

Raising of the Evening Incense except that it is performed in the morning).

While traditionally this usually lasts all night and is immediately followed by the service of the Divine Liturgy, more commonly the preparation prayers are prayed the night before, followed by everyone retreating to their homes to sleep, and then all the faithful return early the next morning to pray the prayers of the Raising of the Morning Incense and then finally the Divine Liturgy.

The Divine Liturgy can be divided into four parts:

**1) The Offertory.** Immediately following the Raising of the Morning Incense, the Priests and Deacons dress in their Liturgical garments. Then the highest ranked clergy is "offered" a selection of special bread from which to choose the "Lamb" (resembling Christ) who will be slain as a sacrifice for the remission of sins. That bread will eventually be changed into the Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ and offered as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of the people's sins. The priest then baptizes the Lamb in water and then through a series of motions recalls the crucifixion and burial of the lamb.

**2) The Liturgy of the Word.** This portion of the Divine Liturgy constitutes a selection of readings from the New Testament and a reading from a book entitled the "Anaphorium" (which commemorates the lives of saints and other notable events), culminating in the reading of a portion of the Gospels. Usually this is followed by a sermon from the clergy.

**3) The Pre-Anaphora.** "Anaphora" refers to that part of the Divine Liturgy where the Bread and Wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. Just before the Anaphora is the Pre-Anaphora, constituting a recitation of The Nicene Creed (a summary of Orthodox theological beliefs) and the Prayer of Reconciliation (where we recall how humans, who were estranged from God due to the "fall of man" caused by the first human's sin, were

reconciled to God by Christ who took upon Himself humanity and redeemed it to Himself). Moreover, all Christians present are then asked to ensure that everyone is reconciled with each other and that there is nothing standing in the way of caring for and loving one another.

**4) The Anaphora.** Finally we arrive at the most significant part of the Divine Liturgy. First the Church joins with the angels who stand before God and recite one of their hymns (as the Bible tells us). Then, the priest recalls the Mystical Supper, uttering the words that Christ Himself spoke to His disciples when He instituted the mystery of the Eucharist. Finally, the pinnacle of the Divine Liturgy is reached when the priest invokes the Holy Spirit (God Himself) to change the Bread and Wine into the actual Body and Blood of Christ.

#### Significance of the Eucharist

It is absolutely necessary to partake of the Body and Blood of Christ in order to live eternally with Him in heaven:

*"When Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.'" - John 6:53-54*

## The Divine Liturgy



*"For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him." (John 6: 56-57)*

The word liturgy (leitourgia) is a Greek word meaning “work of the people.” This word is used in a broad sense to refer to official ritual services of the church (e.g., prayers and rites of the service of baptism). However, most Orthodox Christians use this word to refer to the “Divine Liturgy,” or the “Liturgy of the Eucharist.” The Divine Liturgy entails prayer and worship culminating in the change by God Himself (the Holy Spirit) of bread and wine into the actual Body and Blood of Jesus Christ (the Eucharist), just as Christ did during His Last Supper with the Apostles. Only those that are baptized in the Orthodox Christian faith and who have prepared their spirits by confessing their sins may partake of the Eucharist, which is the means by which the faithful are cleansed of their iniquities.



### The History of the Divine Liturgy

Today the Divine Liturgy consists of a predetermined set of prayers prayed by the clergy and responses by the deacon and congregation in a specific order and accompanied by particular rites. On different occasions there are certain predetermined changes to the deacon and congregation responses to commemorate particular events (such as the Resurrection, or the Birth of Christ).

This was not always the case. In the early church there was a greater deal of fluidity in the Divine Liturgy. While there was a certain fixed scheme of prayers, the substance of the prayers were left much up to the improvisation of the clergy. This however led to serious problems. When a clergyman held an erroneous belief, he would include his heretical teachings in his prayers during the service of the Divine Liturgy. After a number of crises had befallen the early church, the Orthodox Churches agreed to avoid such incidents by substituting improvisation with specific prearranged prayers.

One of the first written compositions of the Divine Liturgy was by St. Mark the Apostle which later was modified by St. Cyril I, the 24th Pope of the Coptic Church. This liturgy known as St. Cyril's liturgy is one of the oldest liturgies known to the Christian world. Two additional liturgies were formed, both of which were derived from St. Cyril's, for a total of three liturgies used in the church today: the liturgy according to St. Basil, bishop of Caesarea and the liturgy according to St. Gregory the Theologian, bishop of Constantinople.

### The Rituals during the Divine Liturgy

The word “rite” in Arabic is pronounced “tuks,” which is in turn derived from the Greek word “taxis,” meaning a “system.” In the church, this refers to the method by which liturgical worship takes place. This includes the recitation of verbal prayers and the performing of certain symbolic motions and gestures. Nearly every motion by the deacons and the clergy during worship carries with it a deep spiritual meaning, some of which may not be instantly apparent to even the faithful.

One might wonder why there is so much emphasis on order and rites. First, the Church is continuing what has been handed down to it since the time of the Apostles, who set in motion aspects of the liturgy that were prescribed by Christ Himself. Secondly, it is clear in the Bible that from the beginning of time God mandated certain rituals of worshipping him, “for God is not the author of confusion but of peace” and hence, “let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:33, 40). In the Bible, a large portion of the book of Exodus and nearly the entire book of Leviticus is dedicated to explaining how God wanted the Israelites to worship Him. Requiring certain order and rituals in the service of the Divine Liturgy only proves to establish the continuity of God from past to present.



### The Divine Liturgy: Active Participation

Before embarking on an explanation of the components of the Divine Liturgy, it is important to note that this service is not a performance to be watched by non-participant spectators, but actually entails the active participation of clergy, deacons, and the congregation in a continuous state of prayer and worship. All throughout the Divine Liturgy the clergyman says a prayer to God, which is almost always followed by a deacon who verbally directs all present to do something (whether it is to pray for a particular purpose, to pay attention, to stay standing, etc). Hence, the Divine Liturgy truly becomes the “work of the people” as a whole.



### The Components of the Divine Liturgy

The main focus of the Divine Liturgy is to receive the “mystery of mysteries” whereby the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. In its love and honor of this event, the Coptic Church long ago set out a certain formula of prayers and worship to precede this momentous event.

Preparation for the Divine Liturgy begins the night before with the **Prayers of the Evening Hour** (from a prayer book referred to as the “Book of Hours,” or the Agpeya), the **Raising of the Evening Incense** (prayers and worship in the evening accompanied by the use of the censor and incense), the **Midnight Psalmody** (a beautifully arranged set of praises and worship that are sung in about 15 different tunes), followed by the **Prayer of the Morning Hour** (which is to be prayed early in the morning, being one of several prayers to be prayed from the Agpeya), and finally the **Raising of the Morning Incense** (which is virtually identical to the