

UNDERSTANDING THE LITURGY

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Father Athanasius Iskander

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PREFACE

In general, the word Liturgy means *the corporate service of worship of the assembled Church*. For example, the collection of prayers and scriptural readings that are used during the ceremony of marriage constitute the Liturgy of Holy Matrimony. Similarly, the collection of prayers, hymns and scriptural readings said on Holy Friday, constitute the Liturgy of Holy Friday. Again, the prayers, hymns and readings said during the celebration of the Eucharist constitute the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Most people use the term Liturgy to refer to the Liturgy of the Eucharist. For our purpose, we will use the word Liturgy in this sense (i.e., to mean the Liturgy of the Eucharist).

In order to understand the Liturgy, one has to do several things. First, one has to start with an old version of the Liturgy. Several aspects have to be considered: the meaning of the words, their biblical origin, the correct manner in which the rubric (rituals) should be performed. Studying the “silent prayers” of the priest also gives excellent insight into the symbolism behind the various acts performed by the priest and the deacons.

Second, one has to consult the sayings of the Fathers of the Church, as well as other ancient writers. This helps us understand the historical changes which have occurred over the years. Reading the Fathers can give meaning to many of the rubrics, many of which are not carried out properly because of lack of understanding of their meaning.

Third, one has to study the Old Testament, and more specifically the rituals used by the priests in performing the animal sacrifices. It is in these that one can find the true meaning of some of the Liturgy’s Rubrics. Many of the actions and words of the priest have an old Testament “Type” or counterpart.

Fourth, one has to meditate on the information gathered, trying to synthesize it into a coherent understanding of the Liturgy and its rubrics. The results, however, may be at variance with some widely held beliefs.

Divisions of the Liturgy:

Traditionally, the Liturgy is divided into two parts: The Liturgy of the word (or the Liturgy of the catechumens), which is the teaching part of the Liturgy, and the Liturgy of the Faithful or the Eucharist proper.

Modern liturgical theologians¹ like to expand this to include three component parts, the Assembly, the Liturgy of the word, and the Anaphora

¹Father Schmemman, the Eucharist, and Diederich E. in "the Sacraments".

(Liturgy of the Faithful) which ends with communion. This threefold division of the Liturgy is based on the story of the two disciples of Emmaus (Luke 24: 13-35). The two disciples were walking together, meditating on the events of the crucifixion and burial of the Lord. Suddenly, the Lord appears and walks with them, for indeed “where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matt. 18:20). This corresponds to the first part of the Liturgy, the Assembly, when the people of God assemble to become the Church, the body of Christ. As in the incidence of Emmaus, the Lord (the head of the body) is always there amongst the assembled Church.

This is the preliminary part of the Liturgy, when we assemble for the “prayers of the hours”. In this part Christ reveals himself in the congregation. This is why the priest always faces the congregation during the prayers of the hours (the Agpeya).

The second phase of the story of Emmaus is when the Lord explains the Scriptures to the two disciples. This corresponds to the second part of the Liturgy, the part we call the Liturgy of the word, which consists mainly of scriptural readings and commentary (sermon). During this part, the Lord reveals himself to us in the scripture (the word). During the reading of the Gospel, the priest offers incense while facing the lectern.

The third phase of the story is when the Lord took bread, blessed it, brake and gave to them. This corresponds to the third part of the Liturgy, the Liturgy of the faithful. During this part, the Lord reveals himself to us in the bread and wine, which become the body and blood of our Lord. It is for this reason that the priest is always facing the altar while praying the “anaphora.”

Although the two disciples recognized the Lord only in the breaking of the bread, they recalled how their hearts were inflamed in them when the Lord spoke to them. In a similar manner, we can say that the Liturgy of the word inflames our heart and prepares us for the “breaking of the bread” (communion).

Father Athanasius Iskander

THE OFFERTORY

The offertory, simply defined, is the rite of bringing the offerings of bread and wine into the Altar. This rite has undergone a process of evolution in churches all over the world. This evolution involved basically three stages. We have enough information that enables us to reconstruct these stages of development.

In the beginning:

In the very early Church, this rite was practiced after the *kiss of peace*. The first part of the Liturgy was known as the Liturgy of the catechumens (candidates for baptism). This was comprised of readings from the bible, the acts of the martyrs and a sermon by the Bishop, who normally presided at the Eucharist. The kiss of peace concluded this part of the Liturgy. The catechumens were asked to leave since they were not allowed to see the holy things which belong only to the holy (the faithful). This was in obedience to the Lord's admonition "Cast not thy pearls before swine" (Matt. 7:6).

The doors of the church (or more probably, the house, where the Eucharist was celebrated) were then closed. The large veil that covered the altar (to conceal it from the eyes of the catechumens) would be removed by the priest and the deacon, and brought into the assembly. The deacon would then exhort the people in Greek saying, "Prospherin Kata etropon" (meaning, offer in order) and the people would then bring their offerings of bread and wine, putting the bread in the large veil. The deacon and the priest would then bring the offerings into the altar, where the Bishop, after washing his hands, starts the Liturgy of the faithful by saying, "The Lord be with you all."

Traces of the old practices still remain in our liturgy and serve as telltales of the past. Even though the offertory has now been moved to the beginning of the Liturgy, the deacon still exhorts the people to offer by saying "Prospherin," after they have exchanged the kiss of peace (the original time for the Offertory). The washing of hands has been moved with the offertory to the beginning of the mass, but is practiced again before the Liturgy of the faithful. The veil that covers the altar is still known as the "prospherin" even though it is no longer used to collect the "prospora" (the gifts).

The great entrance:

About the time Constantine became Emperor, and the churches started to enjoy peace and prosperity, the simple rite of bringing the offerings to the altar gradually evolved into the elaborate “great entrance,” most probably of Byzantine origin. The rite was also moved to its present position; at the very beginning of the Liturgy, before the Liturgy of the catechumens. No longer would the people bring their gifts directly to the altar but rather give them to the deacons; ahead of time. The deacons and the priests, dressed in their beautiful vestments, with tapers lit, and censers in their hands, would then bring the offerings in a procession that starts from the door of the church and ends in the sanctuary.

There are three main reasons for the evolution of this rite. First, as more people entered the faith, it became impractical to let everyone bring in their gifts to the altar.

Second, the catechumens became mainly infants and the Church was not as obsessed with secrecy as in the beginning.

Third, the peace and prosperity brought about by Constantine's edict allowed the building of churches that were suitable for this elaborate procession.

Traces of this practice survives in our Liturgy, for (the eves of) the three great feasts of the Nativity, Epiphany and Easter.

The contemporary rite:

The final stage of the evolution of the rite was a return to a less elaborate procession. Rather than circle the whole church, the priests and the deacons carry the gifts of bread and wine, circling the altar instead (see *the procession of the Lamb*, later).

Although less elaborate from the outside, the rite has become laden with complex rituals that are full of symbolism concerning the death and burial of our Lord. The death of our Lord had many Old Testament “types,” or symbols. The oldest symbol was the immolation of the “Passover Lamb”. John the Baptist called Christ “the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Saint Paul also refers to Christ as “our Passover” (1Cor. 5:7). That is why we call the bread of the oblation “the lamb” and the circling of the gifts around the altar, “the procession of the Lamb.”

After the Psalms are concluded, the priest stands at the door of the sanctuary, facing the west. The bread and wine are presented to him while a deacon stands at his right carrying a veil in his right hand and a

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lighted taper in his left hand. The priest would then examine the loaves of the bread to choose “a lamb without blemish” (Ex. 12:5, 1 Pet. 1:19). He also examines the wine, making sure it has not gone sour, then gives it to the deacon standing at his right. The priest would then bring in the chosen “lamb” and puts it on a veil setting it down on the north side of the altar. The deacon would bring the wine into the sanctuary.

The entrance of the gifts into the sanctuary is a symbol of the entrance of Christ who, “By His own blood entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Heb. 9:12).

Christ's entrance into the holy place to offer himself “without spot to God” (Heb. 9:14), was prefigured in the Old Testament not only by the Paschal lamb (Ex. 12:5), but also by the high priestly sacrifice of the day of atonement (Yom Kippur) (Ex. 30:10, Heb. 9:7). The rubric reminds us of these two Old Testament figures. The Paschal lamb figure is the reason the “bread” chosen by the priest is henceforth called simply the “Lamb.” The symbolism of the day of atonement sacrifice will be dealt with later in detail.

The washing of hands:

The priest would then wash his hands three times. This no doubt is related to the ablutions that the Old Testament priests were required to do before immolating the sacrifices in the temple. These washes, which to the Jews meant ritual purity, have now acquired a new meaning. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem (fourth century) explains it this way:

You saw, then, the deacon who offers the water for the washing of the hands of the celebrant and to the presbyters who encircle the altar of God. Not that he offered this water on account of any bodily uncleanness, for we did not enter the church unwashed; rather the ablution is a symbol of our obligation to be clean from all sins and transgressions. The hands symbolize action. So by washing them we signify plainly the purity and blamelessness of our conduct. Did you not hear the blessed David explaining the mystery of this ceremony when he says, “I will wash my hands among the innocent and will circle your altar, O Lord” (Ps. 25:6)¹

The Psalm alluded to by Saint Cyril is actually recited by the priest as he washes his hands. Note also how he sees in this

¹Cyril of Jerusalem: *Mystagogical Catechesis* 5, in Sheerin D.J. *The Eucharist*.

psalm an explanation not only of the washing of the hands but also of the circling of the altar (the procession of the Lamb) that follows it.

The rubric then directs the priest to dry his hands slightly, and then carrying the Lamb on the palm of his left hand, he rubs it above and below with his right hand, while saying this prayer, “Grant O Lord that our sacrifice may be accepted in Thy sight for my sins and for the ignorances of Thy people...”

The words of the priest bring to our mind the Old Testament sacrifice of the day of atonement, when, once a year, the high priest would enter the holy of holies, “not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people’s sins committed in ignorance” (Heb. 9:7, Lev. 16). The priest is thus signifying that the imperfect sacrifice of the Old Testament has now been replaced by the perfect sacrifice of Christ, Who himself has become our sin offering. (Is. 53:10)

In the Old Testament sacrifice of the day of atonement, as in other sin sacrifices, the high priest had to lay his hands on the sacrificial animal, then make an atonement for himself and for the sins the people committed in ignorance. The laying on of hands signifies transfer of the sins to the sacrificial animal. The animal is then killed. Rubbing the Lamb may represent the old Testament’s laying on of hands,¹ while uttering the words, “Grant O Lord that our sacrifice may be accepted in Thy sight for my sins and for the ignorance of Thy people...” reminds us of the atonement that the high priest made for his own sins and for the sins the people made in ignorance.

After rubbing the lamb with his slightly wet hands above and below, the priest wraps it in a veil, and proceeds with the “Procession of the Lamb.” This action may be,

... in imitation of the burial of Christ, wherein Joseph, after taking His body down from the Cross, wrapped it in clean linen after he had anointed it with spices and ointment, and carried it with Nicodemus, and buried it in the new tomb cut from the rock.²

¹Dom Gregory Dix: The shape of the Liturgy.

²Germanus of Constantinople: on the Divine Liturgy, in Sheerin D.J. The Eucharist.

So, the action of rubbing the Lamb (above and below with the slightly wet right hand of the priest), signifies, not only the laying on of hands, as done by the high priest in the Old testament, but also the anointing of the body of the Lord before being wrapped in linen, as recorded in the Gospel. (John 19:40)

The procession of the Lamb:

The priest then carries the lamb wrapped in a veil above his head. The deacon similarly wraps the wine flask in a veil, carries it above his head and follows the priest. The rubric directs that before each of them goes a deacon carrying a lighted taper. They all follow in a procession around the altar.

The procession around the altar would now be a symbol for carrying the body of Jesus wrapped in linen to lay it in the tomb. The priest and the deacon represent Joseph and Nicodemus who carried the body of our Lord. The deacons who precede them (carrying tapers), represent the two angels “who came and stood by throughout the passion and death of our Lord.”¹ These were the same angels whom Mary Magdalene saw in the empty tomb (John 20:12). The whole procession of the Lamb becomes a beautiful icon for the short journey from Calvary to the nearby sepulcher.

As the priest starts circling the altar he gives glory to God by saying this doxology, “Glory and honour, honour and glory unto the all holy Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit...” Then he asks God to give peace and edification (building up) to His Church that is now assembled and is kneeling in worship and reverence to the memorial of the passion of Christ.² Then he mentions those who brought the gifts, those on whose behalf they have been brought (the person in whose name the oblation is offered,) and those by whom they have been brought: probably the deacons who became “the guardians of the gifts brought by the people.”³

¹Theodore of Mopsuestia, in Enrico Mazza's *Mystagogy*

²Theodore of Mopsuestia, in Enrico Mazza's *Mystagogy*

³Schemmman A : *The Eucharist*

The day which the Lord has made:

The people respond by singing a psalm: usually part of Psalm 116. The Church always saw in this Psalm a reference to the day which the Lord hath made, Sunday, the day of the resurrection. That is why this hymn is sung only on Sundays, and especially on Easter Sunday. “This is the day the Lord has made, let us be glad and rejoice in it.”

Just as the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, holds first place among all women, so among all other days this day is mother of all... This day is one of seven and one outside of seven... This is the day the synagogue ended and the Church began... For all these reasons, dearly beloved, let us chant in unison, “This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”¹

The “signing” of the Lamb:

When the procession around the altar is concluded, the priest stands in front of the altar facing east. He puts the Lamb in the palm of his left hand, the deacon, holding the wine flask in his right hand (on a veil) with a lighted taper in his left hand, would then bring the wine closer to the Lamb. The priest makes the sign of the cross on both the bread and the wine three times, consecrating them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. With the first signing he says, “Blessed be God the Father the Pantocrator;” in the second he says, “Blessed be His only begotten Son Jesus Christ Our Lord;” and in the third he says, “Blessed be the Holy Spirit the Paraclete.” In doing so, the priest starts the process of consecration of the gifts which involves signing them twenty seven times throughout the Liturgy.

The deacon responds after each signing by saying “Amen,” then he responds to the priest’s doxology by saying, “One is the Holy Father, One is the Holy Son, One is the Holy Spirit...” He then sings his own doxology, “Blessed be the Lord God forever. Amen.” Finally, he asks the congregation to share in glorifying the Lord God, by reciting Psalm 117: “Praise the Lord all ye nations, praise Him all ye people, for His mercy is confirmed upon us and the truth of the Lord endureth forever.” To this, the

¹Jerome, in Liturgical practice in the Fathers.

people respond by singing *their* own doxology, “Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, Now and always and unto the ages of all ages. Amen.”

Now to understand all of this let us consider the deacon's exhortation, “Praise the Lord all ye nations”. The Coptic, “ni ethnos tiro,” is often translated “all ye gentiles;” and indeed, when St. Paul quotes this psalm he uses the word gentiles (Rom. 15:11). This invitation to the gentiles to glorify God, at the beginning of the consecratory process of the gifts fulfills a very important prophesy in the book of Malachi, where the Lord says, “For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the gentiles and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name and a pure offering.” (Mal. 1:11).

That the pure offering in this prophesy refers to the sacrifice of the Eucharist is quite obvious in the writings of the early Church Fathers. Justin Martyr comments on this prophesy saying,

In this passage God already speaks of the sacrifices which we, the gentiles offer Him in every place, namely the bread of the Eucharist and the cup, likewise, of the Eucharist. He foretells that we glorify His Name.¹

So, we, the gentiles fulfill Malachi's prophesy, by glorifying God. We glorify Him “for his mercy is confirmed upon us,” now that our offering (prospora) has become “acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (Rom 15:16). We glorify Him for “His truth endureth forever”, since what He foretold of old, concerning the offering of the Gentiles, has been fulfilled, today, in our sight.

The Burial of the Lamb:

The priest now takes the bread and places it on a veil, which sits inside the paten. He also pours the wine into the chalice, mixing it with some water. The pouring of the wine is again, a symbol of the pouring of the blood of Christ.²

¹Sheerin D.J. The Eucharist

²Theodore of Mopsuestia, in Enrico Mazza's *Mystagogy*

Then He says the Prayer of thanksgiving at the end of which is an inaudible prayer called the Prayer of the Prothesis:

Master, Lord Jesus Christ, the Co-eternal Logos of the unblemished Father, who art of one essence with Him and the Holy Spirit. For Thou art the Living Bread which came down from heaven, and didst afore time make Thyself a Lamb without spot for the life of the world. We ask and entreat Thy goodness O Lover of Mankind, show Thy face upon this bread, and upon this cup which we have set upon this, Thine holy table.

Now the priest makes the sign of the cross on the bread and the wine three times, while he says,

Bless them, sanctify them, purify them and change them, in order that this bread may become indeed Thine holy Body, and the mixture which is in this cup, indeed your precious blood. May they become for all of us a partaking, healing and salvation of our souls, our bodies and our spirits.

As usual, he ends the prayer with a doxology glorifying the Holy Trinity.

This prayer, sometimes called “*pre-epiclesis*,” marks a further step in the process of sanctifying the gifts, which starts at the offertory and finds its fulfilment in the Epiclesis.

The priest then covers the bread with a veil and the chalice with another veil. Then the priest and the deacon cover the altar with the *Prospherin*, and put another veil on top of the *Prospherin*.

Each one of these actions has a symbol that pertains to the burial of our Lord. The altar is a symbol of the tomb; the paten symbolizes the bier; the bread is the body of our Lord; the veil under the bread is the burial cloth, while the veil covering the bread stands for the cloth which was upon the head and face of Christ (John 20:7). The four hands of the *asterisk* “hugging” the bread in the paten, symbolize the hands of Joseph and Nicodemus who carried the body of Christ and laid it in the tomb. The *prospherin* becomes the stone that closed the door of the tomb and the triangular veil on top of it becomes the seal which was put on the stone.¹

In case you wonder why there is this obsession with the death and burial and how it is related to the Eucharist, consider what the Lord said

¹Germanus of Constantinople: on the Divine Liturgy, in Sheerin D.J. The Eucharist.

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to His disciples: “For 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.” The Church, the bride of Christ, has remained faithful to His command by proclaiming His death in the rites of the offertory, and confessing His resurrection in the lifting up of the *Prospherin* before the Anaphora. Did not the Lord command us saying, “do this in remembrance of me?” Can there be a better way of commemorating His holy passion, his resurrection from the dead - than re-enacting these life-giving actions by entrenching them in our Eucharistic rites?

THE LITURGY OF THE CATECHUMENS

The teaching part of the Liturgy was called the Liturgy of the Catechumens, because those candidates for baptism (catechumens) were allowed to attend it. It concluded with the *kiss of peace*, which not only was a sign of reconciliation among all, but also gave the faithful “Godparents” a chance to say goodbye to the catechumens whom they sponsored. It is also called (by modern liturgical theologians) the Liturgy of the Word, because in it the word of God is proclaimed.

In old times, it preceded the offertory because the uninitiated eyes of the catechumens were not deemed worthy to behold the holy mysteries. In modern liturgical practice, it starts after the conclusion of the Offertory or *Prothesis*.

In our previous article we spoke about covering the altar with the *Prospherin* and the symbolism involved in this. Having done this the priest silently says the “Absolution to the Son,” kisses the altar, then going to the south side of the altar (to his right), he bows down (giving thanks to God for the grace of the priesthood which was bestowed unto him). Then, rising, he proceeds to the north side of the altar. There, the senior among the acolytes (deacons serving the altar) bows before him then raises his head towards the priest, who blesses him by placing his hand on his forehead. They both leave the sanctuary, the rest of the acolytes having preceded them. The priest then says the “Absolution of the servants.”

While the priest is on his way out of the sanctuary, the deacons start intoning or humming, “o-wōw..... o-wōw ...,” while the congregation bows their heads. In order to know the meaning of this, we have to go back to the Old Testament rituals. The book of Sirach tells us that,

While the priest went up to the holy altar to offer the oblation of the Lord before the congregation of Israel, and, finishing his service on the altar, to honour the offering of the Most High King, the sons of Aaron shouted... and made a great noise to be heard for a remembrance before God. Then, all the people together made haste and fell down to the earth upon their faces to adore the Lord God. ... Then, coming down [from the altar], he [the priest] lifted up his hands over all the children of Israel to give glory to God with his lips.¹

¹ Si 50: 16-22.

It is in emulation of this that the deacons, waiting for the priest to come down from the altar, hum this tune to honour the offering of the oblation of the New Testament. The people bow down for the same reason.

When the priest has come down, all the acolytes as well as the other priests, bow down facing east. He then, standing behind them, and facing the East, he says the “Absolution of the Servants.” He faces the altar while saying the absolution out of reverence to the oblations placed on it.

At the conclusion of the “Absolution of the Servants,” the priest proceeds to the south side of the altar. One of the acolytes brings the Censer to him. He puts incense into the censer and starts to offer incense around the altar.

Now, in order to understand the meaning of this, we have to go back to the Old Testament ordinances, once again. God ordered Aaron and his children to offer incense twice a day, once in the morning (Ex. 30:7) and once in the evening (Ex. 30:8). Our Church observes this ordinance in the morning and evening Offering of Incense service. But God also ordered another offering of incense, during the high priestly sacrifice of Yum Kippur (the day of atonement). This sacrifice, the most solemn of all the Old Testament sacrifices was done only once a year. Only the high priest could offer it, because he was the only one allowed to enter the Holy of Holies (the second tabernacle) to make this offering. He went in “not without blood to offer for his own sins and for the people's ignorance” (Heb. 9:7). After offering the sacrifice Aaron was instructed to “take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the Lord, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the veil. And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not” (Lev. 16:12-13). Saint Paul tells us that this Old Testament sacrifice was only a shadow and a figure of Christ's perfect sacrifice, Who “Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Heb. 9:12). The priest's entrance into the sanctuary (behind the veil) to offer incense is in emulation of the Old Testament ordinance. We do this because as we said before, these sacrifices were types and figures of Christ's eternal sacrifice. And if it behoved Aaron to offer incense over the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament, how much more it behoves the priests of the New Testament to offer incense over Christ's perfect sacrifice, whose memorial is on the altar?

While the priest is offering incense on the altar, the congregation sings the beautiful hymn, *Tai Shori*. This hymn is usually sung in an abbreviated form, but there is a longer hymn that is rarely used nowadays. We shall give the English text of the hymn, with the parts belonging to the longer form in *Italics*.

This censer of pure gold,
 bearing the sweet incense,
 in the hands of Aaron the priest,
 offering incense upon the altar,
*before the mercy seat,
 is the holy Virgin Mary;
 Who brought forth Jesus Christ;
 the Son and Logos.
 The Holy Spirit came upon her,
 purified her, sanctified her,
 and filled her with grace.
 Through her intercessions,
 O Lord, grant us the forgiveness of our sins.*

Here is the evidence of the Old Testament origin for this incense.

Another ritual that I sometimes notice and which supports this also, is when one of the acolytes brings the censer out with him while the priest says the Absolution, and later gives it to the priest, who enters with it into the Sanctuary. This may be done in order to emulate exactly what Aaron did in the Old Testament, when he had to take the censer and bring it *within the veil*, then offer incense.

Now, someone may ask, since the Old Testament “bloody” sacrifices are over with, why do we retain this ordinance of offering incense? The answer is in the Old Testament prophecy of Malachi (Mal. 1:11-12). In this prophesy, the Lord foretells that the Gentiles will,

- (a) Offer incense unto His name
- (b) Offer a pure offering
- (c) Glorify His name, which the Jews have profaned.

That the pure offering in (b), is the Eucharistic offering, is beyond a doubt from the various writings of the Fathers.¹ It is also obvious from

¹Justin Martyr: Discourse with Trypho, many others.

studying the ancient Coptic liturgy of Saint Mark, which quotes this prophesy in the anaphora,

We offer this reasonable and bloodless sacrifice, which all nations from the rising to the setting of the sun, from the north and the south offer to Thee, O Lord; For great is Thy name among the nations (gentiles), and in all places are incense, sacrifice and oblation offered to Thine Holy Name.¹

The fulfilment of part (b) of the prophesy of Malachi (offering a pure offering,) has been accomplished in the Offertory (see above).

The glorification of the Lord by the nations (gentiles) is accomplished when the congregation, prompted by the deacon's exhortation, "Praise the Lord all ye nations..." respond with the beautiful *Doxology of the Gentiles*, "Doxa Patri Ke Eio..." the Doxology that is always sung in Greek, the language of the Gentiles.

The only remaining part of this prophesy is the offering of incense by the nations (gentiles), which is fulfilled by the morning and evening *Offering of Incense*, as well as the incense offered during the Eucharist.

Another question that may be raised is, "Why do we offer incense upon the oblations before they become the Body and Blood of Christ?" To this Father Schmemman answers, "It is in anticipation of their becoming the Body and Blood of Christ."²

After offering incense in the Sanctuary, the priest offers incense in the chancel (area occupied by the chanters), then he goes around the church offering incense. First, he goes to the north side (where the men are seated), then, coming back towards the sanctuary, he goes to the south side (where the women are seated), then again into the sanctuary. While he is doing this, one of the readers goes to the lectern and reads the Pauline Epistle. The censuring of the nave during the reading of the Pauline Epistle symbolizes the spread of the Gospel, through the preaching of St. Paul, all over the world.

After concluding the Pauline incense, the priest returns to the sanctuary, where he silently says this prayer:

O 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

¹Anti-Nicene Fathers vol vii

²Schmemman: The Eucharist.

with great power; Who of Thy Goodness has called upon Paul, who was for sometime a persecutor, to be a chosen vessel; And was pleased in him that he should become a chosen Apostle and preacher of the gospel, O Christ our God; We ask Thee also now, O Thou, the Good Lover of mankind, graciously grant us and all Thy people, a mind free from wandering, and a clear understanding, that we may learn and understand how profitable are Thine holy teachings, which are read to us now after him. And as he followed Thine example, O Thou, Prince of life, so make us to be like him in deed and in faith, that we may glorify Thine Holy Name and ever glory in Thy Cross. And unto Thee we send up glory, honour and worship, with Thy Good Father and the Holy Spirit, the Life-Giver, Who is of One Essence with Thee, now, and at all times, and unto the age of all ages. Amen.

A chapter from the Catholic Epistles is then read. These are the Epistles written by the other Apostles (James, Peter, John and Jude). These are called catholic because, unlike St. Paul's Epistles which are directed to a particular church or to one of his disciples, these are directed to the whole Church. (The word catholic means universal).

During reading of the catholic Epistle, the priest says the following prayer inaudibly:

O Lord God, Who hast revealed unto us through Thine holy Apostles the mystery of the Gospel of the glory of Thy Christ, and hast given unto them according to the power of the infinite gift of Thy grace, that they should proclaim among all nations the glad news of the unsearchable riches of Thy mercy, we ask Thee, O our Lord, make us worthy to have a share and an 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 for godliness' sake. Keep Thou Thine holy Church, which Thou founded through them, and bless the lambs of Thy flock, and make to increase this vine, which Thy right hand has planted in Christ Jesus our Lord, through Whom are due unto Thee glory, and honour, and dominion, and worship, with Him and the Holy Spirit, the Life-Giver, Who is of One Essence with Thee, now, and at all times, and unto the age of all ages. Amen.

This is followed by the Acts of the Apostles, and the chronicles of the martyrs, the Synaxarion.

During the reading of the Acts of the Apostles, the priest offers

incense around the Altar, then in the chancel but does not circle the whole church. This signifies the spread of the Gospel through the preaching of the other Apostles, who unlike St. Paul, remained closer to Jerusalem.

The Trisagion:

The “*Agius*”, is one of the oldest hymns in the Church. From ancient times it has been sung before the reading of the Gospel.¹ We know that it was always sung in Greek (even in Latin churches), because the New Testament was preached in the Greek Language.²

There is an old tradition in the Church about how this hymn originated, and it goes like this: When the holy Joseph and Nicodemus were burying the body of our Lord, doubts entered their minds concerning His Divinity. Suddenly, a choir of angels appeared to them singing defiantly, “Holy God, Holy mighty, Holy immortal.” The two righteous men, realizing their error, joined in the singing, and then as if to confess their sin and to ask for mercy and forgiveness, they added to the angelic hymn the phrase, “O Thou Who was crucified for us have mercy on us.” The Church later adopted this hymn, adding a verse concerning the Virgin birth of our Lord and another concerning His resurrection and ascension.³

We have evidence to support this in our liturgical *hymnody*. The angelic origin of this hymn is recorded for us in the “Doxology of the Heavenly,” sung during the Offering of Incense,

And the twenty four Priests,
In the church of the first-born,
Praise Him incessantly,
Proclaiming and saying,

¹Robert Cabie: History of the Mass.

²Pseudo-Germanus in Daniel J. Sheerin: The Eucharist.

³Encyclopaedia Britannica: Versions older than 1970

Holy, O God:
 The sick, O Lord, heal them.
 Holy, O Mighty:
 Those who slept, repose them.

Holy, O Immortal:
 O Lord, bless Thine inheritance,
 And may Thy mercy and Thy peace
 Be a fortress unto Thy people.

The part attributed to the holy Joseph and Nicodemus is preserved for us in the beautiful burial hymn of Holy Friday called "*Golgotha*"

The two righteous men,
 Joseph and Nicodemus,
 came and took the Body of Christ.
 They anointed Him with spices,
 shrouded Him, and placed Him in a tomb.
 They praised Him, saying,
 "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal,
 Who was crucified for us, have mercy upon us."

The prayer for the Gospel:

The reading of the Gospel is the climax of the Liturgy of the Word. It is the most important reading. For this reason a special prayer is said in order to prepare us for hearing the proclamation of the good news (the Gospel).

The prayer starts by the words of our Lord Jesus to His disciples: "Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see..." The Church is here reminding us that we too are privileged because we can see Christ offered for us on the altar, and hear His voice proclaimed in the Gospel, the things which the kings and prophets of the Old Testament desired to see and hear but could not. Following this is a petition that we may be granted to be worthy not only to hear but also to act according to the holy Gospels. We ask this through the prayers of the saints.

We end the prayer by remembering those who asked us to remember them, the departed, the sick, and so on.

The Psalm before the Gospel:

The psalms are filled with prophecies about our Lord's life, passion, resurrection, His ascension and His Parousia (second coming). It was thus fitting that selections of the psalms should be read as an introduction to the Gospel reading. When the Lord Jesus met the two disciples of Emmaus, "Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded to them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27). Later on, they recalled how their heart was burning within them while He talked with them and opened to them the scriptures (Luke 24:32). Only after understanding the scripture, could they recognize the Lord in the breaking of the bread (Luke 24:31). In the same manner, the reading of the Psalm opens our minds to understand the Gospel. Hearing the Gospel, in turn, inflames our heart with the desire to receive the Lord in the breaking of the bread (Communion).

The sermon:

The sermon is as old as the Eucharist itself. Justin Martyr mentions that after the reading of the "memoirs of the Apostles" (Gospels) is concluded, "The president [bishop presiding at the Eucharist] verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things."¹

The Litany:

During the reading of the Gospel, the priest says inaudibly two prayers. The first of these is called the "Prayer after the Gospel." This prayer, is said aloud only during the weekdays of Holy Lent and the three days of the fast of Nineveh. It is a petition that God may receive our prayers, supplications, repentance and confessions and to make us worthy to hear the gospel and observe its commandments bringing forth fruit, a hundred fold, sixty fold and thirty fold. The priest then remembers the sick, those who are travelling, the plants, the fruits of the earth, the weather etc. Then he says a prayer for the King and ends with a prayer for the catechumens. Marquess² says that there is no doubt that this prayer was

¹Justin Martyr: First Apology in ANF Vol I.

²Marquess of Bute: Coptic morning service for the day of the Lord.

always said aloud in the beginning. Certainly a prayer concerning the Catechumens would have been said aloud before the dismissal of the catechumens.

The second prayer said silently by the priest is called the “Prayer of the Veil.” The rubric directs that it be said inaudibly by the priest, standing bowed down beside the door of the Sanctuary,

O God, Who in Thine unspeakable love toward mankind, sent Thine Only-Begotten Son into the world, that He might bring the lost sheep home unto Thee, we ask Thee, O our Lord, thrust us not behind Thee when we offer this awesome and bloodless sacrifice. For we put no trust in our righteousness but in Thy mercy, whereby Thou hast given life to our race. We pray and entreat Thy Goodness, O Lover of mankind, that this mystery which Thou hast appointed unto us for salvation may not be unto condemnation unto us, or unto any of Thy people, but unto the washing away of our sins and the forgiveness of our negligence, and unto the glory and honour of Thine Holy Name, O Father and Son and Holy Spirit, now, and at all times, and unto the age of all ages. Amen.

The Three Long Prayers:

The prayers for the peace, the Fathers, and the congregation are very old, belonging originally to the liturgy of St. Mark. They appear as early as the fourth century in the liturgy of St. Basil, where they follow the sermon.¹ No doubt that together with the preceding prayer after the Gospel, they constituted the “Common Prayer” that Justin Martyr testifies to by these words, “Then [after the conclusion of the sermon] we all [both catechumens and faithful] rise together and pray” He gives the details of this “Common prayer” as this,

We offer hearty prayers in common for ourselves and for the baptized, and for all others in every place, that we may be counted worthy, now that we have learned the truth, by our works also to be found good citizens and keepers of the commandments, so that we may be saved

¹Jasper and Cummings: Prayers of the Eucharist.

with an everlasting salvation.¹

The Creed:

The Creed was introduced into the Liturgy of the Eucharist after the first three Ecumenical Councils. We have this testimony about its recital:

The Creed which is proclaimed by the people at the time of the sacrifice was produced by the discussion of the three hundred and eighteen holy fathers at the Council of Nicea. Its rule of the true faith excels in so many mysteries of the teaching of the faith... and for that reason it is proclaimed in a common confession by the people in all churches.²

¹Justin Martyr: First Apology in ANF vol.I

²Isidore of Seville in Sheerin D.J. : The Eucharist.

THE PRAYER OF RECONCILIATION

The prayer of reconciliation made its appearance in the Liturgy around the sixth century. Earlier documents show the Kiss of Peace following immediately after the Liturgy of the Catechumens.¹ The offering of the gifts would then start as soon as the Catechumens leave. We first hear about a “prayer before the Kiss of Peace” in the sixth century. Here is how one of the Church Fathers describes this prayer:

After these a prayer is made before the Kiss of Peace, that we might all be reconciled to one another in charity, and thus be worthily joined together by the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ.²

We find the same prayer preceding the Kiss of Peace in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius³.

Before the introduction of this prayer, the deacon used to exhort the people to “greet one another with a holy kiss,” thus asking them to be reconciled to one another before offering their gifts. There always arose this question in the minds of some people, why should I forgive my enemy? The Church tried to answer this question first from the pulpit, in sermons. An example of this comes from a sermon by St. John Chrysostom:

If you have anything against your enemy, get rid of your wrath, heal the wound, let go of your hostility, that you may receive healing from the table. For you are approaching the awesome and holy sacrifice. Show reverence for the goal of the sacrificial offering. The slain offering is Christ. And for whom was He slain, for what purpose? That

¹

Jasper and Cummings: Prayers of the Eucharist.

²Isidore of Seville: On Church Services

³Dionysius the Areopagite: The Ecclesiastical hierarchy.

He might make peace between heaven and earth, to make you a friend of the angels, to reconcile you to the God of all, to make you, an enemy and adversary, a friend. He gave His life to those who hated Him. Will you continue in enmity with your fellow servant? ... Hear at least what He says, When you offer your gift upon the altar, and, standing there before the altar, you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift upon the altar, and go and be reconciled with your brother, and then offer your gift [(Matt. 5:23-24)]. ... For this reason, at the very time of sacrifice He recalls to us no other commandment than that of reconciliation with one's brother.¹

Time and time again, the Church preached this message of reconciliation between man and man, based on the model of reconciliation between God and man, that is the essence of the sacrifice of the Cross; the sacrifice of the Eucharist. Then, guided by the Holy Spirit, the Church deemed profitable to standardize this teaching and making it a part of the Liturgy.

The message of the Prayer of Reconciliation is the same that St. John Chrysostom and other Church Fathers preached from the pulpit earlier. Christ has reconciled us to God; now we have to be reconciled towards one another, that we may be able to partake of the table of the Lord, without being condemned.

"O Great and Eternal God, who formed man in incorruption, and death which entered into the world by the envy of the Devil"

This statement that describes man's creation and fall is taken from one of the Old Testament's "Deutero-canonical" books, called the Wisdom of Sirach,

For God created man incorruptible, and to the image of his own likeness he made him. But by the envy of the devil, death came into the world. (Sir. 2:23-24)

God did not have death in His plan for man. He created him in His own image; immortal. Man could have remained immortal had he not

¹John Chrysostom: Sermon on the betrayal of Judas.

transgressed the commandment of God. But, through the envy of the devil, and man's gullibility in believing the serpent rather than God, man fell from grace and lost his immortality.

The devil envied man because God created him in His own image, not only of immortality, but also in God's image of authority. The Book of Genesis tells us, "And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have **dominion** over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth..." (Gen. 1:26). The liturgy of St. Gregory the Theologian confirms this: "Thou hast inscribed in me the image of Thine **authority**." Satan was God's most beautiful and most wise creature (Ezek. 28:12), and his pride could not accept that man, who was created after him, would have this authority and dominion over all the earth, so, he conspired and succeeded in robbing man of both his immortality as well as his authority over all the earth (Luke 4:6).

The destruction of death:

This death which came into the world by the envy of the devil was destroyed by the coming of the Son of God. One may wonder why the Liturgy does not time the destruction of death with the redemptive death of Christ but rather with His coming (manifestation). This is because we believe that the salvation on the Cross was "afore-ordained before the beginning of the world"¹ The Church sees the destruction of death already happening at the manifestation of the Son of God. The same sentiment is reflected in the prayer of Simeon the Elder, "Lord now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace for mine eyes have seen thy salvation" (Luke 2:29). Simeon too saw the salvation accomplished in the manifestation of the Lord's Christ (Luke 2:26).

Thou hast filled the earth with the peace from Heaven:

The Son of God's manifestation (coming down into the world) was greeted by the angels who came to proclaim to us the peace from heaven, "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth and goodwill towards men"

¹Prayer of the Prothesis, vide supra

(Luke 2:14). But, what peace is this? It is peace between man and God, between heaven and earth, between men and angels, as St. John Chrysostom teaches us in the sermon quoted above. The same sentiment is beautifully preserved for us in the liturgy of St. Gregory the Theologian: “Thou hast reconciled the earthly to the heavenly, making the two into one... and the old enmity Thou hast destroyed”

Pray for perfect peace:

The deacon exhorts us to pray that we may obtain this “peace from the heavens,” God's perfect peace that surpasses all understanding (Phil. 4:6). It is a different kind of peace than worldly peace. People of the world “speak peace to their neighbours but mischief is in their hearts” (Ps. 28:3) but, our heavenly peace comes from Christ. In His farewell discourse with His disciples, the Lord said unto them, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you, **not as the world giveth**, give I unto you” (John 14:27). The peace that Christ gives us is not from this world. It is heavenly. It is the perfect peace that cannot be shaken by anything or anyone.

... for love and the holy apostolic kisses:

The act of reconciliation, that we will be called upon to perform, becomes impossible without love. That is why the deacon exhorts us to pray, asking that we may be granted love. Love is the greatest of all commandments. To love God and your fellow man is the fulfilment of all commandments. Christian love embraces all: friends, neighbours, acquaintances, even enemies who plot against us and seek to harm us. Christ prayed for His killers (Luke 23:34), so did Stephen (Acts 7:60). God is love and he who does not love has not known God. He who has no love cannot be reconciled to his brother.

We pray for love that we may be able to exchange with one another the “Kiss of Peace,” that oldest of all Eucharistic rituals. We pray that the kiss we are about to exchange might be holy, without deceit or hypocrisy. The kiss is called Apostolic because it was delivered to us by the Apostles. St. Paul instructs us to share this kiss of peace (Rom. 16:16, 1 Cor. 16:20, 2 Cor. 13:12, 1 Thess. 5:26) and so does St. Peter (1

Pet. 5:14).

As usual, the people respond to the exhortation to pray by the customary “Lord have mercy.”

According to Thy goodwill O God:

God has shown His goodwill towards man in reconciling Himself to man in spite of man's desperate situation. That Divine goodwill is clearly illustrated in the parable of the master who had a slave that owed him 10 000 talents (Matt. 18:23-33). Not only did the master forgive his servant's enormous debt, he also gave him freedom from his slavery. Man was indebted to God. He owed his life, for “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). This enormous debt God has forgiven by sending his Only Begotten Son to die, thus paying the debt instead of mankind.

Man was also a slave “Bound and sold because of his sins”¹, for all the souls of the sons of Adam were held in the prison (Hades). God has also given man his freedom from the slavery of the Devil, when Christ descended into Hades to free His elect from that prison.

The priest reminds God of His goodwill that was shown towards us, before asking Him for the many things that he will plead on our behalf.

Fill our hearts with Thy peace:

The first request is that God fills our hearts with His perfect peace, the peace which comes from heaven. Only then could we be reconciled to one another. Only then could we greet one another with a holy kiss.

Cleanse us from all blemish:

In older times, the deacon exhorted the people before communion, “He that is pure let him come forward!” It is fortunate that the rubric no more calls for these frightening words, for who can presume to be pure enough to partake? Only God can make us pure, only he can cleanse us. So the Psalmist tells us, “Purge me with the hyssop and I shall be clean, wash me and I shall be whiter than snow” (Ps. 51:7). It is for this reason that

¹The second Eucharistic prayer (vide infra)

the Church, represented by the priest pleads with God, “cleanse us”

☩ All guile, all hypocrisy, all malice:

St. Peter exhorts us to lay aside “all malice and all guile and hypocrisy” (1 Pet. 2:1), but, how can we lay away all these sins? Only God can help us do so, for He told us, “without me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). It is for this reason that we turn St. Peter’s exhortation into a prayer that God may help us rid our selves of all guile, all hypocrisy and all malice.

Guile means deceit, cunning, duplicity, double dealing. It means playing tricks on others.

Hypocrisy is pretense of goodness, feigning to be what one is not, insincerity. It means shaking hands with someone pretending to be reconciled to him while your heart is filled with hatred towards him.

Malice is chronic anger that has turned malignant! It is hatred and desire for evil for our enemies. It is a constant desire for revenge against those who wrong us. John Climacus describes it as a “dark and loathsome passion... a pleasureless feeling cherished in the sweetness of bitterness... the ruin of the virtues... the poison of the soul... the shame of prayer”¹

The remembrance of evil, entailing death:

Remembrance of evil is the name given by the Fathers to “sins of memory”. The best way of explaining this is by giving an example. Suppose that you had a fight with someone in the past. You were then reconciled with him. You even confessed your sin of anger and obtained forgiveness (through the absolution). Months later and for no apparent reason, your memory replays the fight. Your memory, directed by the devil, enhances the viewing by adding “special effects” to the replay, making the fight seem much worse than it actually was. Suddenly you

¹John Climacus: *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*

are seized with anger, hatred, and spitefulness. Imagination quickly comes to the help of her sister (memory), and thoughts of revenge start cropping up in your mind. In your imagination you insult... beat up... even kill your enemy. Without you knowing it, you have once again fallen into the sin of anger.

Remembrance of evil is the greatest obstacle to reconciliation and forgiving one another. That is why we ask God to cleanse us from this deadly sin.

And make us worthy O our Master...

Having been filled with the peace of God, and cleansed according to His goodwill, we now beg to be made worthy of that holy Kiss of Peace, and the partaking, without condemnation of the heavenly and immortal gifts.

We call the gifts **immortal** because the body we partake of is the body of the resurrected Lord.¹ And since after the resurrection death has no dominion over Him anymore (Rom. 6:9), we call the gifts immortal.

We call them **heavenly**, because even though we offer unto God earthly gifts (bread and wine), he returns the gifts to us as the body and blood of his Son, who is in heaven at the right hand of His Father.² And since we partake of the very flesh of the very Christ who is in heaven, we call the gifts heavenly.

Greet one another with a holy Kiss:

The deacon now exhorts us to exchange a kiss of peace. Having been edified by the prayer the priest offered on our behalf, we now show our reconciliation towards one another by greeting one another. The priests greet one another, the deacons greet one another, and the people greet one another. Here is how the Fathers describe this kiss:

You must not suppose that this kiss is the kiss ordinarily exchanged in the streets by ordinary friends. This kiss is different, for it effects a

¹Cullman O: Early Christian worship

²John Chrysostom: *Homily on Ephesians*

[co-mingling] of souls, and pledges complete forgiveness. The kiss then is a sign of a true union of hearts, and of banishing any grudge... The kiss then is a reconciliation and is therefore holy.¹

The hymn after the Kiss:

“Through the intercessions of the Mother of God St. Mary, O Lord grant us the forgiveness of our sins.”

The hymn is a plea for forgiveness. “If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly father will also forgive you” (Matt. 6:14). This was the promise of our Lord. So, now that we have fulfilled this condition (forgiving one another as shown in exchanging the Kiss of Peace), we ask for the reward promised, that our own sins will be forgiven.

We end the hymn by offering worship to Christ together with His good Father and the Holy Spirit, For He came and saved us. It is through His coming to our world that the economy of salvation was inaugurated, that salvation that had its ultimate fulfilment on the Cross. It is this salvation that made it possible for us to be reconciled both to God and to our fellow man.

The deacon would then say, **“Yea, Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God hear us and have mercy upon us.”** The deacon is saying “yea” to our petition, he is pleading with God to hear our petition and have mercy upon us.

In the old liturgy books we find a gap after this response, and on a new page bearing the heading, **“Anaphora,”** we find another exhortation of the deacon, **“Offer in order...,”** to which the people respond, **“A mercy of peace, a sacrifice of praise.”** I am sure that many are wondering why did the liturgy book not join the two deaconal responses **“Yea Lord...”** and **“offer...”** The answer to this is in history.

As we said earlier, in the early Church tradition, immediately following the kiss of peace, the Catechumens were ordered to leave. The gap after the first response **“Yea Lord...”** represents the historical landmark for the dismissal of the catechumens and the closing of the

¹Cyril of Jerusalem: *Mystagogical Catechesis* 5.

doors. Only then would the deacon invite the Faithful to bring forward their offerings by saying **“Offer in order...”**

To understand the point of view of the early Church about this “dismissal of the catechumens” let us go back to the writings of one of the early Church Fathers.

The deacon shouts to the catechumens to go out according to an ancient rite of the Church, the reason is that the Jews and heretics and pagans undergoing instruction, who came to baptism as adults and were being tested before baptism, might remain in the church and hear the counsel of the Old and New Testament... but that afterwards they should go outside because they were not worthy to remain in the church while the oblation was being brought in... as the Lord says, “Do not give what is holy to dogs and do not cast your pearls before swine.” (Matt. 7:6). For what on earth is more holy than the consecration of the body and blood of Christ, and what is more unclean than dogs and swine? They are comparable, by analogy, to him who has not been cleansed by baptism.¹

Nowadays, things are different. The catechumens are basically infants, probably two or three months old, and the old obsession with secrecy has gone by. Now the offering of the gifts has been moved to the beginning of the Liturgy and there is no need to dismiss the catechumens. So, now the deacon says all three responses one after the others, **“Greet one another...”** followed by, **“Yea Lord...,”** followed by, **“Offer in order...”** The congregation also now sings the hymn **“Through the intercessions of the Mother of God...”** followed by **“A mercy of peace, a sacrifice of praise.”**

The Washing of the hands:

In the early Church, the washing of the hands was after the Kiss of Peace, during the Offering of the gifts. When the Offertory was moved to the beginning of the Liturgy (probably around the 4th century), another washing of the hands was “copied” to its new place, just before the procession of the Lamb. It was then that we started to have two

¹Pseudo Germanus of Paris: Letter 1

washings, one in the offertory and another after the Kiss of Peace.¹ When the Prayer of Reconciliation was introduced before the Kiss of Peace (around the 6th century), the second washing was placed before the Prayer of Reconciliation.

Why did the Church keep two washings? It is because the washing is meant to prepare the priest spiritually before approaching the altar, “I will wash my hands in innocency, so will I compass thine altar O Lord” (Ps. 26:6). In the beginning, the priest approached the altar once, after the Kiss of Peace, the first part of the Liturgy (the Liturgy of the catechumens) being done entirely outside the Sanctuary.² When the offertory was moved to the beginning of the Liturgy, the priest approached the altar twice, once during the offertory, and once again when he prays the Prayer of Reconciliation.

When the priest has washed his hands, he shakes his hands in front of the congregation as a sign of warning that anyone approaching the table of the Lord unworthily, will be responsible for his own condemnation.

¹Dix D. G.: The shape of the Liturgy.

²Schmemman A : The Eucharist

MERCY, PEACE, THE SACRIFICE OF PRAISE

“Offer in order, stand in trembling, look towards the East.” With this exhortation the deacon signalled the people (in older times) to bring forward their offerings to the altar. But now things have changed, the offering of the bread and wine has been moved to the beginning of the Liturgy, and the deacons, rather than the congregation, bring it to the Sanctuary. So, why did the Church keep that exhortation to the people to offer?

To answer this we have to understand the meaning of offering in the early Church. Indeed, the basic Eucharistic offering was the bread and wine, but that was not all. Father Schmemman explains this.

In the experience and in the practice of the early Church, the Eucharistic sacrifice was offered not only on behalf of all and for all, but by all, and therefore the real offering by each of his own gift, his own sacrifice, was a basic condition of it. Each person who came into the gathering of the Church brought with him everything that “as he has made up his mind” (2Cor. 9:7), he could spare for the needs of the Church, and this meant for the sustenance of the clergy, widows and orphans, for helping the poor, for all the good works in which the Church realizes herself as the love of Christ, as concern for all and service of all to all. The Eucharistic offering is rooted precisely in this sacrifice of love, therein lies its origin. And this was so self evident for the Church that, according to one witness, orphans who lived at the expense of the Church and did not have anything to bring participated in this sacrifice of love by bringing water.¹

We find confirmation to Father Schmemman's words in our own liturgical tradition. One of the oldest prayers of the Liturgy is called the **“Prayer for the Offerings”**. This prayer which belongs to the liturgy of St. Mark, is also said during the morning offering of incense on Sundays. In this prayer the priest

¹ Schmemman A. : The Eucharist

says, “Remember O Lord, the sacrifices, the offerings (prosphora) and the thanksgiving of those who have offered, unto the honour and the glory of thine holy name.” The deacon would then respond,

Pray for those who have care for the sacrifices, the offerings, firstfruits, oil, incense, veils, reading books, and altar vessels, that Christ our God reward them in the heavenly Jerusalem and forgive us our sins.

The priest would then resume the prayer asking that all of these sacrifices and offerings may be accepted by God. To this list of offerings mentioned above, the priest adds “*thanks-offerings*”, he even mentions “*those who desire to offer but have non, those who give in abundance and those who give in scarcity...*” You see, all of the above were considered sacrifices and offerings. Let us meditate on the various sacrifices and offerings mentioned in this beautiful prayer.

Firstfruits:

The people offered the firstfruits of their crops to God. Foremost among these was wheat and grapes. Wheat was used for making the Eucharistic bread after the custom of each one bringing his own bread ceased. The remainder was used for feeding the clergy and the poor. Grapes were used for making wine for the Eucharist. Wine used in the Eucharist is called “*Abarkeh*,” a corruption of the Coptic word “*aparche*” which means firstfruit. We are all familiar with the story of Saint Demetrius the Vinedresser who went to offer the firstfruit of his vine, and was chosen as the twelfth Patriarch of Alexandria. Motifs of wheat and grapes are used to adorn churches and altars as a reminder of this old habit.

In North America, the habit of bringing pumpkins and ears of corn to the churches at Thanksgiving is a reminder of this old habit of bringing firstfruits to God.

That we are supposed to bring to God these firstfruits is evident in the writings of the early Fathers,

We are bound therefore to offer to God the firstfruits of His creation, as

Moses also says, “You shall not appear in the presence of the Lord your God empty handed” (Deut. 16:16).¹

The concept of the bread and wine being **firstfruits** is quite prominent in the thought of the Fathers,

Again, giving directions to his disciples to offer to God the firstfruits of His own created things... He took bread, a part of creation and gave thanks saying “This is my body.” And the cup, likewise a part of that creation to which we belong, He declared it to be His blood, and taught the new oblation of the New Covenant.²

Oil, incense, veils, reading books, and altar vessels:

All of these things were brought to the church by the congregation. Books were hand-inscribed and bound before being brought to the church. People still bring these offerings to the church until this day. Even when printing was invented, the habit of offering books to the church survived in the many people who would pay for printing them. Many of the old books used in the church, carried this statement, “printed at the expense of...”

Thankofferings are the vows that people made to God and later on brought to the church. *Those in abundance and those in scarcity* refers to other freewill monetary gifts. Tithes are not mentioned here because the early Christians considered them the duty of the Jews. Christians gave to God more than their tithes, they gave all they could spare,

The Jews, to be sure, had the tenth part of their goods consecrated to Him, But those who have received liberty set apart all that they have for the Lord's purposes, giving joyfully and freely what is to them less valuable, since they have the hope of greater things, as that poor widow who put all her substance in the treasury of God. (Luke 21:2-4).³

¹Irenaus of Lyon; Against heresies.

²Ibid

³Irenaeus of Lyons: Against heresies.

The Book of Acts tells us the same story, early Christians sold their possessions and brought the money into the church for the service of the poor. (Acts 4:34). Saint Paul describes the attitude of the early Christians towards giving to the needy by saying that they gave “beyond their power” (2Cor. 8:3).

The sacrifice of mercy:

Offerings towards the needs of poor (charitable donations) was considered a true part of the Eucharistic offering, “the sacrifice of mercy.” They were brought together with the bread and wine to the church on Sunday, the first day of the Week. Saint Paul is a witness of this.

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him. (1Cor. 16:2).

Saint Augustine explains the importance of this “Sacrifice of mercy” by saying,

What does the Lord require of you but to do justly and to love mercy (Mic. 6:6-8) ... In the Epistle entitled *to the Hebrews*, it is said, “To do good and to be sharers forget not, for with such sacrifices God is pleased” (Heb. 13:16). And so, when it is written “I desire mercy rather than sacrifice” (Matt. 12:7), nothing else is meant than that one sacrifice is preferred to another, for that which is in common speech called sacrifice is the symbol of the true sacrifice. Now mercy is the true sacrifice, and therefore it is said, as I have just quoted, “with such sacrifices God is pleased”.¹

St. Irenaeus gives the same argument calling almsgiving “**sacrifices**” and “**oblations**”.

¹Augustin of Hippo: City of God

For there were oblations then and there are oblations now; there were sacrifices among the people, there are sacrifices also in the Church, rather the kind alone has been changed... Since then the Church makes offering guilelessly, her gift is rightly reckoned a pure sacrifice by God as Paul also says to the Philippians: "I am replete, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, an odour of sweetness, an acceptable sacrifice, one pleasing to God" (Phil. 4:18).¹

Here is another instance of Saint Paul calling alms a sacrifice. A sacrifice that in the first Church was considered to be an important part of the Eucharistic sacrifice, the sacrifice of mercy.

Peace as a sacrifice:

The Book of Ezekiel tells us that the ideal sacrifice is to be offered to God seasoned with salt (Ezek. 43:24). Our Lord Jesus confirms this and explains to us the meaning of this salt, "Every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. ¶ Have salt in your selves and have peace one with another." (Mark 9:49-50)

Peace is the "salt" of our Eucharistic sacrifice, without it our sacrifice is not complete since it lacks the "seasoning" required for the sacrifice to be acceptable and pure.

The early Church Fathers understood this as referring to the "Kiss of Peace," the reconciliation that we are required to offer to each other before we can offer our "gifts" of bread and wine.

That they considered peace as a true sacrifice is evident in their writings, "The greater sacrifice to God is our peace and brotherly harmony."²

The importance of this "sacrifice of peace" has been dealt with earlier in the Prayer of Reconciliation.

The Sacrifice of Praise:

Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. (Heb. 13:15).

¹Irenaeus of Lyon: Against the heresies.

²Cyprian: On the Lord's Prayer.

The Fathers understood this sacrifice of praise as the prayers and the hymns of the Eucharist. By participating in singing the hymns of the Eucharist we offer to God a true sacrifice of praise and Thanksgiving. The word Eucharist means thanksgiving, and the whole Eucharistic prayer in which both the priest and the people participate becomes a continuous hymn of praise and thanksgiving that is part and parcel of our Eucharistic sacrifice.

We are the true worshippers and the true priests who sacrifice in the spirit prayer as a suitable and acceptable sacrifice and we are bound to offer at God's altar this prayer dedicated with all our hearts.¹

Another Father reiterates the same when he says,

We indeed worship when we give thanks, for the sacrifice of this worship simply consists in blessing and this is right, for sacrifice ought to be offered to God by word in that God is the Word.²

Eusebius of Caesaria summarizes this whole concept of **sacrifice of praise** by saying,

We sacrifice the sacrifice of praise, the pure sacrifice of the new covenant, the contrite spirit (Ps. 51:17), and we offer this through our prayers... we offer thanksgiving for our salvation through pious hymns and prayers to God.³

So, the sacrifice of praise consists of the hymns, the prayers and the thanksgiving that comprise the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

From all that has been said above, we can now clearly see that the early Church Fathers saw two inseparable components of the Eucharistic offering: (1) the “gifts” of bread and wine, which represented the firstfruit of God’s creation, and (2) the *spiritual sacrifices* of, mercy (almsgiving), peace (reconciliation), and praise (hymns and prayers of thanksgiving).

¹Tertullian: On prayer

²Lactantius: Divine institutes.

³In Hanson R. Eucharistic offering in the early Church.

These “*spiritual sacrifices*” of **mercy, peace and praise** were considered true sacrifices ordained by the Lord himself.

The Saviour taught us to offer sacrifices, but not of irrational animals. We sacrifice by means of spiritual hymns and praises and thanksgivings, by comradeship towards our neighbours and by acts of benevolence.¹

This is why, the people when exhorted to offer by the deacon respond, “(Of) mercy of peace, a sacrifice of praise.” That these “spiritual sacrifices” are not offered instead of, but in addition to the bread and wine, is quite obvious from the following,

Christians offer to God in the Eucharist praise and thanksgiving, and also offer to Him the bread and the wine to be transformed by Him into the body and blood of Christ so that Christians can have communion with Christ.²

Ourselves as sacrifice:

Man himself, consecrated in the name of God, and vowed to God, is a sacrifice in so far as he dies to the world that he may live to God.³

St. Augustin considers offering ourselves to God in the Eucharistic offering as part of the *mercy sacrifice*,

This is a part of that *mercy* which each man shows to himself, and so it is written, “Have mercy on your soul by pleasing God.” (Sir. 30:24)⁴

In explaining this, St. Augustin quotes St. Paul's admonition, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1). He then adds,

¹Hanson R. Eucharistic offering in the early Church.

²Irenaeus: against heresies

³Augustin of Hippo: The city of God.

⁴Augustin of Hippo: The city of God.

Since therefore, **true sacrifices** are works of mercy to ourselves or our neighbours, ... it comes about accordingly that the entire redeemed city, that is to say the congregation and society of saints, is offered to God as a manifold sacrifice.

By offering mercy, peace, and praise, and ourselves to God in the Eucharist, the whole Church becomes a sacrifice, offered in the **one bread**, which will become the **one body** of Christ, “For we being many are one bread, and one body” (1Cor. 10:17).

St. Augustin sums up the **Eucharistic sacrifice** as indeed being the whole Church offering herself as sacrifice,

This is the sacrifice which the Church continually celebrates in the Sacrament of the altar, known to the faithful, in which she teaches that she herself is offered in the offering she makes.

This idea that in the Eucharistic sacrifice we are “offering ourselves” is also prominent in the writings of the 10th century Coptic bishop Sawires Ibn Almukaffa.

Father Schmemman reiterates the same sentiment,

Our life has become offering and sacrifice, it grows into a “Holy temple in the Lord” (Eph. 2:21), through the joy of offering ourselves and each other and all creation to God, ... the Church lives by this offering and fulfills herself in it.¹

Now we can understand the meaning of the deacon's exhortation during the offertory, (and later on before the commemoration of the Saints), “Pray for these holy and precious gifts (the bread and wine), *and our sacrifices* (of mercy, of peace, of praise... of ourselves) *and those who have brought them.*”

The lifting of the *Prospherin*:

If in the rituals of the Offertory, we proclaim the Lord's death and burial, it is in the lifting of the *Prospherin* that we confess His resurrection.² And, since the spreading of the *Prospherin* at the end of the Offertory

¹Scmemman A. : The Eucharist.

²Theodore of Mopsuestia, in Enrico Mazza: Mystagogy

was a symbol of the stone that was placed on the door of the tomb, the lifting of the *Prospherin* becomes an emulation of the angel who rolled the stone from the door of tomb to proclaim the resurrection of our Lord.¹

Now, every thing on the altar takes a new meaning. No more is the paten, the seat of our Lord's passion (paten is from the Latin *pati*, which means to suffer), it now represents the circle of the earth (Is. 40:22), the dome like *asterisk* represents the circuit of heaven (Job 22:14). In the centre of the paten, is the bread, in the likeness of the sun, for it represents the risen Lord, the "Sun of Righteousness" (Mal. 4:2). Under the bread and surrounding it, filling the paten, is a beautifully adorned veil, it represents the glory of the Lord, filling the whole earth.(Is. 6:3).

¹Germanus of Constantinople, in Sheerin D J : The Eucharist

THE LITURGY OF THE FAITHFUL

Introduction:

The Liturgy of the Faithful follows the same steps the Lord followed in the Last Supper. By reviewing the Synoptic Gospels' account of the Last Supper, as well as the account given by Saint Paul in 1Cor:15, we find out that the Lord:

1. Gave Thanks,
2. Blessed,
3. Broke,
4. Gave to the Disciples.

Following the same plan, the Liturgy of the faithful can be divided into four parts:

1. Prayers of Thanks-giving,
2. Prayers of Blessing,
3. Prayers of breaking the bread,
4. Communion.

The first two parts, that is those concerned with thanksgiving and blessing are together called the "Anaphora" or the "Cannon" of the Liturgy. This is separated from the prayers of breaking the bread by a series of prayers called the intercessions. Although the biblical account of the Last Supper does not mention any intercessions as such, it is obvious that these were added to the Liturgy of the Faithful very early on, as evidenced by Saint Paul's request that intercessions should be made, "...for all men ... that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." (1Tim 2:1-2).

The Anaphora:

The Anaphora begins with the great prayer of thanksgiving, from which the Eucharist derives its name (Eucharist means thanksgiving). This prayer of Thanks-giving can be divided into two parts.

The First Eucharistic Prayer, which starts immediately following the priest's dialogue with the people, "*The Lord be with you all ...*", is a hymn of thanksgiving concerning God's wonderful acts of the **creation** of the universe and all the creatures both visible and invisible. It ends

with the *Sanctus*, or the hymn of the Seraphim (Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Hosts . . .).

The Second Eucharistic Prayer, is a hymn of thanksgiving concerning God's wonderful acts of **salvation**, following man's fall from grace. It ends with the remembrance of the Lord's awesome *Parousia* (second coming), to judge the living and the dead, and reward everyone according to his deeds.

The Lord be with you all:

“*o Kyrios meta panton imon*” This very old salutation brings to mind the angel Gabriel's salutation to the Virgin, “*Ho Kyrios meta soo*” (The Lord is with you). Saint Augustin tells us that the priest salutes the people by these words because, “Our well-being requires that the Lord be always with us, since without Him we are nothing.”¹

The people respond, “And with your spirit”. St. John Chrysostom explains this exchange of greetings between the priest and the people by this, “The priest prays for the people, and the people also pray for the priest, for the words “and with your spirit” are nothing but this.”²

The people respond to the priest with love as they say: With you, O priest, and with the sacerdotal spirit you possess! They say that the *spirit* and not the *soul* is in the priest, since it is the *Spirit* which the priest has received through the imposition of hands. By this imposition, the priest receives the *Spirit* through which he becomes capable of carrying out the Mysteries.³

Lift up your hearts:

Saint Cyril of Jerusalem tells us that,

The priest cries, “Lift up your hearts!”, for truly is it necessary at that most awesome hour to have one's heart on high towards God, and not below, occupied with earth and the things of earth. In effect, then, the priest commands everyone at that very hour to banish worldly thoughts

¹Augustine of Hippo: A discourse concerning the Lord's day.

²John Chrysostom: Homily on second Corinthians.

³Narsai of Nisibis, Homily 1 in Robert Cabie: History of the Mass.

... and to have their hearts in heaven. ... Then, assenting to this by your confession, you answer, “we have lifted them up to the Lord.” Let no one present be so disposed that while his lips say “We have lifted them up to the Lord,” in his mind, his attention is engaged with worldly thoughts. At all times we should be mindful of God, but at least, if this is not possible due to human frailty, we must strive for it at that hour.¹

This act of raising our hearts is not our doing but it is the Lord's doing, who, “Raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places.” (Eph 2:6). Saint Augustin reminds us of this and advises that we should not attribute lifting up our hearts to the Lord to our own strength, our own merits or our own efforts, “since it is God's gift to have one's heart lifted up . . .”² It is for this reason that some prefer to respond, “*They are with the Lord.*”

Let us give thanks to the Lord:

Now that our hearts are raised up high to the Lord, the priest tells us that it is time to start the Eucharist. The word Eucharist means giving thanks, so the priest invites us to start this thanks-giving. We have to note an important contrast here; for, up to this point the priest has been admonishing us, but now he is asking for our participation.

Christ is present in the person of his minister not to pray alone to the Father, with us listening in, but rather he is inviting us to be united with him in prayer, as well as with one another.³

The people respond, “It is meet and right.” and by saying so, they are giving their approval to start the Eucharist or thanksgiving. Saint John Chrysostom explains this partnership of people and priest in offering thanks to God by saying,

The offering of the thanksgiving (*Eucharistia*) is in common, for the priest does not give thanks alone, but all the people as well, for having received their assent, only after they agree that it is fitting and right to do

¹Cyril of Jerusalem: Mystagogical Catechesis 5.

²Augustine of Hippo: Concerning the Sacraments.

³Diederich E.A.: The Sacraments.

so, does he begin the thanksgiving.¹

The priest now reiterates that it is meet (fitting) and right to give thanks to the Lord, then he starts the first Eucharistic Prayer.

O Thou Who art:

If you look closely at the text of your liturgy book, you will read, “O Thou Who art” followed by a “*comma*”. You may think that this is a mistake in punctuation, but it is not! “O Thou Who art,” is a statement, separate from what follows. It is an attribute of God. God is the one “**Who Is**”, Whose being is not derived from someone else. He is “**Absolute Being**,” and our own being, together with all the creations’ being is relative, being derived from God’s “**Absolute Being**”.

When God appeared to Moses in the burning bush and commanded him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses inquired of God about His name, for he figured that the Israelites would ask about God’s name. “And God said unto Moses, ‘**I AM THAT I AM**’, and He said, ‘Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.’” (Ex 3:14).

The word **I AM** (**YHWH** in Hebrew, sometimes translated Jehovah) became a proper name of God in the old Testament, a name the Hebrews revered so much that no one dared to use the expression “I am”, because only God could utter these words which signify His name.

When our Lord came to save the world, he used this word freely: **I AM** the light of the world; **I AM** the true vine; **I AM** the bread that came down from heaven. He thought that the Jews would understand that He is the **ONE WHO IS (YHWH)**, but they didn’t. The situation came to a critical moment at the time of the arrest of Jesus in Gesthemane. Jesus asked the men that came to arrest Him, “Whom seek ye?” They answered Him, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus said unto them, “**I AM**”. The Bible tells us that “as soon as He said unto them **I AM**, they went backward and fell to the ground.” (John 18:4-6). They were shocked to hear a man use the name of God.

Now, when the priest, on behalf of the whole Church starts the thanks-giving (Eucharist), he wants to address God by His name, “**I AM**,” so, he says, “O Thou Who art,”.

¹Saint John Chrysostom: Homily on second Corinthians.

Master, Lord, God of Truth:

God is the Master (Mal 1:6), and the Lord (Gen 2:4). He is the God of Truth (Ps 31:5).

Being before the ages and reigning forever:

God existed before the ages (Ps 55:19), and reigns forever (Ps 146:10), He has no beginning and no end. God is timeless, He is before time! The Book of Genesis tells us, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth ..." (Gen 1:1). The beginning here refers to the beginning of time, for when God started to create, time began. It is obvious that God existed before the creation, and since the creation marks the beginning of time, then God surely existed before time (or before the ages).

God reigns over all his creation forever, for His Kingdom shall have no end. (Ps 45:6)

Who dwells in the highest and looks upon the lowly (Ps 113:5,6):

God dwells in the highest (Lk 2:14), in the heaven of heavens (Deut 10:4), in the unapproachable light (1Tim 6:16), but His "eyes" behold all the lowly creatures that He had created. God is a Spirit (John 4:24), He has no "eyes" but the scripture sometimes uses human expressions in order to simplify for us the Divine mysteries, so, when we say that God beholds the lowly we mean that God cares for all His creation, lowly as they are, compared to His indescribable greatness.

Who has created . . . :

God has created the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is therein (Ps 146:6). By reciting this verse from the Psalms, the Church acknowledges in thanks-giving the Creator of all things.

The Father of our Lord, God and Saviour :

God is the Father of our Saviour Jesus Christ. But our Saviour is also our Lord and God for He is of One Essence with the Father. Thomas, one of the Saviour's disciples, had doubts about this, but the compassionate Saviour invited him to touch Him, all traces of

doubt departed from him and immediately he declared, “My Lord and My God!” (John 20:28). We too are invited to touch the Saviour, when we receive His Body and His Blood in Communion, but even before we do, we proclaim Him as our Lord, God and Saviour, for, “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:29).

By Whom Thou hast created . . . :

It is through the Son, the ever-existing Logos, that all the creation was made, for Saint John tells us, “All things were made by Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made.” (John 1:3)

All things, seen and unseen . . . :

In giving thanks to God for His creation, we acknowledge all that He had created, things we see and things we cannot see, the visible world and the invisible world of the spirits, the ministering spirits that serve Him without ceasing.

Who sits upon the throne of His Glory and Who is worshipped by all the holy powers:

When Saint John, the beloved disciple was taken in the spirit, he saw heaven, and the likeness of God sitting on His throne. He also saw in the midst of the throne, the Lord Jesus, in the likeness of a Lamb, standing as if it had been slain. Saint John saw many angels, ten thousand times ten thousand standing roundabout the throne. He also saw the four incorporeal beasts, and the twenty four priests, and they all worshipped Him Who sat upon the throne. Saint John also heard “Every creature which is in heaven and on earth, and such as are in the sea . . .” participating in this celestial liturgy (Rev 4, 5).

You who are seated stand:

Consumed by the imagery of God on His heavenly throne, with thousands of thousands and ten thousand times ten thousands of heavenly creatures standing before Him, offering Him worship, the Deacon exhorts the people, that should someone be sitting, he should now stand in awe of God’s glory. The Deacon says this in anticipation of the priest’s next sentence, **Before Whom stand**

the angels

The priest then starts to enumerate all the ranks of the heavenly powers Whom God had created, and who worship Him day and night without ceasing. There are nine heavenly orders. The **angels** have been mentioned in the Bible on numerous occasions. There are seven **archangels** according to tradition, they are alluded to in Rev 4:5, 15:1. The **principalities**, the **thrones**, the **dominions** and the **powers**, are mentioned by Saint Paul, "For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be **thrones**, or **dominions**, or **principalities**, or **powers**: all things were created by Him and for Him." (Col 1:16) The **authorities** were mentioned by Saint Peter, "Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God, angels and **authorities** and **powers** being made subject to Him." (1Pe 3:22)

Look towards the East:

The Deacon now exhorts us to look towards the East. The East is where the Garden of Eden was, our home, from which we were banished. Looking to the East signifies our desire to return to that blessed state in which we were created by God, before the fall. The East is also where the sun appears, and since Christ is the Sun of Righteousness, we look towards the East whenever we pray.

It is also the place from whence our Lord Christ shall come in His second coming (Mat 24:27). It is for these reasons that the early Christians always prayed facing the East. By looking towards the East, we are keeping the memory of Paradise, our original home, and we are awaiting the coming of our Lord.

... the Cherubim and the Seraphim ... :

The priest continues, with two more of the heavenly orders, the **Cherubim**, full of eyes and the **Seraphim**, with six wings. The word **Cherubim** is the plural of Cherub. The **Cherubim** are described in Ez 1 and 10, and also in Rev 4. They are full of eyes within and without. Eyes symbolize knowledge, so, when they are described as full of eyes, this signifies their unsurpassable knowledge.

The **Seraphim** are described in Isa 6:1-7. They have six wings, which signifies that they are so swift in carrying out God's orders. (Isa 6:6-7)

The first Eucharistic Prayer is ended by the hymn of the Seraphim (see below). Saint Cyril of Jerusalem summarizes for us this part of the Liturgy by saying,

After that we call to mind the heavens, the earth and the sea ..., the whole rational and irrational creation, both visible and invisible, Angels and Archangels, Virtues, Dominions, Principalities, Powers, Thrones, and the many faced Cherubim ... We call to minds also the Seraphim, whom Isaiah, in the Holy Spirit, saw encircling the throne of God, with two wings veiling their faces, and with two their feet, while flying with two.¹

The Seraphic hymn (the Sanctus):

The people now sing this beautiful hymn, “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Hosts, heaven and earth are full of Thine holy glory.” This is the Hymn that Isaiah the prophet heard the Seraphim sing without ceasing. (Isa 6:3) “We recite this doxology which comes to us from the Seraphim that we may be sharers of the hymnody of the heavenly hosts.”²

The second Eucharistic Prayer:

Holy, Holy, Holy, truly O Lord, our God! Thus exclaims the priest, repeating the “Sanctus”, then he starts the second Eucharistic Prayer; a hymn of thanks-giving to God for our salvation.

Who formed us, created us . . . :

The priest starts this by recounting the account of man’s creation. The Book of Genesis tells us that, “The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there he put the man whom He had formed” (Gen 2:7-8).

Then he brings to memory the account of man’s fall by the deception of the serpent (the devil), and how this led to man’s loss of immortality, as well as his original home in the garden (Paradise of Joy) God never intended for man to die, for He

¹Cyril of Jerusalem: Mystagogical catechesis 5

²Ibid

formed him incorruptible (Sir 2:23). Man, exercising his free will that was granted to him by God, disobeyed God's command and thus fell from eternal life and lost his immortality.

And were exiled from the Paradise of Joy:

So far, all the expressions used to describe the creation and the fall are biblical, but now, the language changes, for instead of using the biblical expression, "driven out" (Gen 3:24), the Liturgy uses a theological term instead, "exiled". The reason for this is that, "driven out" has a sense of finality, while "exile" is a temporary status. An exiled person always has the hope of returning to his home.

Thou hast not abandoned us to the end:

This part of the Liturgy recalls God's mercy shown to fallen man even before the reconciliation. God visited mankind by sending to them His Holy Spirit, Who spoke through the prophets.

And, in the last days . . . :

In the fullness of time, God visited us by sending His Logos; His Only-Begotten Son to redeem us. The whole passage is a re-wording of Hebrews 1:1-2. "God, Who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in the past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." God manifested Himself to us through His Only-Begotten Son, Who is "The brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person" (Heb 1:3).

. . . Who of the Holy Spirit and of the holy Virgin Mary—:

If you feel that this is an incomplete sentence, you are right! It is half a sentence, the other half appears later, "—Was incarnate and became man." The reason for splitting the sentence is that the rubric says that the people *interject* the priest in mid-sentence with "Amen"!

One of the most wonderful characteristics of the Coptic Liturgy is the dynamic interchange between the priest, the deacon, and the congregation.

The incarnation of the Logos of the Holy Spirit and of the holy Virgin was the first chapter in the story of salvation.

And taught us the ways of salvation:

Although salvation was offered to us freely by God, yet it is up to each one of us to work for his or her salvation. The free will, which led man to his fall from grace, has to be exercised in *synergy* with the grace of God in effecting man's own salvation. God, in His wisdom has offered us several ways that lead into salvation. One way may be suitable for the one but not for the other and vice versa.

One person may find the way to salvation through celibacy, another through matrimony, another through martyrdom, and yet another through ordination.

The birth . . . through water and the Spirit:

Whatever way one may pursue to work out his/her salvation, there are certain Sacraments that the Lord has granted us to help us attain our goal of the salvation of our souls. The first is baptism, the birth from on high through water and the Spirit. "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." (John 3:5)

He made us unto Himself a congregation:

In the Old Testament, a condition for becoming a member of the congregation of the Lord was circumcision. But circumcision was a figure of Baptism. Now Baptism became our guarantee of admission into the congregation of the Lord. By granting us the grace of baptism, we became members of the congregation of the Lord. Through Baptism, we can enjoy all the privileges of the elect of God, our names become written in the Book of Life, and if we remain faithful until the end, we will enter the kingdom of God.

And sanctified us by Thine Holy Spirit:

Christ granted His followers the "promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4), the Holy Spirit that came upon the Apostles as cloven tongues of fire. We received the same Spirit after baptism, in the Sacrament of Chrismation. Through this we become "sanctified". The word "sanctify" has two meanings, the first is to hallow or make holy, and this the Holy Spirit effects in us, for having been sanctified by the Holy Spirit, we become a holy nation. (1Pet 2:9)

The other meaning is to consecrate, or assign something or somebody for the Lord, and this too happens to us when we are Chrismated and receive the Holy Spirit. All of our organs are consecrated to become organs of the Lord. (1Cor 6:15)

He loved His own who are in the world:

Christ loved His own who were in the world ... unto the end (John 13:2). He loved us even unto death, for He gave Himself unto death for our sakes. Jesus taught that, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Jesus practised what He taught, so He did just that, He laid His life for His own who were in the world, whom He loved.

... Unto death which reigned over us:

Death reigned over mankind because of Adam's offense, (Rom 5:12-21) for "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). Not only did sin cause physical death to those who lived in the Old Testament, but it caused their souls to be held and sold in Hades.

When Adam accepted the counsel of the Devil and disobeyed God, he sold his soul to the Devil, becoming a slave to him. As children born into a house of slavery belong to the master of the house, all the children of Adam were born into slavery to the Devil. Even the righteous souls were kept bound in Hades (Hell) until the descent of Christ into Hades.

The descent into Hades:

The Church teaches that after our Saviour gave up the ghost, His human soul united to His Godhead descended into Hell, the prison where the souls of Adam and all his children were kept in the bondage of the adversary. There, the Lord freed Adam and those of his children who were counted righteous under the Mosaic Law and brought them with Him to Paradise.

There are many biblical allusions to this, for Saint Peter tells us that "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, ... being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit, by which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison" (1Pet 3:18-19). Saint Paul also tells us, "Wherefore he saith, when He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. Now, that He ascended, what is it that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?" (Eph 4:8-9)

The resurrection drama, enacted on Easter eve is a reminder to us of Christ's descent into Hades. Here, the deacons take the part of the angels going before the face of Christ, crying out to the gate-keepers of Hell, "Lift up your gates, O ye princes, and be lifted up, O ye eternal gates, and the King of Glory shall enter in" (Ps 23:7-8).¹ The Doxology of Easter also testifies to this dogma.

By His power He abolished death,
 And made life to shine on us,
 He Who descended to,
 The lower parts of the earth.
 The gate-keepers of Hades,
 Saw Him and were afraid,
 He abolished the pangs of death,
 And He was not held by it.
 He has broken the gates of brass,
 And cut asunder the bars of Iron,
 and brought out His elect,
 With joy and rejoicing.

He rose from the dead . . . :

Christ's resurrection from the dead and ascension into heaven are cornerstones of our faith. When Christ ascended into heaven, he ascended in the body, thus lifting us up with Him to sit together with Him in the heavenly places (see Eph 2:6).

The day of judgment:

Both Old and New Testaments tell us of the Day of the Lord—the day of judgment—when, resurrected in our new bodies, we must stand before the judgment seat of Christ, who will reward everyone according to their deeds. What a dreadful day!—the day when the books are opened, and *another book* is opened. The books that are opened are those containing our sins; unrepented, unconfessed, unforgiven. The *other book* is the Book of Life containing a list of those appointed for life in eternal happiness with Christ (See Rev 20:12-15).

Reminded of that awesome day of judgment, the congregation raises up a fervent supplication, crying, "**According to Thy**

¹Pseudo-Germanus: Exposition of the Liturgy.

mercy, O Lord, and not according to our sins.”

This part of the Liturgy is summarized for us by Germanus of Constantinople.

Then again the priest declares to God the Father, the mysteries of the incarnation of Christ, His ineffable and glorious birth from the Holy Virgin, ... His crucifixion, His death, and the liberation by Him of the souls in bondage, His holy third-day Resurrection from the dead, His Ascension into the heavens, His Enthronement at the right hand of the Father, and His second coming again in the future for us.¹

¹Germanus of Constantinople: *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

THE INSTITUTION NARRATIVE

Introduction:

The prayers of the blessing of the elements begin with the Institution Narrative, the story of the first Eucharist and how the Lord instituted it. The tradition underlying this is certainly older than the Gospels for many reasons.

First, a fully developed Institution Narrative exists in the liturgy of Saint Mark. It is a well known fact that this ancient liturgy is older than the Gospels, for it has no New Testament quotations, and yet it has the Institution Narrative.

Second, Saint Paul writes in his first letter to the Corinthians, “For I have received of the Lord, that which I have delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night he was betrayed, took bread ...” (1Cor 11:24). It is again well known that this letter was written earlier than any of the Gospels and yet it has an Institution Narrative, that Saint Paul must have used in the Eucharist he delivered to the Corinthians.

Third, our Liturgy, retains some details not mentioned in the biblical accounts of the Last Supper. It is quite obvious that a tradition about the Last Supper existed very early on in the Church, from which both the Eucharistic as well as the biblical accounts drew.

Accounts of the Last Supper exist in Mat 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, and 1Cor 11. There is no Institution Narrative in the Gospel according to Saint John, but here we have important details pertaining to the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

Although the miracle of the feeding of the multitudes is mentioned by all four gospels (the only miracle so distinguished), yet only St. John gives us the discourse between the Lord and the Jews concerning the meaning of this miracle (John 6). From this discourse, we understand that this miracle is a figure of the Eucharist, in the same manner that the manna was a figure for the Eucharist in the Old Testament.

Saint John also tells us about the washing of the feet of the disciples that preceded the blessing of the bread and wine. The washing of the feet was a figure of confession before taking communion.¹

¹Iskander A: The Sacrament of the Eucharist in Parousia.

For, being determined to give Himself . . . :

Christ gave up His life of his own will. Nothing forced Him to do so except His love for us. The crucifixion was not a historical act forced upon Him. For had He not been determined to give Himself up for the life of the world, He would have asked His Father to send Him twelve legions of angels to defend Him (Mat 26:53).

The narrative that follows is the most lively and most interactive part of the Liturgy, for, with every act re-told, the congregation gives its consent and declares its faith with beautiful melodies of assertion.

He took bread ...:

In the act of taking bread into His holy hands, the Lord is symbolically taking His own life into His own hands.¹ “No man taketh it from me. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it away” (John 10:18).

In recounting and repeating this gesture, the Church re-enacts Christ's self-gift. In the action of the priest (taking the bread into his hands as he recounts this), the self-giving of Christ is extended to the present community.²

He looked up towards heaven . . . :

The fact that Christ “looked up towards heaven” is not mentioned in any of the four biblical narratives of the Last Supper, but we find this mentioned in narrating the miracle of the feeding of the multitudes (Mat 14, Mark 6, Luke 9). As we said earlier, the miracle is a figure of the Sacrament, and even though the biblical narrative of the Last Supper does not mention it, our liturgical tradition, much older than the written Bible, preserves for us the narrative and the words of institution spoken by the Lord, with most intricate detail.³

¹Paul Quenon: The Eucharist in The Sacraments.

²Ibid.

³Iskander A. The Eucharist in Parousia

And when He had given thanks . . . :

By giving thanks, it is meant “His speaking to God the Father in the manner of a prayer.”¹

He blessed it . . . :

Again, here it is understood that the Lord said a prayer to bless the bread. These prayers of thanksgiving and blessing that the Lord said on the bread and wine constituted the Liturgy of the Eucharist that the disciples learned from the Lord and later taught to the congregations where they preached.²

And He sanctified it:

The words “When He had given thanks” and “He blessed” are found in the biblical accounts of the Last Supper. The expression “He sanctified it” is however, not recorded in any of the biblical accounts of the Last Supper. It is found only in the Lord's intercessory prayer found in John 17, “And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth” (John 17:19).

Many exegetes explain the word “sanctify” not in terms of “to make holy” for our Lord is the source of holiness, but in the sense of “consecrate”. To consecrate something or someone is to make a vow that this thing (or person) is offered exclusively to God. For example when we consecrate a chalice or a paten, we are making a vow of offering them exclusively for the use on the altar. In a similar way, the Lord, when He was about to offer Himself as a pleasing sacrifice unto His good Father, on our behalf, sanctified Himself for this purpose, in order that through His sacrifice on the cross we may be sanctified in Him. Our beautiful liturgical tradition has preserved for us this act of the Lord “sanctifying Himself” in the context of the institution narrative. For indeed the sacrifice of the cross and the sacrifice of

¹Cyril of Alexandria: Homily on the Gospel of Luke.

²Dix, Dom Gregory: The shape of the Liturgy.

the eucharist are one and the same.¹

Take, eat of it all of you :

In these words there is complimentary giving and receiving,

The gift is not thrust upon the other, it is freely taken by the other. One has the option of not taking. But, by freely taking, one responds to the gift freely given.²

This is my body .. this is my blood:

The early Church since it's birth had clung to this tradition that the bread and the wine in the Eucharist are truly indeed the body and blood of Christ.

Saint Paul declares so clearly in his first letter to the Corinthians that "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?" (1Cor 10:16). The observation that Saint Paul uses the interrogative, points to the fact that Saint Paul was not declaring something new but rather asserting a tradition that was firmly established in the Church at that time.

The writings of the early Church Fathers reinforce this widely and unanimously accepted dogma of the early Church,

When the Master Himself has declared and said of the bread, "This is my body," who will still dare to doubt? When He is Himself our warranty, saying "This is my blood," who will ever waver and say it is not His blood? .. Do not think of the elements as mere bread and wine. They are, according to the Lord's declaration, body and blood. Though the perception suggests the contrary, let faith be your stay. Instead of judging the matter by taste, let faith give you an unwavering confidence that you have been privileged to receive the body and blood of Christ.³

The bread and the wine are not merely types of the body and blood of Christ, not at all, but the deified body of the Lord Himself. For the Lord

¹Iskander A.: The Eucharist in Parousia.

²Quenon, Paul: Eucharist in The Sacraments.

³Cyril of Jerusalem: Mystagogical Catechesis.

has said, “This is my body,” not “This is a type of my body,” and “my blood,” not “a type of my blood.” And on a previous occasion He said to the Jews, “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, you do not have life in you. For my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink.” and again, “He who eats me shall live” (John 6:54-58).¹

... which shall be broken for you ... :

To many, this saying will seem difficult to reconcile with the known facts about the crucifixion. It is obvious that no bones of the Lord were broken when he was crucified (John 19:33) and this agrees with the prophecies that “A bone of Him shall not be broken.” (John 19:36). Why then did the Lord tell the disciples that His body “shall be broken”? The answer comes to us from modern science! Medical scientists wrote many articles about the “Pathology of Crucifixion”², that is to say, what happens to the human body during the process of Crucifixion and what are the possible causes of death from such cruel punishment. Many agree that one of the effects of hanging the person from his wrists is multiple dislocations at his major joints. This means that the body becomes disjointed or separated at the joints. It is probably this what the Lord meant when He predicted that His body shall be broken.

The prophecies give support to this explanation, for David prophecies by the Holy Spirit concerning the Lord’s passion saying, “All my bones are out of joint” (Ps 22:14).

During the Fraction, the priest proceeds to gently disjoint the “body” along markings in the oblation, sometimes without completely separating the parts. Could it be that the priest is emulating what happened to the body of our Lord on the Cross?

... to be given for the remission of sins :

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Physician of our souls is here prescribing for us His body and blood as a remedy for our sins. The Fathers tell us so,

What does the Apostle say to you? As often as we receive, we proclaim the death of the Lord. If His death, then we proclaim the forgiveness of

¹John of Damascus: An accurate exposition of the Orthodox faith.

²Edwards, Gabel and Hosmer: On the physical death of Jesus Christ, in Canadian Medical association Journal March 1986

sins. If, as often as blood is shed, it is shed for the forgiveness of sins (Heb 9:22), I ought always to receive Him, that He may always forgive my sins. I, who sin always, should have a medicine always.¹

We should not suspend ourselves from the Lord's communion because we realize that we are sinners. Rather, more and more we should hasten to it with eagerness, for healing of soul and purification of spirit, but with such humility and faith that we judge ourselves unworthy to receive so great a favour, and seek it, rather as a remedy for our wounds.²

In the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah had a vision of the Lord, he was so afraid and said, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips ..." (Is 6:5) Then, one of the Seraphim standing before the Lord flew to him carrying a live coal, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar. He laid it upon Isaiah's mouth saying, "Lo, this has touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged." (Is 6:7).

The Fathers of the Church understand this as referring to the holy mysteries that purify us as soon as they touch our mouths.

As we are certain that the Seraphim purified the prophet, so we are to be certain that by communion in the holy mysteries our debts are completely covered, provided that we repent and that we suffer and feel compunction in our hearts because of our sins.³

We may want to underline the fact that we should repent, suffer and feel compunction in our hearts (through confession) before we approach the mysteries, for if we take communion while unrepentant, we become "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." (1Cor 11:27).

The Lord Himself has shown this clearly in the incident of the washing of the feet of the disciples (John 13:4-10). The Lord started washing the disciples' feet, and when Peter's turn came, he objected out of reverence to the Lord. The Lord tells Peter "what I do thou knowest not now but thou shalt know hereafter." Here the Lord explains to Peter that the action has some mystical

¹ Ambrose of Milan: On the Sacraments.

² Abba Theonas: On sinlessness in John Cassian: Conference 23.

³ Theodore of Mopsuestia: Homily 16 in Enrico Mazza : Mystagogy.

aspect that he will understand later (when he receives the Holy Spirit on Pentecost day). Peter nevertheless insists: “Thou shalt never wash my feet.” The Lord answers him: “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.”

Peter, realizing that this mystical washing of the feet is essential to his eternal life, now asks the Lord to wash not only his feet, but also his hands and head. But the Lord answers: “He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet.”

The Lord's action of washing the feet of his disciples is symbolic of the washing away of sins through the Sacrament of Confession. The Lord emphasizes to us that it is not optional, since if He doesn't “wash our feet,” we shall have no part with Him.

The Lord explains the relation of the Sacrament of Baptism to the Sacrament of Confession by saying that he that is washed (baptized) needs not to be re-baptized if he sins, for baptism is done only once, but only to “wash his feet” that is to wash away his every day sins through the sacrament of Confession.

... He mixed it of wine and water ... :

Although not mentioned in the biblical narratives, yet our liturgical tradition tells us that in the Last Supper, our Lord used wine mingled with water. The Church Fathers had plenty to say about this.

That this wine of the Lord's blood is to be mixed with water the Lord shows, not only through tradition, but also by the very nature of His Passion. From the stroke of the lance there flowed from His side blood and water (John :19:34).¹

The book of Proverbs, written a thousand years before the Gospels, prophesies about this: “Come eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled.” (Pro 9:5)

... This is my blood of the New Covenant:

A covenant is a treaty between two parties. The blood of an animal sacrifice was usually spilt as a witness to the covenant.

When God established His covenant with the people of Israel, we are told that Moses took the blood of the sacrificed oxen . . . “And

¹Eusebius Gallicanus: Sermon 17 in Sheerin: The Eucharist.

sprinkled it on the people and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you” (Ex 24:8).

The prophet Jeremiah prophesying by the Holy Spirit says, “Behold, the days will come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel” (Jer 31:31). Our Lord established this new covenant “neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood” (Heb 9:12). The blood of Christ shed on the cross, and of which we partake in the Eucharist is the witness of this New Covenant between Christ and those who partake of Him. And what are the terms of this covenant? “Whoso eateth my flesh and drinks my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:54). “The covenant then, was established by blood, for blood is a witness to Divine favour.”¹

... Do this in remembrance of me:

The Greek word for "remembrance" is "*anamnesis*", which means more than just keeping the memory of a departed one. It means re-living an experience. In the Old Testament, the Jews kept the memory of their salvation from Egypt by eating the Paschal meal. In the Eucharist, we are keeping the memory of our salvation (through the death and resurrection) of our Lord by eating His body which was broken on the cross for us and drinking His blood which was shed on the cross for us.

The Jews also considered the celebration of the Passover as a renewal of the old covenant between them and God². We too in the Eucharist receive this renewal of the new covenant between Christ and us.

The memorial action (*Anamnesis*) is the vital link that brings the sacrifice of Calvary into the Eucharist. It makes us recognize, in the sacrament, the same saving power of Calvary.

The Anamnesis Hymn:

In response to the Lord’s admonition, “For every time you shall eat of this bread and drink of this cup, you proclaim my death, confess my resurrection, and remember me till I come,” the

¹Ambrosiaster: Commentary on first Corinthians in Daniel Sheerin: The Eucharist.

²Paul Quenon: The Eucharist.

people respond with this beautiful hymn, “Amen, Amen, Amen. Thy death, O Lord we proclaim ...” This is one of the oldest hymns of the Liturgy and is found in almost all ancient liturgies, east and west. After having re-enacted the passion and the resurrection of our Lord in the ritual handling of the gifts, we now crown the memorial action by this public verbal proclamation of our faith in the death, resurrection and ascension of our Lord. We then present to the Lord the sacrifice of praise, “We praise Thee, we bless Thee, We thank Thee ...,” for this is “the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name” (Heb 13:15).

The Oblation:

“Therefore, as we also commemorate ... we offer unto Thee ...”

The offering of the oblations to God the Father is intertwined with the memorial action. The two are inseparable. The oblations (gifts of bread and wine) are the tools of the memorial action, not only in the ritual handling of these, but also in the fact that the bread will become the body of the Lord broken for our sakes and the cup will become the blood shed for our sakes. The memorial is meaningless without the gifts.

The memorial action begins and ends in the handling of these material elements. It is that which transpires in and through this symbolic handling of these elements that the mystery of the memorial action consists.¹

Likewise the gifts are meaningless outside the context of the memorial, since the memorial assures us that we will find in the consecrated gifts the same saving power of the death and resurrection of the Lord. Hence, this peculiar relationship, *as we commemorate, we offer*.

We offer to God the Father our gifts of bread and wine and he returns our gift as the life-giving body and blood of His Only-Begotten Son. We offer the gifts to God the Father, because Christ offered Himself as a pleasing sacrifice to His Father. We offer to God what is really His own, for the bread and wine are God's own creation. We offer them as the first fruits of God's own creation.

¹Everette A.: The unfolding presence of Christ in The Sacraments.

For everything, concerning every thing, and in everything:

This is one of the most difficult sentences to interpret. The Coptic reads, *kata hov niven, nem ethve hov niven, nem khen hov niven*.

The word *kata* is actually Greek and it has 14 different meanings! However, most Greek liturgists understand the first segment as meaning, “on behalf of all things.” That means we are offering the gifts on behalf of all the creation. Man is the custodian of God’s creation and when he offers to God his gifts, he represents all the created things; things seen and things unseen. The Eucharistic offering is what it literally means, a thanks-offering (Eucharist means thanksgiving), and man offers it on behalf of all the creation.

In Psalm 148, the Psalmist invites the sun, the moon and the stars to take part in praising God, and in the hymn of the three children even heat and cold, fire and hail are summoned to praise God. In the same vein when man offers the Eucharistic oblation, he offers it on behalf of all the creation.

The oblation is offered on behalf of all humanity too, those who have gone before us, those now living, for those now being born and for those who will come after us.¹

We offer the Eucharistic oblation **concerning everything**. This means that we offer our gifts as a Thanks-offering to God the Father because of His wonderful acts of creation (of us, and all things seen and unseen,) His acts of salvation across the ages; for granting us the new birth, and for sanctifying us; for making us His own congregation; for sending His Son to die for us; for His Son’s going into Hades to save our ancestors; for His promise to come back in glory to give us our reward if we are faithful and prudent.

We offer the oblations as Thanks-offering for all the good things God is giving us,

For this reason also the mysteries, awesome and full of abundant salvation, which are celebrated at every assembly, are called a Thanks giving (*Eucharistia*), because they are a recollection of many benefactions and exhibit the totality of God’s care for us.²

¹John Chrysostom: Homily on Matthew 25.

²Ibid.

Again, here, we are offering our thanks-offering not only for our own blessings, but also for those of others.¹

We offer our oblations **in everything**, that means always and regardless of anything. We offer them in times of peace and in times of persecution; in times of plenty and in times of scarcity; in times of joy and in times of mourning, and we will continue to do so until the Lord comes again.

The Epiclesis:

Now comes the most solemn moment of the Eucharist, when the whole Church, having offered the oblation to God the Father, now pleads with Him to send His Holy Spirit upon the whole congregation and upon the gifts, so that both the congregation and the gifts become sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

And we ask Thee, O Lord our God- we, Thy sinful and unworthy servants. We worship Thee by the pleasure of Thy Goodness, that Thine Holy Spirit descend upon us, and upon these gifts set forth, and purify them, change them and manifest them as a sanctification of thy saints.

Note that the priest uses “we” and not “I” both in “we offer unto Thee” and in “we ask Thee.” For the priest is not offering his own gift, but that of the whole Church. It is also the whole Church that is asking God the Father to send His Holy Spirit upon the congregation and the gifts, the priest is representing the congregation in this petition. The congregation meanwhile, is offering to God praise and blessing, and service and worship.

The priest then, rising and signing the bread three times with the sign of the cross, says aloud, “And this bread He makes into the holy Body of Him,” to which the people reply, “I believe, Amen” (which means ‘so be it’). Similarly, when the priest says, “And this cup also, the precious blood of the new covenant of Him,” the people reply, “Again I believe,

¹John Chrysostom: Homily on Matthew 25.

Amen.” Note that the people do not say “we believe,” because, belief in the change of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Him (Christ), has to be declared by every individual, and we will see why later on.

The nature of the change:

Now we have to deal with a difficult and little understood problem concerning the change of the elements into the Body and Blood of the resurrected and glorified Lord. The problem arose in the middle ages, when some Roman Catholic “theologians” started teaching that the bread and wine are “physically” changed (or trans-substantiated), so that the bread *physically* turns into flesh and the wine *physically* turns into blood!

The Orthodox never accepted this innovation and actually condemned it. To us, the change is “mystical” and not “physical.” This is explained to us in the beautiful “*Prayer of Reconciliation by the Thrice Blessed John.*”¹

Exalted above all the power of speech, and all the thoughts of the mind, is the richness of Thy **gifts**, O our Master. For that which Thou hast hidden from the wise and the prudent, Thou hast revealed unto us babes. And those things which prophets and kings have desired to see and have not, the same didst Thou grant unto us, we the sinners, that we may serve **It** and be purified thereby, when Thou didst ordain unto us the Economy of Thine Only-Begotten Son, and the hidden mystery of this **sacrifice**, which has neither the blood of the Law nor the righteousness of the flesh roundabout **It**. Behold the **Lamb** is spiritual and the knife is verbal and immaterial; that **sacrifice** which we offer unto Thee!

What we are told here, is that the change of the gifts is a “hidden mystery” that is exalted far above the limits of human thought or the power of speech. It is hidden from the wise and prudent, who want to explain it in simplistic terms and reduce the “hidden mystery” into a physical trans-substantiation. But it is revealed to us, the “babes” who, in faith, believe in the mystery without any probing into the nature of the mystery, the “babes” who cry out aloud, “I believe, *so be it.*”

¹John Bishop of Bostra, (6th century) contemporary and friend of St. Severus of Antioch

Belief in the trans-substantiation would bring back the “Blood of the Law” into the bloodless sacrifice of the New Covenant. It would reduce the “Epiclesis” into some kind of magical incantation that changes the physical nature of the gifts rather than a sanctifying power that changes the essence of the gifts.

That the “change” surpasses understanding is also confirmed by John of Damascus,

And now you ask how the bread becomes Christ’s body and the wine and water Christ’s blood, and I say to you: The Holy Spirit comes and does those things which surpass description and understanding.¹

The Holy Spirit descends not only on the gifts but on all of us, and by sanctifying us and the gifts, we receive the gifts as truly the very Body that hung on the Cross and the very Blood that came from the side of Christ. It is this double action of the Holy Spirit that makes it possible for the priest to boldly declare, “The holies for the holy!” The bread and wine, sanctified by the Holy Spirit, become **holies** (Body and Blood of Christ) but only for the **holy**, who have been sanctified by the descent of the Holy Spirit in the Epiclesis, those who believe in the hidden mystery, without doubting or probing. This is emphasized clearly by Mar Ephraem the Syrian: “If any one doubts and eats it, it is plain bread to him.”²

It is for this reason that each one of us has to declare his un-doubting and unquestioning faith in the “hidden mystery” by the individual “*I believe, Amen.*”

That we have to accept this transformation by faith only is evident from the following:

The overshadowing power of the Holy Spirit becomes, through the epiclesis, the rain to this new cultivation. For just as God made all that

¹John Damascene: An accurate exposition of the Orthodox Faith.

²Mar Ephraem the Syrian: Memra for Holy Thursday.

He made by the energy of the Holy Spirit, so also now the energy of the Spirit performs those things which are above nature, which it is not possible to comprehend except by faith alone.¹

. . . and eternal life to those who shall partake of Him:

The Lord has promised us that “Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life” (John 6: 54). The Fathers of the Church in commenting on this, tell us that since what we partake of is the body of the risen Lord, which had victory over death forever, it becomes in us like the little leaven which leavens the whole lump (Mat 13:33).

Theophilus of Alexandria superimposes the call of Christ for each one of us with this insight: “Receive me as leaven into your mass, that you may partake of the indestructible life that is in me.”² Saint Gregory of Nyssa echoes the same sentiment.

He plants Himself, by the economy of His grace, in all believers by means of the flesh which derives its substance from both wine and bread, mingling Himself with the body of believers, in order that, by union with that which is immortal, man also might partake of

¹John Damaschene: An accurate exposition of the Orthodox Faith.

²Theophilus of Alexandria: sermon on the Mystical Supper.

incorruption.¹

¹Gregory of Nyssa: Oration 37.

THE INTERCESSIONS

Intercessions are prayers on behalf of others. St. Paul tells his disciple Timothy, "I exhort therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks be made for all men" (1Tim 2:1).

Intercessions have always been a part of the Liturgy as attested by St. Cyril of Jerusalem.

When the spiritual sacrifice, the bloodless worship has been completed, over this sacrifice of propitiation we beseech God for the common peace of the churches, for the good estate of the world ... we all pray and offer this sacrifice.¹

The intercession for peace:

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem," exhorts the Psalmist (Ps 122:6). To us, children of the new covenant, Jerusalem is the Church, "the mother of us all" (Gal 4:26).

She is **One** and **Only**, as the bride of Christ. "My undefiled is but **One**, she is the **Only** one of her mother" (Song 6:9).

She is **holy** (Eph 5:27), **catholic** (universal) (Rom 1:8), and **apostolic** (Eph 2:20).

The intercession for the Fathers:

We next pray for the pope, the bishops, the hegoumens, the priests and the deacons, the subdeacons and the seven orders of the Church of God.

The word hegoumen originally meant the head of a monastic community (an abbot). It is used in the Liturgy to describe Abba John the hegoumen and Abba Daniel the hegoumen, both of

¹Cyril of Jerusalem: Mystagogical Catechesis 5.

which were heads of monastic communities. It is currently used to describe the senior priest in a church.

Deacons and subdeacons are among the higher orders of the Church. The seven minor orders of the Church include the readers (anagnosts), the singers (psalts), the exorcists, the monks, the virgins, the widows and the door keepers.

Exorcists were used in the early Church to prepare catechumens for Baptism. Since catechumens were idol worshippers, the Church deemed them in need of a lengthy service of exorcism on the night preceding their Baptism.

Virgins and widows were two orders in the early Church with specific duties (1Tim 5:9, 1Cor 7:25).

Intercession for the place:

A prayer for the city or monastery in which the church is located, and all other cities, districts (provinces or states), islands and monasteries.

The seasonal intercessions:

Three intercessions follow, one for clement weather, one against drought, and one for the plants.

The intercession for the air of heaven and the fruits of the earth is a prayer for good weather. The ancients believed that the atmospheric changes that produce the four seasons are controlled by the “four winds of heaven” (Dan 8:8). It is the orderly succession of the seasons that brings about the fruitfulness of the earth (Gen 8:22).

The intercession for the rising of the river waters is a prayer against drought. In recent years many areas of the world suffered drought including Canada and U.S.A.

The intercession for the corn, the herbs and the grass of the field, is a prayer for the plants in general.

Corn (wheat) is the mainstay of human diet (bread). By **herbs** is meant vegetables which are necessary for the human diet also.

Grass of the fields (or plants of the field) are food for domestic animals (Isa 37:27, Dan 4:23).

Commemoration of the saints:

Our Lord Jesus Christ commanded the commemoration of the saints when he told His disciples, “Verily I say unto you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told **for a memorial of her**” (Mat 26:13). That is why all the ancient liturgies mention the departed saints,

Next, we call to mind also those who have fallen asleep, first of all, patriarchs, prophets, Apostles, and martyrs, that God, through their intercessory prayers, may accept our supplication.¹

By **patriarchs** we mean the fathers of fathers, like Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The **prophets** are the likes of Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, Daniel, and so on. The **Apostles** include the 12 disciples and the other seventy Apostles. **Preachers** and **evangelists** are those who spread the gospel (Act 21:8, 2Tim 1:11, 4:5).

Martyrs are those who died for the sake of God. **Confessors** are those who suffered bodily harm for the sake of God but were not killed, like St. Samuel the Confessor, who lost an eye and a leg for the sake of the orthodox faith.

Let those who read . . . :

The Deacon exhorts, “*Let those who read recite the names of our holy fathers the patriarchs who have fallen asleep ...*” Here, one of the deacons usually held a wooden board on which is inscribed the names of all the patriarchs of Alexandria, starting with St. Mark. The names were actually read as a memorial of those great

¹Cyril of Jerusalem: Mystagogical Catechesis 5.

fathers! This is rarely done today for sake of saving time! In the same time, the priest mentions the names of those who have fallen asleep, asking God to repose their souls in Paradise. This is also an ancient custom of the Church.

Next, we pray also for the holy fathers and bishops who have fallen asleep, and generally for all who have fallen asleep before us, believing that this will be of the greatest benefit to the souls of those on whose behalf our supplication is offered in the presence of the holy, most dreaded sacrifice.¹

Someone may object that prayer for the departed will not benefit them, but we have a biblical precedent for this in the second letter to Timothy, where St. Paul prays for his departed friend Onesiphorus that, “The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in *that day*” (2Tim 1:16-18). The Church believes that as long as *that day* (judgment day) has not come yet, there is always hope that our supplication may benefit the departed.

And I want to convince you by an illustration, for I know that many say, “what does it avail a soul departed this world, whether with or without sin, to be remembered at the oblation?” Well, suppose a king banished persons who had offended him, and then their relatives wove a garland and presented it to him on behalf of those undergoing punishment, would he not mitigate their punishment? In the same way, when we offer our supplications to Him for those who have fallen asleep, even though they are sinners, we do not weave a garland, but offer Christ slain for our sins, propitiating the merciful God both on their and our own behalf.²

The whole idea of praying on behalf of the departed, and asking

¹Cyril of Jerusalem: Mystagogical Catechesis 5.

²ibid.

them to pray on our behalf is underscoring the fact that the Church militant on earth and the Church victorious in heaven are one.

The final doxology:

“That in this and also in all things, Thy great and holy name, be praised ... etc.” The Liturgy of the Eucharist starts with a doxology, “Glory and honour ... unto the all-holy Trinity ... etc.,” and it is most fitting that it ends with another doxology glorifying the Holy Trinity.

Introduction to the fraction:

A prayer of thanksgiving to God, Who made us worthy to complete the Liturgy, and a plea that he may make us worthy to partake of the holy body and the precious blood of Christ. Older copies of the Liturgy (up to the 14th century) do not have the people's response *“We worship Thine holy body, .. and Thy precious blood”* Which means that they were introduced in the middle ages. This is most probably taken from the Catholic medieval practice of “Adoration of the Host.”¹ This in turn is based on the writings of Saint Augustin, “No one eats that flesh, unless he has first adored it.”²

The fraction:

We mentioned earlier, that the Liturgy of the Faithful follows a plan based on the actions of our Lord at the Lord's Supper. The Lord gave thanks, blessed and broke. In the same manner, the Liturgy of the Faithful contains prayers of Thanksgiving (The

¹See Page 97 footnote 1

²Augustin of Hippo: Sermon on Psalm 98.

Eucharistic prayers), prayers of blessing (the Institution Narrative, the Epiclesis, the Anamnesis and the Oblation), and finally, the prayers said over the breaking of the bread, or the Fraction.

The Fraction is the most versatile part of the Liturgy, since we have various prayers for the various seasons and occasions. Although the rubric (liturgical instructions) do not specifically mention a people's response, it is customary for the people to interject by saying, "*Kyrie eleison.*" This response is mentioned by Pseudo-Germanus, who says that, "As the priest makes the fraction, the supplicant clergy sing an antiphon."¹

The way in which the priest divides the Body is very peculiar. There is very sparse commentary on this by the Fathers. The only explanation I came across is that it represents the appearances² of the Lord after His resurrection, to His disciples.³

Older versions of the Liturgy contain a very short Fraction, which was used regularly, except if there is an occasion or a feast. We reproduce it here for the record.

O Master, Lord, God, Who giveth light unto the world. Who hath crowned us with His faith. Who giveth unto us before we ask. Grant Thou unto us to bring forth fruit acceptable unto Thee, and with confidence to entreat Thee, our holy Father, Who art in the heavens and say—⁴

The Lord's prayer:

The recital of the *Abba* (the Lord's Prayer) at the conclusion of

¹Pseudo-Germanus: Exposition of the Ancient Liturgy.

²See 1 Cor 15:5-8

³Theodore of Mopsuestia, in Mazza E: Mystagogy.

⁴De Bute M: Coptic service of the Lord's day.

the Eucharist is a very old custom in the Church.¹ While the people recite the Lord's Prayer, the priest recites three prayers, the last of which is called the Absolution of the Father.

The deacon responds by saying, "Saved Amen, and with your spirit, in the fear of God let us attend." The words "saved Amen" are also said at the beginning of the Liturgy of the Catechumens, after the priest recites the Absolution, "May Thy servants ..." It is a very difficult word to interpret, but being said after the recital of the Absolutions, one could say that because in both Absolutions the priest admits his own sins and unworthiness, the response is to mean, you have been saved indeed by admitting your weakness before the Lord. "And with your spirit" means may the Absolution you just gave us be with you also.

Because the Absolution at the beginning of the Liturgy of the Catechumens is said aloud, the people respond, "Saved, Amen ..." The Absolution of the Father is however said in a low voice, only the deacon hears it and so he exclaims, "Saved, Amen, and with your spirit." The people respond, "Lord have mercy".

The holies for the holy:

Next the priest says, "Holy things for the Holy." Holy are the offerings after they have received the visitation of the Holy Spirit, and you are holy after you have been privileged to receive the Holy Spirit. So holy things and holy persons correspond.²

The exclamation is said in Greek, and the continuation of it is a little controversial. Current liturgy books cite,

EgloGHToC KgrioC IHCoc XriCtoC gioC ueoC
aGiaCmoC Phegma aGioh amHh

¹Cyril of Jerusalem: Mystagogical Catechesis.

²Cyril of Jerusalem: Mystagogical Catechesis.

Translated into English, this means, “Blessed be the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the *sanctification of the Holy Spirit*. Amen.” This is, at best, meaningless.

Older liturgy books contain the following text instead,

EgloGHToC Kgrioc IHCoC XriCtoC gioC ueoC
aGiacac eh Phegmati aGiv agtog amHh

Translated into English, this means, “Blessed be the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, *He hath sanctified Them by His Holy Spirit*. Amen.”¹

The people respond, “One is the all-holy Father ...” This means that only One is holy: God Who is in truth holy. We are made holy by Him. “For truly One is Holy, holy by nature, we also are holy, not, indeed, by nature, but by participation, asceticism and prayer.”²

The confession:

The three proclamations of the priest to which the people respond, “Amen”, as well as the final confession, echo the Orthodox teachings of St. Cyril of Alexandria, during his fight against Nestorianism.

Proclaiming the death according to the flesh of the Only-begotten Son of God, that is Jesus Christ, confessing His Resurrection from the dead, and His Ascension into heaven, we celebrate the un-bloody sacrifice in the churches, and so proceed to the mystical consecrated gifts, and are sanctified, having become partakers of the holy flesh and precious blood of Christ, the Saviour of us all. And not as common flesh do we receive it, not at all, nor as a man sanctified and associated with the Word according to the unity of dignity, or as having had a divine indwelling, but as **truly the life-giving and very flesh of the Word Himself. For**

¹De Bute M: The Coptic Service of the Lord's day.

²Cyril of Jerusalem: Mystagogical Catechesis.

He is Life according to His nature as God, and when He became united to His flesh, he made It life-giving [boldface mine].¹

¹Cyril of Alexandria: Letter to Nestor.

COMMUNION

In the early Church, communion was approached in the following way,

Coming up to receive, then, do not have your wrists extended or your fingers spread, but making your left hand a throne for the right, for it is about to receive a King, and cupping your palm, receive the body of Christ, and answer “Amen.” Carefully hallow your eyes by the touch of the sacred body and then partake, taking care to lose no part of it. After partaking of the body of Christ, approach also the cup of His blood. Do not stretch out your hands, but, bowing low in a posture of worship and reverence as you say “Amen,” sanctify yourself by partaking of the blood of Christ. While it is still moist upon your lips, touch it with your fingers, and so sanctify your eyes, your forehead and other senses.¹

Taking communion in the hand is also evident from the writings of St. Dionysius, the 14th Pope of Alexandria.²

To kneel or not to kneel?

Anyone observing communicants will see some kneeling at communion and others standing. Archibald King, who visited Egypt in the early 1920s observed that “Copts receive communion standing while Catholics normally receive kneeling.”³ The same observation is made by Marquess de Bute.⁴

The Corporal:

The tradition of holding a small veil in the right hand to cover the mouth after receiving the body of the Lord has an interesting history behind it. It

¹Cyril of Jerusalem: Mystagogical catechesis 5

²Dionysius the great: Letter to Sixtus II, Bishop of Rome

³Archibald King: The rites of Eastern Christendom.

⁴John Marquess de Bute: The Coptic Morning Service for the Day of the Lord

goes back to the old days, when the Body was given to the communicants in their hands. It all started in the fourth century, when some rich ladies in Rome, out of reverence to the body of the Lord, made silken veils adorned with the cross and held them in their right hand in order to receive the body of Christ in it. These veils were called “corporals” from the Latin “corpus” which means body. The custom must have spread rapidly into the East (Constantinopolis and Alexandria.) Sometime in the middle ages, the Church in Egypt started to give communion directly into the mouth of the communicant. In spite of this, the habit of carrying a corporal in the right hand and raising it to the mouth, as if it contained the body of Christ, still survives!

Amen, Come Lord Jesus:

In the old times, when communion was over, and the priest raised the paten up high in commemoration of the ascension of the Lord, the people usually showed their yearning for the second coming of the Lord by saying, “Maranatha!” (O Lord come!) (ICor 16:22,) or “Amen, come Lord Jesus” (Rev 22:20). How and when and why did this essential part of the Anamnesis become replaced with “Glory to God in the highest” is a mystery. A proclamation of the Church’s yearning for the coming of the lord is in keeping with the Lord’s words, “For every time you shall eat of this bread and drink of this cup, you proclaim my death, confess my resurrection, and remember me till I come.” The same is also obvious from the priests words at the “oblation:” “as we also commemorate His holy passion, his resurrection from the dead, His ascension into the heavens and His sitting at Thy right hand O father, and his second coming from the heavens, awesome and full of glory ...”

The exclamation, “Maranatha” or “Amen, come Lord Jesus” is the only part of the Liturgy where we commemorate the Lord’s second coming, and by doing so, we are faithful to His own admonition to us, “remember me till I come.”

APPENDIX I

PREPARATION FOR COMMUNION

To be ready for receiving the body and the blood of the Lord, one has to be clean, both in body and soul. To be clean in body, we wash and put on clean clothes. To be clean in spirit, one has to wash away his sins through the Sacrament of Repentance, and put on the clean garments which he receives through the absolution. When the prodigal son returned to his father's house, he had to confess and put on clean clothes before being admitted to the feast (Lk 15:21-23).

The figures of confession:

This washing away of sins through the Sacrament of confession is symbolically illustrated in the Lord's washing of the disciples' feet (Jn 13:4-10). The Lord started washing the disciples' feet, and when Peter's turn comes he objects out of reverence to the Lord. The Lord tells Peter "what I do thou knowest not now but thou shalt know hereafter." Here the Lord explains to Peter that the action has some mystical aspect that he will understand later (when he receives the Holy Spirit on Pentecost day). Peter nevertheless insists: "Thou shalt never wash my feet". The Lord answers him: "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me."

Peter, realizing that this mystical washing of the feet is essential to his eternal life, now asks the Lord to wash not only his feet, but also his hands and head. But the Lord answers: "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet"

The Lord's action of washing the feet of His disciples is symbolic of the washing away of sins through the Sacrament of Confession. The Lord emphasizes to us that it is not optional, since if He doesn't "wash our feet," we shall have no part with Him.

The Lord explains the relation of the Sacrament of Baptism to the Sacrament of Confession by saying that he that is washed (baptized) needs not to be re-baptized if he sins, for baptism is done only once, but only to "wash his feet" that is to say, wash away his every day sins through the Sacrament of Confession. Saint Cyril of Alexandria explains

this washing the feet as healing the heel wounded by the serpent in his “Sermon on the Mystical Supper,”

I have placed enmity and cursing between the deceiver and the deceived, a wariness of head and heel (Gn 3:15). And now I arm the wounded heel against the serpent, that it no more limp away from the straight path.

Communion without confession:

The Bible has a lot to say about approaching the Sacrament of Communion without washing away our sins through confession. Saint Paul tells us, “Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself ... for he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself not discerning the Lord's body” (1Cor 11:27-29).

The Gospel according to St. John tells us of such a man that approached the mystical Supper with unrepented evil in his heart. Judas Iscariot, was there sitting with the Lord and the rest of the disciples with his heart set on betraying his Lord. The Lord gives him a chance to repent when he says: “verily verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.” And when John asks Him, who would betray Him, the Lord answers “He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it.” Judas, totally unrepented, accepts the dipped sop, “and having received the sop he went immediately and it was night” (Jn 13:26-30). The words, “it was night,” are symbolic of the outer darkness that is prepared for him who is “not discerning the Lord's body”.

In one of the Lord's parables, the King has a wedding feast for his Son. The feast here symbolizes the Eucharistic feast, the table of the Lord. “And when the King came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment, And he saith unto him, ‘Friend, how camest thou hither not having a wedding garment?’ and he was speechless. Then said the King to the servants, bind him hand and feet, and take him away, and cast him into the outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mat 22:11-13).

Before coming to partake of the holy Sacrament, We have to put on the wedding garment, the state of heavenly purity that we first obtained when we were baptized and the same we get when we confess and get the absolution.

Saint Paul in warning the Corinthians of the perils of approaching the mysteries unworthily, adds, “For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.” (1Cor 11:30-31).

Ancient writers of the Church emphasize the necessity of confession before communion,

If you approach with purity, you come unto salvation; but if you approach with a guilty conscience, you come unto punishment and retribution.¹

On every Lord’s Day, after you have assembled, break the bread and give thanks, first confessing your sins, that your sacrifice may be pure.²

Institution of the Sacrament:

The Lord instituted this Sacrament of repentance when, after His resurrection, while speaking to His holy disciples “He breathed on them and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain they are retained.” (Jn 20:22,23).

In doing this, the Lord gave His disciples a special grace, and a commission, to accept confession from the faithful. This was only granted to the disciples and they passed on the same to the bishops and the priests

Confession in the Old Testament:

In the Old Testament, people had to confess their sins and bring a sin

¹ John Chrysostom: Homily on John 6.

²The Didache.

offering to the priests. “And it shall be, when he shall be guilty in one of these things, that he shall confess that he hath sinned in that thing. And he shall bring his trespass offering unto the Lord for his sin which he hath sinned ... and the priest shall make an atonement for him concerning his sin” (Lev 5:5,6). The priest would then take his sacrificial animal (a lamb or a goat).. “And he shall lay his hand upon the head of the sin offering, and slay it for a sin offering” (Lev 4:33). This sacrifice of sin was a figure of “the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), who made Himself a sacrifice of sin on our behalf (Isa 43:10).

This ritual has a parallel in our Eucharistic rite. In the Offertory, when the priest has chosen the “Lamb” (the bread which will become the body of Christ), he then lays his hand on the chosen lamb and says inaudibly, “grant O Lord, that this, our sacrifice, be acceptable unto Thee, for my sins and the ignorances of Thy people”

In the New Testament, the Sacrament has replaced its Old Testament figure. The sinner would come to the priest confessing his sins, and the priest shall make an atonement for him concerning his sin: (prays that God forgives him, via the absolution). Then, at the Eucharist, the priest lays his hands on the Lamb (the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world), and offers Him as our bloodless sacrifice of the New Testament, for which the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament were a mere figure.

Confession in the New Testament:

Saint John tells us “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9).

Saint James also exhorts us, “confess your sins, one to another.” He means one human being (the sinner), to another human being (the priest), and not only to God, a temptation that the devil often suggests to us, to our peril.

How to confess:

When we fall into sin, our conscience rebukes us. The first thing we should do is to raise our hearts to God acknowledging our sin and asking for God's help in overcoming our weakness. This is the first step and is a temporary confession that is complete only when we go to our father in confession. Before we sit to confess, we should prepare ourselves, recalling all the sins for which we have offered this initial repentance. We humbly acknowledge our sins in the presence of the priest, condemning ourselves rather than making excuses. After listening to the advice of our father in confession, we should bow our heads to receive the absolution. It is a good practice to memorize Psalm 51 (Have mercy upon me, O God ...), and recite it inaudibly while you receive the absolution.

Fasting before communion:

This is an old tradition in the Church.

It was a part of this mystery that the disciples first did not receive the Body and the Blood of the Lord fasting. But now it is received through the entire Church by those who are fasting. For thus it was pleasing to the Holy Spirit, through the Apostles, that in honour of so great a Sacrament the Lord's Body should enter into the mouth of a Christian before other foods, and on that account this practice is observed throughout the whole world.¹

¹Isidore of Seville: On Church services

CANONS CONCERNING COMMUNION

The following are some canons concerning communion:

The canons of Timothy of Alexandria:

Saint Timothy, the 22nd Pope of Alexandria, who attended the Second Ecumenical Council, left us 18 canons, in the form of answers to questions, that are ecumenically acknowledged. Here are some that relate to communion.

Question III: If any one who is a believer is possessed of a demon, ought he to partake of the Holy Mysteries or not?

Answer: If he does not repudiate the mystery, nor otherwise in any way blaspheme, let him have communion, not, however, every day of the week, for it is sufficient for him on the Lord's day only.

Question V: If a woman has coition with her husband during the night, or, a man with his wife, and a church meeting ensues, ought they to partake of communion or not?

Answer: They ought not to do so, because the Apostle says emphatically: "Deprive yourself not of each other, unless it be for a time by agreement, that ye may give yourselves leisure to pray; and then come ye again together, to avoid having Satan tempt you on account of your failure to mingle." (I Cor. 7:5)

Question VII: If a woman finds herself in the plight peculiar to her sex, ought she to come to the mysteries on that day or not?

Answer: She ought not do so, until she has been purified.

Saint Dionysius the 14th Pope of Alexandria when asked the same question answered, "If one is not wholly clean both in soul and in body,

he shall be prevented from coming to the Holies of Holies.”¹

Question XII: If a layman who has had a nocturnal emission asks a Clergyman to let him to partake of communion, ought the Clergyman to administer communion to him or not?

Answer: If it is a case of desiring a woman, he ought not. But if it was Satan tempting him in order to provide an excuse for excluding him from communion, the Clergyman ought to administer communion to him, since the tempter will not cease attacking during the time when he ought to partake of communion.

Question XVI: If anyone is fasting with a view to communion, while washing his mouth, or in the bath, has swallowed water involuntarily, ought he to commune?

Answer: Yes, since Satan has found an occasion whereby to prevent him from partaking of communion, he will keep on doing this more frequently.

Canons of the Egyptian Church:²

Canon twenty eight: “None of the believers shall taste anything, but after he has taken the sacred mysteries.”

Canon thirty three: “That the oblation offered on behalf of those who are dead is not to be done on the Lord’s day.”

¹The Canons of Dionysius of Alexandria: Canon II

²Known in Egypt as the Canons of Hippolytus (Arabic: Abolidis)

APPENDIX II THE HISTORY OF THE LITURGY

THE FIRST FOUR CENTURIES

Introduction:

The Liturgy and its rites were delivered by the Apostles to the churches, which they had established. The Apostles were taught by the Lord himself, who for forty days, following His resurrection spoke to them “of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).

Saint Paul emphasizes this fact when he says, “For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which He was betrayed took bread ...” (1Cor 12:23). Here, St. Paul emphasizes the fact that each Apostle received the liturgical tradition from the Lord Himself. Dix¹ affirms the same when he writes: “Every local church had received the rite of the Eucharist-the way of performing it-with its first evangelization. This is important. It means that the living tradition of the Liturgy as the heart of its corporate life went back into the very roots of every apostolic church.”

Documentation of the liturgy:

In the beginning, the Liturgy was passed from the Apostles to their successors, the bishops as an oral tradition. This is the same way in which the books of the Bible were propagated. Oral tradition always preceded the written forms of both the Bible and the liturgies.

The Liturgy was commanded to writing only after heresies started to appear in the Church, and when heretics attempted to put their heretic teachings into the Liturgy. The fact that a manuscript of a liturgical text is dated to the fourth century, does not mean that the Liturgy was composed in the fourth century but merely that it was recorded in writing in the fourth century. Hamman emphasizes this:

¹Dom Gregory Dix: The shape of the Liturgy

The setting down in a written form of the liturgical prayers in both Judaism and Christianity is a relatively late practice. In both cases, it came about only after it was felt that tradition was in danger of being changed as long as it was not cast in forms that were set even to their last details. This is indeed the reason why we see Christian texts of this type becoming common only after the great crisis of Arianism, that is, after the second half of the fourth century.¹

Some of the heretical texts were also put in writing and these serve to emphasize the point we just mentioned, that the Church put the Liturgy in writing to guard it against such corrupt influences.

Other texts are also recorded, which although were not heretical, yet do not represent the common usage of the Church, but rather a very localized tradition. An example of these is *The Euchologium of Serapion* which appears to be the work of Bishop Serapion of Thmuis (Demiati). Such texts became extinct as the authority of the pre-eminent bishop became established in each *see* (ecclesiastical jurisdiction), around the fourth century.

The Liturgy of Alexandria:

Saint Mark, one of the seventy Apostles, who brought Christianity to Egypt around the middle of the first century A.D., also brought to Egypt the liturgy that bears his name; The liturgy of Saint Mark. This liturgy which was originally in Greek, is probably the oldest and most authentic liturgy in Christendom.

Saint John Chrysostom tells us that St. Mark was the first Apostle to inscribe the Liturgy, in the form of a service or a regular church ritual which is strictly followed in the celebration of the Eucharist².

This is not without biblical foundation. We know that the very

¹Adalbert Hamman: The Mass.

²Quoted by: Dr. H. Amin: Saint Mark in Africa (page 15)

first Eucharist was held in the upper room, in St. Mark's house in Jerusalem. The man carrying the pitcher of water is believed to be no other than St. Mark himself (Mk 14:13-15). The disciples even after the resurrection of the Lord, continued to meet and pray in his home. They also received the Holy Spirit there. According to tradition in all Apostolic churches, St. Mark's home is well known as the first church in the world.¹

When Saint Athanasius, the 20th Patriarch of Alexandria, sent Fromentius to Ethiopia in 330 A.D. as the first Egyptian head of the Ethiopian Church, he gave him a copy of the liturgy of Saint Mark, which the Ethiopians started to use immediately.²

The liturgy of Saint Mark has some characteristics that were borrowed by the other liturgies, such as *the preface and the Sanctus*. Gregory Dix emphasizes this:

The use of the preface and the Sanctus in the Eucharistic prayer began in the Alexandrian Church at some time before A.D. 230, and from there spread first to other Egyptian churches, and ultimately all over Christendom.³

By the end of the fourth century another liturgy started to be used, that is the liturgy of Saint Basil the great, to be discussed later in this book.

The Liturgy of Rome:

The earliest liturgy that is known to exist in the Church of Rome is the liturgy of Hippolytus. Most agree now that this liturgy originated in Egypt and was exported to Rome. Hamman,

¹Dr. H. Amin: Saint Mark in Africa. (page 10)

²Rev M. Dawood: The liturgy of Saint Mark.

³Dom Gregory Dix: The shape of the Liturgy.

speaking about the early Roman liturgy had this to say:

The most ancient formula of consecration of the Eucharistic offerings is provided for us by Hippolytus, probably of Egyptian origin, and adopted by the Roman clergy.¹

Dix, quoting another researcher says the same thing concerning Hippolytus:

Are we able to pinpoint his origin? Fr. Hanssens thought it possible and judged that he should be looked upon as an Alexandrian who became a Roman priest, seeking to transport from Alexandria to Rome those forms which he judged ideal.²

The noted French Theologian Father Louis Bouyer says this about the origin of the liturgy of Hippolytus, “In any case it is a work of the third century and reflects if not the liturgical life of Rome, then that of Egypt and Alexandria.”³

The Liturgy of Jerusalem:

In Jerusalem, the city of our Lord, the liturgy of St. James was the dominant Eucharistic prayer by the fourth century. Not only in Jerusalem, but also in Syria, Arabia, Greece and Armenia. This was accomplished, no doubt, through the many pilgrims who traveled to the holy land.

The liturgy is attributed to St. James, the brother of the Lord (the Lord’s cousin), who became the first bishop of Jerusalem and who wrote the Epistle bearing his name in the New Testament.

¹ Adalbert Hamman: The Mass.

² Dom Gregory Dix: The shape of the Liturgy.

³ Louis Bouyer: Eucharist

Hamman describes this liturgy: “Despite the hellenization of its form and of the thought beneath it, it is still astonishingly close to the original Eucharist.”¹

Concerning the origin of this liturgy, the same author has this to say: “Even if St. James is assuredly not its author, this liturgy represents a Jerusalemite tradition.”

Jasper and Cuming² believe that there is some form of connection between this liturgy and the liturgies of Alexandria. There was probably at Jerusalem a form very similar to St. Mark’s. The liturgy of St. James seems to be a fusion of this early form with the Egyptian anaphora of St. Basil. This may explain the great similarity between this liturgy and the anaphoras of Saint Mark and St. Basil. In some prayers the text is almost word for word. The liturgy starts with the greeting:

Priest: The love of God the Father, the grace of the Lord, and God and Son, and the communion and the gift of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

People: And with your spirit.

Priest: Lift up the minds and hearts.

People: We have lifted them up to the Lord.

Priest: Let us give thanks to the Lord.

People: That is meet and right.

The text that follows is very similar to the Greek St. Mark’s: “... the Angels, the Archangels, the Thrones, the Dominions and the awesome Powers, the Cherubim with countless eyes and the six

¹Adalbert Hamman: the Mass.

²Jasper and Cuming: Prayers of the Eucharist

winged Seraphim ... crying out saying: Holy, holy, holy, Lord Sabaoth, heaven and earth are full of Thy Glory.”

The institution narrative is also very similar: “He took bread in his holy, pure, spotless, and immortal hands. ... giving thanks, He blessed it, hallowed it, broke it and gave it to His holy disciples and Apostles saying ... do this as a memorial of me: as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you announce the death of the Son of man and you proclaim His resurrection until He comes.” The people respond: “We announce your death, Lord, and we proclaim your resurrection ...”

Like in the liturgy of St. Mark, before the Epiclesis, the priest says: “Thy people and Thy Church beseech Thee” to which the people respond, “Have mercy upon us, Lord, God the Father, the Pantocrator.” The priest concludes the Epiclesis by saying, “And make this bread the holy body of Christ.” The people respond with “Amen.” “So that they may be for all who partake of them for the remission of sins and for eternal life.”

The intercessions follow, for the Church, the fathers, the deacons, the city “and every city and town and all who dwell therein in the orthodox faith.” Then follow prayers for seasonable weather, showers, plenty of fruits: “crowning the year with Thy goodness, for the eyes of all hope in Thee and Thou givest them their food in due season.” A prayer for the gifts and those who brought them is also said: “give them for exchange of earthly goods, heavenly ones; for corruptible gifts, incorruptible ones; for temporal gifts, eternal ones.”

The commemoration of the saints follows: “Deign again to remember, Lord, those who have been pleasing to Thee over the ages ... the holy fathers, patriarchs, prophets Apostles, martyrs, confessors ... and every righteous spirit consumed in the faith of your Christ.” The saints are mentioned starting with the Virgin, the Baptist, the Apostles and so on. The prayer for the departed follows: “grant them rest ... in the bosom of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, ... where there is no pain, sadness or weeping.”

The Liturgy of Antioch:

Antioch was the city in which Barnabas and Paul spent a whole year preaching and where the disciples were called Christians first. (Act 12:25,26). It was the first centre to be preached to outside Judea. In this important centre of Christianity, another liturgical tradition thrived by the fourth century: The liturgy of the Apostles. Supposedly written by Clement, bishop of Rome, who in turn received it from the Apostles. The liturgy is similar to St. Mark's liturgy. It seems to be a re-arranged and expanded version of an earlier local liturgy that must have been very similar to the liturgy of Saint Mark.

An interesting point of historical importance is the prayer for "bishop Annianus and his parishes." St. Annianus was of course the second bishop of Alexandria following St. Mark.

To sum up, of all the four early centres of Christianity, Alexandria used a liturgy that is considered to be the oldest of all liturgies, that is the liturgy of St. Mark. Jerusalem and Antioch utilized liturgies that were very similar to St. Mark's, but probably modified in form. Rome used a very primitive liturgy, imported to Rome by an Alexandrian priest (Hyppolitus) who immigrated to Rome carrying with him the liturgy that bears his name.

THE LITURGY IN THE SIXTH CENTURY

The Church of Alexandria

The Greek liturgy of Saint Mark has now been translated into Coptic. Since the translation is traditionally attributed to Saint Cyril, it became known as The liturgy of Saint Cyril. There are basically no differences between the two, the odd word is found in one version and not the other and vice versa.

Another anaphora known as the anaphora of Saint Basil was by now established side by side with the anaphora of Saint Cyril. It was believed that Saint Basil brought this anaphora with him from Cappadocia during his visit to Egypt in A.D. 357. This is the view held by Dom Engberding and Baumstark. Another researcher, Father Hanssens questions this theory and thinks that the attribution to St. Basil of the text that the Egyptians knew at a very early date is incomprehensible.¹

This view of Father Hanssens has been dramatically confirmed by the discovery in 1960 of a version of the anaphora in Sahidic Coptic that may well be dated to the late third century, years before Saint Basil was born.²

There is no doubt that the anaphora of St. Basil has been derived from the anaphora of St. Mark. The similarity between the two is not coincidental. The institution narrative is the same in both. Both anaphoras start with "The Lord be with you all" rather than the Cappadocian Paulene formula, "The love of God the Father ..."

The most probable explanation is that Saint Basil, during a visit to Egypt, edited an already existing anaphora that had evolved from the much older St. Mark's.

Although similar in many respects, the anaphora of Saint Mark

¹Louis Bouyer: Eucharist.

²Jasper and Cuming: Prayers of the Eucharist.

and that which bears the name of Saint Basil have some differences that we shall summarize;

In the anaphora of Saint Mark all the intercessions are before the anaphora while in St. Basil's many intercessions were introduced into the anaphora while still retaining the pre anaphoral intercessions.

The anaphora of St. Mark has no Christological (pertaining to the nature of Christ) or Sotiriological (pertaining to the Theology of salvation) formulas, while St. Basil abounds with these.

Another difference is the biblical insertions, while St. Mark's quotes the old Testament, St. Basil's has many new Testament quotations so much so that some describe it as "nothing but a biblical patchwork."

The explanation of these differences rests on the date of composition of these two anaphoras. The anaphora of St. Mark was introduced in the first century, before the definition of the canon of the new Testament, and probably before any of the books of the New Testament. Formulas of Christology and Sotiriology were developed centuries later, this is the reason why the anaphora of St. Mark is devoid of Theological formulas and New Testament insertions. As these developed, and certainly most of them developed in Egypt, by Origen, Athanasius and Cyril, they found their way into the Liturgy. The same applies to the intercessions, which in all liturgies, increased in number and scope with the passage of time. So, while the anaphora of St. Mark reflects the "raw" spirituality of the first century, that of St. Basil reflects the sophisticated theology of the third and fourth century.

It is safe to assume that St. Basil took an ancient anaphora that evolved in Egypt by the end of the third century, edited and organized it, putting into it his own style.

The result is a magnificent litany of all the titles and attributions of the Divine persons in the Bible, beneath which we can see Origen's great vision, corrected by Saint Athanasius and his successors, of the

economy of salvation.¹

A third anaphora known as the anaphora of St. Gregory the Theologian started to make its appearance, first in the monasteries of Nitria, and later in the rest of Egypt. Like the anaphora of St. Basil, which it resembles in many aspects, it is based on the ancient St. Mark's but reflects more Cappadocian influence. It starts with the Paulene grace formula, "The love of God the Father ..", so characteristic of the Cappadocian liturgy.

It is believed to be written by St. Gregory during his visit to Egypt as a young monk around the middle of the fourth century. The anaphora is addressed to Christ rather than to the Father. It abounds with the mature Theology of the fourth century, The Christological and sotiriological formulas are greatly expanded into what sounds like one of the sermons of St. Gregory the Theologian.

The Church of Rome

In Rome, the liturgy attributed to Pope Gregory the great, made its appearance in the sixth century and replaced the liturgy of Hippolytus, which has been in use before it. The liturgy of Gregory the Great is quite different from that of Hippolytus both in structure and in the treatment of its subjects. This led many to believe that it could have not evolved from the liturgy of Hippolytus. Father Bouyer emphasizes this, "To explain the evolution that might have produced the canon of the Roman mass of St. Gregory with Hippolytus' liturgy as a starting point, is to set a task for ourselves that has no chance of success."²

Where then, did this liturgy attributed to Pope Gregory the great come from? Father Bouyer answers this intriguing question by saying, "Ultimately we have to start with the Alexandrian liturgy, ... the liturgy of St. Mark, which had long been classical in Alexandria." Father Bouyer further declares,

¹Louis Bouyer: Eucharist.

²Louis Bouyer: Eucharist.

The analogies of content, structure and even similarities of expression are manifold between the solidly attested forms of the Roman Eucharist and those of the Alexandrian liturgy. If we consequently wish to bring together all the elements capable of shedding light on the genesis of the present Roman Eucharist, it is in relation to the Alexandrian Eucharist that it is fitting to study it. Here, we are on solid grounds.¹

This noted Catholic theologian (Father Bouyer) continues,

We think that study of the Egyptian Eucharist has made available to us most of the elements necessary for elucidating the canon of the Roman mass. Their general structural analogy alone invites us to connect the two.²

He further tells us that if we compare the plan of the Eucharist of St. Mark with that of the Roman Eucharist, we find that they remarkably agree. “The schema of the body itself is exactly the same as in the Alexandrian rite.”

Not only does the structure of both liturgies agree but even the words.

To this structural analogy, we must add a whole series of verbal parallelisms, which exclude any assumption that it could be merely coincidental.³

Father Bouyer gives several examples of this verbal parallelism, “Only in Egypt and Rome does the introductory dialogue begin with, ‘The Lord be with you’ followed by, ‘lift up your hearts’.” A further point of similarity is the beginning of the Eucharist. At Rome it starts by, “It is truly meet and right, equitable and available to salvation.” At Alexandria the same words are used with the addition of “holy” after meet and right. The Roman institution narrative mentions that Jesus “lifted up his eyes”—the same as in St. Mark's liturgy.

¹Louis Bouyer: Eucharist.

²Ibid

³Ibid

The Church of Constantinople

Constantinople, the city of Constantine, the second Rome and capital of the Eastern Empire, started to compete with Rome and Alexandria as an important see. Not only did it eclipse Jerusalem and Antioch, it eventually dominated all the churches of the East, except those who refused to subscribe to the Chalcedonian formula. Sooner or later, the liturgical practice of Constantinople is forced on all the local churches, including those of Jerusalem and Antioch. We are therefore going to concentrate on the liturgical developments in Constantinople, which were in due time, extrapolated to all the eastern Orthodox churches.

Towards the end of the fourth century, the liturgy commonly used in Constantinople was an expanded version of the Egyptian St. Basil's, almost twice its size. The question that naturally arises is whether the Egyptian version is an abbreviation of the Byzantine, or the other way around. In 1932, Dom Hieronymus Engberding demonstrated that the Egyptian text is an earlier version of the Byzantine rather than an abbreviation of it, and his conclusions have been universally accepted. This was confirmed by the discovery of a version of the anaphora in Sahidic Coptic that goes back to the end of the third century. This version also has influenced the anaphora of St. James.

Dix emphasizes this,

It is not in Cappadocia, nor in neighbouring Syria, nor even in Constantinople, but only in Egypt that we find the Eucharist of St. Basil in what seems to be its original form.¹

For some centuries, St. Basil was the principal liturgy of Constantinople, until finally ousted by the liturgy attributed to St. John Chrysostom. The Byzantine St. Basil is still in use in the Eastern Orthodox churches but only ten times each year.

The liturgy of St. John Chrysostom which gradually replaced the

¹Dom Gregory Dix: The shape of the Liturgy.

Byzantine St. Basil's, may well be the form used in Antioch during Chrysostom's episcopate. It has much in common with the anaphora of the Apostles (see above) and at several points the wording is very similar to the Byzantine St. Basil's. It is a short anaphora, less than half the length of the Byzantine St. Basil, which is no doubt the reason it supplanted the latter.

It seems that this liturgy is derived from both the anaphora of the Apostles and that of St. Basil. St. John Chrysostom might have only abbreviated it and touched it up rather than authored it. It then received his name when he moved from Antioch to Constantinople.

To sum up, by the end of the sixth century, Egypt had three liturgies, the old St. Mark which was now translated into Coptic, and two other anaphoras that were derived from the latter, St. Basil's and St. Gregory's. Rome abandoned its early liturgy, attributed to Hyppolitus, believed to be of Egyptian origin, to adopt another liturgy, bearing the name of Pope Gregory the great, which is largely an adaptation of the Egyptian St. Mark. Constantinople starts to use an expanded form of the Egyptian St. Basil and later adopts a much abbreviated liturgy attributed to St. John Chrysostom.

THE LITURGY IN THE MIDDLE AGES

The middle ages saw a lot of dramatic changes, Rome broke up with Constantinople in the eleventh century and the Protestants broke up with Rome in the sixteenth. The Liturgy deteriorated in the west until it finally "died", while in Constantinople there were abuses that history recorded for us. Our main source of the following account is taken from Father Bouyer's invaluable work¹. When other sources are consulted, we will give the references.

¹Louis Bouyer: Eucharist.

The “Silent” Mass:

Around the eighth century, in both Rome and Constantinople, it became fashionable to say most of the prayers of the Liturgy inaudibly. “It becomes certain that in the Frankish lands as at Rome, from the *Sanctus* on, the faithful could no longer hear what the priest was saying.”

In Constantinople, the Emperor had to intervene after receiving some complaints. The Emperor chastised the Bishops for violating the canons of the Church by ordaining men “who did not even know the prayers of the anaphora or of Baptism.” The emperor then gave the following order, “Moreover, we order all bishops and priests to say the prayers used in the divine anaphora and holy baptism, not inaudibly, but in a voice that can be heard by the faithful, so that the mind of those listening can be aroused to a greater compunction.” The emperor threatened those who refused to carry on his orders.

The Invention of the Choir:

Choral chants were introduced into the Liturgy and gradually overshadowed the role of the celebrating priests as well as that of the congregation. The original liturgies had certain chants, but these were simple enough to be chanted by the whole assembly. Examples of these authentic chants include, the *Sanctus*, “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Hosts ...,” and the people's “Amen” at certain parts of the Liturgy. Following the institution narrative, the people chanted, “We announce your death O Lord, and we proclaim your resurrection.” Before the epiclesis, when the priest said, “Thy people and Thy Church beseech The,” the people responded, “Have mercy upon us O God, the Father Almighty.” Before the final doxology the people exclaimed, “Take away, forgive, pardon, O God, our voluntary and involuntary offenses, those that are known and those unknown.” Father Bouyer asserts that these responses are ancient, since they are found in old manuscripts.

In Constantinople, people started to introduce other chants that became more and more complex that they needed “specialists” to sing them. In due time, choirs took over the role of the congregation. As the Choral chants grew in length they reduced the parts said aloud by the priest to a few sentences.

In Rome, things became even worse, the chants of the choir grew without any direct connection to the prayer of the priest. In the eleventh century, the choir sang throughout the Liturgy, songs that had no relationship to the mass. “It may be said that the priest had become so enshrouded in the silence of the canon that in the eyes of the faithful he appeared to vanish within it.”

The “personal” prayers:

As the choir took over the mass, the priest had to introduce all sorts of personal prayers to kill the time while the choir sang!

Evidently these better responded to his own devotion than the official text that he was content to perform functionally. These personal prayers multiplied and invaded the Eucharistic prayer like some foreign growth! Nothing of the old Liturgy was left intact, and it came to be considered merely as a support for a private devotion which was inspired from other sources.¹

The “death” of the Liturgy in the west:

More abuses followed,

It was not uncommon to hear one of the voices sing the words of a popular song which had been taken over for use in the Liturgy intermingled with the Latin phrases of the *Sanctus*.²

¹Louis Bouyer: Eucharist.

²Louis Bouyer: Eucharist.

The priests started denying communion to the people. This led to the invention of “private masses” for those who wanted to have communion. These were “often mingled with a superstition undeniably more magical than religious.”

All of these things combined led to the actual “death” of the Liturgy in the west by the end of the middle ages.

At this stage, even if the traditional Eucharist is present, it may be said that a Eucharistic spirituality and even a theology of the Eucharist, both without any serious roots in tradition, have buried it and almost completely stifled it with their parasitical excrescences.¹

Jasper and Cuming tell us the same grim story,

The active participation of the laity virtually disappeared, the Eucharist becoming a spectacle overlaid with ceremonies and symbolism unknown to the early Church: communion itself became a rare occurrence, being supplanted by the elevation and adoration of the consecrated elements.²

The Protestant movement:

It was these abuses, among others that led to the protestant movement,

The reformers looked upon a Church plagued with a multitude of real superstitions, some gross and wholly evil in their effects, some merely quaint and fanciful, and these errors and misconceptions had been accumulating over the centuries.³

Faced by this, the reformists ended up “discarding what was good with what was bad.”

¹Ibid

²Jasper and Cuming: Prayers of the Eucharist.

³Dom Gregory Dix: The shape of the Liturgy.

The Liturgy in Egypt:

The Egyptians, ostracized by both Rome and Constantinople, and trying to cope with the eccentricity and outright persecution of the various ruling dynasties, were spared the tragic changes that happened elsewhere. In their pre-occupation with survival in a hostile surrounding, the Copts clung to their Eucharistic tradition. In doing so, the Copts did the whole of Christendom a great service, by preserving for them an authentic Eucharistic and liturgical tradition that goes back to the roots of Christianity itself. It is this that led many researchers including Leitzman and Richardson to the conclusion that

The authentic Eucharistic and liturgical tradition as delivered by the Lord to His disciples, and as was practiced by the disciples after the Lord's ascension is found only in Egypt.¹

Even in the fifteenth century, Egypt was still influencing the liturgical practices of the rest of Christendom. Dix reports that during this period the custom of the priest dividing the bread during the institution narrative was emulated by the French, the English and later, the rest of Christendom.²

¹Quoted by: M. Al maskeen: Eucharist

²Dom Gregory Dix: The shape of the Liturgy.

THE LITURGY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

During this century, a large volume of research concerning worship in the early Church was accumulated. The sources we consulted in writing these articles are but a drop in a bucket compared to the volumes of material written on this subject. Historians and Theologians even among Protestants started to realize that the early Church had a liturgy, it had Sacraments, and that ministry of the early Church was deeply liturgical not simply a charismatic ministry as was once thought. The study of Patristics (sayings of the Fathers of the Church) overwhelmingly supported this fact.

Cullman, a professor in the faculty of Protestant Theology in Paris, studied in detail the worship in the early Church and came to the same conclusions, "Primitive Christianity did not hesitate to use stereotyped liturgical formulae. ... The Liturgy in the first congregations is something extraordinarily alive, ... all members take part in the Liturgy. ... The thought that in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper a communion with the risen Christ takes place, lies beneath all the Pauline utterances ... We have found a convincing argument for the view that as a rule there was no gathering of the community without the breaking of the bread. ... The Lord's Supper is thus the basis and the goal of every gathering." Cullman concludes his work by comparing the worship of the early Church to that of the Protestant churches, "We must assert here and now that the services of worship in the Protestant Churches of our own era are very much poorer, not only in the free working of the Spirit, but also in respect of what is liturgical."¹

This is just a sampling of the writings of prominent Protestant writers who found out through research that the early Christian

¹Oscar Cullman: *Early Christian Worship*.

worship was both liturgical and Sacramental. This led to the “Liturgical Movement”, a movement in western Christendom aimed at re-discovering the Liturgy. For several years, representatives of tens of Protestant denominations have been meeting in Lima, Peru, for the purpose of formulating a liturgy that can be used by all of their congregations, an ecumenical liturgy. The liturgy has been recently published. It resembles to a great extent our own St. Basil.

In the Catholic Church, a movement for liturgical renewal has also been going on for years. The result; three new liturgies are now available for Catholic worship, two of these are based on the Coptic St. Basil.

It seems that the western churches in trying to find the authentic liturgical heritage of the early Church, are time and time again led into the direction of Egypt and its liturgy.

To sum it all up, we offer this quotation from the “*COPTIC CHURCH REVIEW*,”

The twentieth century has witnessed a 'liturgic movement' in most churches- Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant. Thanks to this movement, the churches have revised or completely changed their liturgies in order to conform to the liturgy of the early Church; also they changed their practices in favour of more participation of the faithful in the liturgy and more frequent communions. The Coptic Church does not need a movement in this sense, because she has kept the Liturgy as it was in the early Church.

APPENDIX III

A TRAINING MANUAL FOR ACOLYTES

Introduction:

The word “Acolyte”, (Gr. *acolythis*) is mentioned in the writings of the Fathers as early as the fourth century. It simply means a server in the altar. Although usually a singer or a reader, he is usually called a “deacon”. Older liturgy books identify one of the acolytes as “*Al Shammamas Al Khadeem*”, usually the most senior among the acolytes, and attributes certain responsibilities to him.

About seven years ago, we developed “A TRAINING MANUAL FOR ACOLYTES”, a document we used as the basis for an annual workshop for young “deacons” who aspire to serve in the altar. We usually hold the workshop on December 26 (a holiday in Canada), preceded by the Divine Liturgy. Although any one can attend (even girls!), yet, only boys 10 years or older, who have been ordained, receive a certificate of completion. The latter, are then allowed to serve in the altar and are encouraged to attend the annual workshop as a refresher.

The references we used in preparing the manual are:

-Bute, J.M.: Coptic Morning Service for the Day of the Lord.

-King, A.A.: The rites of Eastern Christendom.

Both of which used the fourteenth century Euchologion printed by Touki in Rome. In addition, we consulted the “*Kholagi Al Thalath Quddasat*”, of the nineteenth century.

We re-wrote the instructions in a contemporary understandable way, while remaining faithful to the content.

Comparison with available sources in Arabic shows the sad extent to which the original instructions have been corrupted. It is even more distressing that these corrupted instructions have become the norms.

It never ceases to amaze me, when a visiting deacon from another

church, is given the courtesy of serving in the altar, and he tries diligently to “correct” our young acolytes! We train our acolytes not to argue, and to meekly obey. However, as soon as the visitor is gone, they are expected to go back to practicing what they had learned!

Several points of difference need to be elucidated.

During the prayers which are said outside the the Sanctuary door, the acolyte should be behind the priest and to his right. This is to satisfy the cardinal rule that the acolyte should never be in the way when the priest turns to bless the people while saying "Iriini passi".

During the “censing of the altar” (pages 103,110), there are several points that have to be observed.

First, the rubric calls for the acolyte to raise the cross and stand across from the priest to say the responses. No where is it mentioned that he should carry the “Gospel” around.

Another point, is that the instructions clearly state that as soon as the acolyte finishes his responses, he leaves the sanctuary. Again, this is to avoid being in the way when the priest blesses the people saying, “but let Thy people be in blessing etc.”

Please note that on page 104, the acolyte is to carry the cross with him when he leaves the sanctuary, since he will raise it to say the response to the prayer that follows. On page 111, he is instructed to leave the cross on the sanctuary before leaving, since there is no prayer that follows and hence no response.

An important point of difference is the way the “Procession of the Lamb” is done (page 109). Please read it carefully and compare with the current practice.

During the “Entrance of the Gospel” (page 106,) two acolytes are supposed to precede the priest carrying lighted tapers, while another acolyte carries the “Gospel”, facing the priest, in procession. Please note that this is the only time when the acolyte is to carry the “Gospel” in procession around the altar!

THE OFFERING OF INCENSE

Duties of the Acolyte before the Service:

Before the service starts, the acolyte should make sure the two candles on the altar are lit, and should put coals in the censer and light them. If there is a perpetual lamp in the sanctuary, he should light that too. He should also turn on the lights and sound system and set up the microphone and book stand for the priest, just outside the entrance to the sanctuary.

The Prayer of Thanksgiving:

As soon as the priest starts the prayer, the acolyte holds the cross in his right hand and stands behind the priest, to his right, ready to say the responses. Towards the end of the prayer, he goes into the sanctuary, puts the cross on the altar, and fetches the censer, waiting for the priest. When the priest enters the sanctuary, the acolyte holds the censer close to the incense box while the priest puts five “hands” of incense into it. With each “hand”, the acolyte says “Amen.” The priest then says the Prayer of the Morning/Evening Incense (inaudibly) while the acolyte goes to the east side of the altar.

The Censing of the Altar:

When the priest finishes the prayer, he starts censing the altar, facing the East, while saying the Prayer for Peace. The acolyte, across from him, raises the cross in his right hand and says the response for that prayer: “Pray for the peace of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic, Orthodox Church of God. (Lord have mercy.)”

As the priest walks around to the other side of the altar, the acolyte exchanges places with him. The priest, now facing west, censes the altar

and says the Prayer for the Fathers. The acolyte, now facing east, says the appropriate response: “Pray for our high priest, Papa Abba ---
 ①Pope and patriarch, and archbishop of the great city of Alexandria①and for our Orthodox bishops.”

The priest and the acolyte walk around the altar again. The priest, now facing east again, censes the altar and says the Prayer for the Congregations. The acolyte, facing west, says the response: “Pray for this holy church and for our congregations.”

When he has finished saying this response, the acolyte kisses the altar and leaves the sanctuary with the cross. He stands on the south side of the sanctuary entrance, and waits for the priest to finish censing the altar and leave the sanctuary.

A Note on How to Enter and Leave the Sanctuary:

When leaving the sanctuary (after the censing of the altar), the acolyte should exit backwards (while still facing the altar) from the north side of the main entrance, with the left foot first. At all other times, he should leave by the north side entrance (if there is one) in the same manner.

The acolyte should enter the sanctuary with the right foot first, by the south side entrance, or else from the south side of the main entrance.

Before entering and after leaving the sanctuary, the acolyte should also kneel at the entrance and bow his head to the floor, or else he should at least bend his knees and touch the floor with his right hand.

The Prayer for the Departed (Evening):

At the end of the Verses of the Cymbals, the priest says the Prayer for the Departed. The acolyte stands behind the priest again, to his right, ready to say the response.

Note: Whenever the acolyte is about to say a response, he should raise the cross and keep it raised until the end of the

response.

At the end of the prayer, the priest circles the altar, the congregation, then the altar once more, while offering incense. During this time, the acolyte quietly enters the sanctuary, puts the cross on the altar and waits for the priest to finish offering incense, in order to take the censer from him and hang it on its stand.

The Prayers for the Sick and for the Oblations (Sunday Morning):

In the Offering of the Morning Incense, the priest says these prayers instead of the Prayer for the Departed. The acolyte stands behind the priest, to his right, ready to say the first response. At the end of the Prayer for the Sick, the priest and the acolyte both enter the sanctuary. The priest faces east and says the Prayer for the Oblations. The acolyte stands off to his right and says the response.

At the end of the prayer, the priest circles the altar, the congregation, then the altar once more, while offering incense. During this time, the acolyte puts the cross on the altar and waits for the priest to finish offering incense, in order to take the censer from him and hang it on its stand.

Note: Whenever the acolyte gives the censer to the priest or takes it from him, he should kiss his hand.

The Prayer for the Travelers (Weekday Mornings):

This prayer is said instead of the Prayer for the Oblations. The priest says it while standing outside of the sanctuary. The acolyte stands behind him, to his right.

The Doxologies and the Prayer for the Gospel:

The congregation sings the Doxologies. Then, the Creed is said. Towards the end of the Creed, the acolyte prepares a cross with three lighted tapers and gives them to the priest, who then stands outside the sanctuary entrance and chants “God have mercy upon us...”. Meanwhile, the acolyte brings the censer to the entrance of the sanctuary, waiting for the priest to finish. Then, holding the censer in his left hand, he gives it to the priest and takes the cross and tapers from him with his right hand. He extinguishes the tapers and puts them away, takes the cross and the Gospel from the altar, leaves the sanctuary by the north entrance and stands behind the priest, to his right. The priest says the Prayer for the Gospel, and the acolyte, raising the cross and the Gospel, says the response.

The Entrance of the Gospel:

At the conclusion of the Prayer for the Gospel, the acolyte enters the sanctuary from the south side of the main entrance. He then circles the altar before the priest, facing him. Two other acolytes precede them, carrying lighted tapers. As they reach the sanctuary entrance, the acolyte hands the Gospel to the priest, and raising the cross, he says, “Stathite met afovo Theo...”.

The Five Short Prayers:

If these have not been said (silently) during the reading of the Gospel, they are said outside the sanctuary with the acolyte standing in his customary position to say the responses. At the conclusion of these, the acolyte takes the censer from the priest to empty it.

The Three Absolutions:

While the congregation says the “Abba” (the Lord's Prayer), the acolyte

takes the Gospel and leaves the sanctuary. At the end of the Lord's Prayer, he exhorts the people: "Bow your heads to the Lord" ... "Let us attend in the fear of God." The acolyte then kneels before the sanctuary entrance, facing east.

Note: Whenever the acolyte exhorts the people to bow their heads or to worship the Lord, he should bow down as well.

The End-of-Service:

At the end of the Absolutions, the acolyte hands the Gospel to the priest, who puts the cross on top of it. Then, all those who are present kiss the Gospel and the cross, starting with the priests, followed by the rest of the servants (according to their rank), then the rest of the men and the women.

Duties of the Acolyte after the Service:

At the end of the Evening Incense, the acolyte should extinguish the candles on the altar, empty the censer, and turn off any lights and the sound system. Of course, these steps are not necessary in the morning service since the Liturgy follows the Offering of Incense.

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

The acolytes serving with the priest should be well versed in the rubrics of the liturgy. They should come early in the morning and participate in the Offering of Incense. The optimum number of acolytes serving in the sanctuary is three, but more may serve. In any case, there should be at least one acolyte serving with the priest. The acolytes serving around the altar are assigned to this role and should never invite themselves.

The most senior among the acolytes is usually designated as the “captain” of the group, and he should be responsible for deciding who says which responses. The captain and the other team members should agree on some method of non-verbal communication, since no one is allowed to speak or even whisper during the service. The signals used by the captain in his communication with the other acolytes should be very discrete and not noticeable by the congregation, so as not to distract them.

The captain should be the one who makes sure that the censer contains lit coals at all times. Preferably, he should also be the one who brings it to the priest whenever this is called for.

During the service, the priest recites several inaudible prayers. The captain should be acquainted with these, if possible, and open the liturgy book to the appropriate page in aid of the priest.

The Blessing of the Vestments:

Before the service starts, the priest blesses the vestments by signing them thrice with the cross.

Note: No servant is allowed to put on his vestments unless the priest blesses them first. He should only take off his vestments after the priest has done the same, or when the priest permits him to do so.

The Offertory:

The priest stands at the entrance of the sanctuary facing west. An acolyte stands at his right side carrying a veil in his right hand, ready to receive the wine cruet, and holding a lit taper in his left hand. Customarily, the acolyte crosses his arms, with his left arm below the right one.

The bread and wine should be presented to the priest by the most senior participating servant. After choosing the bread, the priest hands the wine cruet to the acolyte at his right side. They both move towards the north side of the altar. Another acolyte should be waiting *inside the sanctuary*, ready to help the priest with the washing of the hands (see “The Anaphora”, below, for details).

The Procession of the Lamb:

According to the rubric, four people take part in the procession: an acolyte carrying a lighted taper; followed by the priest carrying the Lamb (the chosen loaf of bread) wrapped in a veil, raised above his head; followed by another acolyte carrying a lighted taper; followed by the acolyte carrying the wine cruet, wrapped in a veil, raised above his head.

The captain should decide beforehand who responds to the priest.

The Signing of the Lamb:

After the procession, the priest holds the Lamb close to the wine and signs both of them three times. Following each signing, the acolyte assigned by the captain says, “Amen,” then he says the response, “One is the Holy Father...”.

During this, all of the acolytes present (including the one holding the wine) hold lit tapers. They extinguish them only after the priest mixes the water with the wine in the cup (see below).

The Prayer of Thanksgiving:

The priest takes the wine and pours it into the cup, then he mixes it with a little water. An acolyte should be ready with the water pitcher.

The priest begins the prayer of thanksgiving and the acolytes say their assigned responses. The priest then says the Prayer of the Prothesis in a low voice. Unless there is another priest present, the captain (being the most senior among the serving acolytes) goes to the east side of the altar and prepares the prospherine (the large veil used for covering the altar). When the priest has finished saying the Prayer of the Prothesis, he helps him cover the altar. The priest then circles the altar and as he reaches the north side, the captain kneels before him. Then he raises his head so that the priest may bless him by placing his hand on his head. They both kiss the altar then leave the sanctuary with the rest of the acolytes.

The Absolution of the Servants:

After leaving the sanctuary, the acolytes kneel before the sanctuary entrance, facing east, bowing their heads. They should be as close to the entrance of the sanctuary as possible since the rubric calls for the priest to stand *behind them*, facing east, while he says the Absolution of the Servants.

After the Absolution, they all rise. The captain goes into the sanctuary and fetches the censer. The other acolytes remain in the nave for the duration of the Liturgy of the Word, unless they are assigned a duty by the captain.

The Censing of the Altar:

The priest places the five “hands” of incense into the censer. The captain responds with “Amen” after each “hand”. The priest then says the Prayer of the Paulene Incense (inaudibly), and begins censing the altar. The captain (or an acolyte assigned by him) goes to the east side of the altar, raises the cross in his right hand. They both circle the altar. While they circle, the captain or acolyte says the responses, as described above

for the Offering of Incense.

Following the last response, the captain or acolyte kisses the altar, places the cross on it, and leaves the sanctuary. When the priest finishes censuring the altar, he circles the nave, then goes around the altar once more. He then leaves the sanctuary to offer incense before the sanctuary entrance. Having finished this, he hands the censer to the captain, who waits just inside the sanctuary entrance (on the south side), ready to take it from him and hang it on its stand.

The Liturgy of the Word:

During this part of the service, the captain remains in the sanctuary to help the priest. The other acolytes sit outside and listen attentively to the readings. After the Catholic Epistle, the captain brings the censer to the priest who says the Prayer of the Praxis Incense in a low voice. The Censing of the Altar is repeated, as described above.

The Prayer for the Gospel:

The captain assigns one acolyte to say the responses for the Prayer for the Gospel. The assigned acolyte enters the sanctuary, takes the cross and the Gospel from the altar, leaves the sanctuary by the north entrance and stands behind the priest, to his right. The rubrics for the Prayer for the Gospel and the Entrance of the Gospel are as described above for the Offering of Incense.

The Reading of the Gospel:

During the Gospel reading, the priest stands in the sanctuary and says the Litany of the Catechumens followed by the Prayer of the Veil, inaudibly. Following this, he offers incense to the Gospel.

When the reading of the Gospel is finished, the captain takes the censer from the priest and hangs it on its stand. Then, everyone sits in the nave to listen to the sermon. When the sermon is concluded, the serving acolytes quietly go back into the sanctuary.

The Three Long Prayers:

The captain assigns the acolytes who will say the responses to these three prayers. During the second prayer (the Prayer for the Fathers), when the priest says, "...and their prayers on our behalf...", the captain brings the censer to the priest, who puts incense in it. The captain stands there holding the censer, and as soon as the priest finishes saying the first part of the Prayer for the Congregations ("...remember, O Lord, our congregations. Bless them."), he hands the censor to the priest, who completes the prayer while offering incense. After the priest censures the congregation to the west, at the end of the prayer, the captain takes the censer to hang it on its stand.

At the conclusion of the prayers, the assigned acolyte holds the cross in his right hand and says, "In the wisdom of God...". The captain (or an acolyte assigned by him) now promptly washes the priest's hands by pouring a little water on them three times in a row. He should be careful not to spill the water all over the priest's sleeves!

Note: Throughout the rest of the service, the acolytes stand at the right hand of the priest. They should stand attentively, watching the captain, ready to say the responses as he gives each one of them the signal agreed upon.

The Lifting of the Prosperine:

At the conclusion of the Prayer of Reconciliation, the captain, standing on the east side of the altar and facing the priest, assists him in lifting the prosperine. He then folds it neatly, with the help of one other acolyte, and puts it in its place.

Note: If another priest is present, he should be the one to assist the celebrant in lifting the prosperine.

The Anaphora:

This part of the Liturgy is straightforward. The acolytes, standing at the southern side of the altar (to the right of the priest), say their assigned responses in the usual manner. Three points merit explanation:

The Lighting of Tapers:

The acolytes carry lighted tapers *whenever the priest is signing the gifts*; in other words, from the beginning of the Institution Narrative to the end of the “Epiclesis”, and again from the Introduction to the Fraction until the end of Communion.

Note: As a rule of thumb: Light tapers when the priest bares his hands, and extinguish them when he covers his hands with veils.

The Censer:

The captain brings the censer to the priest three times during this part of the Liturgy:

After the priest says, “...Who, of the Holy Spirit and of the Holy Virgin Mary ☩”, at which point the priest puts incense in the censer.

As the people say, “According to Thy mercy, O Lord...”, at which time the priest censens his hands three times before handling the gifts.

At the conclusion of the Commemoration of the Saints, at which point the priest puts incense in it, as he mentions those who have departed.

The Prostrations:

The acolytes (as well as the rest of the congregation) prostrate themselves four times during the Anaphora:

At the Epiclesis, when the assigned acolyte says, “Worship God in fear and trembling”. Everyone, *including the acolyte who gives this exhortation*, should worship at this point.

At the “Elevation of the Host”, during the Introduction to the Fraction, when the priest says, “The holy Body.”

After the Fraction, when the assigned acolyte says, “Bow your heads to the Lord.” They rise up as they say, “One is the All-Holy Father...”, not before.

During the Profession, until the assigned acolyte has finished saying his response.

Communion:

After the priest says the Profession, the assigned acolyte, standing across from the priest and facing west, holds the cross in his right hand and a lit taper in his left, and says his response.

The acolytes partake of the Body of Christ, in order of seniority, beginning with the captain. Following this, the other servants partake. Then the priest goes towards the men to give them communion. After that, he crosses over to the other side to give communion to the women. Having finished, he returns to the altar. The process is repeated for the Blood.

Note: As each person approaches to partake of the Body or Blood, he or she should say “Amen”.

Note: Throughout Communion, the captain holds a lit taper and stays close to the priest. Whenever the priest carries the

Body or the Blood and moves around, the captain precedes him carrying the lit taper, always facing the Body or the Blood (walking backwards).

The Washing of the Vessels:

After all have partaken of the Body and Blood, the captain helps the priest wash the vessels, while the other acolytes collect the veils from the altar and fold them neatly.

The captain then dries the vessels thoroughly, using a separate towel for this purpose (other than the one used for drying the hands of the priest). He then wraps them in a veil and puts them away. In wrapping them, he takes two diagonally opposite corners of the veil and makes a double knot. Then he take the other two corners and ties them in a triple knot. He should be careful not to wrap the veil too tightly around the vessels, lest they should be warped.

Duties of the Acolytes after the Service:

The captain supervises the other acolytes in the following duties:

Emptying the censer.

Extinguishing the candles on the altar and changing them, if necessary.

Emptying the water pitcher as well as the wash basin.

Washing the wine cruet thoroughly and hanging it upside down to drain.

Tidying up the sanctuary.

Turning off the lights.

Turning off the sound system.

Acolytes should remove their vestments only after the priest has done the same, or after taking his permission.