a talk which explains the essence of the Sacrament which the Lord imparted in the bread and the cup.

St. John the Apostle was diligent in recording this explanation in a more concise way than the record of the rite of the supper itself. This appears from chapter 13 to chapter 17 in his gospel, i.e. from the beginning of the supper to the time of our Lord's arrest. This is in addition to a full chapter (John 6) which preceded the supper record.

If we review in depth what St. John recorded in these chapters, a picture-first picture-becomes clear before our eyes of the Eucharist explanation which could be suitable for an actual Eucharist Liturgy, and it may have constituted the elements of the Eucharist practiced by St. John himself! The following is a summary of the words mentioned in chapter 6; 50-56 which are the essence of the Institution part of the Eucharist Liturgy:

- + This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die.
- + I am the living bread which came down from heaven.
- + If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.
- + The bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.
- + Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.
- + Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.
- + My flesh is food indeed (true food) and My blood is drink indeed (true drink).
- + He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.

These words are in themselves an explanatory Liturgy in which St. John elucidates, on the mouth of our Lord Jesus the Christ, the intricacies of the Eucharistic action which took place on Good Thursday.

It should be noted that this Eucharistic explanation for the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, although it was for the disciples, in reality it was directed to the whole world: "The bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I will sacrifice for the life of the whole world". Therefore, these words are directed to all the nations to understand the mystery through which they can unite with the Christ by eating His body and drinking His blood. It should be emphasized that the basis which was put by St. John on the mouth of Christ is the one on which is established the Eucharist Sacrament, i.e. the death of our Lord by His will "The bread which I shall give is the flesh I offer". In other words, St. John gave a clear biblical record that the Eucharist is based on the death of the Lord, and the offering of the bread and cup is in itself the offering of the sacrifice of the cross= death of the Lord, and the death of the Christ is here, through the sacrament, the offering of the bread and cup or the communion of the "living bread" and the "life-giving blood".

## **How did the Apostles develop the structure of the Liturgy as we know it today?**

The above mentioned actions and explanatory words became in the disciples' minds an indivisible part of celebrating the Eucharist. They used to gather "for breaking the bread" during the forty days after the Lord's Resurrection. They used special prayers pleading for the Lord's coming among them and transforming the bread and cup, as He did during the Good Thursday, through His power. It is most probable that the Lord responded several times and appeared to them during those moments, i.e. at the breaking of the bread, similar to what happened with the two disciples of Emmaus. They used to respond to this appearance by worshipping Him at those moments in fear and trembling which made them spiritually inflamed during that Invocation = Epiclesis. They considered the presence of the Lord, visibly or invisibly, an awesome and decisive moment for the sanctification of the Eucharist. The fear and worshipping continued to be associated with the prayer of the Invocation in the inherited tradition over the years until our days. During those moments all the people worship saying: "We praise You, we bless You, we serve You, and we worship You" in the Liturgy of St. Basil. In the Gregorian Liturgy, the deacon says "Worship the Lamb the Word of God" indicating the true faith of the Lord's presence at that moment.

We can trace nowadays' structure of the Eucharist Liturgy to the time of the early church after the descending of the Holy Spirit on the Pentecost Day. This practice is recorded in the book of Acts of the Apostles in chapter 2, verse 42: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers", i.e. the structure of the Liturgy consists of four main elements:

1. Apostles' Doctrine (Teaching)
2. Apostles' Fellowship
3. Breaking of Bread
4. Prayers

It is worth noting that the Eucharistic expressions recorded in the Didache had great relationship to what is recorded in St. John's gospel. It seems that the Didache and St. John's gospel were written in the same period and some scholars think that the Didache was written before St. John's gospel and that the latter explains what came in the Didache. Didache is an abbreviated form of "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles" and was probably written towards the end of the first century. It contains instructions related to liturgical services. The term stems from the Greek (Didache) meaning teaching.

The above mentioned four elements constitute the Liturgy as celebrated from the time of the Apostles until now:

### **1. Doctrines or Teachings of the Apostles**

This is what we call now the Liturgy of the Catechumens (in Arabic: al-maw'oozin). The Catechumens are those who are undergoing instructional preparation in the early Church. They used to be dismissed before the proper celebration of the Eucharist. The term is now assigned to those who attend Biblical reading and instruction. This part of the Divine Liturgy includes:

- a) Readings from the Pauline Epistles
- b) Readings from the Catholic Epistles
- c) Readings from the Acts of the Apostles and its extension, the Synexarion
- d) Psalms

#### e) Gospels

The homily or sermon follows after the reading of the gospel. Since it is part of the Catechumens Liturgy it should not be delivered during or after the Holy Communion.

### **2. Fellowship**

In the early Church, as they came from far areas they used to bring with them their own food and eat together in a fellowship which is the Agape Meal. However, St. Paul noticed disorderly behavior at the Eucharist Liturgy such as rich people bringing expensive food and showing-off in front of the poor ones (1 Cor. 11: 20-22). This led to deferring the Agape Meal till after the Holy Communion. This is symbolized by the Eulogion (Arabic: lukmat al-barakah) which is the portion of consecrated bread. It is distributed to worshippers by the priest at the end of the liturgical service. It is a token of blessedness and Christian love. Originally the Greek term (eulogia) means blessing. As such it was commonly used by St. Cyril of Alexandria who is known as the Pillar of Faith. In Orthodox Churches, however, this blessed bread is the Christian symbol of charity and spiritual unity.

### **3. Breaking of the Bread (Institution of the Holy Communion)**

This is the distribution of Christ's Body, i.e. the Holy Communion.

### **4. Prayers**

These are the prayers which lead to the Holy Communion. They include also the preparation prayers and praises extending from the Vespers until the time of the Holy Communion.

## **Day of Celebrating the Eucharist**

In the New Testament Church, the day of worship was transferred from Saturday to Sunday: "It was on the first day of the week that the disciples came together to break bread" (Acts 20:7).

In the early Church the Eucharist was celebrated only on Sundays because Sunday is the day of the resurrection and every Eucharist is a new resurrection. Sunday was called the Lord's day: "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10, 24:12). Later the Church considered celebrating the Eucharist also during other days of the week since the Eucharist represents the salvation which our Lord Jesus Christ perfected and performed for us on the cross as He said: "Every time you eat of this bread and drink of this cup you proclaim My death, confess My resurrection and remember Me till I come" (1 Cor. 11:24-26).

## **Importance of the Holy Eucharist**

The Sacrament of the Eucharist is the greatest of all God's works. God has granted us spiritual weapons to fight the devil with, and certainly this sacrament is the strongest of all sacraments. No wonder, for it is the extension of the sacrifice of the cross by which the Son of God redeemed the world and conquered the devil and death. St. Makarios the Great said, "Through this sacrament you are protected against the devil. Anyone who does not respect this sacrament can be easily conquered by the powers of darkness." Through the Holy Communion we can overcome sin, the entire devil's temptations and all the stumbling blocks of the world. Therefore, the Church calls it "the food of the strong". No wonder, for we eat that about whom it is written, "There went power out of Him and healed them all". (Luke 6:19).

St. John Chrysostom said, "We, who are sick let us proceed to this sacrament with faith, for those who touched the border of His garment were healed; what about those who eat Him all!". He also said, "After eating this spiritual food, let us return as lions whom the devils are scared from and inside whom God's love is inflamed."

St. Ambrosias said, "Let the Lord Jesus be your guest, for when the devil sees this guest, he escapes immediately."

Our weapons in our spiritual battle derive their power from the divine grace we received through the Blood of Jesus. But this sacrament is the Blood of Jesus Himself and His Body. When we use other spiritual weapons, we fight the devil with the power of Jesus, but in this sacrament Jesus Himself conquers our enemies. He said, "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him" (John 6:56). St. Paul said, "... , it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." (Gal. 2:20). Therefore, when we overcome our enemy, it is the Blood of Jesus that conquers in us as it is written in Revelation, "They have conquered him through the Blood", or as the prophet David prophesied in his favorite psalm "The Lord is my Shepherd", and said, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies" (Ps. 23:5). This is the holy table which the Lord prepares for us to conquer our spiritual enemies.

The Holy Communion is food for our spirit and life: "He has made His wonderful works to be remembered; The Lord is gracious and full of compassion. He has given food to those who fear Him; He will ever be mindful of His covenant." (Ps. 111: 4, 5).

St. Augustine said, "The one who wants to live with You and gain life, let him proceed and eat this Body". As the Israelites were fed with manna in the wilderness till they entered the promised land, so does this Holy Communion feed our souls and protect us till we enter the Heavenly Jerusalem.

## **The Eucharist and the Mystery of Immortality**

Among the mysteries we come across in the life or words of Christ none equal that awesome mystery- the mystery of immortality. Christ kept it hidden until the last hours of his life on earth. On the night He was to deliver Himself up to death for the life of the world He sat at table with His disciples and prepared for that mystery by proclaiming His love for His own who were in the world-a love which the gospel describes as "to the end" (Jn. 13:1).

For those who eat of His flesh and drink of His blood Christ summarized it all in one comprehensive verse: “As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feed on Me will live because of Me” (Jn.6:57). Christ here in a clear, concise and powerful manner reveals the mystery that lies in the Eucharist: he who eats the bread transformed into the flesh of Christ and drinks the wine transformed into the blood of Christ will have eaten the person of Christ and obtained the mystery of immortality. This is the basis for the martyr St. Ignatius’ definition of the consuming of the flesh and blood as the “antidote of death”, i.e. “the elixir of immortality”. His definition is absolutely right for it implies, first, healing or forgiveness of sin and, second, victory over death and obtaining eternal life.

## **The Eucharist and the Unity of the Believers**

St. Paul the Apostle, who is the greatest expositor of the mysteries of the New Testament altogether, revealed the mystery that results from the consuming of the flesh and blood, that of the communion between the believer and Christ and the communion between those who partake together of the flesh and blood: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” (1 Cor. 10:16).

From the reality of this divine communion, the result of believers partaking together of the one flesh and one blood in the Eucharist, St. Paul concludes that the believers unite together in Christ and attain the unity of humankind which Christ had striven for with His death on the cross in order to present humanity as one person to God:

A. “For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread” (1Cor. 10:17).

B. “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:12,13).

In these two verses St. Paul discusses the mystery of the Eucharist; that in communion all differences of race, physical appearance, character, customs, strife, controversies, contrasts and false disputes are removed. This happens because partaking of the one bread unites us in the one body of Christ, and drinking from the one cup unites in exultation our hearts and spirits with the one Spirit of Christ.

## **The Eucharist- a Heavenly Wedding**

To understand the importance of the Divine Liturgy and how to live it, we should keep in our minds the fact that it is a “Heavenly Wedding”. For this we should study the following events which our Lord Jesus participated in or taught us about in the Holy Scriptures:

### **+ The Wedding of Cana of Galilee**

This took place three days after our Lord’s baptism from St. John in the Jordan River. He did the first miracle at this wedding. He declared at this wedding that He is the real groom and that He came to give us joy. St. Mary was attending and his disciples too. She told our Lord that they have no wine, i.e. there is no more joy. But our Lord said to her “My hour didn’t come yet!” What does the wine have to do with the hour? You recall that at the night when our Lord was to give Himself for crucifixion, He said “... the hour has come, glorify Your Son”. He was saying

to St. Mary they are not going to have joy unless My blood is shed. That means only through My Sacrifice on the Cross they can receive the joy. But for our Lord there is no time or space limit and in spite of saying that to the Virgin Mary he did the miracle to give them “choice wine” and give them joy. Therefore, He was referring to the Eucharist.

We can apply the same word to our presence in the Eucharist: the curtain is open, we see the bosom of the Father, the throne, the twenty four priests, and we hear the angelic hymns and the saints surround us. We ask ourselves, are we in heaven. Did our Lord come again, i.e. did His second hour come? Similar to what He said at the wedding of Cana, even though the hour did not come, He is revealing His glory to us as He revealed it to His disciples at that time.

So during the Divine Liturgy, our Lord is present with us with His glory. We should not look at the watch and its time limits. We pray: “As we commemorate His holy passion, His resurrection from the dead, His ascension into the heavens, His sitting at Your right hand, O Father, and His second coming which shall be from the heavens, awesome and full of glory; ...”. We say all this at the same time even though the hour of the second coming did not arrive yet. We say this in the Eucharist as the wine and water are about to be transformed into our Lord’s blood which will run into our circulation when we take the communion and give us the joy as at Cana’s wedding. But as at that wedding, during the Divine Liturgy the Virgin Mary is present. She is our intercessor and is present with us. As she told the servants at Cana she tells us “Whatever He says to you do it”. This is the Liturgy of the Catechumens. We hear the Pauline epistles, the Catholic Epistles, the Acts of the apostles, etc. We should listen and do accordingly in simplicity of heart.

The servants listened to what the Lord said. They filled the jars with water and offered to the Wedding Master. We too fill the cup with wine and water which are sacramentally transformed by prayers and descent of the Holy Spirit to the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Priest (Master of the Wedding) takes communion first. We all receive the joy. We are all invited to the Heavenly Wedding and that leads us to the parable which our Lord gave us in that regard (Mt. 22: 2-14).

### **Parable of the Marriage Feast (Mt. 22: 2-14)**

The wedding invitation is open to all even to those outside. What does the invitee need to bring, a gift or an animal sacrifice? Nothing at all! All what is needed is to have the wedding garment which is the baptism. Every time we come to the heavenly wedding we need this garment renewed by repentance which is renewal of baptism.

### **Invitation to Wisdom’s Table (Prov. 9 : 1-6)**

A parallel to this parable of wedding invitation is found in chapter 9 of the book of Proverbs (Proverbs 9: 1-6). This is an invitation to everyone of us to come.

### **Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19: 7-9)**

This applies to us as brides to our bridegroom, our Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Our participation in the Divine Liturgy is amazing. As the curtain is opened and we see the altar and we are participating in the feast of the heavenly wedding.

# Preparatory Activities and Services before the Divine Liturgy

## Preparatory Activities

### +Repentance and Confession:

Please refer to notes taken during the Spiritual Theology Lectures on this subject.

It is important to practice this sacrament regularly in the true spirit of discipleship to the father of confession. In these sessions the priest knows the individual's spiritual needs as a true shepherd knows his flock one by one. The confessor (disciple) procures the benefits of real Christian discipleship which helps him/her in the continuous, even though it may be slow, spiritual growth which leads him/her to the numerous graces given by God. The confession entitles him/her to the communion from the sacrament of the Eucharist.

### +On the Way to Church

Recite some of the psalms which help you get prepared for entering the church unaffected by the world's distractions. The following three psalms are highly recommended to be known by heart:

- Psalm 122 (121 in the Agpya, Vespers): "I was glad when they said to me, Let us go into the house of the Lord..."
- Psalm 84 (83 in the Agpya, Sixth Hour): "How lovely is Your tabernacle, O Lord of hosts!..."
- Psalm 15 (14 in the Agpya, Prime Hour): "O Lord who may abide in your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill..."

### +Entering the Church

When we arrive at the door we make the sign of the cross and enter quietly in awe and reverence, remembering Simeon the elder who came to the temple guided through the Holy Spirit, and was worthy to see the Christ and carry Him with his arms (Lk. 2:25-28). As we enter we recite with the Psalter: "But as for me, I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your mercy; in fear of You I will worship toward Your holy temple." (Ps. 5:7).

When we arrive in front of the altar, we make the sign of the cross and kneel worshipping three times, saying:

- During the first "we worship You O Christ our God",
- During the second "with Your good Father",
- During the third "and the Holy Spirit", for You came and saved us.

Then we stand in reverence and pray "Our Father..." or Ps. 123 (122 in the Agpya): "Unto You I lift up my eyes, O You who dwell in the heavens...". Thereafter, one kisses the altar's curtain in awe and reverence as it symbolizes our Lord's garment which cured the woman with blood flow disease when she touched it (Mk. 5:25-34). Then one takes the priest's blessing by kissing his hand which holds the cross. Thereafter one takes his usual place in the church.

Important Note: If one enters the Church during the gospel reading one must stand in reverence at the door and listen to the gospel and at the end proceed to enter as indicated above.



**The following spiritual activities are conducted in the church from the evening till the morning that precedes the Divine Liturgy:**

**+ Vespers Tasbeha, Prayers, Raising of Incense and Doxologies**

**+ Midnight Prayers, Tasbeha, and Morning Doxologies**

**+ Morning Raising of Incense**

**The following several pages include explanations of and meditations on the above mentioned liturgical activities:**

**+ Vespers Tasbeha**

The Vesper (Tasbeha); it is shorter than the Midnight Tasbeha. It begins with a beautiful tune: "Ni-Ethnos-Teero", which is Psalm 117, *"Oh, praise the Lord all you Nations. Exalt Him all you peoples! For His mercy is confirmed upon us, and the truth of the Lord endures forever, Amen, Alleluia."* It is called the Sunset Psalm and is the first psalm in the Sunset Prayer in the Agpeya. We should learn these beautiful tune and urge others to learn it so all those in the church can pray together in one voice.

After this tune, the Tasbeha starts. It is composed of the Fourth Hoas, then the day's Epsalia or anniversary (or both together), then the Tazakia (Theotokia) of the day, Lobsh, Tarh and conclusion.

We should partake in the Tasbeha, normally said in Coptic/English, and praise together in one voice, just as the Apostles advised, *"That you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Romans 15:6), resembling the heavenly hosts who praise before the Divine Throne.

If you do not know the Coptic language very well, or the Tasbeha praises, follow the chanters with your Tasbeha Book, and repeat the verses of the Psalia and Tazakia. These verses were instituted specifically as recitations for the whole congregation to say during the Tasbeha. While following the Tasbeha praises, you may contemplate on its deep meanings.

### **The Rite of the Raising of Incense**

The use of incense in the church is not a pagan ritual but a Biblical fact which represents the prayers and praises of the saints and angels, as seen in Revelations 8:3;"Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. And he was given much incense, that he should offer it, with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar, which is before the throne. "Incense is raised during Vespers and Morning Prayers before every liturgy, except those during the Great Lent which are concluded late, and hence, incense is only raised during Vespers on the Saturday night. The Raising of Incense is an introduction and preparation for the Liturgy, consisting of a collection of prayers, praises and Thanksgiving prayers which request the Lord's blessings upon the sacramental service. The Raising of Incense may be performed on its own, not just as an introduction to the Liturgy, but as an offer of the sacrifices of prayer and praise to

God through its sweet incense. However, the Raising of Incense is mandatory prior to the Liturgy (except, of course, during Lent, as just stated above), the minimum requirement being the raising of the Prime Incense after the midnight praises. The raising of Incense can be found in the Old Testament. The Temple of Jerusalem contained a separate altar for the raising of incense called the Incense Altar which was different to the Altar of Offertory.

### **Details of the Raising of Incense**

The priest enters the Church and opens the curtain saying, "Have mercy upon us, O Father the Almighty, O Holy Trinity have mercy upon us, O Lord of Hosts be with us for we have no other supporter in our tribulations but You." He then prays The Lord's Prayer and prostrates before the altar saying, "We worship You, O Christ, with Your Gracious Father and the Holy Spirit, for You have come/risen and saved us." He then prostrates before the other priests and the congregation saying, "Accept my prostration. Bless me and forgive me." He exchanges a holy kiss with the other priests as a sign of love, peace and reconciliation. He also turns to the congregation and says, "Forgive me, I have sinned." The absolution from the other priests, and the forgiveness from the congregation is very important before starting the prayers, for our beloved Saviour said, "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses" (Mark 11:25). Also the Apostle Paul says, "Therefore I desire that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting" (1Tim.2:8). The priest then stands reverently before the altar with his hands raised, the cross in his right hand. The deacon stands behind the priest and begins praying the Thanksgiving Prayer.

### **The Thanksgiving Prayer**

Our church begins every prayer session with the Prayer of Thanksgiving, whether it be a liturgy, wedding, funeral, baptism, or anything else. We thank the Lord on every occasion, in every condition and for all things, in happiness and in sadness, as well as in sickness and in health. We thank Him, and believe that every circumstance is the Lord's will and occurs with His permission, as it is said in Romans(8:28),"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." The priest prays audibly up until the phrase, "...and all the powers of the devil...", then he must pray the inaudibly part-as this part contains the Name of Christ; through Whom every prayer is accepted, as He promised when He said, "Most assuredly I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My Name He will give you" (John 16:23).

### **The Perpetual Prostrations**

After praying the Prayer of Thanksgiving, the priest prostrates and kisses the entrance of the sanctuary. He then enters the sanctuary with his right foot, as he is entering the Holy of Holies. He again prostrates before the altar and kisses it. He prostrates as a humble request that God accept his prayers, pleadings and sacrifices. Leaving the sanctuary from the left side, he steps out with his right foot, his left foot still facing the altar.

## **The Mystery of Incense Prayers**

The priest stands before the altar and the deacon brings the censer to him from the right side of the altar. The priest places five spoonfuls of incense in the censer while making the sign of the cross three times, thus consecrating the incense to the Only One Holy God (not to idols or strange gods), as it is written, "From the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My Name shall be great among the gentiles, in every place incense shall be offered to My Name, and a pure offering" (Malachi 1:11). These five spoonfuls of incense represent the five righteous men of the Old Testament who offered acceptable sacrifices to the Lord, and the Lord smelled their pleasing aroma. These men are:

1-ABEL, who offered the first born of his flock. "Abel also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering" (Gen.4:4).

2-NOAH, who, after coming out of the Ark, offered from every pure animal and bird. "Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled a soothing aroma, then the Lord said in His Heart, 'I will never again curse the ground for man's sake'." (Gen.8:20-21).

3-MELCHIZEDEK, who offered bread and wine, a non-blood sacrifice, and blessed Abraham. (Gen.14:18)

4-AARON, who offered sacrifices for himself and his people, "...and the fire came out from before the Lord, and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar," as a sign that the Lord accepted the sacrifice (Lev.9:24).

5-ZACHARIAH, who entered the Sanctuary to offer incense, and "...the angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar, and announced to him the birth of John" (Luke 1:8-22).

After placing the five spoonfuls of incense in the censer, the priest receives the censer from the deacon with his right hand. He places the hook of the censer on his little finger, then holds the censer from the middle of its chain, also holding the cross in his right hand. The priest offers incense before the altar while silently reciting either the Mystery of Vespers prayer (evening), or the prayer of the Morning Incense (Matins). The priest holds the cross and the censer during the prayers and Bible readings, unless a bishop is present, in which case, he is the one who holds the cross and blesses the people with it.

## **The Mystery of Vespers Incense**

This special prayer is a deep spiritual prayer which the priest is directing to our Lord Jesus Christ, the True Sacrifice and the Lamb, Who is bearing the sins of the whole world. It consists of verses from both the Old and New Testaments, as seen below:

- "O Christ our God, You are Great and Feared and True", as mentioned in the book of Daniel (9:4), "And I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession and said, O Lord,

Great and Awesome God, Who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him."

- "...You are the Only Begotten Son..." as mentioned in the Gospel of John (1:1), "No one has seen God at any time, the Only Begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him."
- "...The Logos (Word) of God the Father..." as written," In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). The disciple John saw Him "clothed with a robe dipped in blood and His name is called the Word of God" (Rev.19:13).
- "...Your Holy Name is fragrance poured forth...", as Solomon mentioned in the Book of Songs (1:3), "Your Name is ointment poured forth, therefore the virgins love You."
- "...And in every place, incense is offered before You...", as a pure offering, as written in Malachi (1:11), "For from the rising of the sun even to its going down, My Name shall be great among the gentiles, in every place incense shall be offered to My Name and a pure offering. For My Name shall be great among the nations, says the Lord of Hosts."
- "...O Lord we ask You to accept our prayers, as incense rising before You...", as mentioned in Psalm 140:2, "Let my prayers be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice."
- "...For You are the True evening sacrifice Who sacrificed Yourself on the honored cross for our sins...", as seen in Ephesians (5:2), where the Apostle advises his children, saying, "And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us, and given Himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling aroma," and again in Hebrews (7:27), "...who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself."
- "...According to the Will of Your Good Father...", as mentioned in the Gospel of St. John (3:16), "For God so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life," and in Romans (8:32), "He Who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things."
- "...He with Whom You are Blessed, and with the Holy Spirit, the Life Giver, Who is of One essence with You now and forevermore. Amen."

### **The Morning (Matins) Incense Prayer**

In the prayer of the Morning Incense, the priest asks the Lord to accept the incense offered to Him as He accepted the offerings of the righteous Abel, the sacrifices of Noah and Abraham, and the incense of Aaron and Zachariah.(The biblical references for each are detailed above under Vespers).

- "...Accept this incense from our hands, us sinners...", the priest thus asking God to accept the incense offered to Him, as He had accepted the offerings and sacrifices of the five righteous men, and also as He accepted the atoning sacrifice of Christ as a pleasing aroma, as spoken by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians (5:2) when he said, "Walk in love as Christ also has loved us, and given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet smelling aroma."
- "...For the forgiveness of our sins with the rest of Your people...", which asks for the remission of his own sins and those of his congregation, as he is our intercessor before the throne of Heavenly Grace.
- "...For Blessed and full of Glory is Your Holy Name, O Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forevermore, Amen."

### **The Blood Sacrifice - Its Origin, Meaning and Cessation**

Biblical scholars say that when Adam and Eve fell God told them to offer a blood sacrifice of an animal without blemish. This sacrifice was to be an archetype of the blood of Christ, Who crushed the devil, for as it is written in the book of Hebrews (9:22), "There is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood." After Adam offered his sacrifice, "The Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them" (Gen.3:21), to protect them from their shame and nakedness, through which they would realize the need of a Savior to shed His Blood and redeem them. In His death, the Lord was hung naked on the cross so that with His holy resurrection, He would clothe us in purity and righteousness.

From time to time, Adam offered such blood sacrifices after being banished from Paradise so that the Lord might have mercy upon him and forgive him. His obedient son, Abel, learnt these rituals from his father, and when he offered a blood sacrifice of the first born of the best of his sheep the Lord accepted his sacrifice because it was offered according to the law. God rejected the offering of Cain, because his sacrifice was not according to the law. By not offering a blood sacrifice, he showed that he did not feel the need for atonement. God also rejected his offerings because of his evil deeds.

In the New Testament, our offerings are no longer a blood sacrifice but are from the fruits of the land and its produce. God accepts them because, through His Incarnation and death, the curse was taken away from the land. At His Birth, the angels were singing, "Glory be to God in the Highest, Peace be on earth, and good will towards man" (Luke 2:14). During His Incarnation, He walked on the land and purified it. When He died He was buried in a tomb engraved in the earth, and so He purified it. "To the pure all things are pure" (Titus 1:15).

### **The Three Major Litanies**

The priest then goes around the altar three times with the censer, silently praying the Three Major Litanies, namely, the 'Litany of the Peace of the World and Church', the Litany of the Fathers', and the 'Litany of the Gatherings' (These are recited audibly during the Divine Liturgy just before the Creed). During this, the congregation sings the Verses of the Cymbals. Facing him on the opposite side of the altar is the deacon who holds the cross and responds. The

following is a summary of what the priest does around the altar. This is known as the Incense Circuit.

### **The Three Circuits of Incense around the Altar**

After concluding the prayers of the Mystery of the Incense, the priest stands before the altar, facing East, and praying the introduction to the Litany of Peace, saying, "Remember O Lord the safety of Your Holy, Apostolic Church...", while continuing to raise incense. Firstly, the priest raises incense over the altar towards the right of the throne (where the chalice is kept), then on the left side of the throne, and finally in front of the throne. He then swings the censer in a full circle before the altar, from left to right. This is done carefully so that no embers from the censer fall onto the floor. This motion of offering three times over the altar, then in a circular motion, represents The Holy Trinity, in One Essence. While the priest is raising incense and praying the introduction to the Litany of Peace, the deacon stands opposite him on the other side of the altar and says, "Pray for the peace of the One, Holy, Universal and Apostolic church of God." The priest, incensing in front of the altar, then proceeds to the right of the altar; while walking, he says, "That which exists from one end of the world to the other." It is worthy of note that the priest must not offer incense unless he is facing toward East or toward West. As he proceeds from the West side of the altar to the East, the priest prays, "Remember O Lord the safety of Your Church...remember our gatherings. Bless them." Then as he faces toward West, looking at the clergymen and the congregation, he offers prayers for them saying, for example, "Remember O Lord our Patriarch.... Let Your people be thousands and thousands...." Then the priest stands to the East of the altar while facing West, raising incense and saying, "Remember O Lord our honorable Pope Abba (Shenouda III)...and his brother in the apostolic ministry, our father the honored Metropolitan (or bishop) Abba...." The deacon stands in the opposite direction (West facing East), raises the cross and replies, "Pray for our Pontiff Pope Abba...Pope and Patriarch of the great city of Alexandria, and his brother in the Apostolic ministry, our father Metropolitan (or bishop) Abba...and for our Orthodox bishops." The priest then raises incense to the South saying, "Preserve them for many years to come." He then moves to the West and offers incense towards the East while saying, "Remember, O Lord, our gatherings. Bless them." The deacon stands in front of him, East of the altar, saying, "Pray for this holy church, and all our gatherings." The priest moves to the right of the altar and says, "Grant that they may be unto us without obstacle or hindrance, that we may hold them according to Your holy and blessed will." Again the priest moves to the East of the altar, and raising incense towards the West says, "Houses of prayer, houses of purity, houses of blessing, grant them unto us O Lord, and Your servants, who shall come after us forever."

The term 'house of prayer' also should describe our own home if it is worthy of such a holy description in that it is not defiled with unclean acts. The deacon completes his activity around the altar in silence.

Moving to the West of the altar, the priest raises incense, saying, "Arise O Lord God. Let all Your enemies be scattered and flee before Your face." Moving to the East of the altar, he raises incense towards the West, facing the congregation, and says, "But let Your people be in blessing, thousands of thousands and ten thousand times doing Your will." Moving West of the altar and raising incense toward the East, he says, "By the grace, compassion and love of Your Only Begotten Son, our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, through Whom glory, honor, dominion

and power are due unto You, with Him and the Holy Spirit the life-giver, Who is of one essence with You, now and at all times and unto the age of all ages, Amen."

The priest kisses the altar, and comes out from the sanctuary without turning his back on the altar. He steps out of the altar with his left foot, while still facing the altar. In the following page we summarize the circuits with a diagram.

After leaving the sanctuary, the priest raises incense before the sanctuary three times; the first time saying, "We worship You O Christ our God with Your gracious Father, and the Holy Spirit for You have come and saved us." The second time he says, "But as for me, I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your mercy, in fear of You I will worship toward Your holy temple" (Ps.5:7). The third time, he says, "I will praise You with my whole heart. Before the angles I will sing praises to You" (Ps.137:1-2). He then raises incense once to the North of the sanctuary where the icon of St. Mary is displayed, and says, "We hail you with Archangel Gabriel. Hail to you highly favored one, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women" (Luke 1:28). Then he turns and raises incense towards the West, saying, "Hail to the hosts of angels, hail to my fathers the apostles, the martyrs and all the saints." At this point the priest faces the congregation who are standing together in rows, resembling the Heavenly Jerusalem where the angels and saints dwell, then raises incense to the South of the sanctuary where the icon of John the Baptist is always placed, and says, "Hail to John, son of Zachariah, hail to the priest the son of the High Priest." The priest then raises incense once more towards the East, thus ending the procession in the name of the Lord, saying, "Let us worship our Savior, the Lover of mankind, because He had mercy on us and saved us." He faces the East and waits until the congregation finishes chanting the Verses of the Cymbals, then starts praying the appropriate litanies. The priest, standing at the door of the sanctuary, raises incense in all four directions, signifying that God is Omnipresent and can hear our prayers.

## **The Litany of the Departed**

The Litany of the Reposed is always prayed during the raising of the Incense of Vespers. Praying for the departed is very important and a well established teaching in the Coptic Church for numerous reasons: It declares that the souls of those who have passed away are still alive, unlike the animals, because God said, "I am the God of the living, not of the dead," so we have to remember those living souls whenever we pray, striving to help them attain eternal happiness. It confirms the Resurrection; we ask God to raise their bodies on the Judgment Day and forgive their petty mistakes which they may not have had a chance to repent and confess before dying. It verifies the Day of Judgment; through our prayers for the reposed, we confess the day of reckoning, reminding some, and teaching others, to be watchful of their deeds. It ensures that nobody has yet received their full reward, as written in the book of Hebrews (11:39), "And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise." It helps us to always remember that the reposed are our brethren and we should remember them, for it is written, "The righteous will be in everlasting remembrance" (Ps.112:6). It comforts the living in knowing that we shall receive everlasting life, and grants us patience. It fulfils our debt towards the reposed, for God ordered us, as mentioned by the Apostle James, "pray for one another" (James 5:16). St. Dionysius, a disciple of St. Paul, said, "The prayers of the righteous benefit the reposed. If the reposed's sins were trivial there would be great benefit from what was done for

him after his departure. However, if his sins were serious and heavy, the Lord has already closed the door."

### **The Litanies of the Sick, the Travelers and the Offering**

When raising the Morning Incense during weekdays, the priest prays the Litanies of the Sick and of the Travelers, but on Sundays and on holy feast days; the Church anticipates that no one would be traveling, but rather, they are attending the Liturgy or celebrating the feast, bringing their offerings and oblations. Therefore the Litany of the Offerings is prayed instead of the Travelers on these days. A beautiful section of the Litany of the Offerings is a plea to God, which says, "And those who desire to offer but they have nothing, give them the incorruptible instead of the corruptible, the heavenly instead of the earthly, and the everlasting instead of the transient. Fill their houses and stores with good things."

The Church perpetually prays for those who wanted to offer, but were unable to due to lack of means. In this litany it becomes apparent that the Church raises the standing of the offerings to the level of a sacrifice, saying, "Accept them on Your holy, heavenly altar as a fragrance of incense", as the Apostle Paul teaches us, "Do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Heb.13:16). Good deeds are a sacrifice of love and kindness which one offers to others, resembling the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross Who died for our salvation, "For God so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John3:16). The Apostle Paul says, "And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph.5:2).

The priest prays the Litany of Offerings at the altar, facing East, not at the door of the sanctuary where the rest of the litanies are prayed. The Litany of Offerings is usually prayed when the Lamb is present in the church, that is, during weekdays. On Sundays and the Lordly feasts, however, the Litany of Offerings is prayed even if the Lamb is not present in the church.

On Saturday mornings, the Litany of the Reposed is said, in commemoration of our Lord Jesus Christ in the tomb on Easter Saturday.

#### **Some Points about the Litanies:**

The Litany of the Reposed is prayed during Vespers that is at sunset, to remind the believers that our lives on earth shall one day come to an end. The Litany of the Sick is said in the morning because the church is like a hospital which opens its door for the sick and wounded and cures them, as St. John Chrysostom described it. The Mystery of Anointing the Sick is said in the morning when the priest, deacons, and those who are sick are all fasting. The Litany of the Travelers is prayed in the morning because, in the past, people would only travel in the morning light when it was safe to do so. David the Psalmist says, "While the sun rises man goes out to his work and to his labor until the evening" (Ps.104:22-23).



## **The Procession of Incense**

After the priest finishes praying the litanies at the door of the sanctuary he enters the sanctuary, saying, "By the grace, compassion, and love of mankind of Your Only Begotten Son, Our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ, through Whom glory, honor...." He then puts one spoonful of incense into the censer and makes a sign of the cross, saying, "Glory and honor, honor and glory to the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit now and forevermore, Amen." Then he offers incense over the altar three times. The first time he says, "We worship You O Christ our God, with Your gracious Father and the Holy Spirit, for You have come and saved us." The second time he says, "But as for me, I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your mercy. In fear of You, I will worship towards Your holy temple." The third time the priest says, "Before the angels I will sing praises to You. I will worship toward Your holy temple." (Psalm 138:1-2)

## **The Virgin's Incense**

The priest then turns to the North and stands before the icon of St. Mary. The tradition of the Coptic Church is to place the icon of St. Mary to the right of the temple's veil, according to the verse, "King's daughters are among Your honorable women, at Your right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir" (Ps.45:9). Raising incense before her, the priest says, "We greet you with Gabriel the angel, saying, 'Peace be with you, O full of grace, the Lord is with you'."

## **The Heavenly Incense**

Then the priest turns towards the West and, raising incense, says, "Hail to the hosts of angels and my fathers the apostles, the martyrs, and all the saints." While facing West the priest views the worshippers standing in their rows, appearing to be in awe and reverence, reminding him of heaven where hosts of angels, apostles and saints are standing before the Lord's throne, praising Him endlessly. The priest then offers incense to the congregation.

## **St. John's the Baptist's Incense**

Moving to the south of the sanctuary door, the priest then stands before the icon of John the Baptist, son of Zachariah, and says, "Hail to John, son of Zachariah, hail to the priest the son of the High." The icon of John the Baptist is placed on the Southern side of the sanctuary's door, next to the icon of our Lord Jesus Christ. We notice during the procession of Palm Sunday and of the Holy Cross that the chapter from the Bible about John the Baptist is read to the South of the sanctuary door. The priest once again raises incense towards the East, saying, "Let us worship our Savior, the Good Lover of mankind, because He has had compassion upon us and has come and saved us." In raising the incense towards the East, the priest has completed a full circle, signifying that the start and the end of the offering is to God alone, for He is the beginning and the end, "the Alpha and the Omega" (Rev.22:13). He then offers the incense to the Lectionary (Coptic first), then the (Arabic/English), while saying, "We worship the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to Whom is the Glory forever, Amen.". He takes the blessings of the Bible by touching it with his hand and then kisses it. The 'Katameros' (the lectionary) should be opened to the correct readings, while the priest is offering this incense.

## **The Offering of Incense to Holy Relics or a High Priest**

If there are holy relics of saints in the church, the priest is to offer them incense. If the Pope, a Metropolitan or Bishop is present, the priest bows before them, offering incense three times; The first time saying, "May the Lord preserve the life of our Pope / Metropolitan / Bishop...." The second time saying, "Preserve him, O Lord, for many years and safe periods." The third time saying, "Bring all his enemies under his feet quickly." He then kisses the cross and the hand of the Pope, Metropolitan or Bishop and says, "Ask God to forgive us our sins."

There is no formal written note as to what the Pope or Bishop says in response to being offered incense. However, bishop Mettaous, in his book on the Spirituality of the Divine Liturgy, indicates that he has heard a Bishop respond with the same prayer as that with which a priest responds, saying, "The Lord preserve your priesthood like Melchizedek, Aaron, Zachariah and Simeon the priests of the Most High God, Amen."

The prostration and offering of incense before a high priest is not done because we worship the priest himself (as some people might think) but to offer him incense, being our spiritual leader, so that he can plead for us (intercede) and raise the incense to God on our behalf. This tradition can be seen also in public life, whereby appropriate people are chosen to present to a king or a leader the gifts or messages on behalf of others. In doing this, they show their respect and reverence to the king or leader, while, at the same time, securing acceptance of the gift, or the consideration of the petition. It is for these reasons that incense is offered to the Patriarch or the Bishop. Because he has the seniority in priesthood, the incense is offered to him which he then offers with his prayers to the Lord, praying to the Lord on behalf of the people and the clergy. The priest asks the Patriarch or Bishop to intercede for us when he says, "Pray for us to the Lord Jesus to forgive our sins." This explanation therefore refutes some people's objections to incensing or prostrating before the Pope or a Bishop.

## **The Incense Circuit outside the Altar**

After incensing before the clergymen, the Incense Tour around the Church begins. Most churches nowadays have four rows of pews, with three aisles between them; to the North, south, and central. When the community of Incense finishes, the priest walks to the North of the sanctuary door to the iconostasis and offers incense before the icons of the angels, the apostles and saints. Here he prays such prayers as: "Hail to Archangel Gabriel", while standing before Archangel Gabriel's icon, "Hail to the martyr, St. George", before the icon of St. George, "Hail to the martyr, Saint Mina", before the icon of Saint Mina, or "Hail to the Saint Abba Antonious", before the icon of Abba Antonious. He continues as such until he reaches the door of the northern sanctuary where he bows and raises incense saying, "Hail to the sanctuary of God the Father." He then continues offering incense before the icons on the North side of the iconostasis.

After offering incense before the icons to the North of the sanctuary the priest proceeds westward among the congregation, offering incense and blessing them, saying,

- During Vespers Incense: "The blessing of the Vespers incense be with us, Amen."
- During Morning Incense: "The blessing of the Morning incense be with us, Amen."

He then walks to the North-West corner of the Church behind all the seats at the back and then walks south until he reaches the centre walkway. He walks down the centre walkway towards the East until he reaches the middle sanctuary door, then he turns south to the iconostasis and offers incense to the icons there. He continues incensing before the icons on the South side of the iconostasis until he reaches the Southern sanctuary door where he bows and offers incense to the icons. Moving from the Southern door the priest then proceeds westward down the Southern-most aisle of the Church, offering incense to the congregation and blessing them while repeating the phrase, "The Holy blessing of Vespers Incense/Matins Incense be with us, Amen."

The congregation responds with silent words of repentance, such as, "Lord Jesus Christ forgive me my sins of which I am aware, and those of which I am unaware", or maybe, "O God, forgive me for I am a sinner", or they may pray the Repentance Psalm (Ps.51), which begins, "Have mercy upon us O God...."

The priest continues down the Southern walkway in a Westerly direction, until he reaches the back of the Church where he then turns north and travels behind the pews to the centre aisle. Again, he walks down the centre toward the East, while offering incense and blessing the congregation as before.

### **Some Points About the Incense Circuit**

In ancient churches the words, "Hail to the sanctuary of God the Father", was written on the front of the sanctuary door. The Church insists on calling it the sanctuary of "God the Father" for three reasons:

- The Liturgy that is celebrated in the sanctuary is for God the Father.
- The sacrifice of the Liturgy is the Body and Blood of God the Son.
- God, also being The Holy Spirit, sanctifies the mysteries and turns them into the True Body and Blood of Christ.

The priest offers incense to the icons of the martyrs and saints, believing that they are with us in spirit and praying with the priest. The martyrs and saints accept the incense and support us with their prayers and supplications exactly as though they were living. They are now living in the unseen victorious Church while we are living in the struggling Church on earth.

Incense is only offered before icons that have been consecrated by the holy Myron oil. There is a special rite for consecrating the icons which is performed by a bishop.

On the issue of offering incense to the Icons of our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ, there are two opinions; one is that we should say, "Holy God...", both for the regular offering and on a special occasion; and the other is that we should say, "Hail to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ", for the crucifixion icon, "Hail to the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ", for the resurrection icon, "Hail to the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ", for the ascension icon, and so on.

## **The Five Inspiring Contemplatory Verses**

Before he reaches the place of the Passover (Holy Week) Prayers, the priest recites the first verse of the Five Contemplatory Verses, saying, "Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever. He, being one Hypostasis, we worship and glorify Him." This prayer glorifies the Lord Jesus, Who was crucified for us and saved us through His Honored Blood, being taken from the Book of Hebrews (13:8), where St. Paul says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever".

When the priest reaches the place where the crucifixion icon is usually placed on Good Friday, he stops and completes the other four verses. Incensing towards the East, he says the second verse, "This is He Who raised Himself as an acceptable sacrifice on the cross for our salvation", referring to Christ, Who sacrificed Himself so that no one who believed in His Name might perish, but would live forever. The Righteous died for us to save us from the yoke of sin, and to transfer us to the glorious freedom that belongs to God's children, and to the Kingdom of Heaven. The Apostle Paul says, "As Christ also has loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph.5:2). Jesus Christ is the Perfect Priest and, at the same time, is also the Perfect Sacrifice.

The priest then raises incense towards the North saying the third verse, "So His Good Father smelled it on Golgotha in the evening." This refers to God the Father smelling the sweet aroma when He saw the Son on the cross. Through His Crucifixion, the Son gave the Godly righteous His right. He Who is without sin, became a sacrifice of sin, so we become righteous through Him. The Father accepted the sacrifice of Golgotha for the sins of the whole world as "a fragrant offering" (Eph.5:2), the fragrance of satisfaction.

The priest then raises incense towards the West while facing the main Western door of the church (a symbol for the door of Paradise) and says the fourth verse, "He opened to us the gates of Paradise and returned Adam to his rightful place." He then raises incense toward the South while saying the fifth verse, "Because of His cross and Holy Resurrection, He returned man once more to Paradise".

All five of these verses are a glorification for Christ, Who was crucified for our sake, and gave us salvation. All mention the crucifixion, which is why they are said in the crucifixion icon place of Good Friday. The priest then continues walking Eastward down the centre aisle, all the time offering incense to the congregation and blessing them, until he reaches the sanctuary door. Standing at the altar, he puts one spoonful of incense into the censer, saying, "Glory and honor, honor and glory to the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." With the penitent prayers and collective repentance that is offered by the congregation during the incense tour, the priest goes back to the altar and prays The Mystery of Confession.

## **The Mystery of Confession**

This mystery is also called The Mystery of the Return, as the priest says it after he returns from the Incense Tour. Here he raises incense over the altar while saying the Mystery of the Congregation's Confession, saying, "O God, as You accepted the repentance of the thief on Your right while on the cross, accept the confession of Your people. Forgive all their sins for the sake

of Your Holy Name which is called upon us, and according to Your mercy and not on account of our sins." In this prayer the priest asks God to accept the confessions and repentance of his people, just as He accepted the confession and repentance of the thief at Golgotha. He also asks the Lord that He may prepare the congregation to partake of His Mysterious Dinner. He then goes once around the altar, raising incense, before departing via the sanctuary's main door.

Standing before the sanctuary door the priest again raises incense in the four directions (as he has done previously) then offers incense to the Holy Bible and the senior clergymen. Having done this, the priest then hangs the censer in its place. It is preferable to follow the authentic Coptic tradition of hanging the censer by its chain in the centre of the Sanctuary's entrance, as was done in the ancient Coptic churches. This ascending incense gives comfort to the spirit and soul of the congregation through its sweet fragrance, as it represents the prayers that are rising to the Throne of Grace which the Angel offers to the Divine Glory, as in the quote, " And another Angel came and stood at the Altar with a golden censer; and he was given much incense to mingle with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar before the Throne. And the smoke of the incense rose with the prayers of the saints from the hand of the Angel before God" (Rev. 8:3-4). The priest worships the Lord before the altar, and then stands to its right side until the end of the Doxologies and the Creed.

### **Further Remarks on the Incense Circuit**

A lovely old tradition which is still occasionally followed today sees the priest place his hand on each individual's head while he is incensing among the congregation. The reason for doing this is threefold. Firstly, it is to give them blessings; secondly, to recognize the attending congregation and understand their spiritual standing during the mass; and thirdly, to receive a brief confession from those who might have trespassed after their last confession. Today it is left up to each individual to pray the following short prayer while the priest is touring with the incense, saying, "Lord Jesus Christ, forgive me my sins of which I am aware, and those of which I am unaware".

### **The Prayer of Efnouti Nai Nan - Lord Have Mercy on us.**

After the Doxology and the Creed, the priest holds the cross with three lit candles to signify that He Who was crucified is the Light of the world, sacrificing Himself to give light to those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death. The priest stands in reverence in front of the Sanctuary. He spreads both his arms, holding the cross with the three lit candles in his right hand, while the left hand is being opened in supplication and humility. While facing due East, and without signing (i.e. without making The Sign of the Cross), he chants, "Lord have mercy, establish Your mercy upon us." Still facing East, he then makes the sign of the cross, and says, "Have compassion upon us." He turns to face the North and, while signing the cross, says, "Hear us." Then he turns towards the West, gives the blessings to the congregation, and says, "Bless us." The congregation bows their heads to receive the blessings. The priest then turns to the South and says, "Protect us," while making the sign of the cross. He then turns to the East once more, and with the sign of the cross, he says, "Support us." Still facing East, he completes the Litany without signing, saying, "Take Your wrath away from us, tend to us with Your salvation and forgive us our sins."

## **Some Points on the Prayer Of `Ephnoti Nai Nan'**

During Vespers Incense the priest chants this Litany in the `long tune', but in the Morning Incense he uses the `short tune' because the service is too long. When the priest chants the Litany in the `long tune', the congregation responds by singing "Lord have mercy" three times, also using the `long tune'. During the congregation's response the priest remains facing East with his hands raised, being absorbed in a warm prayer of pleas for mercy. Some Liturgy Books state that during this time the priest prays inaudibly the second litany in the Gregorian Liturgy, which begins, "Healing for the sick, and comfort for the needy...".

## **The Litany of the Gospel**

At the end of the congregation's response, the priest makes a sign of the cross over the congregation with the cross and the lit candles, and says, "Let us pray", followed by, "Peace be with you all." He then blows out the candles and gives them to the deacon, crosses the box of incense, and puts another spoonful of incense into the censer while saying the Litany of the Gospel. Standing before the sanctuary, he then offers incense to the Bible while saying, "We worship before the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, through the prayers of David the Psalmist and Prophet. O Lord grant us the forgiveness of our sins."

Entering the sanctuary with the censer, the priest then goes around the altar performing the Round of the Gospel while saying, "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace." Then the Gospel is read in Coptic and in Arabic or English.

## **The Five Minor Litanies**

Having put one spoonful of incense in the censer, the priest stands before the door of the sanctuary and prays the Five Minor Litanies concerning Safety, the Church Fathers, the Holy Places, the Weather and Vegetation, and the Congregations.

## **The Absolutions**

The priest then takes the cross from the deacon and recites the three absolutions; two of them are prayed in silence while facing the East, and the third is said audibly while facing the congregation (West). While the priest is saying the third absolution, the congregation bows their heads, asking for absolution and forgiveness. These three absolutions are the same prayers that our spiritual father prays on us after confession.

The First Absolution: This prayer is called a Prayer of Submission to the Son, as stated below with its Biblical references:

- "Lord, Who has given authority unto us to tread upon serpents and scorpions and upon all the power of the enemy...", as Christ gave to His disciples when He told them, "Behold I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you" (Luke 10:19).

- “Crush its heads beneath our feet speedily...”, as the Apostle prayed on behalf of the Romans (16:20) when he said, "And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly."
- “May You destroy all his evil thoughts that are against us...” as such evil thoughts, vicious fights and deceptive sights are planted in our minds by the devil in an attempt to occupy our thoughts. The priest prays to the Lord that He disperse these away from himself, and from us all, saying, "...For You are our King...."

The Second Absolution: This is also a Prayer of Submission to the Son:

- “For You O Lord who descended from the heavens...”, as the Lord of Glory said about Himself, "For I have come down from heaven not to do My will but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 6:38).
- “...You became man...”, as the Apostle stated, "But He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant and coming in the likeness of men, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil.2:7-8 ).
- "To save mankind...", as the Bible says, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (1Tim.1:15).
- "You are He who sits upon the Cherubim and the Seraphim, beholding those who are lowly...", as mentioned in First Chronicles (13:6), which says, "To bring up from the ark of God the Lord Who dwells between the Cherubim", and also, Isaiah the Prophet (6:1-2) says, "I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood Seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew".
- “Now also our Master, we lift up the eyes of our hearts to You, Who forgives sins and saves our souls from corruption...”, as stated in the Book of Psalms (102:3-5) which says, "Hear my prayer, O Lord...for my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burnt like a hearth. My heart is stricken and withered like grass, so that I forget to eat my bread. Because of the sound of my groaning my bones cling to my skin.
- "We worship Your unutterable compassion, and ask You to give us Your peace, as You have given all things unto us...” which repeats Isaiah's prayer, Lord, You will establish peace for us, for You have also done all our works in us" (Is.26:12).
- "Acquire us unto Yourself, God and Savior, for we know none other than You, for Your Holy Name we do utter..." The church is the bride of Christ which He acquired with His blood, and so the elders of the church are advised to, "take heed to yourselves and to all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own Blood" (Acts 20:28). Paul the Apostle says, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people,

that you may proclaim the praises of Him Who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1Pet.2:9). If the Lord acquires us with His Blood, we are His own, we love Him, and are faithful to Him, as we say in the Litany of Safety, "We do not know anyone other than You, we say Your Holy Name."

- "So fill us, O Lord, with Your fear, for our only desire is for You. Rejoice that we abide in Your goodness, and those who revere You, exalt them in their ways of life and adorn them with virtues. And may we all be worthy of Your Heavenly Kingdom, through the goodwill of our Gracious Father, with Whom You are blessed together with the Holy Spirit...."

Through this absolution the priest is therefore asking the Lord to grant us His peace which we have lost because of our sins, for sin destroys peace, as seen in the quote, "There is no peace, says the Lord, for the wicked" (Isaiah 48:22). The priest also prays that we are be filled with God's fear, for the fear of God is very important in one's spiritual life. It may be noted that when the priest asks for peace, he says, "Give us Your peace", but when he asks for fear, he says, "Fill us with Your fear." St. Antonious, father of all monks, said, "The crown of wisdom is the fear of God. Just as light disperses darkness and illuminates a dark house, so does the fear of God when it enters a man's heart. It drives ignorance away and brings every virtue and wisdom."

The priest is also praying to direct us towards a desire for God. Our taste for spirituality changes because of sin, just as good food tastes different in a sick person's mouth. As a result of sin, our yearning to God becomes tepid. The priest therefore asks the Lord to give us back our longing for Him, as in the saying, "Draw me after you, let us make haste" (Song of Songs 1:4), lest we be drawn to sin and die.

### **The Third Absolution:**

The priest prays this absolution while facing the West and bowing his head:

- "O Lord Jesus Christ the Only Begotten Son...", as the Lord Jesus said about Himself, "He is the Only Begotten Son in the Bosom of the Father" (John 1:18)." ...And the Word of God, the Logos...", as St. John saw Him, "clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His Name is called the Word of God" (Revelation 19:14).
- "...Who rid us from the bondage of sin through His death on the cross. You breathed into the face of Your holy and honored disciples and saintly Apostles saying, `Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you will remit, they are remitted to them, and those which you will retain, they shall be retained'...", as mentioned in John (20:21-23), which says, "Then Jesus said to them again, `Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you'. And when He said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, `Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained."
- "Now also, O our Master, through Your holy Apostles, as You gave grace to those who labored in the priesthood in Your holy church to forgive sins upon the earth, and to bind and to loose every bond of iniquity, we also ask and entreat Your goodness, O lover of



mankind, to remember Your servants...(Here the priest makes the sign of the cross on the congregation twice, saying,)...my fathers and brethren...(then on himself, saying,)...and my weakness. Those who bow their heads before Your Holy glory grant unto us Your mercy and loose every bond of our sins. If we have committed any sin against You, whether knowingly or unknowingly or through anguish of heart, O Master Who knows the weakness of men, grant us the forgiveness of our sins, You great and merciful God." The priest makes a sign of the cross on Himself, on the deacons, and then on the congregation saying, "Bless us, purify us, absolve us and absolve all Your people. Fill us with Your fear and help us to live according to Your Holy good will, for You are our God to Whom be glory, honor and dominion, now and forevermore, Amen."

In this absolution we gain forgiveness for the sins for which we have actually repented. We should note that this absolution covers all sins; those which we know about, and those we do not, whether a sin by word of mouth, or by deed. As each person here is bowing in reverence they should pray silently a secret prayer, such as, "I ask You Lord to forgive my sins, because You are not pleased with the death of a sinner, but to return and live. Forgive my sins, O Lord, and whiten my clothes in the Blood of Your Beloved Son, Who became a sacrifice for my sins. Let me be a partner to those who repented, grant me tears to weep for my iniquities, grant me grace to abide in my repentance, and never go back to sin." They should also silently pray Psalm 50, which begins, "Be merciful to me O Lord according to the multitude of Your tender mercies...", ending with The Lord's Prayer.

At the end of the absolution, the congregation proceeds towards the priest to kiss the cross, the Bible, and the priest's hand.

## **The Blessing**

Some priests leave the blessing out because it is too long. The priest says the blessing while facing the West. The following is a brief blessing, but the name of the church's patron saint, or the saint whose feast is being celebrated, should be mentioned;

"May God have compassion upon us, bless us, make His face to shine upon us, and have mercy upon us. Lord save Your people, bless and uplift the Christians everywhere, through the supplications and prayers of the Lady of us all, the holy Theotokos St. Mary, and the holy Archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, and all the heavenly hosts, and our fathers the Apostles, the martyrs, the saints and the cross bearers, and the blessed saint and angel of this day. May their holy blessings, their grace, their favor, their love, and their support be with us all forever, Amen."

The priest then says, "Christ is our God", and the congregation responds with, "Amen, let it be so." Facing the East, the priest continues, "O King of Peace, grant us Your peace and forgive us our sins, for unto You is power, glory.... Amen." He also asks the angel of peace to accompany each member of the congregation as they leave the church, until they arrive at their homes. Then together with the congregation, the priest prays The Lord's Prayer.

## **The Dismissal**

During the raising of the Vespers Incense, or if the Holy Liturgy is to be held late after raising the Morning Incense, the priest dismisses the congregation saying, "Go in peace, the Lord be with you all, Amen", and the congregation respond, saying, "And also with your spirit." Under normal circumstances, however, the holy liturgy is celebrated immediately after the raising of the Morning Incense, and therefore the Dismissal not said. In this case, the deacons proceed into the sanctuary to put on their white garments of service.

### **+ The Liturgy of Praise in the book of Revelation and in the Church today (St. Marc Monthly Review, January 2000, pp 1-3)**

Anyone who reads the Book of the Revelation carefully finds before him a detailed heavenly picture of all the different kinds of liturgical rites that accompany the prayers and praises offered in church every day, along with the Eucharistic mystery. One sees white robes, censors, incense and a burning coal on the altar, golden crowns, candlesticks, an altar and "a lamb as it had been slain", cherubim, archangels, angels, heavenly powers, twenty-four priests and the hosts of redeemed, general and particular praises and responses and hymns of rejoicing, lyres, prostrations, new names and crowns and consolation in no small measure.

Among the things they say to God in heaven is "Who shall not fear and glorify Your name, O Lord? For You alone are holy" (Rev 15:4). This shows that nature is compelled to glorify God at the revelation of His holiness.

When the glory of God is revealed it is impossible for any of His creatures to stand silent before Him. "And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying, "To Him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever" (Rev 5:13).

And when the whole creation cries out to the glory of God the four living creatures (who are responsible for the created beings) say "Amen" (Rev 5:14). Is not this a wonderful heavenly picture of the Church singing praises in all its liturgical services, when the worshippers sing in response to each other, "Holy, holy, holy. Amen. Hallelujah"?

And when in olden times the churches went to great lengths to secure the relics of the martyrs in order to build their altars over them, was it not a picture of the heavenly truth which we are now explaining and whose seals we are opening: "I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne" (Rev 6:9)?

For just as the heavenly altar is borne upon the souls of the martyrs, so the altar in the church is borne upon the same witness, and the blood of the martyrs is a living part of the liturgy of prayer.

Even the teaching of the Church that there is a true participation with us by the angels and the spirits of the saints in all the liturgical services, prayers and praises, and that they stand around the altar, is clearly borne out by the Book of revelation, when the glorious sight of the angels serving before the throne side by side with all the souls of the just made perfect was revealed to John (Rev 5:11).

So the Church does not follow invented fables!

Nor the rules and rites and teachings of men!

Nor some form of Judaism including the remains of supererogatory acts of worship!

The Book of Revelation stands as an eternal witness that the spirituality of all the principles and types of liturgy and sets an eternal seal on its prayers, its praises, its incense and its sacrifice.

The Book of Revelation declares and bears witness that the traditions of prayer, praise and service given by Christ to the Disciples, and the order and system received by the holy Apostles under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, are eternal and not subject to time. They are not based on symbols but on realities, which we shall continue to live even in the next life, when each of us will take his rightful place around the divine throne and be taught the mystery of angelic praise so that we may serve the same liturgy, perhaps even in the same words, but in indescribable glory.

So it is clear that the work of the Church now is to pave the way, through daily services and the offering of the Eucharist, for the revelation of the Kingdom of God. And in these days we carry out mystically our part in the service of God, as a new creation awaiting the revelation of the coming of Christ, not in idle longing nor in ineffective hope, but in prayer and praise every day and every hour.

### **The effect of the liturgy of prayer and praise on the being of Man**

David is considered a fine example of one who prayed much and praised and sang to God in joy and humility night and day. It is also clear from his life and from God's own witness concerning him that there is a strong relationship between prayer and praise on the one hand, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit and his dwelling in the heart of man on the other.

It is not difficult to perceive that prayer and praise are in themselves a work of the Holy Spirit in us, and that to practice them is to some extent fellowship with the Holy Spirit. So regular participation in the service of the liturgy of prayer and praise in the church is a door through which we may enter into a life that is spiritual, without difficulty and without pride. It can change us little by little from our worldly form into a new form loved by God and men.

We notice that when we praise God from our hearts it awakens the sense of immortality that lies dormant deep inside us and increases our love for eternal life. Afterwards one grows accustomed to the atmosphere of praise and it becomes to us like the air of heaven, our better homeland. We breathe the fragrance of God simply by hearing the church choir sing, for the melody of the hymns is a language of the spirit and from it the soul draws a sense of heavenly things.

When your soul has once been aroused by hymns or set prayers in church, prayer will always be able to admit you to the presence of God without any difficulty, like a child who has learned to speak.

So it is that the liturgy of communal prayer and praise in church is able to stir the soul of man into recognition of his heavenly homeland, to increase his awareness of eternity and his sense of divine things, and to change and renew his thinking.

The choir that sings in church is used by the Holy Spirit to draw the hearts of the repentant towards heaven and to make the voice of God heard above the voice of this transitory world.

Thus hymns of praise and supplication prepare us inwardly and without our consciousness to take part in the communal fellowship with God in the mystery of the Eucharist. This is especially true because participation in the communal singing of praise in church breaks down the barriers between the individual and the community, just as the individual voice is lost among the voices of the congregation. Praising God creates harmony between the believers and prepares them to be one voice for one heart and one spirit, for a hymn separates man from the world just as it separates him from his own selfishness.

# **The Divine Liturgy according to St. Basil**

## **The Offertory**

Since the early church times, the faithful have used to come to the church bearing their offerings. The bread and wine are included in these offerings, in addition to other oblations like oil, cheese, olives, etc.

Offering bread and wine is not only a physical necessity for the Eucharist, but it has a spiritual meaning. As the Lord Jesus offered Himself a sacrifice of love to God the Father on our behalf, we ought to offer our selves totally, through our unity with Him, as His own body.

By the Offertory, the Church declares in a practical way her acceptance to the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, as well as her willingness to offer her life as a sacrifice of love for Him. Our life together with our labor, joys, sorrows, hopes, ambitions, hardships, etc...are represented, by offering the bread and wine.

The essence of our sacrifices is not our money or possessions, but offering ourselves and our lives in Jesus Christ. The Priest says, in the fraction prayer of the Easter; "He, Christ, raised His saints on high with Him; and offered them as an oblation to His Father". For this reason, the Church does not accept the oblations of the unjust, the adulterers, the avaricious and the unbelievers, if they did not repent.

### **1. The Preparation**

As we start the journey of the liturgy and the Eucharist, the Church realizes that this is a unique journey. It is a departure from the earthly concerns to that of the heaven.

How dreadful are these moments, for the Church is moved toward the throne of God, in front of Him, in company with the Cherubim, the Seraphim and all the choirs of the heavenly hosts, offering to the Father the sacrifice of His Only Begotten Son by His Holy Spirit. So, we have to be prepared well for this service.

#### **The Rites of the Preparation:**

To receive the law, Moses was ordered that all the people should be sanctified for three days. The church commands the priests and the people to be prepared for receiving the Communion. Repentance, confession, contrite hearts praising God are the principals of the preparation.

#### **Getting Dressed**

Before starting the service, the priest and deacons put off their clothes, which they use in their daily life. They wear other clothes sanctified by the prayer of the bishop and dedicated for the service of the Lord.

In the Old Testament, the high Priest's special dress represented his function as mediator between God and man. Over the trousers, coat, girdle, and cap, worn by all priests, the high priest wore an EPHOD, a two piece apron reaching to his hips, made of royal colors (blue, purple, and scarlet), and sewed with gold thread. By two onyx stones

bearing the names of the twelve tribes of Israel fastened to the shoulders of the ephod, he brought the whole nation before God in all his Priestly acts (Ex. 28:5-14).

The "breastplate of judgment," made of the same material was attached to the front of the ephod (Ex. 28:15-30). On its front were 12 precious stones engraved with the names of the 12 tribes. In its pocket, directly over his heart, were the URIM AND THUMMIM (Ex. 28:30), the medium through which God could communicate His will. By this the high priest was Israel's advocate before God and God's spokesman to them.

Over the breastplate he wore the blue "robe of the ephod" (Ex. 28:31). Around its hem were pomegranates, pointing to the divine law as sweet and delicious spiritual food (Deut. 8:3), and bells that would ring as he went "into the holy place before the Lord... that he may not die" (Ex. 28:35). The bells announced God's gracious salvation for He had accepted the people in the person of their advocate, the high priest.

On his forehead the high priest wore "the holy crown" of gold engraved with the words, "Holiness to the Lord" (Ex. 28:36- 37). Thus he was represented as bearing "the iniquity of the holy things" (Ex. 28:38) which Israel offered to God and crowned mediator, making atonement for the nation so God might accept their gifts and show them favor.

All these garments stood for the "glory and beauty" (Ex. 28:40) which God placed upon His priests, sanctifying them to minister in His name (Ex. 28:3).

The clothes, which the priests wore also, carried great significance. Their white linen garments symbolized holiness and glory. They also wore a coat woven in one piece without a seam to indicate their spiritual integrity, wholeness, and righteousness. The four-cornered cloth of the coat signified that the priests belonged to the kingdom of God. The cap, resembling an opening flower, symbolized the fresh, vigorous life of the one who wore it. The girdle, or sash, a belt that encircled the priest's body, was the priestly sign of service. It showed that the wearer was an office bearer and administrator in the kingdom of God (Exodus 39).

When God chose Joshua, the high priest, for a great mission, He revealed to Zechariah a vision regarding him. In this vision, we can realize more the significance of the sacred dress. Zechariah said; "Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. The Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebukes you, Satan! The Lord, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebukes you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?"

Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes." Then he said to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you." Then I said, "Put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the Lord stood by. The angel of the Lord gave this charge to Joshua: "This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'If you will walk in My ways and keep My requirements, then you will govern my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you a place among these standing here.'" (Zech 3:1-7) (NIV)

Psalms, 30 (29 in the Agpya) and 93 (92), recited by the priests and deacons during dressing, reflect more spiritual meanings for wearing the sacred clothes. By reciting Ps. 30 (I will extol You, O Lord, for You have lifted me up...), everyone of the servants

thanks God who accepted him to enter into His Holies and serve His mysteries; also because He made him worthy to be His servant in spite of his unworthiness. Therefore, the servant glorifies and blesses the name of the Lord. By reciting Ps 93 (The Lord reigns, He is clothed with majesty; the Lord is clothed, He has girded Himself with strength...), while wearing the bright clothes, the servant is declaring that God is clothed with majesty and power and became King over all His Church, and he is but one of the serving angels who stood at the tomb with their white garments (Jn. 20:12).

In other words, every time we serve the Lord, we must take away our daily infirmities in order to put on God's bright vestments, and to be crowned with chastity and righteousness, i.e. to be hidden in Him.

Lastly, we can say that not only the Priests but also the whole church, ought to put aside the uncleanness of the flesh and the defilement of lust and put on the clean garment by the purification of the Holy Spirit, through the washing of the Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Priest enters to the Sanctuary. Facing the deacons, he blesses his vestments of the service as well as those of the deacons, by the holy cross. The priest and deacons dress their vestments while reciting: " I will extol You, O Lord..." (Psalm 30) and 'The Lord reigns, He is clothed with majesty...' (Psalm 93), inaudibly.

#### **Preparing the Holy Altar**

Preparing the Altar recalls to our minds the events of preparing the upper room of Zion in which the Lord assembled with His disciples to offer the Last supper. During preparing the Altar, the priest arranges, in order, the sacred vessels which are used for the service. These vessels are consecrated by the bishop and used only for Eucharist. They include:

- The Cup; which holds the wine that will become the Holy Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ,
- The Paten; which is for the bread that will become the Holy Body of the Lord Jesus Christ,
- The Spoon; which is for serving the communion at the end of the liturgy and
- The dome; which is used to hold the napkins above the paten.

The Priest offers prayers to God to make him worthy of the service. He confesses his sins and asks God to grant him the power of the Holy Spirit.

As the Priest prepares the Altar, we ought to prepare our inner souls for accepting the Christ in our selves through His Body and His Blood and prepare our hearts to be spiritual altars for offering the spiritual sacrifice of praise.

#### **The Prayer of Preparation**

**Priest:**

The Priest enters to the altar and prays inaudibly:

**Lord, Who knows the hearts of all (Acts 1:24, Ps 44:20-21,Lk 16:15), Who is Holy and Who rests in the midst of the saints; Who alone is without sin and Who is mighty to forgive sins; (Matt 9:6) You, O Lord, who knows my unworthiness, my unfitness, and my unmeet ness, unto this, Your holy service; and I have no boldness that I should draw near and open my mouth before Your holy glory; But according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, pardon me a sinner (Lk 18:13-14) ; And grant unto me that I may find grace and mercy at this hour; And send me strength from high.**

**Priest:**

The Priest blesses the sacred vessels three times in the name of the Holy Trinity, by the cross. He takes off the sacred vessels from the Alter Spreads which are a big napkin called the Prospherine and a set of small napkins used to cover the Altar, the vessels and the hands of The Priest during the service. He wipes the Cup, the Paten and the spoon.

The Priest covers the Altar with the set of the small napkins and puts the vessels in their proper places; the chalice inside the wooden ark placed on the altar, the spoon at the top of the ark and the paten on the Altar. One napkin is placed under the paten, one folded backward over half of its top and another one is placed over the chalice.

Then he continues the prayer of preparation inaudibly. The Priest continues inaudibly:

**Grant that I may begin, and may be made fit, and may finish Your holy service, according to Your pleasure, according to the good pleasure of Your will, and for a sweet savor of incense. (Eph 5:2) Even so, O our Lord, be with us, take part with us in this; bless us. For You are the forgiver of our sins, the light of our souls, our life, and our strength and our confidence. You are He unto Whom we ascribe praise, and glory, and worship, O Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit; Now and at all times, and unto the age of all ages. Amen.**

**Prayer after the Preparation**

After the preparation of the Altar, the priest gives thanks to God who granted him the honor to serve the holy Altar. Confessing his sins as well as the people's sins, he prays that God accept His Son's Sacrifice on their behalf.

**Priest:**

The Priest prays inaudibly:

**You, O Lord, have taught us this great mystery of salvation. (Lk 22:19) You have called us, Your lowly and unworthy servants, to be servants of Your holy altar (Heb 5:4). O You, Our Lord, make us meet, in the power of Your Holy Spirit, to finish this service; So that, without falling into condemnation before Your great glory, we may offer up unto You a sacrifice of praise; (Heb 13:15) Glory and great beauty, in Your sanctuary.**

**God, Who gives grace, Who sends forth salvation, Who works all in all; (1Cor 12:6) Grant, O Lord, that our sacrifice may be accepted before You for my sins, and for the ignorance of Your people (Heb 7:27;9:7); For, behold it is holy, according to the gift of Your Holy Spirit, in Christ Jesus our Lord;**

Through Whom becomes You glory, and honor, and worship, with Him and the Holy Spirit, the Life Giver; Now and at all times and unto the age of all ages. Amen.

**The Canonical Hours**

These Canonical Prayers prepare us for the celebration of the Eucharist; the sacrament of salvation. Each one of these prayers has its own occasion; the Third Hour is the hour of descending the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, the Six Hour is the hour of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ, The Ninth hour is the hour of the death of our Lord, etc.

The celebrant Priest shakes the hands with the other Priests, if any. He asks them the absolution and to support him with their prayers.

The priest, deacons and the Congregation participate in reciting the psalms and the hymns of the Canonical Hours, from the Book of the Hours (The Agpya). They pray the following; On the days on which there is no fasting, they pray the third and the sixth hours, During the fast days, they pray the ninth hour in addition to the third and the sixth hours. During the Great Lent, They pray the third, the sixth, the ninth, the eleventh and the twelfth hours.

### **The Hand Washing**

#### **Priest:**

The priest washes his hands three times while reciting inaudibly quotations from the psalms. As the priest washes his hands with water he asks God to grant him the internal purification. The priest prays inaudibly:

**Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. (Ps 51:7) Make me hear joy and gladness that the bones, which You have broken, may rejoice. (Ps 51:8)**

**I will wash my hands in innocence, so I will go about Your Altar, O Lord that I may proclaim with thanksgiving ((Ps 26:6-7).**

### **The Orthodox Creed**

This creed states the basic beliefs of our faith. It is also known as the Nicene Creed in reference to the Council of Nicea in 325 AD or as the Athanasian Creed in reference to St Athanasius, the apostolic (the 20th Patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria, 296- 373 A.D). As we recite the creed, we remember the Lord's plan for our salvation and the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

#### **Congregation:**

**We believe (Heb 11:1, Jn 17:1-8, Mk 16:15-16) in One God (Deut 6:4, Mk 12:32, Deut 4:39), God the Father (Eph 1:3, Jn 6:27, Eph 4:6) Almighty (Gen 17:1, Rev 4:8, 1 Cor 8:6), Who created heaven and earth (Ex 20:11, Rev 10:6), and all things seen and unseen (Col 1:16) We believe (Jn 3:14-18, 36; Acts 16:30-31) in one Lord (1 Cor 8:6) Jesus Christ (Mk 1:1, Heb 1:2), the Only-Begotten Son of God (Jn 3:16, 18; 1 Jn 4:9), begotten of the Father before all ages; Light of Light; true God of true God, begotten not created, of one essence with the Father; by Whom all things were made; Who for us, men, and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnated of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary, and became Man. And He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate (i.e. at the time of Pontius pilate), suffered and was buried.**

**And on the third day, He rose from the dead, according to the scriptures, and ascended into the heavens; He sits at the right hand of His Father, and He is coming again in His Glory to judge the living and the dead, Whose Kingdom shall have no end.**

**Yes, we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Life Giver; Who proceeds from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified; Who spoke by the prophets.**

**And in one, holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. We confess one baptism for the remission of sins.**

Congregation sings:

**We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the coming age.**

**Amen.**



## **2. Choosing the Lamb**

### **The Bread:**

The bread is round, in the shape of a circle, having no beginning and no end to symbolize the eternity of our Lord. It is stamped in the center with a large cross representing Jesus surrounded by twelve small crosses representing the 12 disciples. Around the crosses appears the stamp of the Trisagion: "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal. The bread is pierced in five places around the central crosses in reference to the 3 nails that hold Jesus on the cross, the crown of thorns and the spear that pierced His side. The bread is made from pure wheat, leavened but unsalted, because Jesus Christ is the salt of the world. The leaven symbolizes our Sins which the Lord Jesus Christ bore for us. The bread must be freshly baked.

### **The Wine:**

The wine must be grape wine, pure and red in color. the priest must smell the wine to see that it has not soured. The wine is mixed with water, as the mixture of the blood and water poured out of Jesus' side when He was on the cross.

### **The Rite of Choosing the Lamb**

This rite speaks of the salvation events united together as if they were one event and beyond the limits of time. Through this rite, the Spirit of the Lord leads us to a journey with Christ.

When the priest wraps the Lamb in a white linen napkin (veil), the Church follows Christ to the manger of Bethlehem contemplating His incarnation. When the priest lifts the Lamb covered with the linen napkin and proceeds around the altar, we are lead to the temple watching Simon the elder carrying the child Jesus.

When the priest puts the Lamb upon his hand and anoints it with water, we follow Him to the Jordan and recognize Him the Lamb of God, Who carries the sins of the world. Covering the Offertory with the Prosperine lead us to contemplate His death on the cross. During choosing the lamb, the priest lays his hands on the oblations in the shape of the cross as the priest of the Old Testament, who lays his hand on the sacrifice while the sinner confesses his sins. This declares that Jesus Christ, The Lamb of God has carried our sins on His shoulders. For this reason, the Congregation sings; "Lord have mercy", at the time of choosing the lamb. After the creed the people sing:"Lord Have mercy" 41 times seeking the mercy and forgiveness of our Lord. The number 41 reminds us of the 39 lashes from a whip that Jesus received before His Crucifixion, the crown of thorns and the spear which pierced His side, when He was on the cross

### **Priest:**

The Priest blesses the bread and wine three times, making the sign of the cross. The Priest prays inaudibly:

In the name of the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, the One God. Blessed be God the Father, Almighty. Blessed be His Only- Begotten Son. Blessed be the Holy Spirit, Amen. The Priest smells the wine to see that it has not soured and offers it to the deacons of the Altar. Each one of them smells it and if it is alright he says, 'Good and Honored.' The Priest chooses the best loaf among the bread offered and kisses it. When choosing the most suitable bread which is to become the Lamb, he places his right hand on top of his left, placing his hands over the tray in the shape of a cross, as Jacob did when he blessed the sons of Joseph (Genesis 48:8). While doing this, the priest says, "May the

Lord choose a lamb without blemish." This chosen bread will become the Holy Body of Christ. Thus, it is called the Lamb.

The priest then touches each of the other breads in the basket with the back of the chosen bread, which is still in his right hand, and places them back in the basket. He then wipes the chosen bread carefully with the small veil, taking care not to turn it upside down. Holding the chosen bread in his left hand so that the three pierced holes are on the right side of the bread, he then dips his right thumb into the wine decanter which the deacon is holding and makes the sign of the cross, once on the face of the chosen bread in his left hand while saying, "Sacrifice of Glory", and then on the rest of the bread in the basket, saying, "Sacrifice of blessing...Sacrifice of Abraham ... Sacrifice of Isaac ... Sacrifice of Jacob." He again signs over the chosen bread, and says, "Sacrifice of Melchizedek." Then the priest bows, asking for absolution from those around him, before entering the sanctuary.

### Further Remarks on the Selection of The Lamb

- Touching the remaining breads with the chosen bread symbolizes that all the sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed to the Sacrifice of the Cross, and that the Sacrifice of the Cross was in turn the aim and the objective of all the Old Testament sacrifices.
  - Holding the chosen sacrifice in his right hand, keeping it on top while touching the other breads, and making sure it is never upside down emphasizes the superior honor and glory that the sacrifice of the New Testament had over those of the Old Testament.
  - The final sign of the cross is done over the chosen bread with the intention of revealing that the sacrifice of the New Testament resembles, to a great extent, the sacrifice of Melchizedek which was a sacrifice of bread and wine and not a sacrifice of blood.
  - The sign of the cross is done firstly and lastly on the chosen bread as it will be transformed into the real Body of the Son of God, Who said about Himself, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last" (Rev.22:13).
  - The number of holy breads in the basket from which the priest chooses the Lamb should always be an odd number (for example 3, 5, 7). The spiritual significance of this is that the number three signifies the Holy Trinity and choosing one of them reminds us that the Eternal Word was incarnated to forgive the sins of the world. It also declares that the three Hypostasis ♦the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit - are all sharing in the salvation process. The number five signifies the five sacrifices of the Old Testament :
1. The Burnt offering
  2. The Sin offering
  3. The Inequity Offering
  4. The Peace offering
  5. The bread offering

These sacrifices were performed using one of five pure living creatures; sheep, cows, goats, pigeons or turtledoves (Lev.10:14). The number seven represents the

five types of sacrifice, as stated above, plus the two birds that were sacrificed to purify the leper (Lev.14:4). All of these sacrifices were archetypes of the sacrifice of the cross and therefore also of the sacrifice of the Holy Liturgy.

**Congregation:**

The Congregation finishes singing Lord have mercy after the 41<sup>st</sup>. time.

**Baptizing the Lamb**

The Priest enters the sanctuary. The deacon carrying the bottle of water pours some into the Priest's right hand. With his wet right finger index, he makes the sign of the cross on the bread from the top of the bread to the bottom, then around the bread from the left side to the right. This action symbolizes the baptism of Christ by St. John in the River Jordan. While doing this, the priest prays "Let our sacrifice be accepted before You Lord for the forgiveness of my sins, and the ignorance of Your people. The priest pours himself and kneels over the selected Lamb.", asking the Lord to accept this sacrifice as a sacrifice for his own sins in particular, and also for the ignorance of the congregation. He places all the burdens of his congregation, the Church and the whole world on this Lamb which carries the sins of the whole world. Then he prays silently a deep prayer:

He places upon the Lamb that is about to be slain for us, all the hardships, tribulations and diseases of His people. He pleads for forgiveness for the sinners, the raising of the fallen, steadiness for the righteous, healing for the sick, relief for the troubled, a safe return for the travelers and reposal for those who have slept. With these remembrances he mentions people by name, which have often been written on a piece of paper and placed on the Altar in front of him. He then prays for all Christians in general and for his relatives in particular, saying, "Remember O Lord, Your servants, the Orthodox Christians, everyone in his name, remember, O Lord, my father, my mother, my brothers and my relatives in the flesh. My spiritual fathers, guard the living with Your angel of Safety, and repose those who have slept." After giving priority to everyone else by praying for them first, he then mentions himself last, saying, "Remember, O Lord, my weakness, I, the poor, and forgive my many sins."

**The Procession of the Lamb**

The Priest holds the chosen bread; the Lamb which is wrapped in a linen napkin together with a cross and lifts it over his head as Simon the elder, who carried the Child Jesus, did.

The deacon holds the bottle of wine with a napkin in his right hand, a lighted candle in his left hand and his arms over each other in the shape of the cross. He lifts both over his head and proceeds behind the Priest. This shows that through the Blood of Jesus Christ light came into this world.

The procession takes place around the altar.

**Priest:**

The Priest faces the Congregation, and raises the lamb over his head, bending a bit (as Christ bent while carrying the cross on His way to Golgotha), and says:

**Glory and honor, honor and glory, (Rev. 4:9-11;1 Tim. 1:17) to the All-Holy Trinity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. (Matt. 28:19) Peace and edification be unto the One Only, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of God. Amen. Remember, O Lord, those who have brought unto You these gifts, those on whose behalf they have been brought, and those by whom they have been offered. Give them all the heavenly reward.**

**Deacon:**

Pray for these holy and honored gifts, our sacrifices and those who have offered them. Lord have mercy.

The procession of the Lamb goes around the Altar only once, to symbolize the Savior being taken to the temple by his parents to fulfill the requirements of the law. It also represents that Christ would offer Himself only once as a sacrifice for the whole world.

**Congregation:**

+ On Sundays, Feasts and The Pentecostal period:

Alleluia! This is the day the Lord which has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it. O Lord save us, O Lord straighten our ways. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Alleluia!

+ During fasting days and week days:

Alleluia! The thought of man shall confess to You, O Lord, and the rest of thought shall keep a feast to You. The sacrifices and the offerings receive them unto You. Alleluia!

+ During the Great Lent:

Alleluia. I shall go in, unto the alter of God, before the face of God Who gives gladness to my youth. I will confess to You, O my God with a harp. Remember O Lord, David and his meekness. Alleluia!

The Lamb's Blessings

**Priest:**

After the procession around the altar, the Priest stands west of the altar holding the Lamb (the chosen bread) in his left hand and the cross in his right hand.

**In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God.**

**Priest:**

The Priest makes the sign of the cross first time over the Lamb and the wine:

**Blessed be God the Father, Almighty. Amen.**

**Deacon:**

Amen.

**Priest:**

The Priest makes the sign of the cross second time over the Lamb and the wine:

Blessed be His Only-Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

**Deacon:**

Amen.

**Priest:**

The Priest makes the sign of the cross third time over the Bread and the Cup:

Blessed be the Holy Spirit the Comforter.

Amen.

**Deacon:**

**Amen. One is the Holy Father, One is the Holy Son, One is the Holy Spirit. Amen. Blessed be the Lord God forever. Amen. Praise the Lord, all you nations; Praise Him, all you peoples for His mercy is confirmed upon us and the truth of the Lord endures forever.**

**Alleluia.**

**Priest:**

While the deacon is singing the above-mentioned hymn, the Priest puts the Lamb on the paten. The Priest prays inaudibly:

Glory and honor, honor and glory, unto the Holy Trinity; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The Priest pours the wine into the chalice (the cup) and mixes it with water (from 1/3 to 1/10 its volume).

Mixing the wine with water reminds the believers of the blood and water that gushed out when Christ our Redeemer was pierced in His side. As they offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving the believers should remember that their Christ is alive in His Divinity although He died in the flesh and gave up His humanly Spirit to the hands of His Father. The proof that He is alive in His Divinity, even after He bowed His Head, came when they pierced His side with a spear and blood and water ran out of His side (John 19:34). It is medically impossible for a dead person to bleed liquid blood. It is a known fact that when someone dies his blood clots. To ascertain the death of a person a physician sticks a pin in his body. If there is no flow of blood then the person is dead. Even if they stab the heart of a dead man with a dagger only few drops of yellowish fluid (known as plasma) come out of the wound. When they pierced Christ in the side after His death, blood and water, still distinguishable from each other, gushed out of His side. This is a proof that although Jesus died in His Humanity, His Divinity never departed His Body, protecting it from decay or corruption. This is to say that Christ died with His Humanity but was alive through His divinity.

**Congregation:**

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and forever, and to the ages of all ages, Amen. Alleluia.

### **3. The Thanksgiving**

Thanksgiving is a spirit which governs the whole rite of the Eucharist. The sacrifice of the Eucharist is also called the sacrifice of the thanksgiving.

#### **The Opening Greeting**

The priest begins the prayer saying; "Eshlil", which means; "Pray". The deacon responds; "Stand up for Prayer" . This is an announcement for the Congregation to get ready for prayer. Every body ought to stand in reverence worshipping God without slothfulness. St. Paul said; "I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing". (1 Tim 2:8)-

Before blessing the Congregation, the priest asks the other Priest(s) to bless and the other (s) respond (s) asking him to bless. This reflects the mutual respect and honor preferring one another, as St. Paul said;" Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves". (Rom 12:10) -

The priest blesses the Congregation, making the sign of the cross saying to them; "Peace be with all" and they respond saying; "And with your spirit". The priest, here is asking and preaching the peace of Christ to his Congregation.

Peace is the gift of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who reconciled the Jews and the Gentiles with God through His body on the Cross. St. Paul said; "For He Himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in His flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in Himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which He put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near". (Eph 2:14-17)-Thus, this opening greeting emphasizes the blessings we receive through partaking the holy Eucharist. Eucharist is the Body and the Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we find peace with God and our brothers.

**Priest:**

+ In case of no other Priest is present:

**Pray.**

+ In the presence of other Priest(s):

**Pray. Bless**

THE OTHER PRIEST(S) (if any):

**You Bless**

**Deacon:**

**Stand up to pray**

**Priest:**

The Priest turns westward towards the Congregation and blesses them making the sign of the cross, saying;

**Peace be with all.**

**Congregation:**

**And with your spirit.**

### **The prayer of Thanksgiving**

This prayer is a thankful remembrance for God's dealing with His people. It is the opening prayer of all the liturgies in all occasions in the Coptic Church.

## **4. The Prayer of the Offertory**

This prayer is called the "Prayer of Covering" because after this prayer, the priest covers the offerings by the big napkin called "Prospherine". This recalls to our minds the burial of our Lord Jesus Christ, covering the tomb with a stone and sealing it. The hiding of the oblations, under the Prospherine, is like the hiding of Christ's reality and His mystery of His redeeming work until the time of His resurrection. After His resurrection He opened the eyes of the two disciples near Emmaus to understand the scriptures and breathed unto His disciples' faces to accept the Holy Spirit; the spirit of understanding and wisdom. This prayer declares also that partaking the Holy Communion is for healing and salvation of our souls, our bodies and our spirits.

**Priest:**

The Priest prays inaudibly:

**Master Lord Jesus Christ, the Co-eternal, the Word of the unblemished Father, Who is of one essence with Him and the Holy Spirit; For You are the Living Bread which came down from heaven, and did aforetime make Yourself a Lamb without spot, for the life of the world; We ask and entreat Your goodness, O Lover of mankind;**

The Priest points with his hand to the Bread, saying:

**Show Your face upon this bread,**

The Priest points with his hand to the Cup, saying:

**And upon this cup;**

The Priest points to the altar, saying:

**Which we have set upon this; Your Priestly table.**

The Priest makes the sign of the cross over the Bread and Cup together, first time, saying:

**Bless them,**

The Priest makes the sign of the cross over the Bread and Cup together, second time, saying:

### **Sanctify them,**

The Priest makes the sign of the cross over the Bread and Cup together, third time, saying:

### **Purify them and change them;**

The Priest points to the Bread on the paten, saying: In order that this Bread, on the one hand, may become indeed Your holy Body; The Priest points to the wine in the Cup, saying: and the mixture, on the other hand, which is in this cup, indeed Your precious Blood;

**And may they become for all of us a partaking, healing, and salvation of our souls, our bodies, and our spirits. For You are our God; and glory is due unto You with Your Good Father and the Holy Spirit, the Life-Giver; Who is of one essence with You; Now and at all times and unto the ages of all ages. Amen.**

### **Remarks on the Greatness of the Holy Sacrament**

- How great is the Holy Communion! It is not only given for the forgiveness of sins, but also for the healing of our bodily and psychological diseases when received with a repentant and contrite heart. The opposite will result, however if the Holy Communion is taken in an unworthy manner, for St. Paul the Apostle says, "For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are sick and weak among you and many sleep" (1Cor.11:29-30).
- The priest then covers the paten and the chalice. Covering the paten and the chalice symbolizes the shrouding of our Lord Jesus Christ after His death on the cross. The priest takes hold of the top two corners of the 'Prospherine' (large altar veil) and the deacon on the opposite side of the altar takes hold of the bottom two corners of the veil and together they cover the Holy Mysteries. The 'Prospherine' represents the stone which was rolled against the entrance of the tomb. Having covered the Holy Mysteries the priest places a small triangular shaped veil on the top of the 'Prospherine'. This small veil represents the seal on the tomb's door. The priest and the deacon who faces him, both in their white clothes, symbolize the two angels that Mary Magdalene saw in the tomb where the body of Jesus was laid, one standing at His head and one at His foot (John 20:11).
- This liturgy is also called the "Liturgy of the Word" because it focuses on the word of God. Every Sunday, weekday and feast has its own readings. These readings have been selected in a way to for a spiritual curriculum and are found in special books called "Katameros".

As the Bible is the greatest source of Christian teaching, the Coptic Orthodox Church reads many chapters from it in each Devin liturgy: The Pauline Epistle (quoted from the Epistles of St. Paul), The Catholic Epistle (quoted from St. Peter, St. James, St. John or St. Jude epistles), The Praxis (quoted from the Book of Acts), The Psalm (quoted from the book of Psalms) and The Gospel (quoted from one of the Gospels; Mathew, Mark, Luke or John). These readings are in

### **1. The Absolutions**

The Absolution means the forgiveness of sins. The Priest gives the absolution to addition to the readings of Raising incense services. the other Priest(s), the deacons, Congregation and himself by the authority, he has been granted by the Lord Jesus Christ. After His resurrection, Jesus

breathed unto the faces of His disciples giving them the Holy Spirit to forgive the sins of the people. St. John said ; "Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." (John 20:21-23)

No one can serve God, whatever his rank is, without being absolved from his sins. This absolution acts as an anointing necessary for the service as God told Moses; "Anoint Aaron and his sons and consecrate them so they may serve Me as Priests ". (Exod 30:30)

### **The Absolution to the Son**

The Priest kneels, kisses the altar, and then goes around the altar while saying inaudibly the "Absolution of the Son" praying for the remission of sins. All leave the Sanctuary and kneel before it.

#### **Priest:**

The Priest prays inaudibly, saying:

Master, Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son and Word of God the Father, Who has broken every bond of our sins through His saving, life giving sufferings; Who breathed into the face of His holy disciples and saintly apostles, and said to them; "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you will remit, they are remitted to them, and those which you will retain, they shall be retained." You also now, our Master, through Your holy apostles, have given grace to those who for a time labored in the Priesthood in Your holy church, to forgive sin upon the earth, and to bind and to loose every bond of iniquity.

Now, also, we ask and entreat Your goodness, O Lover of mankind One, for Your servants, my fathers, and my brethren, and my weakness; those who bow their heads before Your holy glory. Dispense unto us Your mercy, and loose every bond of our sins, and, if we have committed any sin against You, knowingly or unknowingly, or through anguish of heart, or in deed, or in word, or from faintheartedness;

Do, O Master, Who knows the weakness of men, as a good and Lover of mankind ,One God, grant us the forgiveness of our sins; bless us, purify us; make us absolved, and all Your people absolved. Fill us with Your fear, and straighten us unto Your holy, good will; For You are our God, and the glory, honor, the dominion, and the adoration are due to You, together with Your good Father and the Holy Spirit, the Life-Giver, Who is of one essence with You; Now, and at all times, and unto the age of all ages. Amen

Congregation:

Saved; Amen. And with your spirit.

### **The Absolution of the Ministers**

As the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the concept of the one body of Christ is realized. For this reason the church considers the attendance of the service together with the saints who departed are one in Jesus Christ as St Paul said; "in Him all things hold together." (Col 1:17)-. From the mouth of these saints we ask the absolution as we ask it from the mouth of the current Patriarch and Priests.

In this absolution, "all the people" are described as ministers. The Coptic Orthodox Church considers the people, present at the service, participants in the ministry of the Eucharist and not mere listeners.

The highest ranking Priest will pray the following absolution while the deacons and the people are bowing down in the position of repentance (being sorry for your sins)

#### **Priest:**



**May Your servants, ministers of this day, the arch-Priest (s), the Priest (s), the deacons, the clergy, all the people and my weak self, be absolved from the mouth of the all-Holy Trinity, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; And from the mouth of the one only holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, and from the mouths of the twelve apostles, and from the mouth of the beholder-of-God, the evangelist Saint Mark the apostle and martyr; The patriarch Saint Severus, our teacher Dioscorus, Saint Athanasius the Apostolic, Saint Peter the end of the martyrs and the high Priest, Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Cyril, Saint Basil, and Saint Gregory;**

And from the mouths of the three hundred and eighteen assembled at Nicea, the one hundred fifty at Constantinople, and the two hundred at Ephesus; And from the mouth of our honored father, the high Priest (Abba Shenouda, the third) and his brother in the Apostolic ministry, (Abba Ignatius Zaka Iwas), Patriarch of Antioch, and from the mouth of my abject self. For blessed and full of glory is Your Holy Name, O Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit; Now and at all times and unto the age of all ages. Amen.

All rise. The Priest goes up into the Sanctuary and kisses the altar. Now the "Liturgy of the Catechumens" begins. The catechumens can participate in The Liturgy of the Catechumens together with the faithful.

## **2. The Readings**

The readings are always mixed with prayers and raisings of incense. These prayers and incense are kind of worshipping and supplications to our Lord Jesus Christ that He reveals Himself through the holy scriptures and gives the listeners the wisdom and understanding by His Holy Spirit.

Most of the introductions and conclusions of these readings are chanted. This is to secure hearing them and honoring the scriptures.

The readings have been prepared in an order before the council of Nicea. Every Sunday, feast and day around the year has its own readings. The center of all these readings is the life of our Lord Jesus Christ and His salvation. The martyrs and saints of the church are considered as living gospel and have their place in the readings as members in the body of Christ.

### **The Pauline Epistle**

The Pauline Epistle is a quotation from St. Paul's Epistles. During reading the Pauline, the priest offers prayers and incense inside the altar and among the Congregation. The Congregation chant many hymns praising St. Mary and asking her intercession together with the prayers of the saints.

### **The Pauline Epistle Prayer**

The deacon presents the censer to The Priest and The Priest puts five Spoonfuls of incense into the censer. The Priest prays inaudibly:

**Priest:**

God the Great and the Eternal; without beginning and without end; great in His counsel and mighty in His works; Who is in all places, dwells with every one;

**Be with us also, our Master, in this hour and stand in the midst of us all. Purify our hearts and sanctify our souls.**

**Cleanse us from all sins which we have done, willingly and unwillingly, and grant to us to offer before You rational sacrifices and sacrifices of blessing.**

**Deacon:**

The deacon responds inaudibly:  
Pray for our sacrifice and for those who offered it.

**Priest:**

The Priest prays inaudibly. Saying:  
And a spiritual incense entering within the veil in the holy place of Your holies.

**The Procession of the Pauline Incense****The Rite of the Incense Procession:**

This rite declares our wrestle and struggle to enter to the heaven. The priest processes around the altar seven times,

during the readings, and the deacon goes to the opposite side of the altar. They pray the litanies of the peace, the Fathers and the Congregation.

Doing this is a petition to God to let us enter to the heavenly holies and inherit the kingdom of God as the priest and the people did in the old testament, when they processed around Jericho seven times to enter it as the Lord ordered Joshua; "Have seven Priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets". (Josh 6:4)

This rite declares the unity of the church, on heaven and earth, through Jesus Christ. The priest offers the incense to The Lord Jesus Christ, St. Mary, and The Choir of the heavenly hosts, John the Baptist, the gospel, the other Priests, the icons of the saints and to the Congregation. At the end, he comes back and offers the incense in front of the altar to the Lord. He gathers the prayers of all and offers them in front of the altar.

This is a portrait to what has been mentioned in the Book of Revelation. St. John said; "Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" (Rev 5:13)

The people convey any urgent confessions of their sins during offering the incense among them. The incense brings into our memory the redemptive act of the Lord's Atonement on the cross. Every one confesses his sins to be redeemed by the Blood of Jesus and to be saved from the plagues resulting from his sins.

"So Aaron did as Moses said, and ran into the midst of the assembly. The plague had already started among the people, but Aaron offered the incense and made atonement for them. He stood between the living and the dead, and the plague stopped." (Num 16:47-48)

**Priest:**

The Priest offers the incense in front of the Altar, while his face is toward the east. The deacon stands on the opposite side of the altar raising the cross in his hand. The Priest prays inaudibly, saying:

We ask You, O our Lord; Remember, O Lord, the peace of Your one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.

**Deacon:**

The deacon responds inaudibly, saying:

**Pray for the peace of the One, Holy, Catholic, and apostolic Orthodox Church.**

**Priest:**

The Priest turns around the altar, toward the southern side of it. The Priest prays inaudibly, Saying:

**That which exists from one end of the world to the other.**

The Priest turns to the eastern side of the Altar, facing the west and offering the incense, saying: Remember, O Lord, our patriarch, the honored father (Abba Shenouda, the third).

**Deacon:**

The deacon responds inaudibly, saying:

Pray for our high Priest Pope (Abba Shenouda, the third), patriarch and archbishop of the great city of Alexandria, and for our Orthodox bishops.

**Priest:**

The Priest turns around the altar, toward the northern side. The Priest prays inaudibly, saying:

In keeping, keep him unto us for many years and peaceful times.

The Priest turns to the western side of the Alter, facing the east and offering the incense:

Remember, O Lord, our Congregations; Bless them.

**Deacon:**

The deacon responds inaudibly:

Pray for this holy church (monastery) and for our gatherings.

**Priest:**

The Priest turns around the altar, toward the southern side.

The Priest prays inaudibly:

Grant that they may be unto us without obstacle nor hindrance, that we may hold them according to Your blessed will.

The Priest turns to the eastern side of the Altar, facing the west and offering the incense: Houses of prayer, houses of purity, Houses of blessing, grant them unto us, O Lord, and Your servants who shall come after us forever.

The Priest turns to the western side of the Altar, facing the east and offering the incense:

Arise, O Lord, let Your enemies be scattered, and let all that hate Your holy name flee before Your face.

The Priest turns to the eastern side of the Altar, facing the west and offering the incense:

But let Your people be in blessing thousands of thousand and ten thousand times ten thousands doing Your will.

The Priest goes out of the sanctuary, holding the censer. He offers the incense, toward the east, three times, to The Lord Jesus Christ. He offers the incense first time to the Lord Jesus Christ, saying inaudibly:

We Worship You, O Christ, together with Your Holy Father and the Holy Spirit; For You have come and saved us.

The Priest offers the incense second time to the Lord Jesus Christ, saying inaudibly:

According to Your mercy, I enter to Your house, and bow down before Your Holy Sanctuary.

The Priest offers the incense third time to the Lord Jesus Christ:

Before the angels, I sing to You and bow down before Your Holy Sanctuary.

The Priest offers incense toward north; to the Holy Virgin Mary:

We praise you, with Gabriel the archangel, saying; Hail to you, O full of grace, The Lord is with You.

The Priest offers incense toward west; to the holy angels, the apostles, the martyrs and the saints Hail to the angels' orders, my lords; the fathers; the apostles, the choirs of the martyrs and all the saints.

The Priest offers incense toward south; to John the Baptist, saying:

Hail to John; the son of Zachariah. Hail to the Priest the son of the Priest.

The Priest offers incense toward east to the Lord Jesus Christ, saying:

**Let us worship our Good Savior, the Lover of mankind; for He has come and saved us.**

The Priest goes out of the sanctuary, holding the censer, and offers the incense to the Gospel which is the representative of Christ Himself. Then he offers it to the other clergy men, if any, and towards the icons of the saints.

The Priest goes among the Congregation offering them the incense proceeding from the left side of the church to the right side. He lays his hand on every one saying; "the blessing of our teacher the apostle Paul be with you" , and the person responds inaudibly; "O Lord forgive my sins which I committed willingly and unwillingly".

**The Prayer Of The People's Confession**

**Priest:**

The Priest returns to the sanctuary where he offers incense, on behalf of the Congregation. He prays inaudibly the prayer of the ' Congregation confessions' that God may accept their confessions and forgive their sins. He prays inaudibly the previously mentioned prayers while censuring in front of the icons

The Priest offers the incense to the gospel and to the other Priests. Then he gives the censer to the deacon, who put in its place.

**Some Notes on the First Mystery of the Pauline Incense:**

- It is preferable for the serving priest to do all of the Pauline Round, but if the Pope, a Metropolitan or a Bishop is serving, he performs the round inside the sanctuary then gives the censer to the serving priest to continue around the church. The 'Diskolia', which is the book of Apostolic Teachings, says that, "The Bishop carries the incense around the altar three times, then gives the censer to the priest who proceeds around the church with the incense." In doing this the Bishop inside the Sanctuary symbolizes our beloved Lord Jesus Christ in heaven, and passing the censer to the priest who then proceeds around the church with the incense signifies the Lord commissioning His Angels and His saints to care for and serve mankind; the angels being serving spirits who are sent to serve the believers on earth. It also refers to Moses asking Aaron to incense among the congregation so that God's wrath might be removed from the people.
- In the Pauline Round Of Incense the priest proceeds around the whole church in remembrance of St. Paul who exerted himself exceedingly in his travels to preach the message of the Lord, which he did more than any other Apostle. About this the Apostle says, "But by the Grace of God I am what I am and His grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them" (1Cor.15:10).
- When he had to count his toils to convince the Corinthians of the legitimacy of his Apostleship he said, "Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one. I am talking like a madman with far greater labors far more imprisonments, with countless beatings. I have been adrift at sea on frequent journeys..." (2Cor.11:23-28).
- In his Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul says, "From Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum, I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ" (Romans 15:19). Illyricum is a city West of Greece. St. Paul is famous for his four preaching journeys on both sea and land in which he endured hardship and tribulation.
- In the Pauline Round the priest offers incense from the left side of the church and proceeding to the right indicating that through the faith preached by St. Paul we were taken from darkness to God's great light.

- If the Pope, a Metropolitan or a Bishop is serving and needs to consecrate the church's altar, utensils of the altar such as the censor, paten and chalice, or consecrate the icons of the church, he does so during the readings of the Pauline Epistles.
- If the serving priest wants to give the censor to his fellow priest, they exchange a kiss like the one exchanged during the Incense of Fellowship (but without saying anything) and then the censor is passed. The same procedure is followed when the censor is given back to the serving priest.

### **The Hymn of the Censer**

This Hymn describes St. Mary as a pure golden censer holding sweet aroma, in the hands of Aaron the Priest. The Golden censer is St. Mary and the sweet aroma is our Savior, whom she has born.

#### **Congregation:**

At the time of The Procession of The Pauline's Incense, the Congregation sings a hymn glorifying the holy Virgin Mary;

This censor of pure gold, bearing the aroma, is in the hands of Aaron the Priest, offering up incense on the altar.

During the fasting days of the week and the feasts of the Cross, the following is said instead of the above:

The Golden censer is the Virgin; her aroma is our Savior. She gave birth to Him; He saved us and forgave us our sins.

On the weekdays of the Great Lent, the following is said instead of the above:

You are the censor of pure gold, bearing the blessed amber.

### **The Hymn of the Intercessions**

**(The Hitens in Coptic)**

### **Reading the Pauline Epistle**

A lesson from one of St. Paul's epistles is read while the priest is praying in the Sanctuary, inaudibly, the Mystery of the Pauline Epistle.

#### **Priest:**

During the reading of the Pauline Epistle, the Priest prays the following prayer inaudibly:

**God of knowledge; Giver of wisdom; Who brings to light the hidden things of darkness, and gives the word to them that preach the Gospel with great power; Who of Your goodness has called upon Paul; who was for some time a persecutor, to be a chosen vessel; And was pleased in him that he should become a chosen apostle, and preacher of the Gospel of Your Kingdom, O Christ our God.**

**We ask You also now, O You the good and Lover-of-mankind , graciously grant us and all Your people a mind free from wondering and a clear understanding, that we may learn and understand how profitable are Your holy teachings which are read to us, now, after him..**

**And as he followed Your Example, O Prince of Life; so make us to be like him in deed and in faith, that we may glorify Your Holy Name and ever glory in Your cross. And unto You we send up glory, honor and worship, with Your Good Father, and the Holy Spirit, the Life-Giver, Who is of one essence with You; Now and at all times and unto the age of all ages. Amen.**

## **The Catholic Epistle**

While the deacons reads a lesson from the Catholic Epistles, the priest prays inaudibly the Mystery of the Catholic Epistle.

### **Priest:**

During reading the Catholic Epistle, the Priest prays this prayer, inaudibly.

**Lord God, Who has revealed unto us, through Your holy apostles, the mystery of the gospel of the glory of Your Christ; and has given unto them according to the power of the infinite gift of Your grace, that they should proclaim among all nations the graciousness of Your unsearchable mercy;**

We ask You, O our Lord, make us worthy to have their share and inheritance with them.

Graciously, grant unto us always to walk in their footsteps and to imitate their struggle; And to have communion with them in the sweat which they had accepted for godliness' sake.

**Keep Your holy church, which You founded through them; And bless the lambs of Your flock and make to increase this vine, which your right hand has planted; In Christ Jesus our Lord; Through Whom are due unto You glory, honor, dominion and worship with Him and the Holy Spirit the Life-Giver; Who is of one essence with You; Now and at all times and unto the age of all ages. Amen.**

## **The Acts of the Apostles**

### **Congregation:**

The Congregation sings the appropriate response to the season, or the following annual response; Hail to you, o Mary, the Fair Dove, who has born unto us God the Word.

At the conclusion of the response, the Congregation sings;

Blessed are You in truth, with Your good Father and the Holy Spirit, for You have (come) and saved us. On Sundays they say 'for You have risen' which is 'ak Tonk ak' in Coptic.

The Priest descends and offers incense to the Gospel, clergymen, Saints and only to the first choir (division) in the nave of the church, saying :” **May the blessings of our holy fathers; the Apostles be upon us. Amen**”. A deacon recites the proper lesson from the Acts of the Apostles.

The Priest returns to the Sanctuary, where he offers incense on behalf of the people.

### **The Mystery of the Acts:**

#### **Priest:He prays inaudibly:**

O God, Who accepted the sacrifice of Abraham, and prepared for him a lamb in place of Isaac; Even so accept now at our hand, O our Lord, this sacrifice of incense; and send down upon us in return Your abundant mercy.

**Make us pure from all pollution of sin; And make us worthy to serve in holiness and righteousness before Your goodness all the days of our life.**

The Priest gives the censer to the deacon, who put it in its place.

### **Some Remarks Concerning The Round Of The Praxis:**



In coming out of the sanctuary to offer incense in the whole church the priest symbolizes the Apostles when they left Jerusalem to preach Christianity throughout the whole world. The priest does not go around the whole church as in the round of the Pauline, which signifies the fact that the Apostles limited their preaching to Judea and the cities of Judah, whereas St. Paul preached Christianity to the whole world, and therefore encountered more tribulations during his travels than his fellow apostles did.

- The priest offers the incense from right to left to indicate that the Apostles returned from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem after the Ascension of the Lord. Another reason being that, as the priest started the Round of the Pauline from left to right, he starts the Round of the Praxis from right to left, indicating that both are equal.
- After finishing the Round of the Praxis the priest does not enter the sanctuary. This is for two reasons. One is due to the fact that the Apostles did not return to Jerusalem but were martyred in the country where they last preached; and the other is that by the end of the three rounds after reading the Praxis the priest has completed seven rounds, these being the three rounds after the First Mystery of the Pauline, one round after the Mystery of the Congregation's Confession and the three rounds after the Praxis. These rounds are a representation of the children of Israel and the Ark of Covenant who circled Jericho seven times before the walls tumbled down. As the priest proceeds around the altar offering incense and raising prayers and pleadings to the Lord the walls of evil and sin tumble down.

### **The Sinaxarium (The Chronicle of the Saints)**

The Sinaxarium is a book that has biographies of the saints, and explanations of the feasts and fasting arranged according to the Coptic Calendar.

The biographies of the saints are living bible. They declare to us the aroma of Christ as St. Paul said; "For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task? Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God". (2 Cor 2:15-17) As the church preaches the Gospel of Christ, we remember what the martyrs and saints did for their honest and love of this gospel. The Lord Jesus commands to remember such deeds as He said; "I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her." (Matt 26:13)

The appropriate reading of the day or occasion is usually read after the Acts of the Apostles by the highest ranking Priest present.

The Sinaxarium is not read during the fifty days following the Lord's resurrection because during this period we should only be concerned with the miracle of the resurrection.

### **The Psalm and the Gospel**

The Church highly honors and respects the Gospel as it is the sayings and deeds of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Incarnated God. This is why there are many prefaces and notices before reading the Gospel

Before reading the gospel, the priest prays the litany of the gospel, declaring the blessings which we have through the incarnation of our lord Jesus Christ, the true Word of God. Through Him we have seen the things which the prophets and the righteous desired to see. In this prayer, the priest asks God to make us worthy hearing and acting according to the gospel and the church prays for spreading the word of God.

After the Litany of the Gospel, the priest and the deacon march around the altar carrying the Holy Gospel and saying the praise of Simon the Elder. Seeing the salvation of God through His Word, the priest declares his longing to be freed from this world to the paradise of God.

During reading the gospel, the priest prays the inaudible prayer of the Gospel. Different categories of people are mentioned in this prayer together with our daily demands. This prayer

expresses the broad heart of the church who bears the needs and the afflictions of the mankind and presents them in front of the Lord.

The Congregation hears the Gospel while standing in reverence, honoring God who speaks to us through His Words. Moses said to the people of Israel; "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today." (Exod 14:13)

Chanting the Psalm and the Gospel expresses our joy for the salvation, declared in the Gospel. David together with the prophes of the whole generation share the church in the joy of the salvation as Jesus said about Abraham; "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing My day; he saw it and was glad." ( John 8:56)

### **The Hymn of the Trisagion**

The Trisagion refers to the 3 titles or names: Holy God, Holy Almighty, Holy Immortal. The three Sanctus are the hymn of the Seraphim. However, the Oriental churches believe that the pattern of this hymn has been said by Joseph and Nicodemus during the burial of the Lord Jesus Christ in the tomb. While they were amazed of His death, they praised Him saying this hymn. Others believe that they heard the angels of God praising Him saying this hymn and this was a response of their amazement.

### **Congregation:**

The Congregation sings the 'Trisagion' hymn. This is usually sung in Coptic Every time that "Holy" or 'Agios' is said, the people should make the sign of the cross.

**Holy God, Holy Almighty, Holy Immortal, Who was born of the Virgin, have mercy upon us. Holy God, Holy Almighty, Holy Immortal, Who was crucified for us, have mercy upon us. Holy God, Holy Almighty , Holy Immortal, Who rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, have mercy upon us.**

**Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, both now and always, and unto the ages of ages. Amen. O Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us.**

### **The Litany of the Gospel**

Standing before the door of the Sanctuary and facing east, The Priest offers incense.

The deacon stands directly behind him holding up the gospel and a cross together.

### **Priest:**

+ In case of no other Priest is present:

### **Pray.**

+ In the presence of other Priest(s):

### **Pray. Bless I**

THE OTHER PRIEST (S) : (if any)

### **You Bless**

### **Deacon:**

### **Stand up to pray**

### **Priest:**

The Priest turns westward towards the Congregation and blesses them making the sign of the cross, saying;

**Peace be with all..**

### **Congregation:**

**And with your spirit..**

### **Priest:**

Master, Lord Jesus Christ our God, Who said to His saintly, honored disciples and pure apostles; many prophets and righteous men have desired to see the things which you see, and have not



seen them and to hear the things which you hear, and have not heard them. But blessed are your eyes for they see and your ears for they hear.

**May we be worthy to hear and to act according to Your holy Gospels through the prayers of Your saints.**

**Deacon:**

Pray for the holy Gospel.

**Congregation:**

Lord have mercy.

**Priest:**

Remember also, O our Master, all those who have bidden us to remember them in our supplications and prayers which we offer up to You, O Lord our God. Those who have already fallen asleep, repose them. Those who are sick, heal them. **For You are the life of us all, the salvation of us all, the hope of us all, the healing of us all and the resurrection of us all. And to You we send up the glory, and the honor and the adoration, together with Your good Father and the Holy Spirit, the Life Giver; Who is of one essence with You. Now and at all times and unto the age of all ages. Amen.**

**Reciting the Psalm**

A Psalm of David is now usually chanted in Coptic. It may be repeated later in English.

**Congregation:**

At the end, the Congregation sings:

**Alleluja**

**Reciting the Gospel**

Holding the cross and the gospel, the deacon goes up to the Sanctuary. The Priest also goes up into the Sanctuary and puts a spoonful of incense into the censer. The deacon goes around the altar backwards carrying the cross and the Gospel and facing the Priest who is holding the censer.

The Priest offers incense to the gospel and recite inaudibly the "Prayer of Simon the Elder". They both come to the door of the Sanctuary.

**Deacon:**

With the cross raised up, the deacon announces:  
Stand in the fear of God. Let us hear the holy Gospel.

**Priest:**

The Priest then offers incense to the gospel and says inaudibly;  
'Bow down in awe for the Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God to whom glory is due forever and ever Amen.'

The Priest says ;

Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Bless O Lord the reading of the holy Gospel, according to Saint ..., may his blessing be with us all.

**Congregation:**

The Congregation responds;

**Glory to You, O Lord**

**READER:**

Stand in the fear of God. Let us hear the holy Gospel. A chapter according to Saint(...) may his blessings...

**Congregation:**

**Be with us all. Amen.**

**Priest:**

Our Lord, God, Savior, and the King of us all, Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, to Whom is due all glory forever.

**READER:**

From the Psalms of our father David, the prophet and king, may his blessings be with us all. Amen. A psalm (song or poem) of David may be read.

**Congregation:**

At the end, the Congregation responds:

Alleluia.

**READER:**

Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Our Lord, God, Savior, and the King of us all, Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, to Whom is due all glory forever.

**Congregation:**

**Forever. Amen .**

The Gospel is read. The Gospel may be read in Coptic first and then repeated in Arabic and English.

**Congregation:**

At the end of reading the Gospel, the Congregation sings; Glory be to God forever.

**The Inaudible Prayer Of the Gospel**

**Priest:**

The Priest prays inaudibly:

You, who are long-suffering, abundant in mercy and true, receive our prayers and supplications, receive our petitions, repentance and confession upon Your holy undefiled altar in heaven; may we be made worthy to hear Your holy gospels and may we keep your precepts and commandments and bring forth fruit therein a hundred fold, sixty fold and thirty fold, in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Remember, O Lord the sick of Your people that you have visited them with mercies and compassion, heal them.. Remember, O Lord, our fathers and brethren who are traveling, bring them back to their own in peace and safety.

Remember, O Lord, the air of heaven and the fruits of the earth, bless them. Remember, O Lord, the waters of the rivers, bless them. Raise them to their measure according to Your grace.

Remember, O Lord, the seeds, the herbs and the plants of the field, bless them. Remember, O Lord, the safety of the people and the beasts.

Remember, O Lord the safety of this holy place, which is Yours, and every place and every monastery of our Orthodox fathers.

Remember, O Lord, the king (president) of our land, Your servant, keep him in peace, justice and might.

Remember, O Lord those who are in captivity, save them all Remember, O Lord, our fathers and brethren who have fallen asleep and reposed in the Orthodox faith, repose all their souls.

Remember, O Lord, those who have been brought unto You these gifts, those on whose behalf they have brought, and those by whom they have been brought, give them all the heavenly reward.

Remember, O Lord, those who are distressed in hardships and oppressions, save them from all their hardships.

Remember, O Lord, the catechumens of Your people, have mercy upon them. Confirm their faith in You, uproot all traces of idolatry from their hearts. Your law, Your fear, Your

commandments, Your truths, and Your holy precepts, establish in their hearts. Grant that they know the steadfastness of the preaching they have received. And in the set time, may they be worthy of the washing of the new birth for the remission of their sins; as You prepare them to be a temple of Your Holy Spirit;

By the grace, compassion, and Loving of Mankind of Your Only Begotten Son, our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ. Through whom the glory, the honor, the dominion, and the adoration are due unto You, with Him and the Holy Spirit, the Life-Giver who is of one essence with You; Now and at all times and unto the age of all ages. Amen.

### **The Sermon**

#### **Congregation:**

After the reading the Gospel and the sermon, the people sing the gospel response. This song is changed depending on the season and for certain feasts:

**Blessed are they, in truth, the saints of this day, each one, each one by his name, the beloved of Christ.**

Intercede on our behalf; O lady of us all the Mother of God; Saint Mary the Mother of our Savior; that He may forgive us our sins.

At the conclusion of the response, the Congregation sings;

Blessed is the Father and the Son; and the Holy Spirit; the perfect Trinity; we worship Him and glorify Him.

### **3. The Prayer of the Veil (The Mystery of the Iconostasis)**

When Moses read the law to the people of Israel, they bowed their heads in order to avoid seeing the light that shone from his face, as he used to unveil his face when he read the law. After the sermon, while chanting the Gospel's response, the serving priest stands in front of the Sanctuary before the veil (iconostasis). He bows his head towards the East and, in submission and humility, prays the Mystery of the Veil (Iconostasis). This prayer deep, strong and important prayer is outlined below followed by comments and some Biblical references:

#### **Priest:**

The Priest prays inaudibly:

**God, Who in Your unspeakable love toward mankind sent Your Only-Begotten Son into the world, that He might bring the lost sheep home unto You;**

**We ask You, O our Lord, thrust us not behind You when we offer this awesome and bloodless sacrifice. For we put no trust in our righteousness but in Your mercy, whereby You have given life to our race.**

**We pray and entreat Your goodness, O Lover of mankind, that this mystery which You have appointed unto us for salvation may not be unto condemnation unto us or unto any of Your people, but unto the washing away of our sins and the forgiveness of our negligence and unto the glory and honor of Your holy name, O Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now, and at all times and unto the age of all ages. Amen.**

The priest asks the Lord to make him worthy of touching the Holy Sacraments without falling in condemnation and without committing the sin of daring to approach the Holies with no merit; a sin which subjects the person to the Divine wrath, and hence, retribution where man can be cast

out and thrown into darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing the teeth. Because man is never sinless, no matter how hard he may try to purify himself, the Apostle says, "For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this" (1Cor.4:4)... "Even if one was righteous, his righteousness would not save him" (Ezk.33:12)." But we are all like an unclean thing and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags" (Is.64:6).

The Lord commands us not to depend on our piety saying, "When you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do'." (Luke 17:10). Hence, the priest relies on the great mercies of God and approaches the sacraments in fear and awe, saying with the Prophet Daniel, "O my God, incline Your ear and hear. O Lord, hear, O Lord, forgive, O Lord, listen and act" (Dan.9:18-19).

Our beloved Lord Jesus has given us His Holy Body and Honored Blood in the Eucharist, so that we may be cleansed of our sins, if we partake of them in repentance and readiness. In the Confession part of the Liturgy, the priest says, "...Given for the salvation, remission of sins, and for an eternal life to those who partake of them". In order to be prepared to partake of the Holy Sacraments, we must continually live a life of repentance and confession.

As the Apostle Paul teaches us, those same sacraments which are given for the salvation, remission of sins and for eternal life, can become condemnation, weakness, illness and even death to those who risk approaching them without repentance. He says, "Therefore whoever eats this Bread or drinks of this Cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that Bread and drink of that Cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner, eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's Body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord" (1Cor.11:27-32).

The priest must carefully consider those who approach the Holy Communion, especially those personally unknown to him. He must ask such questions as, "Do you have a confession father?", or, "When was your last confession?", "Are you spiritually prepared for the Holy Communion?" If someone receives the Sacraments without repentance and readiness, he will fall in condemnation and the priest would be responsible as he gave him the Body and Blood of the Lord without considering his spiritual state.

Abba Gregorios (the late Bishop of Higher Education..!) has an interesting view about this matter. He likens the priest to a bank cashier (teller), who becomes fully responsible before the bank if he cashes a cheque without properly identifying the cheque bearer. For this reason, the church admonishes new priests during ordination to be extra careful when giving the Sacraments. The Command which the bishop reads on the ordination day says, "It is your duty, above all other church commands, and before all other Apostolic instructions, to apply the utmost care for the distribution of the Lord's life-giving sacraments. You shall administer this diligently and fervently. Rest assured that the Seraphim and Cherubim are standing around the Altar, with fear and awe. Be always aware of the high esteem of Him, Who is slain in your hands. He is Christ, Emmanuel, Who gave Himself up for you. Be always aware that you fraction His Incarnated organs, and that you carry on your hands Him, Whom Simeon the Elder carried with honor and

majesty. And that this chalice is His Blood, shed for our sins with which He saved all captives from Hades. The Blood which flowed from the true vine, His blessed side, after He had given up His soul on the cross. O what a Mystery! This is the Holy Body and the Honored Blood with which the creation has been saved, this is the Lamb of God Who carries the sins of the world and brought man to the light of the truth. So, be always on the alert, O son, pay the utmost attention and guard these jewels like the Cherubim guarded the Tree of Life. Be always vigilant regarding those sacraments so as to be saved from grave matters. Do not give them except to people who are living rightly, with good fame and pure souls. Beware of negligence to avoid any harm coming to you, for the whole world does not deserve even the smallest molecule of them. Let your distribution be in good order, quietness, silence and extreme carefulness. Examine the holy utensils closely, and let those with sharp eyesight check them, twice and three times for any particles sticking to them. If you do all this, your service will be acceptable, your intercession honorable, your prayer beneficial and the Lord's Grace to you will be abundant."

In the ritual procession that is performed for the new priests in the church on the fortieth day of their ordination, they are given the following advice, which states, "Give all the care to distributing the Divine Mysteries. Do not give them unless you assert the merit of those who seek them. For if you take this matter lightly, and in negligence give them to unworthy persons, your judgment will be enormous, as the punishment to negligent priests is so severe." Besides urging priests to give the utmost care when distributing the Holy Sacraments, the church also advises the people about the absolute necessity for preparedness, repentance, confession and internal and external cleanliness before the Communion. It is our view that priests, preachers and ministers should not stop advising, guiding and cautioning the people through their sermons about this vital matter.

The church also performs the 'Washing of Feet' before Maundy Thursday's Mass, emulating the Savior Who washed His disciples' feet before giving them the Mystery of Thanksgiving. The Church's aim here is to teach the people the absolute necessity of washing their souls with repentance, before approaching the Sacred Table. The reason why Jesus washed their feet was to tell them that he who has been cleansed by Baptism, needs only to wash his feet, the only organs that get dirty through contact with the ground. This is a clear indication that after being wholly cleansed through submersion in the baptismal font, one does not need to go into it again before approaching the Holy Communion. All he needs is repentance, as the priest washes him with its rites, and he is cleansed from the sins which he has confessed. But he who receives the Holy Communion without repentance, shall face what Judas Iscariot faced; after he took the bread from the Savior, Satan entered him. By drying the disciples' feet after He washed them, the Lord proclaimed the need to be extremely cautious regarding sin every time we approach and receive His life-giving Mysteries.

In his book 'The Confession Sacrifice', St. Severus, Bishop of Ashmonians and a great saint of the Church, explains the relationship of the mysteries of repentance and confession with the Holy Communion, and the necessity of preparedness before Communion. Under the heading 'Beware not to have Communion without Confession' he writes, "Confession is essential and necessary. Don't you know what the Lord means when He says about the unrepentant sinner, 'From now he shall be condemned'. Also read the Apostle's words, 'For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner, eats and drinks judgment to himself' (1Cor.11:29). Because he has not judged himself

first on the hands of the priest, he shall get the Lord's judgment, which He has brought upon himself, by receiving the Holy Body and the Honored Blood of the Lord unprepared.

Eating the Holy Body without merit is like Adam eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, for the Lord created the tree so that Adam might eat of it when the Lord allowed him to; so that he might live. But when he ate of it without the Lord's permission it brought about his death and destruction. It is the same with the Holy Body which the Lord gave as an eternal life to him who eats of it according to His command; but if anyone eats of it in an unworthy manner, it will result in his death. For the Apostle says, "Whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, will be guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord" (1Cor.11:27). This means he will be guilty of shedding this honorable Blood, exactly like those who shed it on the Cross. This sin of daring to eat the Body of the Lord without confession is greater than adultery, murder and idolatry; it is the greatest of all sins, as the Apostle says, "He will be guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord". No doubt, the offence against the Body and Blood of the Lord is greater than the offence of adultery, murder or idolatry.

We also read the Apostle's words, "Anyone who has rejected Moses' Law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of Grace. For we know Him who said, `Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord'." (Heb.10:28-30).

The Lord gave us these Holy Sacraments to give us the strength to reject sin and hasten to live repentant lives. He who claims that the Lord forgives his sins through the Holy Communion without confession is blaspheming by putting the Lord in the situation of approving of sin and accepting disobedience. For such a person, sin becomes easy because, to them, eternal life is effortlessly achievable. That is why God says that the Holy Sacraments are "forgiveness and eternal life" to those who receive them with merit, and "condemnation and eternal death" if received unworthily. St. Makarios, in one of his sermons, said, "Purify your hearts from every defilement, in order to be worthy to receive the Sacred Body and Blood of Christ, so that He may abide in you and you in Him, and you will be protected from all adversities." Accordingly, he who takes this matter lightly, either receiving the Sacraments without merit or not receiving them at all, will be overcome by the forces of darkness, and thus banish himself by his own will from life. Let us approach Holy Communion in awe and fear, and in true faith, so that the Lord may cast the fear of the enemy away from us, through the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom is the Glory forever, Amen.

If all things related to receiving Holy Communion went according to the rites, and everyone believed that what is in the paten and chalice are the Body broken and Blood shed for the life of the whole world, and if the deacons and congregation were prepared and having confessed their sins, and if the priests were pure on the inside and outside and distributing the Sacraments in awe, fear and caution, and if the people approached the Holy Communion in reverence and devotion, it would indeed be a moment from Heaven. "To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna to eat" (Rev.2:17), and "To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life" (Rev.2:7).

Truly, whoever witnesses those awesome moments will "fall down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you" (1Cor.14:25). He will give glory to the Lord with the twenty four heavenly priests saying, "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive Glory and Honor and Power, for You created all things and by Your will they exist and were created" (Rev.4:11)

#### **4. The Three Major Litanies**

The Litanies are prayers offered to God by the whole church. The priest, the deacons and the Congregation participate in these prayers as one body in the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Priest:**

The priests kiss each other's hands and ask the bishop's absolution. Then the Priest faces the east and holds up his hands covered with the napkins and starts to pray the Litanies.

**The Litany of the Peace**

The Litany of peace is a prayer that God may fill our hearts with the heavenly peace. We pray also for the peace of the president, the armies, the councilors, our neighbors, etc. St. Paul said; "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone; for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." (1 Tim 2:1-4)

As sin is the reason of being without peace, we pray in this litany that sin might not overcome us.

**Priest:**

+ In case of no other Priest is present:

**Pray.**

+ In the presence of other Priest(s):

**Pray. Bless**

THE OTHER PRIEST (S): (if any)

**You Bless**

**Deacon: Stand up to pray**

**Priest:**

The Priest turns westward towards the Congregation and blesses them making the sign of the cross, saying;

**Peace be with all.**

**Congregation:**

**And with your spirit..**

**Priest:**

**Again let us pray to God Almighty, The Father of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ.**

We ask and entreat Your goodness, O Lover of mankind; Remember O Lord, the peace of Your one, holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

**Deacon:**

Pray for the peace of the one, holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Orthodox Church of God.

**Congregation:**

**Lord have mercy.**

**Priest:**

**That which exists from one end of the world to the other; All peoples and all flocks do bless; the heavenly peace send down into our hearts even the peace of this life also, graciously grant unto us.**

**The king, the armies, the chiefs, the counselors, the multitudes, our neighbors, our coming in and our going out, adorn them all with peace. O King of peace, grant us Your peace; for You have given us all things.**

Acquire us unto Yourself, O God our Savior, for we know none other but You, Your Holy Name do we utter. May our souls live by Your Holy Spirit; And let not the death, which is by sins, have dominion over us, we Your servants, nor over all Your people.

**Congregation:**

**Lord have mercy.**

### **The Litany of the Fathers**

We pray for the peace of our honored patriarch, the bishops and the priests; that God may keep them, strengthen them and accept their prayers for us as we pray for them. This prayer reflects the unity of love between the Congregation and the fathers of the church.

**Priest:**

**Again, let us pray to God Almighty, the Father of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ. We ask and entreat Your goodness, o Lover of mankind; Remember, O Lord, our Patriarch, the honored father, the high Priest (Abba Shenouda, the third) and his brother in the Apostolic ministry, (Abba Ignatius Zaka Iwas), Patriarch of Antioch.**

**Deacon:**

Pray for our high Priest Abba Shenouda, the third, Pope, Patriarch and Archbishop of the great city Alexandria, and his brother in the apostolic ministry, Abba Ignatius Zaka Iwas, Patriarch of Antioch, and for all our Orthodox bishops.

**Congregation:**

**Lord have mercy.**

**Priest:**

**In keeping, keep him (them) unto us for many years and peaceful times, Fulfilling that holy high Priesthood with which You have entrusted him, from Yourself, according to Your holy and blessed will; Rightly defining the word of truth; shepherding Your people in purity and righteousness.**

**And all the Orthodox bishops, arch -Priests, Priests and Deacons and all the fullness of Your one, holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. Grant them and us peace and safety in every place.**

**Their prayers which they offer on our behalf, on behalf of all Your people, as well as our prayers on their behalf;**

The Priest turns towards the people and raises incense toward them:

**Do receive upon Your holy, heavenly and rational altar, as a sweet savor of incense.**

All their enemies, seen and unseen, trample and humiliate under their feet speedily. As for them, keep them in peace and righteousness in Your holy Church.

**Congregation:**

**Lord have mercy.**

### **The Litany of the Congregation**

As we long to see every one enjoying the salvation of the Lord, we pray, in this prayer, for the assemblies of the church that God grant us to have them without hindrance

**Priest:**

**Again, let us pray to God Almighty, the Father of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ; We ask and entreat Your goodness, O Lover of mankind; Remember, O Lord, our Congregations,**

The Priest blesses the Congregation, making the sign of the cross:



**Bless them.**

**Deacon:**

**Pray for this holy Church and for our Congregations.**

**Congregation:**

**Lord have mercy.**

**Priest:**

**Grant that they may be unto us without obstacle or hindrance, that we may hold them according to Your holy and blessed will.**

The Priest makes the sign of the cross over the altar with the censer:

**Houses of prayer, houses of purity, houses of blessing, grant them unto us, O Lord, and unto Your servants who shall come after us forever.**

The Priest may continue:

**The worship of idols, utterly uproot from the world. Satan and all his evil powers trample and humiliate under our feet speedily. All offenses and their instigators, abolish. May all dissension of corrupt heresies cease.**

**The enemies of Your holy Church, O Lord, as at all times, now also humiliate. Strip their vanity, show them their weakness speedily.**

**Bring to naught their envy, their intrigues, their madness, their wickedness, and their slander which they commit against us; O Lord, bring them all to no avail, disperse their counsel, O God, Who dispersed the counsel of Ahithophel.**

**Congregation:**

**Lord have mercy.**

**Priest:**

**Arise, O Lord God, let all Your enemies be scattered, and let all that hate Your Holy Name flee before Your face. The Priest turns to the west toward Congregation, offering incense: But let Your people be in blessing thousands of thousands and ten thousands times ten thousands doing Your will.**

The Priest turns to the east and offers the incense three times and continues. Some Priests continue inaudibly:

**By the grace, compassion and love of Your Only-Begotten Son, our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ. Through Whom the glory, the honor, the dominion, and the adoration are due unto You with Him and the Holy Spirit, the Life-giver; Who is of one essence with You; Now and at all times, and unto the age of all ages.**

**Amen.**

## **THE LITURGY OF THE BELIEVERS (THE FAITHFUL)**

### **5. The Orthodox Creed**

In the days of old, the catechumens would attend up until the end of the third litany, and leave the church at the reading of the Creed. This was because their faith was weak and they lacked knowledge of the Christian faith. For this reason the deacon calls out before the Creed, "**Attend to God with wisdom, Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy**". **Truly we believe in one God....** The deacon calls upon the people to maintain reverence while saying the Creed. The Creed must be said audibly and in harmony and unity.

## **A Point on the Creed:**

In the rites of the liturgy reciting the Creed is of great importance as there are two essential conditions that have to be met before offering the bloodless oblations and receiving the Holy Communion; these are:

- **Faith**, without which we cannot please God, for he who comes to God must believe that He is the goal, and will reward those who diligently seek Him (Heb.11:6). "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb.11:1). We declare this strong faith in our Lord by reciting the Christian Creed. We declare it from our hearts so that it may be acceptable and pleasing to the Lord.
- **Love**. We show our love for each other before God when we exchange holy kisses with one another during the Reconciliation Prayer, "**Exchange a holy kiss with one another....**" And so, by reciting the Creed we declare our orthodox faith in the one God with three Hypostases. We announce our hope and anticipation in the Resurrection from the dead when Christ will come again to judge the world. We also hope for the eternal life of the world to come with all the happiness and joy for those who are righteous, and declare misery and sorrow for the unrighteous. By exchanging holy kisses we show love towards each other and subsequently to God, according to the blessed Apostle's words, "If someone says 'I love God' and hates his brother, he is a liar, for he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him that he who loves God must love his brother also" (1John 4:20-21). Hence, by saying the Creed and exchanging holy kisses we have obtained the three great Christian virtues; 'Faith, Hope and Love' (1 Cor. 13:13), and the Lord will accept our prayers and offerings. As we lead a life of repentance we will approach the Holy Sacraments with a pure heart.

## **6. The Pre- Anaphora Washing the Hands**

While the Creed is being read the priest washes his hands three times, as he did before choosing the Lamb. He stands by the Sanctuary's door, facing West, and shakes his hands before the people. This action cautions and warns people to be prepared before receiving the Holy Communion. He repudiates the guilt of him who dares to receive Communion undeservedly, as if he is reminding them of St. Paul's fearful words, "Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup in an unworthy manner, will be guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner, eats and drinks judgment to himself not discerning the Lord's Body" (1Cor.11:27-30). By shaking his hands the priest is signifying, "I am innocent of the blood of whoever undeservedly partakes of the Holy Sacraments, without letting me know", after which he dries them on a white clean towel.

## **A Point on the Washing of the Hands:**

The priest washes his hands before the Prayer of Reconciliation in preparation to touching and fragmenting the Holy Body with his undefiled hands, just as the Savior purified His disciples before the Lord's Supper by washing their feet and drying them.

## **The Prayer of Reconciliation**

**Priest:**

**The Priest sprinkles drops of water in front of the Congregation saying that he has sinned and asking to forgive him. Then, he dries his hands and stands in front of the altar with awe. The following regular Prayer of Reconciliation of the Liturgy of Saint Basil may be said ; other prayers of reconciliation may be substituted.**

**+ In case of no other Priest is present:**

**Pray.**

**+ In the presence of other Priest(s):**

**Pray. Bless**

**THE OTHER PRIEST (S): (if any)**

**You Bless**

**Deacon: Stand up to pray**

**Priest:**

**The Priest turns westward towards the Congregation and blesses them making the sign of the cross, saying;**

**Peace be with all..**

**Congregation:**

**And with your spirit..**

**Priest:**

**God, the Great and the Eternal, Who formed man in incorruption; and death which entered into the world by the envy of the devil; You have destroyed, by the life-giving manifestation of Your Only-Begotten Son, our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ. You have filled the earth with the heavenly peace; by which the hosts of angels glorify You saying; Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, good will toward men.**

**Deacon:**

**Pray for perfect peace, love and the holy Apostolic kisses.**

**Congregation:**

**Lord have mercy.**

**Priest:**

**According to Your good will, O God, fill our hearts with Your peace. Cleanse us from all blemish, all guile, all hypocrisy, all malice and the remembrance of evil entailing death. And make us all worthy, O our Master, to greet one another with a holy kiss; that without falling into condemnation, we may partake of Your Immortal and heavenly gift through Christ Jesus our Lord.**

**The Priest may continue:**

**Through Him the glory, the honor, the dominion, and the adoration are due unto You with Him and the Holy Spirit the Life-giver; Who is in one essence with You; now and at all times, and unto the age of all ages.**

**Amen.**

## **Commentary on the Prayer of Reconciliation**

Reconciliation means to "make peace with". Here it refers to our reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ and our reconciliation with one another before taking communion. In this prayer the church recalls our fall since the Garden of Eden and God's plan for our

salvation. God sent the prophets for us and in the last days He sent His Only Begotten Son ; Who offered Himself a ransom and granted us reconciliation with God; as St. Paul said; "and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross". (Col 1:20) This is a precious time to examine yourself; are you reconciled with God?

The first part of the Reconciliation Prayer is a contemplation on the Lord's creation of the uncorrupted man who then fell into sin through the envy of Satan, resulting in the death of man. God saved us by the life-giving manifestation of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ when He reconciled us with the Father through His shedding of blood on the cross. "God was, in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed us to the word of reconciliation" (2Cor.5:19). This is why the Liturgy for the believers begins with the Prayer of Reconciliation, as it symbolizes the reconciliation between us as sinners and God. This reconciliation is important before approaching the Holy Sacraments.

### **Further Discussion on the Prayer of Reconciliation**

The Reconciliation Prayer is not prayed on Maundy Thursday as an indication that the true reconciliation will not be accomplished until the crucifixion of Christ on Friday. In the second part of the Reconciliation, the priest prays to God to fill the hearts of the people and himself with His heavenly peace. This wonderful and precious peace which Christ has given us is to be enjoyed by all believers until it is perfected in heaven. When He gave His peace to the disciples, and to the church after them, He said, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). Every day, at the end of the Doxology, we pray that we may be worthy of that Heavenly Peace, saying, "O Christ, the Word of the Father, the Only God, grant us Your peace which is full of joy. As when You gave it to your holy Apostles, so also say unto us what You said to them, 'My peace I give to you...My peace which I have taken from My Father, I now leave with you until the end of the ages'." The peace which Christ gives us and which the world cannot give is the peace that comes from the cross, from the forgiveness of sins and from the Reconciliation with God. He is our peace (Eph.2:14).

The Reconciliation Prayer in all of the three Liturgies prayed in the Coptic Church emphasizes this peace. In the liturgy of St. Basil, the priest prays, "With Your Goodness, O God, fill our hearts with Your peace." In St. Gregory's liturgy he prays, "You have become our mediator with the Father, and have brought down the dividing wall of hostility, and reconciled the earthly with the Heavenly making the two of them one." In St. Cyril's liturgy he prays, "Make us worthy of the heavenly peace which befits Your Divinity, and make us worthy to exchange a holy kiss with one another."

As the priest entreats the Lord in the Reconciliation Prayer to fill his heart and the hearts of His people with the Heavenly peace, he also prays that He may cleanse them from defilement, evil doings, quarrels and feuds so that they may be able to exchange a holy kiss each other in love, and thus become worthy of partaking of the Divine and Life- giving Mysteries.

On Maundy Thursday, the Reconciliation is not prayed and exchanging the holy kiss is not done, to remind us of Judas Iscariot's fraudulent kiss. Here the church urges her children not to emulate his dishonesty, treachery and love of money, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil,

for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1Tim.6:10).

In some old Liturgy's Books the Reconciliation is called the Prayer of Exchanging Holy Kisses because at the end of the Reconciliation Prayer the deacon calls out, "Exchange a holy kiss with one another." Men exchange kisses with other men, and women with other women; they are kisses of reconciliation, peace and love. "God has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (2Cor.5:18-19), meaning that Christ has reconciled us with the Father through shedding His precious blood on the cross. He has become our mediator with the Father and has broken down the dividing wall (Gregorian Reconciliation). Likewise, we ought to be reconciled with each other, and forgive each other with the kiss of reconciliation, peace and love according to the Apostle's advice, "Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another, even as Christ forgave you, you also must do. But above all these things put on love which is the bond of perfection" (2Cor.3:13-14). Since peace is the fruit of love, reconciliation and forgiveness, the Apostle added, "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body and be thankful" (Col.3:15).

While praying the second part of the Reconciliation Prayer the priest holds up the triangular veil which is on top of the Prospherine, which symbolizes the seal on the Savior's sepulcher. The lifting up of this cloth symbolizes the breaking of the seals on the tomb's door. When lifting this veil, the priest holds its corners and raises it before his face in the same triangular shape, as it had been when on the top of the Prospherine, and it remains in this triangular shape until the end of the Reconciliation Prayer when the priest places it on the left side of the Altar, ready to take it in his left hand after lifting the Prospherine.

When the deacon says "Prospherine, "Prospherine!", (meaning "Come forth!"), at the end of the Reconciliation, the priest, with the help of the deacon, raises the Prospherine while creating a vibration. Raising the Prospherine signifies the rolling away of the stone from the sepulcher's entrance, and also to the return of the Savior's soul to His Body at His rising from the dead. The vibration symbolizes the quake that happened when the angel rolled the stone away from the tomb's entrance. However, the Savior had risen in absolute quietness and left the sepulcher while the stone was still blocking its entrance with the seals still intact and the armed soldiers still guarding the tomb. Jesus coming out of the tomb while it was left intact is symbolic of how He was born of Virgin Mary while her virginity was still untouched, and also of when He entered the Upper Room where His disciples were while the doors remained locked. Throughout the Reconciliation Prayer and until the end of the Fraction, the priest bows his head before the Altar. At the end of each sentence he kneels down folding his arms on his chest. When alternating service between praying priests, the priest standing before the altar must not leave it before the other priest takes his position before the altar. It is forbidden to leave the altar unattended by a priest for even a moment while the Sacred Sacrifice is present.

After the praying of the Reconciliation and before the lifting of the Prospherine is when the ordination of readers, sub-deacons, deacons, archdeacons, priests, and protopriests takes place in the presence of the Pope or a bishop. It is done during this time to represent that reconciliation has lifted the barrier that was placed before the Holy of Holies in the Old Testament, (now the Sanctuary), from which all were forbidden to enter except to the high priest who was allowed to enter only once a year (Lev.16:34). These days anyone with a priestly rank, whether high or

small, can enter it once he has been ordained, as we are now in the days of grace and intimacy with God. Another reason for the ordination to take place at this particular moment is so that the newly ordained priests and deacons can participate in the mass from the beginning.

### **The Apostolic Kiss**

#### **Deacon:**

**Greet one another with a holy kiss. Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy. Yes, Lord, Who is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, hear us and have mercy upon us. Offer, offer, offer in order. Stand with trembling. Look towards the east. Let us attend.**

#### **Congregation:**

Each person in the Church turns towards the people around him or her and greets them with the 'holy kiss'. This is done by touching the fingertips of the person next to you with your own hands and returning your fingertips and the 'kiss' to your lips. Repeat for all the people around you.

The Congregation sings the 'Aspasmos Adam' hymn. This song may be changed according to the day and the season. At the end, the Congregation sings:

**Through the intercession of the Mother of God, Saint Mary, O Lord grant us the forgiveness of our sins. We worship You, O Christ, with Your good Father and the Holy Spirit, for You have (come) and saved us. The mercy of peace, the sacrifice of praise.**

### **Comments on the Holy Kiss**

At the end of the Reconciliation Prayer, the deacon calls out, "Exchange a holy kiss with one another", and the people do so with an action of their hands, showing love and forgiveness. The whole Church becomes one heart and one thought, and are prepared to attend to the Holy Liturgy which begins with the priest saying, "The love of God the Father and the grace of His Only Begotten Son Jesus Christ, and the gift and fellowship of the Holy Spirit, to be with you all", meaning that if we have love for one another, then the love of God will abide within us also. This kiss of peace, which is still exchanged in the Coptic Church, was used from the apostolic era. They used to kiss one another, men kissed men, women kissed women, saying; "Christ is in the midst of us", and the other reply; "He is and will be" We cannot enjoy reconciliation with God in Jesus Christ unless we have peace one another. The Lord Jesus said; " If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. (Matt5:23-24). By this kiss, the Congregants declare that they wish to be one family in Jesus Christ, and every one is forgiving one another. By this way, they can attain the forgiveness for their sins, as Jesus promised; "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you" (Matt 6:14).

## **PART III**

### **THE LITURGY OF THE FAITHFUL,cont.**

#### **1.The Anaphora**

The Priest and the deacon lift up the veil "Prospherine", slowly wave it above their heads. While removing it, the voice of its rattles is heard in the church. Uplifting the Prospherine acts as announcing the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Prospherine represents the stone, which has been moved, and the sound of the rattles represents the earthquake heard after His resurrection. By the power of the Lord's resurrection, the church starts its heavenly liturgy entering to the heavenly throne.

#### **The Lord Is With you**

At the beginning of the Anaphora, a wonderful dialogue, between the priest and the Congregation, takes place. The priest declares that the Congregation is in the presence of God. They answer him that the Lord is with him too. This means that all the celebrants of the

Eucharist pray for each other to have the blessing of being in the presence of the Lord. This also means that they remind each other that the Lord is in the midst of the Church, and the Church is uplifted, spiritually, to the throne of God.

Then the priest asks the Congregation to lift their hearts unto the Lord. He makes the sign of the cross over them to have the blessing of being heartily uplifted to God. This announcement also means that the Congregation should be heavenly minded, not earthly minded.

The Congregation give their consent and say that their hearts are lifted up to heaven, where their treasure is, that is Jesus Christ. Now That our hearts are in the heaven in Christ, nothing remains but to give thank to the Lord.

Before responding, we must ensure that our hearts are truly uplifted. We must put our minds and hearts in the words and the meaning of the response because if we utter it and our hearts are not uplifted and our minds are not focused on praying then we are lying to the priest and at the same time being dishonest to God. And what a grave sin it is to lie to God who searches the heart and examines the mind. It is better to be silent and not to utter this response if we think that our minds are not centered on praying. Let us first learn and practice how to pray in spirit and truth, then we can truly say that our hearts `are with the Lord'. Let us remember the Psalm which says, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight O Lord, my strength and my redeemer" (Ps.19:14). Let us fear the Lord's reproof, and heed the words, "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me" (Matt.15:8). We should ask the Lord at the beginning of every Liturgy to give us this Grace and let our hearts be with Him and be focused on Him, alone, throughout the Mass.

**Priest:**

The Priest places the small triangular napkin, which he placed on the left side of the altar, on his left hand. In his right hand he takes the napkin which was over the lamb. He makes the sign of the cross three times. First time, The Priest turns to the west, blessing the Congregation, making the sign of the cross:

**The Lord be with you all.**

**Congregation:**

And with your spirit.

**Priest:**

Second time, he turns toward east, blesses the deacons to his right, making the sign of the cross:

**Lift up your hearts.**

**Congregation:**

They are with the Lord.

**Priest:**

Third time, he turns toward the east, he blesses himself, making the sign of the cross:

**Let us give thanks to the Lord.**

**Congregation:**

Worthy and right.

Worthy and Just

Now we are standing together with the heavenly choirs. We praise our Lord with the seven choirs of the angels and with the two choirs of Cherubim and Seraphim. We become as the tenth choir of the heavenly creatures.

In the Gregorian Liturgy, the priest says; 'Who have given, those on earth, the hymn of the Seraphim, count us with the heavenly hosts'.

In the Liturgy of St. Cyril, he says; "With all who hollow You, receive our hollowing ".

**Looking toward the east:**

As we are counted with the heavenly hosts, we ought to stand with them looking to the east; to the throne of the Sun of Righteousness.

**Priest:**

The Priest raises his hands up; covered by the two napkins and continues:

**Worthy and right, Worthy and right, truly, indeed, He is worthy and right. You, Who are Master, Lord, God of truth, being before the ages and reigning forever, Who dwells in the highest and looks upon the lowly; Who has created the heaven, the earth, the sea and all that is therein. The Father of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, by Whom You have created all things, seen and unseen. Who sits upon the Throne of His Glory, and Who is worshipped by all the holy powers.**

**Deacon:**

You who are seated, stand.

**Priest:**

**Before Whom stand the angels, the archangels, the principalities, the authorities, the thrones, the dominions, and the powers.**

**Deacon:**

Look towards the east.

**Priest:**

**You are He around Whom stand the Cherubim full of eyes, and the Seraphim with six wings praising continuously, without ceasing saying:**

**Congregation:**

(The Congregation may sing another appropriate song (Aspasmos), instead of the following):

The Cherubim worship You, and the Seraphim glorify You, proclaiming and saying:

At the conclusion, the Congregation sings the Hymn of the Seraphim:

Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of hosts; Heaven and earth are full of Your holy glory.

This praise was heard by Isaiah the Prophet from the mouth of the Seraphim in his revelation (Isaiah 6:1-7). We sing it to prove our partaking with the angels of heaven in praising God.

When the angels look and see the beauty of God and His Holiness, they can only praise Him by saying, "**Holy, Holy, Holy.**" Let us also look to the beauty of God, in faith, in His holiness when we sing this praise.

**The Sanctus**

**(Holy. Holy. Holy)**

**The Revelation of Isaiah:**

"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above Him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory." At the sound of their voices the door posts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty." Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, This has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." (Is 6:1-7)



### **The Memorial of God's Salvation:**

The Memorial is an Eucharistic prayer includes proclamation of the history of our salvation; the divine saving plan for us. This prayer starts with the memorial of our creation and fall. Then the priest declares the incarnation of the Son of God and His works for us, His Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension and His last Advent. These prayers have their roots in The Book of Isaiah and The Book of Revelation. St. John said; "Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, Who was, and Is, and Is to come." Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to Him Who sits on the throne and Who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him Who sits on the throne, and worship Him Who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things, and by Your will they were created and have their being." (Rev 4:8-11) "Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, Who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" (Rev 5:11-12) This is our eternal hymn, by which we give praise to the Holy Trinity, and in which we find a fountain of love, peace, joy, righteousness and divine love. Here The Priest puts the napkin which is on his left hand on the Altar. He holds a cross with the napkin from the Cup in his right hand.

### **Priest:**

The Priest says "Holy " three times as follows. Each time The Priest says 'Agios' the people should make the sign of the cross.

While facing east, first time, he blesses himself, making the sign of the cross:

**Holy,**

Second time, he blesses the deacons to his right, making the sign of the cross:

**Holy,**

Third time, he turns toward west and blesses the Congregation, making the sign of the cross:

**Holy,**

The Priest raises his hands up; covered by the two napkins and continues:

**Holy, Holy, Holy, truly O Lord, our God, Who formed us, created us and placed us in the paradise of joy. When we disobeyed Your commandment by the guile of the serpent, we fell from eternal life, and were exiled from the Paradise of joy. You have not abandoned us to the end, but have always visited us through Your holy prophets, and in the last days, You did manifest Yourself to us, who were sitting in darkness and the shadow of death, through Your Only-Begotten Son, our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, Who of The Holy Spirit and of the Holy Virgin Mary.**

**Congregation:**

**Amen**

The deacon brings the censer to the Priest who puts a spoonful of incense into the censer saying:

**Priest:**

**He incarnated and became man and taught us the ways of salvation. He granted us the birth from on high through water and Spirit. He made us unto Himself a Congregation and sanctified us through Your Holy Spirit;**

**He loved his own who are in the world, and gave Himself up for our salvation unto death which reigned over us, whereby we were bound and sold on account of our sins. He descended into Hades through the Cross.**

**Congregation:**

Amen. I believe.

**Priest:**

He rose from the dead on the third day; He ascended into the heavens, and sat at Your right hand, o Father; He has appointed a day for recompense, on which He will appear to judge the world in righteousness and give each one according to his deeds.

**Congregation:**

During the next chant anyone who wishes to do so may beat his or her chest following the example of the tax collector who is mentioned in the Bible; this is a sign of repentance (being sorry for our sins).

According to Your mercy, O Lord, and not according to our sins.

**More remarks on the above part of the Liturgy;**

- Uncovering the paten by lifting the small veil from it saying, "The Lord be with you", while the Chalice remains covered represents Christ's appearance to Mary Magdalene while His identity was concealed to her.
- Uncovering the chalice when saying, "Agius", indicates that He revealed Himself afterwards to Mary Magdalene and she then recognized Him.
- Covering the chalice again after it was uncovered symbolizes Jesus showing Himself to the two disciples who were on their way to Emmaus, then disappearing from them.
- When the priest first does the sign of the cross with the veil that was on the paten saying, "The Lord be with you all", and then when he does the second sign of the cross with the veil that was on the chalice saying, "Agius", indicates the equality between the Body and the Blood, and the need to get the blessings of them both. These actions also honor both the Body and Blood.
- The veils, or wrapping cloths, represent the shrouds that wrapped the Savior's Body at His burial. The direction of the shifting of the veils is performed in the same order in which the Lord Jesus unwrapped Himself and took them off His body during His Glorified Resurrection. The veils are also placed on the altar in a similar order to the way the shrouds were placed in the tomb when found by Peter and John as they entered the sepulcher (John 20:4-7). This proves that the Savior's body was not stolen from the tomb as the Jews alleged, as a robber, in his rush and confusion while committing his crime would leave everything in disarray, and not in the perfectly organized manner in which Christ left the shroud.
- The action of the priest moving the veils around on the altar represents the movement of the Cherubim's' wings
- Taking the veil from the top of the Chalice's Throne and replacing it with another represents that this Mystery has been instituted for the rise and the fall of many (Luke 2:34). It also means that we have been exalted to take the place of the fallen angels.
- While saying, "He was incarnated and became Man" the priest adds a spoonful of incense to the censer so that the fragrance of the incense, as it is diffused, reminds us of the incarnation of the Lord Jesus in the womb of the Virgin Mary, who is the Golden Censer. The burning embers symbolize the fire of Divinity. At the end of the passage the priest

says, "He descended into Hades through the cross." The priest then bows in reverence, placing his hands on his chest in the shape of the cross, then kisses the altar. He then says, "He rose from the dead on the third day." At the end of this passage when the priest says, "He will appear to judge the world in equity and reward each one according to his deeds", he beats his chest three times in awe and remorse for his sins, recalling the horrifying day of reckoning when the people will gather and the angels will open the books which reveal the deeds and examine the minds of all; the righteous proceeding to eternal life, while the wicked to shame and everlasting contempt. (Dan.12:2)

- **Further Remark With Respect to Maundy Thursday and the Saturday of Light**  
In the Liturgies of Maundy Thursday and Easter Saturday (Saturday of Light), some favour the opinion of saying the passage from St. Gregory's Liturgy, which says, "You came to the slaughter...", to the passage, "He rose from the dead...", for at that particular time Christ had not yet risen.

## 2. The Consecration

Consecration is transforming the Bread and Wine into the Body and the Blood of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit., Who is in one essence with the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of fellowship, Who changes the oblations into the Body and the Blood of Christ and unites all the members of the church in Christ.

### 2.1. The Institution Narrative

Here the priest remembers the story of the institution of the sacrament, in the Last Supper. He utters the same words, which Jesus said. The deacons stand around the altar with lighted candles. The Priest places the two corporals on the altar. The deacon brings the censer to The Priest, who incenses his hands over the censer in preparation to touch, consecrate, fragment, and distribute the Holy Sacraments. Some priests transfer a handful of incense smoke and put it on the bread; others transfer it to both the bread and the chalice. Some do this action only once and others three times. They transfer the incense smoke on the Sacrament as a symbol of the spices which Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus put on the Savior's body at His burial.

#### **PRIEST**

The Priest points to the bread and the wine with both hands, and says:

**He instituted for us this Great Mystery of godliness. For being determined to give Himself up to death for the life of the world.**

**Congregation:**

We believe.

**Priest:**

The Priest takes the bread in his left hand, lifts the corporal beneath it on the paten, kisses it, and places it on the altar:

**He took bread into His holy, spotless, unblemished, blessed and life-giving hands.**

**Congregation:**

We believe that this is true. Amen.

**Priest:**

The Priest lays his right hand on the bread that is in his left hand and looks upward and says:  
**He looked up towards heaven, to You, O God, Who are His Father and Master of everyone.**

The Priest makes the sign of the cross, over the bread three times. First time, he says:

**He gave thanks.**

**Congregation:**

Amen.

**Priest:**

The Priest makes the sign of the cross, over the bread second time and says:

**He blessed it.**

**Congregation:**

Amen.

**Priest:**

The Priest makes the sign of the cross, over the bread third time and says:

**And He sanctified it.**

**Congregation:**

Amen. We believe, we confess, and we glorify.

**Priest:**

The Priest breaks the Bread into two pieces, using his thumb; one-third and two thirds of the loaf, without touching the Spadikon (central part) and without separating the two parts. The Priest holds the one third section in his right and the two thirds section in his left hand and says:

**He broke it and gave it to His own holy disciples and saintly apostles saying; Take, eat of it, all of you. For this is my Body, Which is broken for you and for many, to be given for the remission of sins. Do this in remembrance of Me.**

The Priest divides the bread without separating it. He places it on the paten. He rubs his hands on the paten to make sure that no crumbs are sticking to his hands:

**Congregation:**

This is true. Amen.

**Priest:**

The Priest uncovers the Cup and lays his hands on its top. Then he moves his finger around its edge and says:

**Likewise, also the cup after supper, He mixed it of wine and water,**

The Priest makes the sign of the cross, over the Cup three times. First time, he says:

**He gave thanks.**

**Congregation:**

Amen.

**Priest:**

The Priest makes the sign of the cross, over the Cup second time and says:

**He blessed it.**

**Congregation:**

Amen.

**Priest:**

The Priest makes the sign of the cross, over the Cup third time and says:

**And He sanctified it.**

**Congregation:**

Amen. Again, we believe, we confess, and we glorify.

**Priest:**

Holds the top of the cup saying:

**He tasted** (at this point the Priest breathes over the cup as he did with the bread), **and gave it also to His own holy disciples and saintly apostles saying;**

The Priest moves the Cup gently towards the west, east, north and south in the form of a cross and continues:

**Take, drink of it, all of you. For This is my Blood of the new covenant Which is shed for you and for many, to be given for the remission of sins. Do this in remembrance of Me.**

**Congregation:**

This is also true indeed. Amen.

**Some remarks on the above part of the Liturgy**

- From the moment the priest handles the bread the deacons around the altar hold lit candles to illuminate the area around the bread and the chalice. The candles are lit until the priest says the phrase, "He tasted and gave it ...". The lighting of candles signifies the awesome moment of transformation when the deacon calls out, "Attend to the Lord in awe and reverence" after which the priest invokes the Holy Spirit to transform the bread into the Body of Christ and the wine into His Blood.
- The Priest breaks the bread into three parts, from the top to the bottom, without separation. He places one-third of it on his right hand and the two-thirds of it on his left, saying, "He broke it...".
- He opens the bread slightly and breathes the Holy Spirit onto it, then continues saying, "...and gave it to His holy disciples and pure Apostles saying...", as he breaks the top and the lower part of the bread, still without separating them.
- The broken parts are the parts above and below the Spadikon; breaking it this way the bread is divided into four sections making the shape of the Cross. During this time the priest continues saying, "Take, eat of it you all, for this is My Body...".
- Moving the chalice from West to East symbolizes that we, who were once alienated from God and living in darkness, (the west symbolizing alienation from God), have been transformed to the light and to the grace of God through the Bloodshed and death of Christ on the cross, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the Blood of Christ" (Eph.2:13).
- Moving it from the left to the right signifies that we were once rejected and separated from God but through the precious blood of Christ shed on the cross we have been moved to the right hand of the Father to be with our beloved Saviour and Good Shepherd Jesus Christ.
- Moving the chalice in the shape of the Cross indicates that Christ shed his Blood on the Cross for the Salvation of all mankind; "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world" (1John 2:2).

**2.2. The Anamnesis**

The Anamnesis is a living proclamation for our Lord Jesus' death and resurrection and remembrance of Him until His Coming.

**Priest:**

The Priest points to the bread saying:

**For every time you eat of this Bread.**

The Priest points to the Cup saying:

**and drink of this cup, you proclaim My death, confess My resurrection and remember Me until I come.**

- These are the very same words that Jesus said when instituting the Eucharist (Matt.26:26-28), and Apostle Paul also said, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1Cor.11:26). Therefore, every time we perform the Mystery of Thanksgiving and partake of the Holy Sacrifice we preach the Lord's Death in our own inner Jerusalem, inviting our souls to die with Christ so that we may also rise with Him; "For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him" (Rom.6:5-8). We die to the world and to the lusts of the world, as in the quote, "Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom.6:11).

**Further Points on the Anamnesis:**

- Here remembrance means the living memory rather than just remembering. The word 'Anamnesis' is a Greek word, meaning 'recalling' and 're-enacting'.
- We 'remember' Christ, Who died for us and rose from the dead, not merely as an historical event, but as an existing, true sacrifice. In other words, it is an effective memory because what we offer on the altar is the same sacrifice that was offered up for us on the cross.
- This type of remembrance can be likened to the manna which Moses put in a golden container and kept in the Ark of the Covenant inside the Holy of Holies in remembrance of the Manna the Israelites ate in the desert of Sinai. Remembrance can also consist of something that the mind can conceive but the senses cannot perceive.
- God exists everywhere, but we still say that the devout will always remember Him, as the Psalmist says; "His remembrance is to the age of ages." It is therefore absolutely correct to say that this Mystery is in remembrance of Christ's Death, because He is present in it in a mysterious, invisible and imperceptible manner.

**Congregation:**

While the Congregation sings the following, they may hold their hands out, palms upward. They may make the sign of the cross when "we bless You" is said. They may kiss the front and back of their fingertips and then hold their hands palm upward again when "we thank You" is said.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Your death, O Lord, we proclaim. Your holy resurrection and ascension, we confess. We praise You, we bless You, we thank You, O Lord, and we entreat You, o our God.

**Priest:**

**Therefore, as we also commemorate His Holy Passion, His resurrection from the dead, His ascension into the heavens, His sitting at Your right hand, O Father, and His second coming which shall be from the heavens, awesome and full of glory; we offer You Your oblations from what is Yours, for every condition, concerning any condition, and in every condition.**

When we commemorate His Holy passion our emotions ascend to Him Who was sent as a lamb to the slaughter. We contemplate on Him who endured the iniquity of the wicked, was scourged, had his face slapped and did not turn his face away from those who spat on Him (from the Liturgy of St. Gregory). We contemplate on Him Who "Gives His cheek to the one who strikes Him and be full of reproach" (Lam.3:30), "He has filled me with bitterness. He has made me

drink wormwood" (Lam 3:15).

When we remember His life-giving sufferings on the Cross, we remember also His descent into Hades to redeem Adam and all his children who died in the hope of the Redeemer. Today, in partaking of the Holy Communion, the Slain One descends from the Altar into our hearts, into our bodies and into our souls, to set us free, and to save us from the captivity of the world and Satan.

At the end of the above sentence, the priest kneels down before the altar in piety and respect to pray the Mystery of Invocation. The deacon calls out to the people, "Attend to the Lord in awe and reverence." He then also kneels down beside the altar but keeps an eye on the Oblation, lest any fly or insect comes near it, for he too is responsible for the Sacrifice as he is the servant with the priest. When the deacon alerts the congregation to kneel before the Lord in awe and reverence he has to set an example of that fear and reverence. His kneeling down beside the altar must show the utmost piety and respect for this precious moment, which is the most awesome moment of the whole mass, the moment when the Holy Spirit comes down on the Bread and the Wine to transform them into the Body and Blood of Christ

### **2.3 The Epiclesis (The Invocation of The Holy Spirit)**

The Epiclesis is a prayer that the Holy Spirit descends upon the Bread and Wine and change them into the Body and the Blood of Christ and to sanctify the whole church members.

**Deacon:**

Worship God in fear and trembling.

**Congregation:**

The Congregation bows down and sings:

We praise You, we bless You, we serve You, and we worship You.

**Priest:**

The Priest prays inaudibly:

And we ask You, O Lord, our God, we, Your sinful and unworthy servants; we worship You by the pleasure of Your goodness; that Your Holy Spirit descend upon us and upon these gifts set forth, and purify them, change them, and manifest them as a sanctification of Your saints.

**Deacon:**

Let us attend. Amen.

**Priest:**

The Priest makes the sign of the cross over the Bread three times:

**And this Bread He makes into His Holy Body.**

**Congregation:**

We believe. Amen.

**Priest:**

The Priest makes the sign of the cross over the Cup three times, saying:

**And this cup also, into the Honored Blood of His new covenant.**

**Congregation:**

Again, We believe. Amen.

**Priest:**

## **Our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ given for the remission of sins and eternal life to those who shall partake of Him**

**Congregation:**

**Lord have mercy (3).**

### **Some Remarks on the Litany of the Invocation of the Holy Spirit**

The Liturgy book states that the priest does the sign of the cross three times quickly on the bread and likewise on the Chalice. The reason for the swiftness is that, as he utters the words "He makes it into His Holy Body", it immediately becomes the Body of the Lord which He took from the Virgin Mary, and which He gave to His pure disciples; the Body which received the life-giving sufferings and was shrouded and buried; the Body which rose from the dead, in which He ascended to heaven, and in which He will come again to judge the living and the dead. Similarly, as he says, "His Honored Blood of the New Testament" the wine transforms into the Lord's Blood which was shed on the cross for the salvation of Adam and his offspring.

NOW THE BREAD AND WINE HAVE BEEN TRANSUBSTANTIATED (CHANGED) INTO THE HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST.

The Priest shall no longer bless them by his hand because the blessings now can only come from the Sacraments. Also it is not permitted to the Priest to move far off the altar or to look backward until the end of the service.

Swiftness is necessary as the action of doing the sign of the Cross on the sacraments must be completed before the priest finishes the sentences, "He makes it into His Holy Body... and His honored Blood of the New Testament." In other words, the signings of the cross must be confined to the words "...this bread...", in the first instance, and, "...this chalice too...", in the second instance. However, the priest may need to say the words slowly in order that the signs are completed before the transformation takes place.

### **3. The Seven Minor Litanies**

After the Prayers of Consecration are completed the priest picks up the two veils which he left on the altar when he began doing the signs of the Cross, and, taking one in each hand, he prays, **"Make us all worthy, O Our Master, to partake of Your Holies for the purification of our souls, bodies and spirits, that we become one body and one spirit, and may share the inheritance with all the saints who have pleased You ever since the beginning."** He pleads for himself and the believers who intend to approach the Holy Sacraments, that the Lord prepares them for the partaking of His holy, pure and heavenly Mysteries for the salvation and sanctification to their souls, bodies and spirits in order to become one with Him, and abide in Him, and share an inheritance with all the saints who perfected the faith. Then he prays the Seven Minor Litanies:

- The Litany of Safety: which asks for the safety of the universal and the Apostolic Church, and for its protection from the schemes of Satan and his forces.
- The Litany of the Fathers: which asks the Lord to grant the Pope and all the Orthodox Bishops strength, grace and wisdom in their service, and that they maintain the right faith which has been delivered by the saints.
- The Litany of the Ministers: in which we pray for the priests who assist the bishops in rightfully disclosing the word of truth, and in shepherding, attending to and caring for the people and the salvation of their souls.



- The Litany of Mercy: which asks that the Lord may have mercy upon him and upon all the people, according to His great mercies and abundant compassion, "For with the Lord there is mercy and with Him is abundant redemption" (Ps.130:7).
- The Litany of Places: in which we pray for the safety and security of the cities and monasteries where our church is located, and for all the places, cities and monasteries in the whole world, because, if the place where the church dwells is in peace, then the children of the church will find their own peace, as in the saying, "And seek the peace of the city ...for in its peace you will have peace" (Jer.29:7), "That we may lead a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and reverence" (1Tim.2:2). The Psalmist prays for his city saying, "Peace be within your walls, prosperity within your places. For the sake of my brethren and companions, I will say `Peace be within you.' Because of the House of the Lord our God , I will seek your good." (Ps.122:7-9).
- In saying, "...And for those who are dwelling in it, in God's faith...", the priest refers to the believers who dwell in the places and monasteries, referring particularly to the monks who live in the wilderness because of their strong faith in God and His care. If it was not for these monks' great faith and love for Jesus Christ they would have not been able to survive such desolate wilderness and endure life in remote monasteries, mountains, and caves, and in places no one knows about. Although impoverished, distressed and humiliated with asceticism and strife, in their vigilance and solitude, all this they endure with joy because of their great love for our Lord. (If the priest wants to say the part "Your people and Your church..." , it should be said after the Litany of Places).
- The Litany of the Waters, Sowing and Harvesting: which refer to the season of the Nile's flooding when the flood waters cover the cultivated lands and deposit abundant silt to enhance its fertility, which occurs from the 12th of Baouna to the 9th of Baba. Prayer for the plants, from the 10th of Baba to the 10th Tuba, is the season for sowing the main crops in Egypt after the flood waters subside. Prayer for the winds, from the 11th of Tuba to the 11th of Baouna, is the period of moderate winds which is suitable for the growth, fruiting and ripening of crops, "That both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together" (John 4:36). After each one of these litanies the priest says, "Bring them up to their measure according to Your Grace ..."

It should be noted that these litanies are combined into one in the Lands of the Diaspora (outside Egypt).

- The Litany of Oblations: which refers to offerings in general, including whatever the believers bring to church to the needs of the church and its people; from flour for the bread, to grape juice for filling the chalice; candles, curtains, books, the Altar's utensils. When praying this litany, the priest points to the Sacraments as they are the crown and symbol of all what the believers offer

#### **4. The Commemoration of the Saints (The Synaxis)**

In the Commemoration of the saints, we remember all the saints as the Lord Jesus commanded<sup>1</sup> concerning the woman who poured the perfume on His head, "I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her." (Matt 26:13)-

This commemoration reflects the unity of the Church between those who are on earth and the departed. The Eucharist, the Body of Christ, is the fulfillment of this unity. St. Paul said; "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. (Heb 13:7).

**Priest:**

**As this, O Lord, is the command of Your Only-begotten Son, that we share in the commemoration of Your saints; Graciously accord, O Lord, remember all the saints, who have pleased You since the beginning; Our holy fathers the patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles, the preachers, the evangelists, the martyrs, the confessors and all the spirits of the righteous who were consummated in the faith.**

**Most of all, the pure, full of glory, ever-virgin, the holy Mother of God, Saint Mary; who in truth, gave birth to God the Word. And St John, the forerunner, Baptist and martyr; St. Stephen the archdeacon, the protomartyr; the beholder-of-God, Saint Mark, the evangelist, the apostle, and martyr;**

The patriarch St. Severus, our teacher Dioscorus, St. Athanasius the Apostolic; St. Peter the Priest, the martyr and high Priest, St. John Chrysostom, St. Theodosius, St. Theophilus, St. Demetrius, St. Cyril, St. Basil, St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Gregory the Wonder worker, St. Gregory the Armenian;

**The three hundred and eighteen assembled at Nicea, the one hundred and fifty at Constantinople, and the two hundred at Ephesus; Our righteous father the great Abba Antony, the righteous Abba Paul, the three saints Abba Macarii and all their children, the cross bearers; Our father Abba John the arch Priest, and our father Abba Pishoy the righteous and perfect man, the beloved of our good Savior;**

The Priest may continue, if he wishes:

Our father Abba Paul of Tammouh and Ezekiel his disciple; My masters the Roman fathers Saints Maximus and Domitius, the forty nine martyrs the elders of Shiheet;

**The strong saint Abba Moses; and John Kame the Priest; our father Abba Daniel the hegomen; our father Abba Isidore the Priest, Our father Abba Pachom of the Cenobite, and Theodore his disciple, our father Abba Shenouti the archimandrite and abba Wissa his disciple; and Saint Abraam bishop of Fayoum and Giza.**

At the conclusion, the Priest says :

And all the choir of Your saints, through whose prayers and supplications, have mercy on us all and save us for the sake of Your Holy Name which is called upon us.

**Deacon:**

Let those who read, recite the names of our holy fathers, the patriarchs who have fallen asleep; O Lord repose their souls and forgive us our sins.

**Further Comments on the Commemoration of the Saints:**

- The communion of saints represents the `cloud of witnesses' which surrounds the believers and to which the Apostle Paul referred to in saying, "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnare us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin" (Heb.12:1-4).

As we mention the names in the "Communion of the Saints" we remember their life stories and recall their virtues and love towards our beloved Lord. They sacrificed themselves for the Lord, and had no regard for the comfort of their bodies, "And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity of return" (Heb.11:15), but they endured everything for their great love to Christ the King. Each of them offered himself as an oblation, in one form or another, to God, e.g.

- It was as though the heart of the Virgin Mary had been pierced with a sword when she shared the sacrifice of her Son on the Cross.
- John, the forerunner, was beheaded because he preached the coming of Christ and told the people to repent.
- St. Mark served and preached the name of Christ to the people until he was dragged along the streets of Alexandria and was martyred.
- St. Severus, St. Discoros and St. Athanasius all defended the faith even to death.
- St. Peter, the Seal of Martyrs, was slain for his people, like He who had been slain for the world.
- St. John Chrysostom was slain for his impartiality.
- The three hundred and eighteen fathers assembled at Nicea, the one hundred and fifty fathers assembled at Constantinople, and the two hundred fathers assembled at Ephesus were all a testimony to the Lord in defending the Apostolic Faith.
- Abba Anthony and Abba Paula left the world and followed Jesus, enduring many spiritual hardships until the end. They were dead to this world, living in the mountains and the wilderness because of their great love for Jesus Christ. Abba Macarius tolerated iniquity and humiliation until death, like Jesus who endured disgrace.
- The powerful Abba Moses the Black offered true repentance and wrestled with sin until death.

We give thanks to God, "Having provided something for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us" (Heb.11:40). "And a white robe was given to each of them, and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they had been, was completed" (Rev.6:11).

## **5. The Diptych**

The Diptych is mentioning the names of the departed persons, praying that God may repose their souls in the paradise of delight. This prayer reflects the feeling of love and gratitude towards our beloved who departed.

### **Priest:**

The Priest may replace the following diptych (which he prays inaudibly) with the one marked with \* in the well-known emotive and mournful tune taken from the Liturgy of St. Cyril.

**Remember also, O Lord, all those who have fallen asleep and reposed in the Priesthood and in the order of laity. Graciously, O Lord, repose all their souls in the bosom of our holy fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, sustain them in a green pasture, by the water of rest in the paradise of joy, the place out of which grief, sorrow and groaning have fled away in the light of Your saints.**

Priest:

When the Priest mentions the name(s) of the deceased and he covers one hand with a napkin and puts one spoonful of incense into the censer.

**Those, O Lord, and everyone whose names we have mentioned, and those whose names we have not mentioned, those whom each one has in mind, and those who are not in our minds, those who have fallen asleep and reposed in the faith of Christ, graciously, O Lord, remember the soul(s) of your servant(s) (.....)**

[Here the Priest mentions the name (s) of the deceased]

**Deacon:**

Pray for our fathers and brethren who have fallen asleep and reposed in the faith of Christ since the beginning; our holy fathers the archbishops, our fathers the bishops, our fathers the arch-Priests, our fathers the Priests, our brethren the Deacons, our fathers the monks and our fathers the laymen, and for the full repose of the Christians; that Christ our God may repose all their souls in the paradise of joy, and we too accord mercy unto us and forgive our sins.

**Congregation:**

**Lord have mercy.**

**Priest: \***

**Graciously, O Lord, repose all their souls in the bosom of our holy fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, sustain them in a green pasture, by the water of rest in the paradise of joy, the place out of which grief, sorrow and groaning have fled away in the light of Your saints.**

**Deacon: \***

The great Abba Antony, the righteous Abba Paul, the three holy Abba Macari, Abba John the short, Abba Pishoi, Abba Paul, our holy Roman Fathers Maximus and Domitius, Abba Moses, Abba John Kame, Abba Daniel, Abba Isidore, Abba Pachom, Abba Shenoute, Abba Paphnoute, Abba Parsoma, Abba Teji, And all who have rightly taught the word of truth, the Orthodox bishops, Priests, Deacons, clergy, laity and all the Orthodox (people).

**Congregation:**

(May their holy blessing be with us. Amen). Glory to You, O Lord. Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy. Lord bless us. Lord repose them. Amen.

**Some Points on the Diptych:**

- In Maundy Thursday's Liturgy neither the Commemoration nor the Diptych are prayed as the church is totally preoccupied in contemplating the Lord's sufferings and death.
- The above mentioned diptych, however, is not sung using the Mourning Tune on Sundays, feast days or Eastertide.
- Some priests prefer to pray the passage that begins with, "Remember O Lord...", from the Liturgy of St. Gregory, with its wonderful tune during the Lord's Feasts and Eastertide, instead of "Those O Lord...".

After St. Basil's Diptych the priest says, "Lead us throughout the way into Your Kingdom ...", and ending with, "Peace be with you all."

All of this he says without doing the sign of the Cross on the congregation because, as mentioned previously, after the Holy Spirit has descended upon the Sacraments and as we are in the presence of Christ, so it is not permitted to do the sign of the Cross on the people or to look Westward, facing his back to the Sacrifice.

**6. The Fraction**

Prayers before the Fraction

**Priest:**

**Those, O Lord, whose souls You have taken, repose them in the Paradise of joy, and in the region of the living forever, in the heavenly Jerusalem, in that place and we too, who are sojourners in this place, keep us in Your faith and grant us Your peace unto the end.**

**Congregation:**

As it was, and shall be, from generation to generation, and unto the ages of all ages. Amen.

**Priest:**

**Lead us throughout the way into Your kingdom, that as in this so also in all things Your great and holy name be glorified, blessed and exalted in everything honored and blessed, together with Jesus Christ, Your beloved Son and the Holy Spirit.**

**Peace be with you.**

**Congregation:**

**And with your spirit**

The phrase, "Again let us give thanks unto God Almighty ...", begins the introduction to the Fraction. If there is more than one priest attending, the serving priest should recite the Fraction. When it is finished the priest puts the two veils down on the altar and does not take them into his hands again.

**Priest:**

**Again let us give thanks unto God Almighty, the Father of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ; for He also has made us worthy now to stand up in this holy place, to lift up our hands and to serve His holy name. Let us also ask Him to make us worthy of the communion and partaking of His divine and immortal mysteries.**

**Congregation:**

Amen.

The Priest puts the Holy Body on the palm of his left hand. He then touches the Holy Body next to the Spadikon with the forefinger of his right hand.

**Priest:**

The Holy Body.

**Congregation:**

The Congregation bows, for the Holy Body and the Honored Blood:

We worship Your Holy Body.

**Priest:**

The Priest then dips his finger in the Honored Blood and makes the sign of the Cross inside the Cup saying:

And the Honored Blood.

**Congregation:**

And Your Honored Blood.

**Priest:**

The Priest then makes the sign of the cross over the Holy Body at the top and the bottom, by his finger, anointed by the Honored Blood saying:

Of His Christ, Almighty, the Lord, Our God.

**Deacon:**

Amen, Amen. Pray.

**Congregation:**  
**Lord have mercy.**

**Priest:**  
**Peace be with all.**

**Congregation:**  
And with your spirit.

### **Some Remarks on the Introduction to the Fraction:**

- The three sentences, "...the Holy Body...", "...the Honoured Blood...", and, "...belonging to His Christ the almighty our God...", are a continuation of the introduction to the Fraction. The whole passage states, "We ask Him to make us worthy to share and offer His Divine and Immortal Mysteries, which are the Holy Body and The Honoured Blood belonging to His Christ, the Almighty, our God."
- Performing the sign of the Cross on the Body with the Blood represents Christ's Body covered with His Blood which spilled from the nails in His body, the crown of thorns on His Head, and from where He was pierced with a sword. During this time the people cry, "Lord Have Mercy", because this moment portrays the Crucifixion of Christ and the shedding of His Pure Blood which He endured because of His mercy and love for those in the world, and for the salvation of our souls.
- The priest offers peace to the congregation at this moment; the moment when the world was in great turmoil; the sun was darkened and the earth shook, the rocks cracked and all the people were horrified.
- When the priest begins to handle the Sacraments, the deacons light candles to illuminate the area around the Holy Body and Honoured Blood, keeping them lit until the end of the Fraction.
- There are two reasons for keeping the candles lit during this time. One is to honour the Holy Sacraments, the other being that the burning candle sheds light upon others so that they may believe in Him, as Jesus, whose Incarnated Body is being fractionated by the priest, gave Himself up so that whoever believes in Him will not perish but will have eternal life.
- The droplets of wax that fall from the burning candle remind us of the sweat that dripped from the Saviour's Body like drops of blood as He prayed in Gethsemane, "And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. And His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44).
- They also remind us of the tears which He shed during intense prayer, "Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear" (Heb.5:7).
- They also remind us of the drops of blood covering His Pure Body when He was hanging on the Cross for our salvation.

A lit candle represents to us the salvation which the Lord Jesus made on the Cross for those who slept in hope. From the Cross His soul descended to Hades to give light to those who were living in darkness and in the shadow of death and to bring them back to Paradise where there is light and joy. "The Lord is my light and my Salvation (Ps.27:1)

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## **Prayer of the Fraction**

The Fraction means the breaking of the Holy Body (the bread that has been changed into the Body of Jesus Christ)

### **Congregation:**

After each pause in the reading of the fraction, the Congregation sings:

**Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy.**

### **Priest:**

The Priest may substitute the following usual annual Fraction prayer by any other prayer according to the occasion, feast or his preference.

**Master, Lord our God, the Great and the Eternal, Who are wondrous in glory; Who keeps His covenant and His mercy unto them who love Him with all their heart; Who has given us redemption from sins through His Only-Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, the life of everyone. The help of those who flee to Him, the hope of those who cry unto Him. Before Whom stand thousands of thousands and ten thousands times ten thousands of holy angels and archangels, the Cherubim and the Seraphim and all the innumerable host of the heavenly powers.**

God, Who has sanctified these gifts which are set forth, through the coming down upon them of Your Holy Spirit, You have purified them. Purify us also, our Master, from our sins, the hidden and manifest; and every thought which is not pleasing to Your goodness, O God the Lover of mankind, may it be far from us.

**Purify our souls, our bodies, our spirits, our hearts, our eyes, our understanding, our thoughts and our consciences, so that with a pure heart, an enlightened soul, an unashamed face, a faith unfeigned, a perfect love, and firm hope, we may dare with boldness without fear to pray to You, O God the Holy Father Who are in the heavens and say: Our Father...**

## **Comments on The Fraction**

The Fraction is a prayer of thanksgiving to God for His inexpressible gift, as He gave us His Holy Body and Honoured Blood as an eternal life to those who worthily partake of them. It is also a supplication that He may give purity to our hearts, souls and bodies so that we dare, in the intimacy of His Divine love, partake of them.

The prayers of Fraction are numerous. Some Fractions are prayed all year round and some are for Major or Minor Lordly feasts, the Virgin's feasts, the angels or saints' feasts, for periods of fasting, and so on. The fractionation of the Holy Body signifies the sufferings which were inflicted upon our Lord Jesus Christ.

## **The Two Methods of Dividing the Holy Body**

### **The Direct & Brief Fraction:**

This procedure is not commonly used, where the priest divides the Body without separating it from the jewels. The Body is divided but is still intact. The priest divides the portion at his right

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(about one third) to four pieces corresponding to the four Crosses on the right. This he does without completely separating them.

The priest then divides the left portion (about one third), into four parts around the four crosses on it (again without separation).

He then separates the Spadikon completely, lifting it out, he kisses it, then puts it back in its place. Then he puts the Holy Body in the paten and cleans his hands, especially the finger he used in dividing it, to remove any particles of the jewel that may have adhered to it.

### **The Comprehensive Fraction:**

This method is more commonly used. The priest divides the right portion (about one third) without separation. He then lifts it and places perpendicular to the remainder (in the shape of a Cross).

He then takes a jewel from the top part of the portion that contains the Spadikon and puts it in the Eastern part of the paten, which is known as the Head. He then takes another gem from the lower part of the portion containing the Spadikon and puts it in the Western side of the paten. This is known as the limbs. He takes a piece from the right side of the right portion (which is placed on top of the two thirds) and puts it in the paten towards the right. He puts the rest of that portion in the paten to the left. Having done this, he has formed the shape of the cross. He then detaches the two remaining portions, proceeding from the top to the bottom. He then takes the centre portion that contains the Spadikon and places it in the centre of the paten. He then starts dividing the portion which is still in his hand, which is the left side of the oblation. He divides it into four parts, without separation, so that each part contains one of the four Crosses.

The priest then removes the pieces he had previously placed on the left side of the paten (which is most of the right third of the oblation), and puts the left third that is in his hand in its place.

The portion which he has taken from the paten he then divides into three parts without separation, each part containing a Cross.

When he finishes he puts it in the right side of the paten beside the piece that was placed to the right at the beginning of the Fraction. This way the right third is divided into four parts like the left third. He then takes the centre third, which he has previously placed in the middle of the paten, and detaches the Spadikon (from below the crust with the soft part in it so that it does not crumble during the following movements).

The rest of the centre portion remains joined together. The priest puts the Spadikon back in its place in the middle of the centre part, taking great care not to let it crumble, then he puts it in the middle of the paten as it was before. The priest then gathers all the divided jewels and puts them back in their place; the oblation now looking intact with all divisions in place as if the fraction never happened. Here the skill of the priest is evident, as the Liturgy Book states, "If the priest is keen and well organized, he fractions the oblation, yet it is still whole and holds in his hands, divided but intact, which is good." Having done this, the priest then rubs his hands over the paten so that the smallest particle does not adhere to them.

### **Remarks on the Fraction:**

The great majority of priests do not remember the Fraction prayers by heart so they must read from the liturgy book during the fraction.



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It is desirable that when the priest finishes each sentence that he then starts dividing the Body, as in this case both his eyes and his mind will be focused on the Body, rather than the book. When he stops chanting the congregation responds with "Lord have mercy", that is an opportune time to look intently and concentrate in dividing the Body, otherwise he may start spilling portions of the Holy Body outside the Paten.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

#### **Congregation:**

Anyone who is sitting should now stand and prays The Lord's Prayer with hands open and palms upward offering the prayer to heaven:

**Our Father, Who art in Heaven; Hallowed be Thy Name; Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive those who trespass against us; And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil; Through Jesus Christ our Lord; For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever. Amen.**

### Inaudible Prayers of Submission and Absolution

#### Prayer to the Father

##### **Priest:**

The Priest prays inaudibly:

**Yes, we ask You, O good Father, who loves goodness, lead us not into temptation, nor let any iniquity get the rule over us but deliver us from worthless works and from the thoughts, motions, sights and touch thereof. Destroy the tempter and drive him away. Rebuke also his movements implanted in us, and cut off from us all impulses which drag us into sin. And deliver us by Your holy Power; In Christ Jesus, our Lord, through whom the glory, the honor, the dominion, and the adoration are due unto You, with Him and the Holy Spirit, the Life-Giver, who is of one essence; with You now, and at all times, and unto the age of all ages Amen.**

##### **Deacon:**

Bow down your heads to the Lord.

##### **Congregation:**

Before You, O Lord.

#### Prayer of Submission

##### **Priest:**

The Priest prays inaudibly:

**The grace of the beneficence of Your Only- Begotten Son, our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ are now fulfilled. We have confessed His saving passion, we have preached His death, we have believed in His resurrection, and the mystery is accomplished. We give thanks to You, O Lord God Almighty for Your mercy is great upon us, for You have prepared for us those things which the angels desire to behold. We ask and entreat Your goodness, O Lover of mankind One, that since You have purified us all, You join us unto Yourself through our partaking of Your divine mysteries. That we may become filled with Your Holy Spirit,**

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confirmed in Your upright faith; having been filled with the longing for Your true love, may we speak of Your glory at all times, in Christ Jesus, our Lord; Through Whom the glory, the honor, the dominion, and the adoration are due unto You, with Him and the Holy Spirit, the Life- Giver; who is of one essence with You; Now, and at all times and unto the age of all ages. Amen.

**Deacon:**

Let us attend in the fear of God.

**Remarks:**

Let us listen during the Submission Prayers, lifting our hearts to God in silence, as the Spiritual Elder wrote: "Silence your tongue, to comfort your heart. Silence your heart, your spirit talks ". And also, "The mouth of the silent reflects the mysteries of God".

**Priest:**

Peace be with you all.

**Congregation:**

And with your spirit.

**Absolution to the Father**

**Priest:**

The Priest prays inaudibly:

**Master, Lord God Almighty; healer of our souls, our bodies, and Spirits, You are He Who said unto to our father Peter through the mouth of Your Only Begotten Son; "You are Peter, upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it, and I will give you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens. That which you will bind upon the earth shall be bound in the heaven, and that which you will loose upon the earth shall be loosed in the heavens". Therefore, O Lord, let Your servants, my fathers, my brethren and my weakness, be absolved by my mouth; through Your Holy Spirit; You, Good and Lover of mankind One. O God, Who takes away the sin of the world, hasten, to accept the repentance of Your servants for a light of understanding and for forgiveness of sins. For You are a compassionate and merciful God; You are patient, Your mercy is great and true. If we have sinned against You either by word or by deeds, pardon and forgive us, as a good and Lover of mankind One; God, absolve us and absolve all Your people from every sin, from every curse, from every denial, from every false oath, and from every encounter with the heretics and the heathens. Our Lord, grant us a reason, power and understanding to flee from any evil deed of the adversary, and grant us to do what is pleasing unto You at all times. Inscribe our names with all the choir of Your saints in the kingdom of the heavens, in Christ Jesus, our Lord; Through Whom the glory, the honor, the dominion, and the adoration are due unto You, with Him and the Holy Spirit, the Life- Giver; Who is of one essence with You; Now and at all times and unto the age of all ages. Amen.**

Here the Priest mentions whom he wants and continues;

**Remember O Lord, my own weakness and forgive my many sins, and where transgression has abounded, let Your grace be multiplied in abundance. Because of my own sins and the abomination of my heart, deprive not Your people of the grace of Your Holy Spirit.**

**Absolve us and absolve all Your people from every sin, from every curse, from every denial, from every false oath, and from every encounter with the heretics and the heathens.**

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Our Lord, grant us a reason, power and understanding to flee from any evil deed of the adversary, and grant us to do what is pleasing unto You at all times.

**Inscribe our names with all the choir of Your saints in the kingdom of heavens, in Christ Jesus, our Lord; Through whom the glory, the honor, the dominion, and the adoration are due unto You, with Him and the Holy Spirit, the Life- Giver; Who is of one essence with You; Now and at all times and unto the age of all ages. Amen.**

Here the Priest prays the litanies for peace and fathers inaudibly and then the litany of Congregation audibly.

**Remember O Lord our Congregation Bless them.**

**Deacon:**

Saved, Amen. And with your spirit. In the fear of God, let us attend.

**Congregation:**

Amen. Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy.

## **7. The Confession**

### **Prayers before Confession**

**(The Holies for the Holy..)**

Having broken the bread, the priest picks up the Ispadikon and lifts it up, his head bowed down, and invites the church to communicate crying: "The holy things for the holy ones," as if to say; Let those who are worthy come to receive the Communion, for holy things are for the holy ones only. The Greek word Hagios cannot be translated into "good". It means more than "good", it means those "who belong to God, the holy ones". St. Paul calls the Corinthians, the chosen hagios (saints), i.e. the chosen people of God. Here the priest's invitation can be translated to "The things of God are for the people of God." This invitation for receiving the Communion is addressed not only to those who are perfect but also for those who are striving to become perfect in Jesus Christ, not by their own power but by the Holy Spirit's.

The people of God are called "holy" because of their unity with the Son of God. We are members of His Body, "of His flesh and of His bones." As long as we remain united with Him, and preserve our connection with Him, we live in holiness, drawing to ourselves, through the holy mysteries, the sanctity which comes from the Head.

St Augustine says; Be holy, because I am Holy. If they say that they are not holy they are insulting their very Head. St. Cyril of Alexandria says; He that eats of the Bread and drinks of the Cup undeservingly eats and drinks doom unto himself and I having examined myself, see that I am unworthy. When then will you be worthy?

When will you present yourself to Christ? Therefore decide to lead a holier life in harmony with the law and so receive the blessing, believing that it has power to expel not only death but all the diseases in us.

**Priest:**

**The holies for the holy. Blessed be the Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God, the sanctification of the Holy Spirit. Amen**

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**One is the Holy..**

As the priest calls the holy ones to receive the holy things, all the Congregation: tremble. They respond; "One is the Holy Father. One is the Holy Son. One is the Holy Spirit. Amen." As if they are saying "There is One Sun that shines on all of us and pours Its own rays of holiness upon us.

**Congregation:**

One is the Holy Father, One is the Holy Son, One is the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Priest:****Peace be with all****Congregation:**

And with your spirit.

**Priest:**

The Priest dips the Spadikon in the Holy Blood and crossing the Holy Body very carefully with the Spadikon, the Priest says:

The Holy Body, and the Honored and True Blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of our God. Amen.

**Congregation:**

Amen.

**Priest:**

The Priest makes the sign of the cross over the Holy Body once more with the Spadikon:

The Holy and Honored Body, and the True Blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of our God. Amen.

**Congregation:**

Amen.

**Priest:**

The Priest makes the sign of the cross over the Holy Body once more with the Spadikon:

The Body and the Blood of Emmanuel our God, this is in truth. Amen.

The Priest puts the Spadikon in the Cup:

**Congregation:**

Amen. We believe.

**The Prayer of Confession**

The Confession is a declaration of faith stating what we believe about our faith. the priest lifts up the paten in both hands and says the Confession

The deacon stands behind the altar, facing the Priest with the Cross raised in his right hand and a candle in his left hand. He holds one end of a corporal with his right hand and the other end with his left hand. The people bow their heads. The Priest kneels down and lifts up the paten holding the Holy Body and says:

**Priest:**

**Amen. Amen. Amen. I believe, I believe, I believe and confess to the last breath; that this is the Life-giving Body that Your Only- Begotten Son, our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ took from our lady, the lady of us all, the holy Mother of God, Saint Mary. He made It One with His divinity without mingling, without confusion, and without alteration. He witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate. He gave It up for us upon the holy wood of the cross, of His own will, for us all. Truly, I believe that His divinity parted not from His humanity for a single moment nor a twinkling of an eye; given for us for salvation, remission of sins and eternal life to those who partake of Him. I believe, I believe, I believe that this is so in truth. Amen.**

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**Deacon:**

Amen. Amen. Amen. I believe, I believe, I believe that this is so in truth. Amen. Pray for us and for all Christians who said to us concerning them, remember us in the house of the Lord. The peace and love of Jesus Christ be with you. Sing. Alleluia. Pray for the worthy communion of the immaculate heavenly, and holy mysteries. Lord have mercy.

**Congregation:**

Glory to You, O Lord, glory to You.

**Further Remarks on the Prayer of the Confession**

- It is worth noting how our Orthodox Church passes on the correct faith to the priest on his ordination. The Patriarch (or the Metropolitan or Bishop) places the centre part of the Body in his hands and the new priest places his hands on it while repeating the confession after the Patriarch, sentence by sentence, in a loud voice. The priest remains honest to this correct faith all his life.
- In his profession, the deacon affirms and confirms, on behalf of the people, all that was mentioned in the priest's profession. He then asks the people to pray for those approaching the Holy Sacraments, that they may partake of them worthily, with a repentant heart, lest they be condemned, for every person approaching the holy sacraments should examine himself/herself, as the Apostle said. The words, "Pray for the merit of partaking of these Holy, Pure and Heavenly Mysteries", emphasize the importance of examining oneself before approaching the Mysteries; is he/she really ready to receive these Holy Sacraments? Is he/she complying with these words?
- As we hear the deacon's call, "Pray for the merit of partaking of these Holy, Pure and Heavenly Mysteries", we ought to lift our hearts to the Lord and beseech His blessings and His mercies on all those partaking, so that their communion fulfils the Lord's promise, which stated, "He who eats My Body and drinks My Blood, abides in Me and I in him" (John 6:56). We should also pray that those who approach the Sacraments may be worthy and not be condemned.
- The reason why the deacon holds the cross in his right hand, a lit candle in his left and a veil between them, is because as a deacon cannot gaze at the splendour of the Lord's glory so he covers his eyes like the Seraphim who covers his face with two of his wings from the brilliance of His Majestic Glory. As for the priest, he does not hide his face because he has been merited, through the sacrament of priesthood, to fraction and hold in his hands the Body of Christ.
- A devout person once said that he used to see his guardian angel walking before him. After he had been nominated and ordained as a priest he saw the angel walking behind him, and so he asked him, "Why have you changed?", to which the angel replied, "Through your ordination as a priest you have attained eminence which merits you to fraction and to hold the fearful Mysteries of Emmanuel, Our Lord, which we, as angels, covet to behold." In his amazement, the devout priest gave glory to God.
- The cross and the candle refer to Christ Who endured the sufferings of the cross and sacrificed Himself to give eternal life to the world like a candle which burns itself to give light to the people. Likewise, Christ had fractionated His Body and shed His Blood on the cross to give light to those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to bring them out into the brightness of His Kingdom.

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- After the deacon's profession, the congregation responds with, "Glory be to You O Lord, Glory be to You." We give glory to God who bestowed His Holy Sacraments for the healing of the soul, body and spirit, for the forgiveness of sins and for abiding in Him.

## **8. The Holy Communion**

### **Priest:**

Holding the paten, the Priest faces the Congregation and crosses them saying: The Holies are for the holy.

### **Congregation:**

Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord.

### **Priest:**

The Priest then gives the deacons and the other people receiving communion the Holy Body saying:

The Body of Emmanuel our God. This is true. Amen.

### **Congregation:**

The partaker of the Holy Body responds: Amen.

The partaker of the Holy Body covers his mouth with a special napkin after receiving the Holy Body to make sure that none is accidentally dropped.

### **Priest:**

The Priest partakes the Holy Blood and then gives the deacons and the other people receiving communion, saying:

The Blood of Emmanuel our God. This is true. Amen.

### **Congregation:**

The partaker of the Holy Blood responds, saying: Amen.

The people do not cover their mouths with the napkin after receiving the Holy Blood as it might be absorbed into the cloth. Anyone who has received Communion drinks some water to make sure that none of the Communion is left in the mouth. Everyone who has taken Holy Communion should be careful not to wash his/her mouth or to let anything come out of his/her mouth for a few hours after taking Communion, as a spiritual reminder that only blessed words and not evil words should come out of our mouths. The deacons and the Congregation sing Psalm 150 and the hymns appropriate to the season, during communion.

### **Further Remarks on the Holy Communion**

- It is of great importance that every partaker should approach the Sacraments in preparedness, repentance and confession, so that he does not take condemnation to himself (1Cor.11:27). He has to clear his conscience beforehand by avoiding errors, having confessed his sins, having been reconciled with everybody and, moreover, abstaining from eating and drinking for required period of time; nine hours for adults, six hours for children and three hours for sucklings. For the late Liturgies, like those of the Great Lent, the abstinence starts at midnight. The nine hours abstinence signifies the Lord's nine hours of sufferings on the day of crucifixion, from the beginning of the trial at 9 AM until His burial at 6 PM.
- St. Macarius the Great once said, "Do not be ashamed to regularly confess your sins to attain healing from them so that you deserve to partake of the Lord's Body and Blood and He may abide in you and you in Him." For if the Lord has warned against eating the Old

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Testament's animal offerings saying, "But the person who eats the flesh of the sacrifice of the peace offering that belongs to the Lord, while he is unclean, that person shall be cut off from his people" (Lev.7:20), how much more is it essential to cleanse the soul, recover its defilement, confess and repent before partaking of the Divine Bloodless Offering.

- Revelations (11:1) states, "Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod, and the angel stood saying, `Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there." Protopriest Abdel Messieh Theophilis Nekhaili says in his interpretation of this chapter, "The rod that was given to John indicates that the ministers of Christ are given the authority to measure and test the believers. The ministers absolve him who deserves absolution and bind him who deserves to be bound, so if the priest bans someone from approaching the Holy Communion, this person should not be enraged or furious, instead he shall listen to the advice and accept the directive."
- The priest covers the paten because it is not befitting that those who are not partaking should behold the Sacraments.
- The congregation bow during this time to emulate Mary Magdalene and the other Mary's who bowed before the Lord when He showed Himself to them after the Resurrection; "Jesus met them and said `Rejoice' and they came and held Him by the feet and worshipped Him" (Matt.28:9). It also signifies the disciples who worshipped Him, as they saw Him ascending to Heaven (Luke 24:52). The bowing and lowering of the heads of the congregation symbolizes the Seraphim who covered their faces with their wings when they saw the Lord sitting on His throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filling the temple (Isaiah 6:2).
- The congregation's cry, "Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord", indicates that what is in the priest's hands is the same Body which Christ took of the Virgin Mary and the same Body with which He entered Jerusalem where the crowds welcomed Him with the same outcry, saying, "Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest" (Matt.21:9). It also signifies that Christ, who was incarnated for our salvation, rose from the dead and ascended in great glory to the Heavens, and will come again in His Glory to judge the living and the dead. At all times, we look forward to His coming when His servants will rejoice and exclaim.
- When the partaker brings his mouth close to the chalice he should imagine that he is approaching the stab wound in the side of the Divine from which blood and water flowed on the cross. He should offer thanks to God for His inexpressible gift.
- The Church gives the two substances of the Thanksgiving Mystery separately, first the Body then the Blood, for two reasons:
  - +The Lord Christ Himself gave it to His disciples in the same way when He instituted the Mystery of the Eucharist, "Jesus took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, `Take, eat, this is My Body'." (Matt.26:27-28).
  - +The Church wants us to never forget Christ's Blood which gushed out of His Divine Side on the cross and was shed on the ground for our Salvation. The Church collects it in a Chalice, separate from the Body, because the Blood which flowed from His side streamed, and still streams, for our salvation. In its flow it saves all those who come to the Father through it because it is alive and it intercedes on our behalf with its redemption

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and saving merits. "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

- The serving priest receives the Holy Communion before all partakers, even if there is an older or higher rank priest among them, (e.g. if a priest is serving and there is a protopriest among the communicants), as the serving priest is the Sacraments' minister. In accordance with what our Glorified Savior did during the Last Supper, He first consecrated His Body, He broke it and ate first, then gave His disciples. Likewise, He sanctified the cup, tasted it first, then gave it to His disciples.
- No one shares the Spadikon with the serving priest, who alone eats it whole without division or fraction, because the word Spadikon means the 'Lordly Part' and it is impossible to divide or faction Master Christ.
- The whole Sacraments must be communed. Nothing is to remain for later or the next day. The command of the Old Testament's law regarding the Passover lamb says, "You shall let none of it remain until morning" (Ex.12:10).
- This does not apply to the part of the Sacraments which the priest keeps in the Gem's box to take immediately after the Mass to a sick person. In this case, the priest, without drinking water after the Holy Communion, goes to the sick person when the Mass is over to give him the Holy Sacrament. He then washes the Gem's box thoroughly and gives some of the water to the sick person to drink, before drinking the rest of it himself.
- When the Lord ascended to heaven the disciples looked steadfastly towards heaven, even after He was out of their sight, for a cloud received Him. They remained staring towards the heavens until two men in white clothes (angels) stood by them and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:4-12).

We should do likewise after the Holy Communion and the going of the Lord's Honored Body and Blood out of our sights. We should have our hearts drawn to heaven, looking forward to His second coming, to take us with Him on the cloud.

- Every partaker should pray a thanksgiving prayer after he has received the Sacraments to offer thanks to God for the grace he has attained, and to plead that his partaking of the Pure Body and Honored Blood be a blessing, a strength and purity to secure a favorable acceptance before the feared Throne on the day of Judgment, and not be for retribution or condemnation. In this regard, one of the fathers said, "After we receive this Holy Sacrament, we should not be hasty to leave the church and we should not speak with other people. Instead, we should stay for a few moments, on our own and in silence, after the Liturgy, offering a thanksgiving prayer to God, and to appreciate the everlasting value which these moments bring to us, as we become able to worship our Lord, and sense the presence of the Divine Guest inside us, and pour our hearts into His Divine heart. Thus we become a new person, a person who has undergone an alteration, then we can leave the church and mix with the people. The people will realize that an unutterable mystery has been fulfilled within us. It is the mystery of love which will be manifested through our increasing love to others." In the prayer book of the Hours, (the Agpya), there are prayers to be said before and after partaking of the Holy Communion



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### **Communion Praises**

During communion, the Congregation is overwhelmed with feelings of sacred love, holy fear and joy. We praise the Lord as we are partaking the communion for He has offered to us the food of immortality. We praise Him as we are, the poor, nourished by His sacrifice, participating in His death and resurrection.

#### **Psalm 150**

**Praise God, in all His saints. Alleluia.**

**Praise Him, in the firmament of His power. Alleluia.**

**Praise Him, for His mighty acts. Alleluia.**

**Praise Him, according to the multitudes of His greatness. Alleluia.**

**Praise Him, with the sound of the trumpet. Alleluia.**

**Praise Him, with psaltery and harp. Alleluia.**

**Praise Him, with timbrel and chorus. Alleluia.**

**Praise Him, with strings and organs. Alleluia.**

**Praise Him, with pleasant sounding cymbals. Alleluia.**

**Praise Him, upon the cymbals of joy. Alleluia.**

**Let everything that has breath praise the name of the Lord our God. Alleluia.**

**Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. Alleluia.**

**Now and forever and to the ages of all ages amen.**

**Glory be to You our God. Alleluia.**

**Jesus Christ, the Son of God, hear us and have mercy upon us.**

#### **Prayer after Communion**

##### **Priest:**

After the communion is finished, the Priest holds the Paten up high, facing the west. He blesses the people as he moves the Paten crosswise saying inaudibly:

**Our mouth is filled with gladness and our tongue with joy, for partaking from Your immortal mysteries, O Lord;**

That which an eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which You, O God, have prepared for them that love Your holy name, and have revealed unto the small children of Your holy church.

**Yes, this is, O Father, the pleasure before You, for You are merciful. We send up unto You, glory and honor, O Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now, and forever....**

##### **Priest:**

On Covenant Thursday, the Priest prays the following prayer instead of the previous one, inaudibly:

**We thank You, O Lord, Lover of mankind One, the beneficent unto our souls, for You have made us worthy on that very day to receive Your heavenly and immortal mysteries;**

For that which an eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have come upon the heart of man, the things which You, O God, have prepared for them that love Your holy name and have revealed unto the small children of Your holy church. Yes, this is, O Father the pleasure before You, for You are merciful.

**We send up unto You, glory and honor, O Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and forever .**

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## 9. The Dismissal

### **Priest:**

Angel of this sacrifice, flying up to the highest with this hymn, remember us before the Lord, that He may forgive us our sins.

### **Congregation:**

Amen. alleluia. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now, and forever, and to the age of ages. Amen.

**We proclaim and say, O our Lord, Jesus Christ, bless the air of heaven, bless the waters of the river, bless the seeds and the herbs; may Your mercy and Your peace be a fortress unto Your people. Save us and have mercy on us. Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy. Lord bless. Bless me. Forgive me, Say the blessing.**

### **The Ending Blessing**

#### **Priest:**

The Priest prays the following prayer or the short blessing, mentioned after it.

**May God have compassion upon us, bless us, manifest His face upon us and have mercy upon us; Lord save Your people, bless Your inheritance, pasture them and raise them up forever; Exalt the horn of the Christians through the power of the life-giving cross; Through the supplications and prayers which our lady, the lady of us all, the holy Mother of God Saint Mary, makes for us; And those of the three great holy luminaries Michael, Gabriel and Raphael; the four Incorporeal Beasts, the twenty four Priests, all the heavenly ranks; Saint John the Baptist, the hundred and forty four thousand, our lords the fathers the apostles, the three holy youths, Saint Stephen; the beholder-of-God St. Mark the evangelist, the holy apostle and martyr; Saint George, Saint Theodore, Philopater Mercurius, Saint Abba Mina, and the whole choir of the martyrs;**

Our righteous father, the great Abba Antony, the righteous Abba Paul, the three holy Abba Macarii, our father Abba John, our father Abba Pishoi, our father Abba Paul of Tammoh, our Roman fathers Maximus and Domitius, our father Abba Moses;

**The forty nine martyrs and the whole choir of the cross-bearers; the just, the righteous, all the wise virgins, the angel of this blessed day ; the angel of this blessed sacrifice;**

The Priest mentions here the name of the patron saint of the church and the saint of the day if not mentioned before

**And the blessing of the holy Mother of God first and last;**

If it is a Sunday:

**And the blessing of the Lord's day of our Savior. May their holy blessing, their grace, their might, their favor, their love and their help be with us all forever. Amen.**

**Christ our God, King of peace, grant us Your peace, establish for us Your peace, and forgive us our sins. For Yours is the power, the glory, the blessing and the might, forever.**

**Amen.**

#### **Priest:**

The Priest may say the following short blessing instead of the previous one:

**May God have compassion upon us, bless us, manifest His face upon us, and have mercy upon us; Lord, save Your people; bless Your inheritance; pasture them and raise them up**

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**forever. Exalt the horn of the Christians through the power of the life-giving cross; Through the supplications and prayers which our lady, the lady of us all, the holy Theotokos, Saint Mary, makes for us;**

And those of all the choirs of the angels, the archangels, the patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles, the martyrs, the just, the righteous, the ascetics, the confessors, the anchorites, the angel of this blessed sacrifice

Here, The Priest mentions the patron saint of the church, and the saint of the day:

**And the blessing of the holy Mother of God, first and last**

If it is a Sunday, The Priest adds

**And the blessing of the Lord's day of our Savior;**

The Priest continues:

**May their holy blessing, their grace, their might, their favor, their love and their help, be with us all, forever. Amen.**

Christ our God, King of peace, grant us Your peace, establish for us Your peace, and forgive us our sins.

**For Yours is the power, the glory, the blessing and the might, forever. Amen.**

**Congregation:**

Amen. So be it.

**Priest:**

**Go in peace. The Lord be with you all. Amen**

### **Remarks on the Dismissal**

- The deacon pours some water in the priest's hand who breathes on it three times while saying the three signings of the cross. If other priests are present they, too, blow on the water and repeat the second signing. The priest stands before the altar and dismisses the angel of the Sacrifice by sprinkling some of the water on the altar and sprinkling the rest upwards saying, "O angel of this offering who ascends to the highest with this praise, remember us before the Lord that He may forgive us our sins."  
It is not befitting that any priest or deacon takes off the vestments of the service before the angel of the sacrifice is dismissed or before the congregation has been dismissed.

### **Dismissing the Congregation**

- After sprinkling the water and dismissing the Sacrifice's angel the priest starts to dismiss the congregation. First he places his hand, wet with water, on the Throne of the Chalice, then on his own beard, then on other priests' beards. He then places his hand on each deacon's head as a blessing before dismissing them. Dismissing the congregation can be done in two ways:
  - +If only few people are in attendance, the priest places his hand on each person's head.
  - +If there are many people he dismisses them by sprinkling water on them in an organized manner to avoid any noise. During the sprinkling of water the people should not leave their places. This is the most recent way of dismissing the congregation and it seems that this had to take place because of the growing number of worshippers and the difficulty of giving them the dismissal in the previous way.
- Some priests find it necessary to sprinkle the dismissal water after the Blessing Prayer, and give the dismissal, "Leave in Peace", to avoid the disturbance during the Prayer of Blessing.

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- The priest dismisses his brothers, the priests, by placing his hand on their beards and not on their heads. The Liturgy Book says that he wipes their faces with his hand because placing the hand on the head indicates giving a blessing and blessings are only given by the senior to the junior, like the Apostle Paul says, "Now beyond all contradiction, the lesser is blessed by the better" (Heb.7:7).
  - As all the priests are brothers and none is less than the other the priest does not give them the dismissal by placing his hand on their heads but by wiping their beards with his hand. Moreover, the beard is a sign of their pledge and devotion to God, so it is a sacred and respected thing.
  - The priest has to make sure that the sprinkled dismissal water has reached each and every single person in the church. The Coptic person is under the conviction that even if he attends from the beginning of the Liturgy, partakes of the Holy Communion and attains many blessings but has not received his share of the dismissal water with which he wipes his face, or has missed out on the Eulogia, he considers the benediction to be incomplete and leaves the church unsatisfied and not filled with happiness.
  - Dismissal by placing the hand on every person's head was the original way of dismissal carried out in our church. It has many meanings and benefits. It means that the priest attends to the congregation and knows who has come to church and who has not, hence he should ask about them. After the Liturgy, he can then go to visit his people as if they are his own children, or as endeared sheep of the holy flock, which deserve the care and attention of the shepherd.
  - If the Patriarch or one of the Bishops is present, but not serving during the Liturgy, the serving priest does not sprinkle the water but instead puts the water that has been poured in his hands into the Patriarch's or the Bishop's hands. The Patriarch breathes on the water and sprinkles it upwards to dismiss the angel saying, "O angel of this offering...". He then prays the dismissal of the clergy and the congregation and says the Blessing
  - After reciting Psalm 46 and kissing the corners of the altar, the priest washes his hands after giving the dismissal in preparation for distributing the Eulogia to the congregation.

### **The Distribution of the Eulogia; Morsel of Blessing**

Eulogia is a Greek word which means 'blessing'. In our church, the word Eulogia is given to the 'morsel of blessing' which is distributed to the worshippers at the end of the Liturgy. The Eulogia comes from the bread which remains after choosing the Lamb. This bread was a potential offering and could have become the Divine Body. For this reason they have much honor and the priests and congregation share them. It has been the custom in Coptic churches that the priest distributes the Eulogia first to the believers in front of the Sanctuary. He starts with his brothers, the priests, who shake hands with him and break a morsel of the Eulogia. If the Patriarch or a Bishop is present he distributes the Eulogia. The priests go first to break a piece from the bread in his hand, then the people follow. The Patriarch, the Bishop or the priest gives each of them a morsel of the blessing which each person kisses, eats and then goes home. In doing this, every believer will come out of the church thankful to the Lord, comforted and asking for the continuation of this grace for him and for all believers.

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**Some Points on the Eulogia:**

- The priest breaks the Eulogia over the Lamb's plate which the deacon holds for him so that fragments of the bread don't fall on the floor. At the end of the distribution, the priest or the deacon collects the fragments which have fallen in the plate and eats them. The Eulogia must be kissed before eating it because it is a morsel of blessing and has attended the Liturgy, and we know that everything becomes sacred with the word of God and with prayers. If the morsel is too big and one cannot take it in one mouthful, he then breaks it with his hands and not with his teeth, making sure he does not drop any fraction on the ground. In the non-fasting days, the Eulogia must be eaten before leaving the church. In fasting days when the Mass is finished earlier than the time of breaking the fasting, the Eulogia can be kept until eating time and be taken before the meal.

The priest then takes off the vestments of service and puts on his black clothes before leaving the Sanctuary, as he does with his left foot, while facing East. He then draws the curtain of the Sanctuary saying, "Draw Your shield over us, and let the door of Your church be opened in our faces, throughout the ages and till the end of all times." He kisses the curtain and goes in peace.

**A Final Remark:**

We should not prostrate or bow after partaking of the Divine Sacraments because we are in a joyous situation, carrying the Lord Jesus inside ourselves. The church rules prohibit kneeling to the ground after receiving the Divine Sacraments.

**10. Comments regarding singing Psalms of Joy during the Communion**

The priest kisses the Altar and goes around it once while saying Psalm 46, which says, "O clap your hands, all you peoples...". The following provides a contemplation of this splendid Psalm: "O clap your hands all you peoples, Shout to God with the voice of triumph...", as clapping the hands and shouting the voice of triumph are signs of joy and happiness, and what joy and happiness are greater than partaking of the Holy Body and Blood of Christ, so that He may abide in us, and so we receive the promise of eternal life. It is written that when the disciples received the last blessing from the Lord at His Ascension,

"They worshipped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing the Lord" (Luke 24:52-53).

Likewise, after receiving the last benediction of the Liturgy which is partaking of the Life-giving Sacraments, and after the Sacraments go out of our sight which symbolizes the Ascension of the Lord into heaven, we see the priest going around the altar and, kissing its corners reciting the Psalm of Joy, joining the disciples who were continually in the temple praising and blessing the Lord.

Attending the Liturgy and partaking of the Divine Mysteries is the same as attending the 'Bridal Supper of the Lamb'. The onlooker blesses those invited to the supper saying,

"Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb." (Rev.9:19).

In the Book of Revelations, the marriage supper of the Lamb is full of joy and jubilation,

"Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (Rev.19:7-8).

The wife of the Lamb is the Church, Christ's Bride, the believers' souls which should be prepared

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and equipped with repentance and self-examination, they should be adorned with virtues ,and beautified with holiness and purity of heart, so as to be worthy of going to the banquet of the Lamb's marriage, and of receiving the awesome mysteries.

Christ's Sacrifice, of which we partake with repentance, with a contrite spirit, having confessed our sins, is our joy and jubilation as we are saved from sin and death. This sacrifice is like the fattened calf which the compassionate father killed when his lost son came back to him. After he embraced his son, he ordered his servants, saying,

"Bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry, for this my son was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry" (Luke 15:20-24).

In their gladness they used instruments of joy and dancing, that is why the church chants Psalm 150 during the distribution and community of the Holy Sacraments. This is the Psalm of praise; praise with the sound of trumpet, praise with the lyre and flute, and praise with loud sounding cymbals.

Then we chant, "Blessed are You", which is said in joyous occasions. We also sing suitable hymns and praises to make all those who are present feel that they really are attending the banquet of the Lamb's marriage."

...For the Lord is the Most High and is feared, Great King of the whole earth, subdued the peoples to us and the nations under our feet...". The Lord is the most High and is feared and He rules the whole world, yet He has humbled Himself and given us His Holy Body and Honored Blood. The church calls the Mystery of Communion 'The Fearful Mysteries of Emmanuel, Our Lord.' We must not take these Mysteries lightly and exploit the kindness of God; His modesty, His love and His patience with us. Instead, we must approach these Mysteries with fear, with awe, with reverence and with thanksgiving to God for this inexpressible gift. We must approach them with repentance, with preparedness and with contrition, lest we be burned with the fire of Divinity, and take dreadful condemnation to ourselves in that great day.

By partaking of the Divine Mysteries we attain strength and fortification with which we overcome our enemies, both the hidden and the manifest. We can overpower demons who fight us with desires and temptations and we can triumph over our corrupt nature, our evil inclinations and desires. We can be victorious over those who wish to harm or persecute us with our tolerance, patience, love, serving and sacrifice, in the same manner as the martyrs used to do with those who persecuted and tortured them. They succeeded in converting them from aggressive swordsmen to saints and martyrs. By partaking of the Holy Communion, we unite ourselves with Jesus, thus we receive strength from Him and we know that His strength is made perfect through weakness. When we receive the Divine Mysteries and carry Christ inside us, we can overcome the world, "Because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." (1John 4:4), "And they overcame him by the Blood of the Lamb" (Rev.12:11)." ...He has chosen us for inheritance. The excellence of Jacob whom He loved...". What is greater than the Lord choosing us to partake of the Divine and Life-giving Mysteries? He has chosen us to attain the pledge of the Kingdom and to experience life in unity with Christ. Life here is like a riddle, or like looking into a mirror, and shall continue to be so until we meet Him face to face and dwell in His house forevermore. The Lord who loved Jacob for his spiritual adornments, such as his tolerance in temptations, his persistence in prayers, wrestling with God, not repaying evil with evil, his humility, dependence and submission to God. So, He also loves those fruits of the Spirit in us. He wants them to grow and multiply until they reach the perfect spiritual excellence, until they reached the perfect fullness of the stature of Christ, whose radiant glamour excels all that of

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the humans, and upon whose lips grace has been poured. He loved righteousness and hated iniquity, and for that the Lord God has anointed him with the oil of gladness and made His Throne forever and the people fall under Him."

...The Lord ascended with a shout, God ascended with the sound of a trumpet...". As mentioned before, the Holy Sacraments disappear in the partakers mouths. The Body and Blood which were on the altar disappear after the Communion, symbolizing the ascension of our Lord Christ into heaven in front of His disciples, and His departure from their sight when He was taken up in the cloud. "

And they worshipped and returned to Jerusalem with joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God" (Luke 24:52-53). The Lord's Ascension was coupled with the disciples' joy on earth, and also with jubilation and welcoming praise from all the heavenly hosts. Psalm 24 tells us about the heavenlies' reception to their Creator at His Ascension to heaven, and about opening the gates widely to let in the Triumphant Lion from the tribe of Judah who went out, overcame, and returned victorious. The Psalm says, "Lift up your heads, O you gates, and be lifted up you everlasting doors! And the King of Glory shall come in, Who is the King of Glory? The Lord, Strong and Mighty. The Lord Mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates, and lift them up, you everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is the King of Glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of Glory" (Ps.24:7-10). The Psalm does not say "open your doors", but, "lift up your doors", so that heaven can welcome her Lord and her God as He ascends from earth after accomplishing the redemption and freeing His people from captivity. Psalm 18:1 says, when the Lord descended to earth, "He bowed the heavens also, and came down." After He had fulfilled His mission and ascended to heaven, He went up with the jubilation of victory for He is the Strong and the Mighty in battle. In the battle of the Cross, He bound Satan, broke his thorn and abolished his authority over humans, because in the Cross, "Having disarmed principalities and powers. He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it [the cross]" (Col.2:15).

How great would it be if we do not just open our mouths to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord, but also open our hearts by lifting away our sins and lusts. Then, He can come into us as a dwelling. He can reign over us and make us His home, finding comfort inside of us. He can find a place in our hearts to rest His weary Head, which has been moistened with the night's dew, because of His waiting and knocking at the doors of our hearts, and their long rejection to the Blessed and Majestic Person."

Sing praise to our God. Sing praise to our King, sing praise because the Lord is King over all the earth. Sing praise with understanding for the Lord has reigned over all nations." How wonderful is this Psalm which is full of joy, jubilation and praises, for the splendor of the Lord's Ascension to heaven. The Psalm repeats the words, "sing praise", five times in two verses. We should feel the great, unutterable and honorable joy when we partake of the Divine Sacraments, submitting our lives to the Lord, depending upon Him in all situations, yielding every thought to the obedience to Christ so that He may reign over all people, over our thoughts, senses, times, talents and lead us at all times in the procession of His triumph.

The church does the correct thing in chanting the joyous hymns during the distribution of the Sacraments, as the people of the church stand in awe during such blessed moments, meditating on the sacrifice of the cross and the slain Lamb for the sins of the world. They listen and participate in the hymns of the distribution. This has been the church's custom since the Apostolic era and this is evident in the Apostolic instructions, "Let all believers sing praise until

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all the oblation has been communed." Taking an example from what happened when Jesus set the Lord's Supper in the upper room in Zion, the Holy Bible says,

"And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives" (Matt.26:30).

It is not right to give a sermon during the distribution, for the songs of praise and jubilation will be silenced and the people will be distracted from the Sacrifice and the significance of the Communion. They will sit during moments when sitting is strictly forbidden; at the time of distributing Jesus' Broken Body and Shed Blood for our sins. During such a sermon, the speaker would be giving his back to the Sacrifice and teaching in the presence of the Greatest Teacher of all. Those who give the sermon at the time of the distribution violate the original rite that had been prevailing in the days of the Apostles, according to the teaching of the Holy Bible, "And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers" (Acts 2:42).

From this verse, we can see that the original arrangements of the ceremony of the Thanksgiving Mystery was firstly, teaching (nowadays this corresponds with the readings of the Pauline, the Catholic Epistles, the Acts, the Synexarium and the Gospel, and then the sermon), and then the fellowship in partaking of the Lord's Body and Blood, and the accompanying prayers and praises. Let us hope that the church realises this mistake and avoids it so that the people can feel the sacredness of the time of Communion and participate in praising the Lamb who had been slain for the life of the world.

St. Severes, son of Mokaftaa, says, "He who approaches the Sacraments must stand up in fear and in reverence, until Christ has ascended from the altar. This ascension happens after the whole Body has been communed and the oblation has been lifted out of the church. It is when the people see that He has ascended that they plead with Him to maintain for them the Grace of the Holy Spirit, which He sent upon His disciples after His Ascension."

It is important to note that he who attends the Liturgy and leaves the church before the end of the distribution and giving the dismissal receives the same share as Judas Iscariot. Likewise, he who does not attend the reading of the Gospel and the consecration of the offerings and then approaches the Sacraments, gets the same punishment. He is partaking of the Holy Communion with an unclean soul. The reading of the Holy Books and praying the Liturgy were set to be read before Communion to sanctify the partaker's soul and body; then he becomes worthy of the offerings. "The Lord sits on His Throne..." As the Lord sits on the Throne, on the right hand of the Greatness, as He ascended to heaven, He also sits on the throne of our hearts when we unite with Him in faith during the Holy Communion. Thus our hearts become thrones, our bodies become a heaven, and our thoughts and all our lives become spiritual and heavenly."

...The leaders of the people gathered together. The people of the God of Abraham for the shield of the earth belong to God. He is greatly exalted. Alleluia." When we approach the Holy Sacraments, let us gather ourselves and meditate on "The God of Abraham", for the Lord Jesus Himself said, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 7:58). It was He whom Abraham saw from afar. He saw the day of redemption and the sacrifice of the cross with an eye of faith hundreds of years before their occurrence. He saw the day of the Lord and the day of redemption, when God ordered him to slay his son Isaac on Mount Morya. When Abraham obeyed, arranged everything, and was about to slay his only son, the Lord stopped him. Abraham raised his eyes and saw a ram behind him tied in the bush by its horns, he took the ram and offered it with great happiness for the redemption which the Lord made. This redemption was a sign of the greatest redemption the Lord would make on the cross in the fullness of time, not for one person, nor for a number of



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people, but a redemption for the whole world so that no one who believes in Him would perish, but gain eternal life. Let our senses be gathered at the time of receiving the Sacraments to ponder the Lord's great mercies on us sinners, for we did not love Him, but He loved us first. He loved us in kindness and gave Himself up for our sake. Here, Abraham is remembered because it was him to whom the Lord gave the promise of the coming of Christ from his offspring when He said,

"And in your seed all families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen.28:14).

The shields of the earth are the strong people who are strong through His strength and those who depend on Him and are exalted on earth. They are renowned for their holiness and their strong life with God. People see their good deeds and give glory to their Father Who art in heaven. For God "Gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength.... Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (Is.40: 29-31). Because the Lord is their strength and their refuge, "He is the shield to all who trust in Him" (Ps.18:30).

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