



Holiness of Hymns and Purity of Praises

The Divine Liturgy of St Mark and The Origin of the Divine Liturgy

ΠΙΦΩΘΕΝ ἸΝΟΥΤ ἸΤΕ ΦΗΘΟΥΑΒ ΜΑΡΚΟC

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Introduction

The Divine Liturgy of St. Mark is the ancient, traditional original Divine Liturgy of the Orthodox Church of Alexandria. With the discovery of a papyrus from the end of the fourth century in 1928, currently kept at Strasburg University, it also has the most ancient documentation of any Orthodox Divine Liturgy still in use. Besides the Coptic Orthodox Church, other Orthodox Churches use it in their prayers.¹

This Divine Liturgy was instituted by our founding father, St Mark the Apostle, the evangelist of the land of Egypt. It is one of three Divine Liturgies utilized in the Coptic Church today: the Divine Liturgy of St Basil, the Divine Liturgy of St Gregory and the Divine Liturgy of St Cyril.

St Cyril, the 24th Pope of the See of St Mark, who is known as the *ἰPillar of the Faith*,^ἰ added some litanies to the original text so the Divine Liturgy of St Mark is also known as the Divine Liturgy of St Cyril.

This Divine Liturgy is the origin of other liturgies such as the Divine Liturgies of St Basil and St Gregory, and the Liturgy of the Apostles used by the Ethiopian Church.²

Origin of the liturgy

The first Liturgy officiated by the apostles was more or less the Liturgy of the Last Supper, officiated by Our Lord. In it, Our Lord completed three main acts, which together constitute one action, the *ἰEucharist*^ἰ

First: Ritual act

In it, Our Lord practiced the Jewish rites of the *ἰAgape*^ἰ which is breaking of the bread followed by supper and then blessing God (offering thanksgiving to Him) on the Chalice and finally praises.³

Second: Mystical act

In it, Our Lord simply declared after the blessing on the bread and distributing it that this is His Body and on the wine that this is His Blood. He then ordered his disciples

to do this for His remembrance.

Third: Explanatory Act

In it, Our Lord explained the aspects of the converted Body and Blood.

How the church completed the three actions

The Agape and the Eucharist

First: ritual act

This was simple, they just repeated the same sequence done in the Last Supper, first in the Upper Room and then later in homes after the number of the Christians increased.

Second: The Mystical

The church faced some difficulty in the beginning. Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Last Supper simply converted the body and blood by the power of His Divinity, with no special prayers. He just said, *ἰTake eat, this is My Body*^ἰ (Matt 26:26). The conversion was simply by the Word of God.

They had then to add somewhere in the Liturgy a plea for the ipresence of the Lord Jesus Christ^ἰ so that He can make this change Himself.

Third: Explanatory

In the beginning, there was no formal form for the prayers. The bishop or priest, heading the Agape and the Divine Liturgy in one of the houses, would say some prayers and do some explanation for the people attending. With the spread of the service and increase in number of the believers, these prayers had to be formulated to explain every move, especially after the entrance of the gentiles in Christianity. So this was beginning of the Divine Liturgy. Later, the bishops in different churches added some parts to the Divine Liturgies. Mainly some litanies, necessitated by their times and explanation of the story of salvation.

Time of writing the Divine Liturgy of St Mark

Most of the famous rites scientist thinks the Divine Liturgy



Holiness of Hymns and Purity of Praises

of St Mark together with other ancient liturgies (Liturgy of St James, Liturgy of St Clement present in the Didache) was written in the third century.⁴ This means that even if they were not written by the apostles themselves, we can surely say that these are the exact word of these apostles, carried down through the spoken tradition.

Parts of the Liturgy

Any Liturgy constitutes four basic parts:

- 1- Introduction to the Liturgy called Preface.
- 2- The Praise of the Cherubim called Pro Sanctus.
- 3- Institution: which are the words of the Lord on the Bread and Wine.
- 4- Invocation or Epiclesis, which is calling of the Holy Spirit or the Word to bless the bread and wine to the Body and Blood.



St Mark

3. Thanksgiving for Creation of Heaven and Earth

ı You are He who has created the heavens and that which is in the heavens, the earth and everything that is therein: the seas, the rivers, the springs, the lakes, and that which is in all of them.

4. Thanksgiving for the Offering of the Sacrifice

ı through whom we give thanks and offer unto You, with Him and the Holy Spirit ı the holy, co-essential, and undivided Trinity ı ı this rational sacrifice and this bloodless service.ı

The Litanies

The litanies in the Divine Liturgy of St Mark come before the Invocation. This was the original place for the litanies and then was moved later after the descent of the Holy Spirit in later Divine Liturgies, like St Basil's and St Gregory's.

The Divine Liturgy of St Mark has its own characteristics. It is kept by the Church of Alexandria in original form. The sequence of the different parts may seem different than other liturgies for that reason.

The Preface:

1. It starts with a dialogue between the priest and the people:
The Lord be with you all → And with your spirit.
Lift up your hearts → We have them with the Lord.
Let us give thanks to the Lord → It is meet and right.
(This is an invitation to the Eucharist: Thanksgiving)
2. Meet and right
We notice here the abundant number of the verbs of praise. ıto **praise** You, **hymn** You, **bless** You, **serve** You, **worship** You, **give thanks** to You, and **glorify** You, And confess to You night and day, with unfeeling lips, with a heart that keeps not silent, and with unceasing glorifications.ı The priest here is switching between the sacrifice of the body and blood to the sacrifice of praise (the last response said by the people: ıA mercy of peace, a sacrifice of praise.ı

The Praise of the Cherubim (Sanctus)

ıFor You are God, who are above every principality and every authority, and every power and every dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come. You are He before whom stand thousands of thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand of holy angels and archangels, serving You ı ı.ı
This praise was first added to the Eucharist in Egypt, specifically Alexandria before year 230 AD, and from Egypt to the end of the world.

The Short Invocation

The priest signs the paten and the chalice together once, while saying: ıFill this, Your sacrifice, O Lord, with the blessing, which is from You, by the coming down upon it of Your Holy Spirit.ı

The Institution

These are the words of the Lord in the Last Supper when He instituted the New Covenant with his Blood.



Holiness of Hymns and Purity of Praises

in the night in which He gave Himself up that He might suffer for our sins and death, which He accepted by His own will for us all. He took bread into His holy hands which are without spot, or blemish, blessed, and life-giving.

The Great Invocation

This is the third invocation: The first is an invocation to the Holy Trinity in the Rites of the Offering of the Lamb (in the very beginning of the Divine Liturgy), the second is an invocation for the Son (the short invocation) and this one is for the Holy Spirit. In all three, it is the same petition to God to change the bread and wine to the Body and Blood of our Lord.

The Fraction

This is the breaking of the Bread, one of the main parts of the original liturgies. Our Lord, after He blessed the bread, He broke it and gave it to His disciples.

The Elevation, Consignation and Commixture

The despotikon (means for the Lord) is the middle part of the bread. The priest takes the despotikon and with It he signs the precious Blood inside the chalice in the form of the cross. Then he dips the extremity of It inside the chalice and carefully raises It soaked in the Blood, and with It signs, in the form of the cross, the pure Body which is all on the paten. This is a symbol of the unity of the Body and Blood.

¹ <http://www.odox.net/Liturgy1-Mark.htm>

² J. M. Neale, General Introduction, p 324, cited by A.N.F., VII, p534

³ John 13

⁴ Rev. William Palmer, *Origines Liturgicane*, Oxford, 1832.

In Succession of Saint Mark

Below is a list of all our Fathers, the patriarchs of the Coptic Orthodox Church, starting from its establishment.

Saint Mark	Peter II	Isaac	Mina II	Youannes IX	Mark VI
Anianous	Timothy I	Simeon I	Abraam	Benjamin II	Metaous IV
Milious	Theophilos	Alexandrous II	Philotheous	Peter V	Youannes XVI
Kerdonous	Kyrillos I	Kosma I	Zacharius	Mark IV	Peter VI
Ebrimous	Dioscorous I	Theodorous	Shenouda II	Youannes X	Youannes XVII
Yostous	Timothy II	Kaeil I	Christotholous	Gabriel IV	Mark XVII
Omanious	Peter III	Mina I	Kyrillos II	Metaous I	Youannes XVIII
Marcianos	Athanasious II	Youannes IV	Michael II	Gabriel V	Mark VIII
Kalawtianos	Youannes I	Mark II	Makarious II	Youannes XI	Peter VII
Eghribanos	Youannes II	Jacob	Gabriel II	Metaous II	Kyrillos IV
Youlianous	Dioscorous II	Simeon II	Michael III	Gabriel VI	Demetrious II
Demetrius I	Timothy III	Yousab I	Youannes V	Michael IV	Kyrillos V
Yaraklas	Theodosious I	Kaeil II	Mark III	Youannes XII	Youannis XIX
Dionisious	Peter IV	Kosma II	Youannes VI	Youannes XIII	Makarious III
Maximous	Demianos	Shenouda I	Kyrillos III	Gabriel VII	Yousab II
Thaona	Anastasious	Michael I	Athanasious III	Youannes XIV	Kyrillos VI
Peter I	Andrenicous	Gabriel I	Gabriel III	Gabriel VIII	Pope Shenouda III
Archilaous	Benjamin I	Kosma III	Youannes VII	Mark V	Pope of Alexandria
Alexandros	Agathou	Makarious I	Theodosious III	Youannes XV	Patriarch of the See
Athanasious I	Youannes III	Theophanious	Youannes VIII	Metaous III	of Saint Mark