

Spirituality of Our Church Rituals IV

Service Vessels

The service vessels are used in the Divine Liturgy and all other mysterious services of the Coptic Church. They are categorized into veils and vessels. They are sanctified for the mysterious services by the Bishop or the Pope's prayers (1 Timothy 4:5) and the Holy Myroon. The Church recognized the need to sanctify them as the Lord ordered Moses to sanctify the Tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant, the Table, the Sacrifice Altar, the Vessels, and all Priests' clothes to be holy for the ritual services and everyone who touched them became holy and sanctified for the services (Exodus 30:29 & Leviticus 8:30).

St Peter requested in his Epistle to St. Clement "Every Altar you build sanctify it with the Holy Myroon which is the oil of joy in the Lord." Only bishops can ordinate and sanctify the vessels. Our Orthodox Fathers set specific rituals and prayers for sanctification of the vessels and clothes of the church services. Also, the Church's laws prohibited the use of these vessels for any other use, except the mysterious services to which they are specified. Also, should anyone steal these vessels the Church has the right to excommunicate him as specified by the laws of councils.

1. **Chalice's Throne:** The *Throne* is a box made of wood into which the chalice should be placed during the mysterious service of the Divine Liturgy. The Church refers to it as a *throne* because it is a symbol of the *Throne* of the Lord as mentioned in the Holy Book of Isaiah 6:1 and Holy Book of Revelation 4:2 as the *chalice* contains the Lord Jesus Christ's Blood to Whom all Heavenly Powers bow and worship. As the Ark of the Covenant in the Old Testament contained the Vessel of Manna (Exodus 16:33), also this *Throne* contains the spiritual Manna by which all believers live (John 6:54).
2. **Paten and Chalice:** In which the Loaf and Wine are placed during the mysterious service of the Divine Liturgy and they are converted by the power of the Holy Spirit into the True Body and the True Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ in the Last Supper used a *paten and chalice* (Matthew 26:26&27) and following Him the Apostles did the same (1 Corinthians 10:16 & 21). Tertullian mentioned in his book about virginity "The early Church used in the liturgical service a *chalice* which is engraved with a picture of a lamb as a symbol of Christ Who is the Lamb of God and in His Blood we are saved" (Ephesians 2:3).
3. **Dome and The Mastyer:** The *dome* is usually placed on the paten so the veil could not touch the loaf. The word "*mastyer*" is a Greek word which means mysterious in reference to the mysterious power of the Lord Jesus Christ's Blood which sanctifies the spirit and the body (Matthew 26:28 and John 6: 52-60) and as mentioned in the Holy Book of Isaiah when the angel took a firebrand from the Altar and touched the prophet' mouth to sanctify him (Isaiah 6:6&7).
4. **Communion Box:** It is a box made of silver in which the Lord Jesus Christ's Body and Blood are placed when the priest goes to give the Mysteries to sick people in homes and hospitals.
5. **Censer:** It is made of silver and has three chains. It is used in offering incense which is a symbol of the saints' prayers.

The **Altar**

The **Altar** can be made of wood, stone, or brick. It is either square or rectangular from the south to the north. Noah was the first one to build an **Altar** for the Lord after the flood as mentioned in the Holy Bible (Genesis 8: 20 & 21). Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob built **Altars** for the Lord (Genesis 12:8, 13:18, 26:25, 28:18 and 35:7). God also ordered Moses to build an **Altar** in the Tabernacle (Exodus 27:1). Solomon, the king, built an **Altar** in the Temple as The Lord gave an example for his father David (1 Kings 6).

In the New Testament, the Apostles ordered the believers to build **Altars** in their Church upon which the sacrifice of the Lord's Body and Blood is offered every day and through which we are saved (Hebrews 9:12). In the early Church, the believers made the **Altar** of wood so it would be easier for them to carry the **Altar** with them during their escape from their persecutors. Later on, they made the **Altar** of stones or bricks as proof of establishment and continuity of The New Testament's sacrifice as mentioned in the Holy Book of Daniel (11:33 and 12:11).

The Church taught that the **Altar** should be in the east and away from the eastern wall so the believers can look at the **Altar** continuously in memory of the Lord on the Holy Cross. It should be separated from the eastern wall so it will be easy for the priest and deacons to go around the **Altar** during services (Psalm 26:6).

There many verses in the Old and New Testaments which prove the presence of the **Altar** for offering the New Testament's Sacrifice of the Lord's Body and Blood:

- (1) "When that time comes, there will be an **Altar** to the Lord in the land of Egypt and a stone pillar dedicated to Him at the Egyptian border. They will be symbols of the Lord Almighty's Presence in Egypt. When the people are oppressed and call out to the Lord for help, He will send someone to rescue them. The Lord will reveal Himself to the Egyptian people, and then they will acknowledge and worship Him and bring Him sacrifices and offerings. They will make solemn promises to Him and do what they promise" (Isaiah 19: 19-22). It is well known that this prophecy was fulfilled when our Apostle St. Mark the Evangelist and the Beholder of God visited and preached in Egypt with the Holy Gospel and this was a prophecy about establishment of our Coptic Orthodox Church which still offers her sacrifices daily to the Lord and will do until the time of His Second Blessed Coming at the end of the days.
- (2) "*People from one end of the world to the other will honor Me. Everywhere they burn incense to Me and offer acceptable sacrifice*" (Malachi 1:10&11). This is a prophecy about the New Testament's Sacrifice which is offered everywhere in the world unlike that of the Old Testament which was offered in Jerusalem's Temple.
- (3) The Lord Jesus Christ Himself said "*So if you are about to offer your gift to God at the **Altar** and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in the front of the **Altar**, go at once and make peace with your brother and then come back and offer your gift to God*" (Matthew 5: 23&24). Of course, the Lord did not mean Jerusalem's Temple as He stated in His prophecy about the demolition of the Temple in the near future and so no more sacrifices will be offered there (Luke 19:41-45) and this prophecy was fulfilled on 70 AD when the Romans destroyed the Temple. So it is clear that the Lord meant the **Altar** of the New Testament.
- (4) St. Paul mentioned in his Epistle to the Hebrews (7:11) that the Lord Jesus Christ came in Melchizedek's rank and priesthood which is higher than that of Aaron the High Priest.
- (5) All apostolic Churches in the early centuries agreed to build **Altars** for offering of sacrifices as mentioned in the Apostles' Laws and supported by teachings of the Apostolic Fathers.