

Coptic Orthodox
Diocese of the Southern United States

RIT 101
LITURGY, AGPEYA AND PRAISES

Servants' Preparation Program
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(1) The History of the Liturgy

The entire section is quoted from "Understanding the Liturgy" by Fr. Athanasius Eskander.

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. "Dix" 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 Holy Bible were propagated. Oral tradition always preceded the written forms of both the Holy 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:

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. 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).

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 written 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 Eucharist.

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

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.

By the end of the fourth century another liturgy started to be used, that is the liturgy of Saint Basil the great.

The Liturgy of Rome:

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

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.”

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 travelled 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. 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.”

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 Cuming 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 St. Mark and St. Basil. In some prayers the text is almost word for word.

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 rearranged and expanded version of an earlier local liturgy that must have been very similar to the liturgy of Saint 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.

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.

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.

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 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 Soteriological (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 Soteriology 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 Holy Bible, beneath which we can see Origen's great vision, corrected by Saint Athanasius and his successors, of the economy of salvation.

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 soteriological 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.”

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,

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

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.

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.

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.

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 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.

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.

¹ http://www.stmarycoptorthodox.org/liturgy-history.htm#_ftn18#_ftn18

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 offences, 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.

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.

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.

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."

This is just a sampling of the writings of prominent Protestant writers who found out through research that the early Christian worship was both liturgical and Sacramental. This led to the "Liturgical Movement", a movement in western Christendom aimed at rediscovering 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.

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THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE RITES OF THE HOLY LITURGY IN THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH

This entire section is quoted from "Spirituality of the Rites of the Holy Liturgy in the Coptic Church" by H.G. Bishop Mettaous.

(2) THE RITUAL OF THE RAISING OF INCENSE:

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

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

After praying the Prayer of Thanksgiving, the priest prostrates and kisses the entrance of the sanctuary. He then enters the sanctuary with his right foot, as he is entering the Holy of Holies

The Mystery of Incense Prayers

The priest stands before the altar and the deacon brings the censer to him from the right side of the altar. The priest places five spoonfuls of incense in the censer while making the sign of the cross three times. These five spoonfuls of incense represent the five righteous men of the Old Testament who offered acceptable sacrifices to the Lord, and the Lord smelled their pleasing aroma. These men are: **1-Abel 2-Noah 3-Melchizedek 4-Aaron 5-Zacharias**

The Mystery of Vespers & Morning Incense

This special prayer is a deep spiritual prayer which the priest is directing to our Lord Jesus Christ, the True Sacrifice and the Lamb, Who is bearing the sins of the whole world.

"...O Lord we ask You to accept our prayers, as incense rising before You. For You are the True evening sacrifice Who sacrificed Yourself on the honored cross for our sins... In the prayer of the Morning Incense, the priest asks the Lord to accept the incense offered to Him as He accepted the offerings of the righteous Abel, the sacrifices of Noah and Abraham, and the incense of Aaron and Zacharias.

The priest then goes around the altar three times with the censer, silently praying the Three Litanies, namely, the 'Litany of the Peace of the World and Church', the Litany of the Fathers', and the 'Litany of the Gatherings', while the congregation sings the Verse of the Cymbals. Facing him on the opposite side of the altar is the deacon who holds the cross and responds. This is known as the **Incense Circuit**.

Then the priest kisses the altar, and comes out from the sanctuary without turning his back on the altar. He steps out of the altar with his left foot, while still facing the altar. After leaving the sanctuary, the priest raises incense before the sanctuary three times; the first time saying, "We worship You O Christ our God with Your gracious Father, and the Holy Spirit for You have come and saved us." The second time he says, "But as for me, I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your mercy, in fear of You I will worship toward Your holy temple" (Ps.5:7). The third time, he says, "I will praise You with my whole heart. Before the angles I will sing praises to You" (Ps.137:1-2). He then raises incense once to the North of the sanctuary where the icon of St. Mary is displayed, and says, "We hail you with Archangel Gabriel. Hail to you highly favored one, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women" (Luke 1:28). Then he turns and raises incense towards the West, saying, "Hail to the hosts of angels, hail to my fathers the apostles, the martyrs and all the saints." He At this point the priest faces the congregation who are standing together in rows, resembling the Heavenly Jerusalem where the angels and saints dwell, then raises incense to the South of the sanctuary where the icon of John the Baptist is always placed, and says, "Hail to John, son of Zacharias, hail to the priest the son of the High Priest." The priest then raises incense once more towards the East, thus ending the procession in the name of the Lord, saying, "Let us worship our Savior, the beloved of mankind, because He had mercy on us and saved us." He faces the East and waits until the congregation

finishes chanting the Verse of the Cymbals, then starts praying the appropriate litanies. The priest, standing at the door of the sanctuary, raises incense in all four directions, signifying that God is Omnipresent and can hear our prayers and this is called “**a cross of incense**”

The Litany of the Departed

The Litany of the Reposed is always prayed during the raising of the Incense of Vespers. Praying for the departed is very important and a well established teaching in the Coptic Church.

The Litanies of the Sick, the Travelers and the Offering

When raising the Morning Incense during weekdays, the priest prays the Litanies of the Sick and of the Travelers, but on Sundays and on holy feast days, the Church anticipates that no one would be traveling, but rather, they are attending the Liturgy or celebrating the feast, bringing their offerings and oblations. Therefore the Litany of the Offerings is prayed instead of the Travelers on these days.

The priest prays the Litany of Offerings at the altar, facing East, not at the door of the sanctuary where the rest of the litanies are prayed. The Litany of Offerings is usually prayed when the Lamb is present in the church, that is, during weekdays. On Sundays and the Lordly feasts, however, the Litany of Offerings is prayed even if the Lamb is not present in the church. On Saturday mornings, the Litany of the Reposed is said, in commemoration of our Lord Jesus Christ in the tomb on Easter Saturday.

The Procession of Incense

After the priest finishes praying the litanies at the door of the sanctuary he enters the sanctuary, put hand of incense and comes out of the Altar after doing a complete circle around it.

Then he stands facing the East and starts another “cross of incense” as mentioned before and right after ,he gives incense to the “Katameros” (reading books both Coptic & English or Arabic) and if there is any Holy Relics in the church, he goes and gives a hand of incense before it then comes back to give hand of incense to the other Clergy (3 hands to the Bishop, 2 hands to the Hegumen and 1 hand to the presbyter)...then starts the procession of incense inside the nave of the church as follow:

The Incense Tour around the Church begins. Most churches nowadays have four rows of pews, with three aisles between them; to the North, south, and central, the priest walks to the North of the sanctuary door to the iconostasis and offers incense before the icons of the angels, the apostles and saints. Here he prays such prayers as: "Hail to Archangel Gabriel", while standing before Archangel Gabriel's icon, "Hail to the martyr, St. George", before the icon of St. George...etc After offering incense before the icons to the North of the sanctuary the priest proceeds Westward among the congregation, offering incense and blessing them, saying, During Vespers Incense: "The blessing of the Vespers incense be

with us, Amen." During Morning Incense: "The blessing of the Morning incense be with us, Amen." He then walks to the North-West corner of the Church behind all the seats at the back and then walks South until he reaches the centre walkway. He walks down the centre walkway towards the East until he reaches the middle sanctuary door, then he turns South to the iconostasis and offers incense to the icons there. He continues incensing before the icons on the South side of the iconostasis, then he proceeds Westward down the Southern-most aisle of the Church, offering incense to the congregation and blessing them while repeating the phrase, "The Holy blessing of Vespers Incense/Matins Incense be with us, Amen.". The congregation respond with silent words of repentance, such as, "Lord Jesus Christ forgive me my sins of which I am aware, and those of which I am unaware", or maybe, "O God, forgive me for I am a sinner". The priest continues down the Southern walkway in a Westerly direction, until he reaches the back of the Church where he then turns North and travels behind the pews to the centre aisle. Again, he walks down the centre toward the East, while offering incense and blessing the congregation as before.

The Five Inspiring Contemplatory Verses

Before he reaches the place of the Passover (Holy Week) Prayers, the priest recites the first verse of the Five Contemplatory Verses, saying, "Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever. He, being one Hypostasis, we worship and glorify Him." When the priest reaches the place where the crucifixion icon is usually placed on Good Friday, he stops and completes the other four verses. Incensing towards the East, he says the second verse, "This is He Who raised Himself as an acceptable sacrifice on the cross for our salvation". The priest then raises incense towards the North saying the third verse, "So His Good Father smelled it on Golgotha in the afternoon."

The priest then raises incense towards the West while facing the main Western door of the church (a symbol for the door of Paradise) and says the fourth verse, "He opened to us the gates of Paradise and returned Adam to his rightful place." He then he raises incense toward the South while saying the fifth verse, "Because of His cross and Holy Resurrection, He returned man once more to Paradise". All five of these verses are a glorification for Christ, Who was crucified for our sake, and gave us salvation. The priest then continues walking Eastward down the centre aisle, all the time offering incense to the congregation and blessing them, until he reaches the sanctuary door. Standing at the altar, he puts one spoonful of incense into the censer, saying, "Glory and honor, honor and glory to the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." With the penitent prayers and collective repentance that is offered by the congregation during the incense tour, the priest goes back to the altar and prays **The Mystery of Confession** also called **The Mystery of the Return**, as the priest says it after he returns from the Incense Tour. Here he raises incense over the altar while saying the Mystery of the Congregation's Confession, saying, **"O God, as You accepted the repentance of the thief on Your right while on the cross, accept the confession of Your people. Forgive all their sins for the sake of Your Holy Name which is called upon us, and according to Your mercy and not on account of our sins."** In this prayer the priest asks God to accept the confessions and repentance of his people, just as He accepted the confession and repentance of the thief at Golgotha.

He then goes once around the altar, raising incense, before departing via the sanctuary's main door. Standing before the sanctuary door the priest again raises incense in the four directions (as he has done previously) then offers incense to the Holy Bible and the senior clergymen. Having done this, the priest then hangs the censer in its place. It is preferable to follow the authentic Coptic tradition of hanging the censer by its chain in the centre of the Sanctuary's entrance, as was done in the ancient Coptic churches. This ascending incense gives comfort to the spirit and soul of the congregation through its sweet fragrance, as it represents the prayers that are rising to the Throne of Grace which the Angel offers to the Divine Glory.

During the incense circuit, the deacons are chanting the appropriate Doxologies for the occasion and the Saints.

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

After the Doxology and the Creed, the priest holds the cross with **three lit candles** to signify that He Who was crucified is the Light of the world, sacrificing Himself to give light to those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death. The priest stands in reverence in front of the Sanctuary. He spreads both his arms, holding the cross with the three lit candles in his right hand, while the left hand is being opened in supplication and humility. While facing due East, and without signing Without Making The Sign of the Cross, he chants, "Lord have mercy, settle Your mercy upon us, have compassion upon us." He turns to face the North and, while signing the cross, says, "Hear us." Then he turns towards the West, gives the blessings to the congregation, and says, "Bless us." The congregation bows their heads to receive the blessings. The priest then turns to the South and says, "Guard us," while making the sign of the cross. He then turns to the East once more, and with the sign of the cross, he says, "Help us." Still facing East, he completes the Litany without signing, saying, "Take away your anger from us, visit us with Your salvation and forgive us our sins." Then the people respond by "Kirialyson 3 times".

The Litany of the Gospel

At the end of the congregation's response, the priest makes a sign of the cross over the congregation with the cross and the lit candles, and says, "Let us pray", followed by, "Peace be with you all." He then blows out the candles and gives them to the deacon, crosses the box of incense, and puts another spoonful of incense into the censer while saying the Litany of the Gospel. Standing before the sanctuary, he then offers incense to the Holy Bible while saying, "We worship before the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, through the prayers of David the Psalmist and Prophet. O Lord grant us the forgiveness of our sins." Entering the sanctuary with the censer, the priest then goes around the altar performing the Round of the Gospel while saying, "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace." Then the Gospel is read in Coptic and in Arabic or English.

The Five Minor Litanies

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

The Absolutions

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

The Blessing

Finally the priest prays the final blessing which varies according to the season...here is the example of the annual one:

"May God have compassion upon us, bless us, make His face to shine upon us, and have mercy upon us. Lord save Your people, bless and uplift the Christians everywhere, through the supplications and prayers of the Lady of us all, the holy Theotokos St. Mary, and the holy Archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, and all the heavenly hosts, and our fathers the Apostles, the martyrs, the saints and the cross bearers, and the blessed saint and angel of this day. May their holy blessings, their grace, their favor, their love, and their support be with us all forever, Amen." The priest then says, "Christ is our God", and the congregation responds with, "Amen, let it be so." Facing the East, the priest continues, "O King of Peace, grant us Your peace and forgive us our sins, for unto You is power, glory.... Amen." He also asks the angel of peace to accompany each member of the congregation as they leave the church, until they arrive at their homes. Then together with the congregation, the priest prays The Lord's Prayer.

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(3) *The Agpeya*

"Seven times a day I praise You because of Your righteous judgments"
(Psalms 119:164)

The Origin of the word *Agpeya*

The word, *Agpeya*, is a Coptic (ancient Egyptian) word meaning "Book of Hours." It is based on the Coptic root word, *ti agp*, which means "hour."

The Book of Hours

The *Agpeya* is primarily used by the Coptic Orthodox Church. It contains prayers for seven different hours to be said throughout the day. The hours are chronologically laid out, each containing a theme corresponding to events in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. Each hour is composed of an introduction which includes the Lord's Prayer, the Prayer of Thanksgiving, and Psalm 50. It is followed by various Psalms, an excerpt from the Holy Gospel, and Litanies. Lord Have Mercy is then chanted 41 times (representing the 39 lashes Christ received before the crucifixion, plus one for the spear in His side, plus one for the crown of thorns), followed by several other prayers and a conclusion.

In every hour the church offers us the memory of a certain phase of God's redeeming work.

+The "Matin" song of praise reminds us of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and our daily resurrection to begin a new life in Him.

+The Terce (praise of the third hour) reminds us of the coming upon the church of the Holy Spirit of God, the Giver of perpetual renewal and holiness.

+In the Sext we remember the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

+In the None (ninth hour) we remember the death in the flesh of our Lord and the acceptance of the right hand thief, in Paradise.

+In the Vespers (sunset) we remember the removing of our Lord's Body from the cross, giving thanks for concluding the day, and asking Him that we might spend the night in peace.

+In Compline we remember the burial of the Body of our Lord watching for the end of our sojourn on earth.

+In the three midnight prayers we await for the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ.

+The Veil prayer is prayed only by the Monks.

PRAYING THE PSALMS DURING THE HOLY LITURGY

The Psalms are read before offering the lamb as they are prophecies about the incarnation of the Lord Jesus for the salvation of the world. For this purpose, the priest must ensure that the basket containing the offertory bread and the decanter of wine is ready before praying the Psalms. Otherwise the Psalms shall be repeated again if the bread and wine were not present.

On Saturdays and Sundays and during non-fasting periods the church prays the Third and Sixth Hour prayers before beginning the mass. During periods of fasting, the church also reads the Ninth Hour, and during Holy Lent and Jonah's fast the Eleventh & Twelfth Hour is also prayed. (In the monasteries, they also pray the Prayer of the Veil.)

If any of the major or minor Lordly feasts or any of the Feasts of the Cross fall on a Wednesday, a Friday or during any of the fasts it is treated as though it is a Sunday, having the morning Liturgy and the reading of the Third and Sixth Hours only.

THE METHOD OF PRAYING THE HOURS

If the priest is praying only the Third and Sixth Hour Psalms he starts by reading the Third Hour Psalms then follows with the Sixth Hour. He then reads the Gospel of the Third Hour and its parts, followed by "Holy God...", The Lord's Prayer, and, "Hail to you O Saint full of glory...." Then he prays the Gospel of the Sixth Hour and its parts, followed by, "We glorify you Mother of the true Light...", The Creed, then "Keryalison" is said during the choosing of the Lamb. During fasting periods when the Ninth Hour is also prayed the church prays the Third Hour prayers completely separate, consisting of the Psalms, the Gospel, the Parts, "Keryalison" repeated forty-one times, "Holy Holy...", The Lord's Prayer and the Third Hour Absolution. The Sixth and Ninth Hour prayers are then prayed following the same structure as that of the Third and Sixth Hour prayers during a non-fasting period.

On the feasts of the Nativity, Epiphany and Resurrection we offer the lamb without first praying the Psalms as the holy Liturgy is celebrated at night.

The serving priest should read the following Psalms each hour;

+ In the Third Hour he should read, "May the Lord answer you...", "I will exalt You..." and, "Oh clap your hands all you people..."

+ In the Sixth Hour he should read, "Save me O God by Your name...", "Lord You have been favorable to Your land...", and, "The Lord reigns...."

+ In the Ninth Hour he should read, "Oh sing to the Lord a new song...", "The Lord said to my Lord...", and, "I believed, therefore I spoke..."



(4) The Midnight Praises

By H.G. Bishop Hedra

Saint Basil the Great said that the work of praising attracts the service of the angels because this is part of their job and they come closer to those who do the same as they.

The psalmody is a deep spiritual monument based in the order of the Holy Liturgy. It was placed through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is clear from the words of the psalmody, which are taken from the Holy Bible, the Book of Psalms, and from the accurate and deep theological understandings. These understandings can be found in either the *theotokiat* or the *Psalis* (which make up the psalmody), or from its tunes which move the emotions and stays in the sky of the spirit. Thus, bringing a person closer and closer to God and helping him easily towards the life of meditation in His characteristics and works. And in order for us to enjoy more the prayer of praise, we must explain it and know its order.

Psalmody starts with the prayer of the psalms of the midnight hours which are found in the *Agpeya* (the book of prayers). Then follows the tune of "*Ten Theno...*" (sung in a long tune) then it is completed normally. "*Ten Theno...*" is composed of the parts said in the midnight prayers and those which are said after Psalm 50 (Have mercy upon me O God). "*Ten Theno...*" mean "Let us rise o suns of light that we may praise the Lord of powers."

After this, "*Tennav*" is sung, which means "Let us look at the resurrection of Christ." And it is said from the feast of the Resurrection and during the 50 days after it, then after that only on Sundays until the end of the month of *Hathor*.

Then the beginning of psalmody comes with the first "*hos*" (canticle). The word *hos* means praise. The first *hos* consists of the praises of Moses and we can find it in the book of Exodus chapter 15. "And it was said when he and Israel crossed the Red Sea, they were saved from the hands of the Egyptians." This was the cause of joy and praising to the entire congregation. It also symbolizes every person who has come out of the strict slavery of the devil and from the bondage of this hard world. He (anyone doing the psalmody) thus praises with Moses saying, "Your right hand O Lord is glorified with power, Your right hand my Lord has defeated Your enemies."

Following the first *hos*, the "*Lobsh*" is sung. The *Lobsh* is an explanation or a praise about the previous *hos*, and it is a poetic piece to be sung in a long hymn and a beautiful melody. Then follows the second *hos* which consists of Psalm 135. In the second *hos* we thank God for He is good and beneficent and the Doer of great wonders, we meditate on all His creation, we thank Him for His creation, and we say "for His mercy endures forever." This phrase is repeated after every verse of the Psalm. Following the second *hos* is another *lobsh* with its beautiful, easy tune and whose beginning verse is, "Let us thank Christ our Lord with the psalmist David the prophet."

The third *hos* is the praise of the three saintly youths [Prayer of Azariah], which we find in the "Apocrypha" which are mistakenly called the "lost books." And in it the three youths ask all the creation to join with them in the praise of God and the blessing of His Mightiness. For example it is sung, "Praise the Lord you rain with the dew," "Praise the Lord you clouds and wind," "Praise the Lord you whales." So how does the creation that is without thought, praise Him, while the creation that has a mind that was created to praise God, stands silent? "Let us praise Him and exalt Him above all forever," ("*Hos erof ari ho oo shasf sha ni eneh.*") This is the phrase sung after every verse.

Following the third *hos* comes the "*Vatos Psali*" for the three saintly youths. All its words are in the Coptic & Greek languages. This *psali* (hymn) has a charming tune. It does not differ in its meaning from the meaning of the *hos* itself. Following is another Greek piece for the three saintly youths, "*Tenen*", which is sung only during the month of Koiahk. And then follows another praise for the three saintly youths, sung in a long and meditative tune, "*Tenoweh ensok khi pen heet tinf*," meaning, "We follow You with all our hearts."

Proceeding these hymns is the commemoration of the saints. When we have become involved in praising God and glorifying Him, we have the participation of the victorious church with us. It is the souls of the saints who have preceded us to the paradise of joy, that come to support us and to accompany us in our continuous struggle against the world, sin, and the weaknesses of the body. So we ask from their love and their aid to remember us before the Throne of blessing with a stronger intercession. So we say, "Intercede (or pray) on our behalf that the Lord may forgive us our sins." This last phrase makes us feel how sinful we are that we may learn the life of humility. It is also a deep theological order in our Coptic Orthodox Church, which teaches us the intercession and prayers of the saints. We also notice the difference between an intercession and a prayer request. The intercession is specified for Saint Mary, the heavenly hosts, John the Baptist, and the 144,000 evangelical martyrs. This is due to the high level at which they are and because they have special favor before God. The prayer request is specified for the rest of the martyrs and the saints. This part of the psalmody is called the commemoration of the saints (in Arabic: "*magmaa*").

After the commemoration of the saints, come the Doxologies (from the Greek word *doxa*, meaning glory). The Doxologies are the hymns in which we honor the Virgin Mary and all the saints. We remember also their virtues and their struggles in their spiritual lives and this is also in conjunction with the teachings of the church and the Holy Bible where the Lord said, "Honor those who honor Me." We also gain the blessing and help of these saints when we remember them in our praises. Usually we sing the Doxology of the Virgin Mary and after that we pick the various Doxologies according to the various feasts of the saints and of the saint of the church or the monastery or whichever we wish from other Doxologies.

After we have gained blessing from the victorious church and the heavenly hosts we return once again to praising God that is sweet and blessed in the mouths of this saints. This is in the fourth *hos*, which is composed of three psalms. Their numbers according

to the Coptic translation are 148, 149, and 150. And these psalms express the state of joy, victory, and rejoicing from all the heart and from all the soul.

All that has been mentioned here starting from "Ten Theno" (Rise up o sons of light) until the end of the fourth *hos*, are sung the same set way in every prayer of the Sunday midnight praise but on the week days praises, a little change happens which is right after the first *hos*, we shift to the seventh part of the Sunday Theotokia with the Gospel reading from St. Luke and we pray from the Sunday Theotokia from part 7 till the end of part 9 and then shift back to the second *hos* and continue as before.

Then we come to the Psali, which changes every day. There are seven Psalis, and each day of the week has one psali specifically for that day. The word Psali means hymn and, in the Psalmody, is organized around the name of the Lord Jesus, which is always repeated in almost every paragraph (verse). Sunday has two Psalis. The first psali is a hymn for the Virgin Mary and the second is about the name of the Lord Jesus. Thus we say at the end of the first stanza, "My Lord Jesus help me" and in the second paragraph, "My Lord Jesus Christ help me." And these two phrases are repeated until the end of the Psali.

For the Psali there is an ending, which is a beginning for the *Theotokia* in itself. In the days of the "Adam", "*Lipon anshan tho ooti*" is sung, which means, "And also if we meet for prayer let us praise the name of the Lord Jesus." And in the days of "Vatos", the ending of the Psali or the beginning of the theotokia is "Eshop an shan erepsalin" and it means when we sing hymns let us say with... "O Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on our souls". *Adam* refers to the days Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday. *Vatos* refers to the days Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Then comes the theotokia which is a Greek word meaning, "The mother of God" for the word "Theo" means God and "tokos" means mother. And in these "theotokiat" are all the symbols and allusions which are in the Old Testament about the Holy Virgin Mary. And in them also are the deep theological understandings about the truth (essence) of the Godly incarnation which is beyond comprehension and the human mind and about the nature of the holy birth of our Good Savior our Lord Jesus Christ of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary.

For each day of the week, there is a specific *theotokia*. Also the way or tune of singing the *theotokia* in the days of *Adam* is different from the tune of the *Vatos* days. So is the case with the *Psalis* as well. The *theotokia* ends with the *lobsh* which means praise, as we said earlier, with a different way than that of the *theotokia* with the exception of Sunday which does not have a "lobsh" but there is a replacing piece instead. And this piece is "*Nem ghar ni nooti*" which means, "Who in the gods is like You O Lord..." This piece is sung in the holy fifty days after the glorious feast of the Resurrection, then only on Sundays until the last Sunday in the month of *Hathor*. And before we say the end of the *theotokia*, "*Nek nai o panooti*" which means, "Your mercies O my God are countless" is sung in the days of *Adam* or "*O pen chois Isos Pichristos*," which means "Our Lord Jesus Christ" which is sung in the days of *Vatos*. Before this ending, the "Antiphonarium" of the day is read and in it is the shortened story of the saint of the day

in which the psalmody is done and it has a Coptic beginning that is specified to it, then the saint story is read.

And after the ending of the "*theotokia*" we say, "We magnify you o mother of the true Light..." until the end and the creed also in full. After that we ask for God's mercies and we say, "*Kirie eleyson*" meaning "Lord have mercy" along with the different requests for our bodily, psychological, and spiritual lives and with the proclamation of our faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ the Rock of the ages. At its end we pray, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord of Sabaoth..." until "Our Father who art in heaven." Finally the morning psalms are recited with their praise as an introduction to the morning rising of incense.

With the ending of this psalmody O blessed loved ones we would have obtained great blessing and strength for our spiritual lives and joy and consolation and gladness that only those who have experienced it can know its meaning. We call all in the love of the Lord Jesus that they may have the life of praise which the fathers have instituted by the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our Coptic Orthodox Church whose love runs in our veins and with every beat of our hearts.

To our Lord is all glory and honor now and forever. Amen.



(5) THE RITUAL OF THE OFFERTORY

WEARING THE VESTMENTS

While putting on the service garments the priest should go over his thoughts and find himself pure and reconciled with everyone. His body and clothes should be clean and ready for service. He should make sure that the Lamb (the Holy Bread) is prepared, and also that the flask is full of good wine. He begins by doing the sign of the cross on his service garments, and on the deacons' garments, before wearing them. While this is taking place Psalms (29) 30 ***I will exalt You O Lord for You have lifted me up and have not let my foes rejoice over me...*** and (92) 93 ***The Lord reigns, He is clothed with majesty, the Lord is clothed, and girded Himself with strength...*** are read.

The priests and deacons who are celebrating the Holy Mass in their white vestments resemble the angels who praise and chant before the throne of God, the church thus becoming the Heavenly Jerusalem on earth. They praise God, sanctify the church through their prayers, and partake of the Holy Communion.

CLOTHING THE ALTAR/THE PRAYER OF PREPARATION

The priest wipes any dust that may be on the altar, then unwraps the utensils that are used for the Holy Communion. At this time, these utensils are enclosed in a special cloth, and tied with three knots. As the priest unties each knot, he does the sign of the cross on it, and then begins the Prayer of Preparation.

Preparing the altar symbolizes the Upper Room in Zion, ***“A large Upper Room furnished and prepared” (Mark 14:15)***, to which our Savior sent a couple of His disciples to prepare for the celebration of the Passover. In this same manner, the heart of every Christian approaching the Holy Sacraments should be prepared.

PRAYING THE PSALMS

The Psalms are read before offering the lamb as they are prophecies about the incarnation of the Lord Jesus for the salvation of the world. For this purpose, the priest must ensure that the basket containing the offertory bread and the decanter of wine is ready before praying the Psalms.

On Saturdays and Sundays and during non-fasting periods the church prays the Third and Sixth Hour prayers before beginning the mass. During periods of fasting, the church also reads the Ninth Hour, and during Holy Great Fast and Jonah's Fast the Eleventh & twelfth Hour is also prayed. (In the monasteries, they also pray the Prayer of the Veil.) If any of the major or minor Lordly feasts or any of the Feasts of the Cross fall on a Wednesday, a Friday or during any of the fasts it is treated as though it is a Sunday, having the morning Liturgy and the reading of the Third and Sixth Hours only. In this case there is no abstinence and the tunes that are sung are joyful tunes or Palm Sunday tunes, especially on the two Feasts of the Cross.

Historical points about the “offertory”:

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 Holy 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 etron” (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 WASHING OF HANDS

The priest washes his hands three times. On the first washing he says,
“Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean, wash me and I shall be whiter than snow” (Ps.50:7).

On the second washing he says,
“Make me to hear joy and gladness that the bones which You have broken may rejoice” (Ps.50:7).

On the final washing he says,
I shall wash my hands in innocence so I will go about Your altar, O Lord, that I may proclaim the voice of thanksgiving, Alleluia”(Ps.25:6-7).

This 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)

THE SELECTION OF THE LAMB

The priest then dries his hands on a clean white linen towel then takes a veil from the paten and puts it inside his sleeve on his left arm or on his head. He then holds the cross with his right hand and stands by the sanctuary door facing the West as the Lamb and the wine are presented to him. The holy bread which is to become the lamb should be presented by the highest ranking person present as an honor to the lamb. The priest puts the decanter of wine on the nearest bread loaf and does the sign of the cross on himself. He then does the sign of the cross on the bread with the decanter of wine.

Next the priest examines the bread to choose the most suitable one for offering. Then he, the associate priest, and the deacon who is to hold the decanter, smell the wine to make sure that it is pure and not vinegary and is NOT distilled wine.

He then hands the decanter to the deacon. When choosing the most suitable bread which is to become the Lamb, he places his right hand on top of his left, placing his hands over the tray in the shape of a cross, as Jacob did when he blessed the sons of Joseph (Gen 48:8). While doing this the priest says, "May the Lord choose a lamb without blemish."

He holds each bread in his hands and examines each one carefully to choose the best. If the one in his right hand is the best, he puts the one in his left hand back in the basket. Then he takes another one in his left hand and compares it with the one in his right. If the one in his left is best, he takes it in his right hand and holds the other bread in his left hand.

He must ensure that the best bread is always on top, putting the other bread back in the tray and picking another one to compare with the one in his right hand. He compares all of the bread in the basket until he finds the best one, being the best in appearance, with a perfect Spadikon, the right number of pierced holes. Nothing should be sticking to it and it should not have cracks; it should be without blemish, just like the Passover lamb (Gen.12:5). The priest then touches each of the other breads in the basket with the back of the chosen bread, which is still in his right hand, and places them back in the basket. He then wipes the chosen bread carefully with the small veil, taking care not to turn it upside down.

Holding the chosen bread in his left hand so that the three pierced holes are on the right side of the bread, he then dips his right thumb into the wine decanter which the deacon is holding and makes the sign of the cross, once on the face of the chosen bread in his left hand while saying, "Sacrifice of Glory", and then on the rest of the bread in the basket, saying, "Sacrifice of blessing...Sacrifice of Abraham ... Sacrifice of Isaac ... Sacrifice of Jacob." He again signs over the chosen bread, and says, "Sacrifice of Melchizedek." Then

the priest bows, asking for absolution from those around him, before entering the sanctuary.

Further Remarks on the Selection of the Lamb:

* Touching the remaining breads with the chosen bread symbolizes that all the sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed to the Sacrifice of the Cross, and that the Sacrifice of the Cross was in turn the aim and the objective of all the Old Testament sacrifices.

* Holding the chosen sacrifice in his right hand, keeping it on top while touching the other breads, and making sure it is never upside down emphasizes the superior honor and glory that the sacrifice of the New Testament had over those of the Old Testament.

* The final sign of the cross is done over the chosen bread with the intention of revealing that the sacrifice of the New Testament resembles, to a great extent, the sacrifice of Melchizedek which was a sacrifice of bread and wine and not a sacrifice of blood.

* Since our Master, Jesus Christ carried our sins within His Body on the cross as He offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin, so the bread offered in the Holy Liturgy should be made with yeast to symbolize these sins that Christ bore. The Coptic Orthodox Church, led by the Holy Spirit, makes its holy bread with yeast, which should then be baked so that the yeast perishes just as sin perished in the Resurrected Body of Christ. The yeast is still present in the bread but is dead because of the fire. As the fire spoiled the effect of the yeast, so Christ had ended the effect of sin through offering His Body as a sacrifice; "God...by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh on account of sin, He condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom.8:3).

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

BAPTIZING THE LAMB

After putting the veil on the altar the priest then carries the Lamb and wets his right hand and wipes the selected bread all around. This action symbolizes the baptism of Christ by St. John in the River Jordan. While doing this, the priest prays " Let our sacrifice be accepted before You Lord for the forgiveness of my sins, and the ignorance of Your people. The priest pours himself and kneels before the selected Lamb.", asking the Lord to accept this sacrifice as a sacrifice for his own sins in particular, and also for the ignorance of the congregation. He places all the burdens of his congregation, the Church and the whole world on this Lamb which carries the sins of the whole world. Then he prays silently a deep prayer called the Prayer of Commemoration.

THE PROCESSION OF THE LAMB

The priest wraps the Lamb in the same veil he used during its selection. He puts the cross on top of it and, bending a bit (as Christ bent while holding the Cross going to Golgotha), he holds the lamb in reverence against his head while standing at the door

of the sanctuary saying, "Glory and honor, honor and glory....and then he prays the litany of the oblations(offerings)". The deacon follows him carrying the Wine decanter with a candle in his hand...also two deacons are going in front of the priest and the deacon carrying the wine with a lit candles in their hands. They all follow in a procession around the altar while the deacon saying "pray for these Holy and precious gifts...".

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. 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.

Some notes on the procession of the Lamb:

* When the priest carries the Lamb with both hands and holds it against his head, he re-enacts what Simeon the Elder did when he carried the child Jesus and proceeded around the altar of God just as Simeon blessed the salvation of the Lord which He prepared before all people, so the priest also goes around the Altar glorifying God, Who sent His Son for our salvation.

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

Consecrating the offerings:

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 decanter 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". Then the priest puts the bread in the paten under the star with its three holes to the right, completing the three signings, saying, "Glory and Honor...." Next the priest uncovers the chalice and makes sure that it is clean by wiping it with the veil in his right hand. He takes the decanter from the deacon and after the response is said by the congregation he says, "Pray." He signs the congregation with the wine while saying, "Peace be to you all" and follows with the Thanksgiving prayer. He pours the wine in the chalice. Then the deacon pours some water in the decanter which is carried by the

priest (around 1/4 or 1/3 full, but not exceeding 1/3 and not less than 1/10). The priest then shakes the decanter and pours it into the chalice.

Mixing the wine with water reminds the believers of the blood and water that gushed out when Christ our Redeemer was pierced in His side.

After finishing the Thanksgiving prayer and while the deacons chanting the appropriate hymn of the season, the priest prays the prayer (litany) of the offerings during which he sings the bread and wine with the cross.

The priest then covers the paten and the chalice. Covering the paten and the chalice symbolizes the shrouding of our Lord Jesus Christ after His death on the cross.

The priest takes hold of the top two corners of the 'Prosfarine' (large altar veil) and the deacon on the opposite side of the altar takes hold of the bottom two corners of the veil and together they cover the Holy Mysteries. The 'Prosfarine' represents the stone which was rolled against the entrance of the tomb. Having covered the Holy Mysteries the priest places a small triangular shaped veil on the top of the 'Prosfarine'. This small veil represents the seal on the tomb's door.

During this time, before coming out of the altar, the priest silently prays the Absolution for the Son saying, "O Master and Lord Jesus Christ the Only Begotten Son... He then kisses the altar, kneels before it, stands up and kisses it again. On the right of the altar he offers a prostration (metania) to the priests and to the altar deacons. They do the same, and together they exchange a holy kiss with each other before leaving the Sanctuary in preparation for the absolution of the Ministers.

THE ABSOLUTION OF MINISTERS

The serving priest gives the cross to the most senior priest present. The senior priest faces East standing behind the other priests and deacons who are kneeling on the floor in front of the sanctuary's door. With five signings of the cross the senior priest says the Absolution of Ministers.

The priest includes the congregation in the Ministers' Absolution as they are considered to be serving and partaking in the Holy Liturgy with the deacons and priest, and are not considered mere spectators. The congregation has their own role with responses and hymns throughout the whole Liturgy. It is the participation of the whole – the congregation, the priests and the deacons - that gives strength as the whole church becomes one heart and soul worshipping and praying in spirit and in truth.

(1) "The Spirituality of the Rites of The Holy liturgy in the Coptic Church" by H.G. Bishop Mattaous

(2) "Understanding the Liturgy" by Fr. Athanasius Eskander



(6) Liturgy of the Word

The church has prepared five readings for each Liturgy; the Pauline Epistle, the Catholic Epistle, the Acts (Praxis), the Sinaxarium, and the Gospel. These readings provide an opportunity for Biblical contemplation and teaching. These readings are in addition to the readings said during the raising of Vespers and Morning Incense. During periods of fasting and feasts prophecies are also read. The priest also prays some silent prayers that the Lord may enlighten His congregation and grants them the grace to apply the words that they hear to their own spiritual lives.

THE CIRCUIT OF THE PAULINE INCENSE

After the Absolution the serving priest enters the Sanctuary, takes the box of incense and bows before his brethren asking them to bless the box with him. In love and humility they bow in return saying, "You Bless." Then he puts five spoonfuls of incense into the censer. The incense circuit follows the same order as mentioned before in the prayer of raising the incense (vespers or morning) with some remarks as follow:

Some Point on the Round of The Pauline Incense:

+ If the Patriarch, a Metropolitan or a Bishop is present he alone should bless the box of incense since he is the Archpriest. On the second signing of the cross he places the incense in the hands the other priests and they put it in the censer. He then completes the rest of the signings.

+ The priest in the Pauline Round says, "The blessings of Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ be with us all, Amen" (instead of, "The blessings of the Vespers/Morning Incense be with us all, Amen.")

+ In the Pauline Round of Incense the priest proceeds around the whole church in remembrance of St. Paul who exerted himself exceedingly in his travels to preach the message of the Lord, which he did more than any other Apostle. About this the Apostle says, ***"But by the Grace of God I am what I am and His grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them" (1Cor.15:10).***

+In the Pauline Round the priest offers incense from the left side of the church and proceeding to the right indicating that through the faith preached by St. Paul we were taken from darkness to God's great light.

+ If the Pope, a Metropolitan or a Bishop is serving and needs to consecrate the church's altar, utensils of the altar such as the censor, paten and chalice, or consecrate the icons of the church, he does so during the readings of the Pauline Epistles.

+While the congregation listens to the Pauline epistle, the priest goes inside the sanctuary and prays deeply *the second mystery of the Pauline incense*, pleading with God to bestow upon His people a mind that is not preoccupied with the world and its anxieties, for these preoccupations are like thorns which poison the Word of God. He also entreats the Lord to give them, as well as himself, a pure understanding, a clear mind, knowledge and wisdom, and to reveal to them the deep spiritual meanings that are behind the words being read.

THE INCENCE OF THE PRAXIS

THE PRAXIS CIRCUIT

There is no round of incense during the readings of the Catholicon, during which time the priest remains in the Sanctuary according to the Lord's command to His Disciples that they should not depart Jerusalem before the coming of the Holy Spirit. After the round of the Pauline and the Arabic or English reading the priest starts praying inaudibly the mysteries of the Praxis Round which are: the *Mystery of the catholic Epistle* "O Lord God who has revealed unto us through Your Holy Apostles the mystery of the glory of Your son Jesus Christ..." and the *Mystery of the Praxis*: "O God who accepted the sacrifice of Abraham and prepared for him a lamb in place of Isaac...". (The priest prays the *Litany of Oblation* after the Mystery of the Catholic Epistle, if he did not pray it in the Morning Incense, but if he has already prayed it, then he does not repeat it.

Circuit description:

The priest proceeds around the altar three times while praying the Three Minor Litanies then comes out of the sanctuary and offers incenses as mentioned in the Round of the Pauline. He then offers the Gospel Incense before exchanging a holy kiss with his fellow fathers and asking them to pray for him. He then proceeds to offer incense to the icons on the Southern side of the sanctuary's door, then proceeds towards the Northern side of the sanctuary. He walks among the congregation down the centre aisle saying, "Let your people through blessing be thousands upon thousands...", and he blesses the congregation while saying, "The blessings of my masters, the Apostles Peter and Paul...". He does not proceed as far as the Western end of the church but returns to the door of the sanctuary while saying the Mystery of the Confession of the congregation.

Some Remarks Concerning The Round Of The Praxis:

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

+ After finishing the Round of the Praxis the priest does not enter the sanctuary. This is for two reasons. One is due to that fact that the Apostles did not return to Jerusalem but were martyred in the country where they last preached; and the other is that by the end of the three rounds after reading the Praxis the priest has completed seven rounds, these being

the three rounds after the First Mystery of the Pauline, one round after the Mystery of the Congregation's Confession and the three rounds after the Praxis. These rounds are a representation of the children of Israel and the Ark of Covenant who circled Jericho seven times before the walls tumbled down. As the priest proceeds around the altar offering incense and raising prayers and pleadings to the Lord the walls of evil and sin tumble down.

THE SYNAXARIUM

After the Praxis the priest reads from the Synaxarium which is the book containing the daily commemoration of saints. 'Synaxarium' is a Greek word meaning: 'The News'; the chronicles of the fathers, prophets, patriarchs, bishops, saints and martyrs. It narrates their lives and spiritual struggles and how the Lord put an end to their toils by rewarding them with the crown of glory and eternal life in the Heavenly Kingdom. The objective of reading the Synaxarium is to savour the personal account of such champions and to learn the history of the church. It also tells of the sufferings that men and women have endured for the church; the types of pain and hardships endured for the sake of keeping the faith.

The striving, the fasting and asceticism of the saints was all with the aim of venerating the Kingdom of Heaven. The Church celebrates the martyrdom of the martyrs, and the departure day of the saints (not their birthdays) as it is the end of their lives which holds significance.

It is customary that the priest himself reads the Synaxarium, to give the message an educational and spiritual strength. After reading the story of the saint of the day, the priest may refer to his or her life story in the sermon, offering a contemplation so that the congregation may benefit and learn from the saint's example.

As the Synaxarium is the book of God's work through the saints of the church starting from the Apostles, the ordination of the Bishops (or the Pope) takes place after the Acts reading symbolizing that it is the same Holy Spirit that worked before through the saints is now working to appoint ministers and leaders for the church to continue the Apostles' ministry and acts.

Also after the Acts reading on the Holy Fifty days, it is the time to have the procession for the Resurrection Icon.

THE LITANY OF THE GOSPEL

After saying the Trisagion, the priest puts one spoonful of incense in the censer, and stands by the door of the sanctuary praying the Litany of the Gospel, saying, "O Master and Lord Jesus Christ Our God...."

While reading the Litany of the Gospel, a deacon stands behind the priest holding the "Gospel Container", which is the four Gospels in a book covered with silver or velvet. He puts the cross on it and raises them in honor to the top of his head. At the end of the first part of the litany the deacon responds saying, "Pray for the Holy Gospel", asking that the Holy Gospel be spread throughout the world and that all should listen and act according to it in the aim of winning eternal life. The congregation responds by saying, "Lord have

mercy.” Then the priest continues, “Remember also, O Our Master...”. At the end of the litany he offers incense to God before the sanctuary saying, “And to You we send up the glory, honor...”. Remaining there, he then offers incense to the Gospel saying, “Bow to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ through the prayers of the chanter David the Prophet, O Lord grant us the forgiveness of our sins.” Then the Psalm is read in Coptic.

The priest and the deacon enter the sanctuary and the priest puts a handful of incense in the censer while saying, “Glory and honor... .” He then holds the “Gospel Container” with the cross on it while the deacon faces him, holding onto them also. Together they go around the altar, the deacon walking backwards, while the priest says,
“Lord now You are letting Your servant depart in peace according to Your word...”

Some Points on the Litany of the Gospel:

- + The priest asks David the prophet to intercede for us as we read one of his Psalms.
- + Going around the altar holding the Gospels and the cross represents the spreading of Christianity to the whole creation and announcing that our salvation was completed through the Cross.
- + The prayer of Simon the elder has two meanings:
 - i.) This prayer ends at approximately the same time as the Psalm ends, then the Gospel of the New Testament is read. This is exactly what Simon did when he saw Christ the Savior of the whole world and asked to depart from this world (representing the Old Testament).
 - ii.) Simon the elder declared seeing God’s Salvation when he saw The Logos (Word) of God, Lord Christ... likewise we also see God’s Salvation by listening to the Word of God.

At the end of the procession the priest puts the “Gospel Container” on his head in honor and stands to the left side of the sanctuary facing West. The deacon raises the Cross on his head and stands by the right side of the sanctuary’s door also facing the West, and when the response of the Psalm finishes he says, “Stand up in the fear of God and let us listen to the Holy Gospel”, drawing the congregation’s attention and asking them stand up in awe and piety to listen to the Holy Gospel, the Word of God and the Constitution of Heaven. Then the priest, facing the East, comes out from the sanctuary without putting his back to the altar, stepping with his left foot while saying, “Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord. A chapter from the Holy Gospel according to Sts. (Matthew, Mark, Luke or John).

The other priests kiss the Gospel, then the serving priest kisses it. The deacon reads the Arabic/English Gospel saying, “Stand up in the fear of God and listen to the Holy Gospel, a chapter from the Holy Gospel according to St. (Matthew, Mark, Luke or John) the Evangelist may his blessings be with us all.” The priest hands the censer to the deacon, as he starts the Coptic reading of the Gospel, starting with, “Our Lord, God, Savior and King of us all Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God to Whom is Glory forever...”. During the reading of the Gospel, two deacons holding lit candles stand on both sides of the lectern; this symbolizes that the Gospel enlightens our path in life.

After reading the Gospel, the priest bows and kisses it in honor and reverence while saying, "Glory be God forever...Amen"

The priest then kneels down to God before the Sanctuary then stands back up. The archdeacon, or a senior deacon who can read properly, begins the Arabic/English reading.

The Priest takes the censer and, while standing in awe before the Gospel, he incenses and prays the Mystery of the Gospel. He implores the Lord to make him and His people worthy to hear the Holy Bible. During this time, the congregation stands up in awe and devotion listening to the Holy Bible, the word of life. They learn this devotion and respect for the Holy Gospel from their priest whom they see standing before the Holy Bible in reverence and adoration while he offers incense and prays the Mystery of the Gospel with dedication.

After the reading of the Gospel, the congregation sits quietly while one of the priests gives the **sermon**, which is usually based, firstly, on the Liturgy's Gospel, and secondly, on the other readings which are thematically similar.

THE MYSTERY OF THE VEIL

After the sermon, while chanting the Gospel's response, the serving priest stands in front of the Sanctuary before the veil (Iconostasis) and this is why it is called "**the prayer of Veil**". He bows his head towards the East and, in submission and humility, prays the Mystery of the Veil: "O Lord, Who, for His unspoken love to mankind, sent His Only Begotten Son into the world to bring back the lost sheep...",

THE THREE GREAT LITANIES

The priest prostrates before the Sanctuary, and then before other priests and finally to the congregation. He asks the priests for absolution and exchanges a holy kiss with them, requesting their prayers. Then he asks the congregation for forgiveness, in accordance with the Savior's command, "**Therefore, if you bring your gift to the Altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the Altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift**" (Matt.5:23-24). The priest then proceeds towards the altar, kisses it and then, with a submissive heart, begins praying the Major Litanies of 'Safety', 'the Church Fathers' and 'Our Assemblies'. He offers incense, as detailed in the Liturgy Book, and at the end of each litany he says, "Through the Grace and Compassion...". He lifts the front of the Prospharine to offer incense to the covered Mysteries by the end of the Litany for the Assemblies, in remembrance of the time when the three Mary's came to Christ's tomb at the dawn of Sunday.

THE CREED

In the days of old, the catechumen (unbelievers) would attend up until the end of the third litany, and leave the church at the reading of the Creed. This was because their faith was weak and they lacked knowledge of the Christian faith. For this reason the deacon calls

out before the Creed, “Attend to God with wisdom, Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy. Truly we believe in one God...”. The deacon calls upon the people to maintain reverence while saying the Creed. The Creed must be said audibly and in harmony and unity.

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

- i. Faith, without which we cannot please God.
- ii. Love. We show our love for each other before God when we exchange holy kisses with one another during the Reconciliation Prayer.

WASHING THE HANDS

While the Creed is being read the priest washes his hands three times, as he did before choosing the Lamb. He stands by the Sanctuary’s door, facing West, and shakes his hands before the people. This action cautions and warns people to be prepared before receiving the Holy Communion. He repudiates the guilt of him who dares to receive Communion undeservedly. By shaking his hands the priest is signifying, “I am innocent of the blood of whoever undeservedly partakes of the Holy Sacraments, without letting me know”, after which he dries them on a white clean towel.

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. 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. Before the introduction of this prayer, the deacon used to exhort the people: “greet one another with a holy kiss,” thus asking them to be reconciled to one another before offering their gifts.

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

Further Discussion on the Prayer of Reconciliation

+ The Reconciliation Prayer is not prayed on Maundy Thursday as an indication that the true reconciliation will not be accomplished until the crucifixion of Christ on Friday.

+ In some old Liturgy’s Books the Reconciliation is called the Prayer of Exchanging Holy Kisses because at the end of the Reconciliation Prayer the deacon calls out, “greet one another with a holy kiss...” Men exchange kisses with other men, and women with other women; they are kisses of reconciliation, peace and love.

+ 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 washings, one in the offertory and another after the Kiss of Peace. 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 innocence, so will I compass your 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. 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.

+ While praying the second part of the Reconciliation Prayer the priest holds up the triangular veil which is on top of the Prospharine, which symbolizes the seal on the Savior's tomb. The lifting up of this cloth symbolizes the breaking of the seals on the tomb's door. When lifting this veil, the priest holds its corners and raises it before his face in the same triangular shape, as it had been when on the top of the Prospharine, and it remains in this triangular shape until the end of the Reconciliation Prayer when the priest places it on the left side of the Altar, ready to take it in his left hand after lifting the Prospharine. When the deacon says "Prospharine, "Prospharine!", (meaning "Come forth!"), at the end of the Reconciliation, the priest, with the help of the deacon, raises the Prospharine while creating a vibration. Raising the Prospharine signifies the rolling away of the stone from the tomb's entrance, and also to the return of the Savior's soul to His Body at His rising from the dead. The vibration symbolizes the quake that happened when the angel rolled the stone away from the tomb's entrance.

+ After the prayer of the Reconciliation and before the lifting of the Prospharine is when the ordination of readers, subdeacons, deacons, archdeacons, priests, and protopriests takes place in the presence of the Pope or a bishop.

+ Some people includes the Prayer of Reconciliation with the Liturgy of the Believers while others prefers to keep the Liturgy for the believers as it used to be which is to start with the "Anaphora" (The Lord be with you all...) , here we will follow the old tradition which is to start the Liturgy of the Believers from the prayer of the "Anaphora".

(1) "The Spirituality of the Rites of The Holy liturgy in the Coptic Church" by H.G. Bishop Mattaous

(2)"Understanding the Liturgy" by Fr. Athanasius Eskander



(7) Liturgy of the Faithful

The “Anaphora”

The priest, with the help of the deacon facing him, lifts up the Prospharine and the deacon folds and places it behind the throne of the chalice until the end of the Mass. The priest then holds the small triangular veil that he placed on the left side of the altar in his left hand and the small veil that is placed on the paten he takes in his right hand in order to bless the people with the sign of the cross saying, **“The Lord be with you all”**

The congregation responds, saying, **“And also with your spirit.”**

The priest then does the sign of the cross towards the servants on the East while he says, **“Lift up your hearts.” And this is why this part is called the “Anaphora”...which means “lifting up”**

The Congregation responds, saying, **“We have them with the Lord.”** Before responding, we must ensure that our hearts are truly uplifted. We must put our minds and hearts in the words and the meaning of the response because if we utter it and our hearts are not uplifted and our minds are not focused on praying then we are lying to the priest and at the same time being dishonest to God.

The Priest then crosses himself saying, **“Let us give thanks to the Lord.”**

The people respond with, **“It is Meet and Right.”** This response is a confirmation of the thanksgiving offered by the priest to God, Who is worthy of every thanks and every praise, for He is full of goodness and His mercy remains forever.

The priest then raises his covered hands signifying the Seraphim who stands before God with his eyes and feet covered by his wings because of the imperceptible and unspoken majestic glory of God (Is.6:2). Then the priest prays the following three passages: **“Meet and Right...”, “Before Whom stand...”, and “You are He around Whom stand...”**.

The people now sing this beautiful hymn, “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Hosts, heaven and earth are full of Your holy glory.” This is the Hymn that Isaiah the prophet heard the Seraphim sing without ceasing. (Isa 6:3).

HOLY (AGIOS)

The priest places the small veil which is in his right hand on the left side of the altar, and with his right hand he lifts the veil which is placed over the chalice and replaces it with the one in his left hand. With his left hand he then picks up the veil which he put on the left side of the altar. He holds the cross within the small veil held in his right hand and **does the sign of the cross three times saying, “Holy (Agios).”** The first sign of the cross he

does on **himself**, the second sign of the cross is on **those who are serving** with him, and the third sign of the cross is on the **congregation**.

Then the priest starts ***“the prayer of Sanctification”*** which goes on three parts telling us the **story of our salvation** starting from the creation of man and placing him in the Paradise, the fall of man through disobeying God, the goodness of God towards us by sending His prophets to assure God’s salvation that to come, the birth of our Savior from Virgin Mary in the fullness of time according to the economy of God, unifying God’s people again through the new birth from the water and spirit, delivering up Himself for our salvation, His decent into Hades to restore all those who were under captivity, His resurrection from the dead, His ascension into the heaven and finally His second glorious coming to judge the world.

This part of the Holy Liturgy is a wonderful teaching tool for many of the basic Christian Dogmas that go in a very simple and deep way, also it is very suitable for all the congregation to meditate in all these events that God did for our sake and because He loved us, His own, to the end...and if the congregation concentrated in the meaning of the words during that time, they are really fulfilling what the priest asked them to do in the “Anaphora” prayer which is to lift up their hearts.

Some Remarks

+ The action of the priest moving the veils around on the altar represents the movement of the Cherubim’ wings.

+ Taking the veil from the top of the Chalice Throne and replacing it with another represents that this Mystery has been instituted for the rise and the fall of many. (Luke 2:34). It also means that we have been exalted to take the place of the fallen angels.

+ While saying, “He was incarnated and became Man” the priest adds a spoonful of incense to the censer so that the fragrance of the incense, as it is diffused, reminds us of the incarnation of the Lord Jesus in the womb of Virgin Mary, who is the Golden Censer. The burning embers symbolize the fire of Divinity.

+ At the end of the passage the priest says, “He descended into Hades through the cross.” The priest then bows in reverence, placing his hands on his chest in the shape of the cross, then he kisses the altar.

+ When he says, “He rose from the dead on the third day...” and at the end of this passage when the priest says, “and give each one according to his deeds”, he beats his chest three times in awe and remorse for his sins, recalling the horrifying day of reckoning when the people will gather and the angels will open the books which reveal the deeds and examine the minds of all; the righteous proceeding to eternal life, while the wicked to shame and everlasting contempt. (Dan.12:2).

The Institutional Prayer or 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.

This prayer is a very well known one in almost all the Liturgies used by different liturgical churches which indicates its originality and authenticity all over the Christian world.

INCENSING THE HANDS

The priest points to the bread and the wine with his hands which are covered with the veils, and says, "He instituted for us this great mystery of godliness...". He puts the veils on both sides of the Throne then incenses his hands over the censer in preparation to touch, consecrate, fragment and distribute the Holy Sacraments. He then moves his hands away from the censer and says, "...for being determined to give Himself up for the life of the world." Some priests transfer a handful of incense smoke and put it on the bread, others transfer it to both the bread and the chalice. Some do this action only once, and others three times. They transfer the incense smoke on the Sacrament as a symbol of Christ, our Sacrifice, will carry our sins in His pure Body (since the priest in the Pauline & Praxis Incense circuits received the confessions of the congregation)

When this is done the priest takes the oblation with his right hand and places it in his left hand, then takes the veil which was in the paten, kisses it and puts it on the altar saying, "...He took the bread into His Hands which are without spot or blemish, blessed and life giving." From the moment the priest handles the bread the deacons around the altar hold lit candles to illuminate the area around the bread and the chalice.

The priest puts his right index finger on the bread which sits on his left palm and, looking up, he says, "He looked up towards heaven, to You, O God, Who art His Father and Master of everyone...", then, doing the sign of the cross on the bread three times he says, ***And when He had given Thanks, He blessed It, He sanctified It***

The deacons and congregation respond with "Amen" after each sentence and signing.

The Priest then breaks the bread into three parts, from the top to the bottom, **without separation**. He places one-third of it on his right hand and the two thirds of it on his left, saying, “He broke it...”.

He then puts his hand on the rim of the chalice and says,
“Likewise also the cup, after supper He mixed it with wine and water and when
He had given Thanks, He Blessed It, He Sanctified It

The deacons and congregation respond with “Amen” after each sentence and signing, as they did with the Bread. He then touches the rim of the chalice and says, “He tasted it...”.

The priest then breathes over the chalice as he did with the bread and continues, saying, “...and gave it to His own holy disciples and saintly Apostles saying...”. The priest lifts the chalice slightly and moves it in the sign of the cross; he first tilts it Westward, then Eastward, to the North (left), then to the South (right), whilst saying, “Take, drink of it you all, for this is my Blood...”. Moving the chalice in the shape of the Cross indicates that Christ shed his Blood on the Cross for the Salvation of all mankind;

The priest points to the Bread and the Chalice saying, “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.” These are the very same words that Jesus said when instituting the Eucharist (Matt.26:26-28), and Apostle Paul also said, **“For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes” (1Cor.11:26)**.

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 people respond with this beautiful hymn, “Amen, Amen, Amen your death, O Lord we proclaim ...”

ANAMNESIS

The priest says, **“As we also commemorate His Holy passion, His Resurrection from the dead...”**. Here remembrance means the living memory rather than just remembering. The word ‘Anamnesis’ is a Greek word, meaning ‘recalling’ and ‘re-enacting’.

At the end of the sentence, the priest kneels down before the altar in piety and respect to pray the Mystery of Invocation. The deacon calls out to the people, **“Worship God in fear and trembling.”**

Now the priest comes to the crucial moment of intercession. This very moment manifests his office as a priest and an intercessor on behalf of the whole of creation, as he offers the oblations and the bloodless sacrifice on behalf of everything and everyone in the world.

The priest kneels down with his hands on the altar and silently prays **the Litany of the Invocation of the Holy Spirit** and when he says saying, “that Your Holy Spirit may come down upon us, he **points to himself** and on these oblations, he **points to the bread and the wine**. The deacon then says, “Let us attend. Amen”, calling for absolute silence and utter stillness during the moments of the descent of the Holy Spirit...The priest rises and quickly does the sign of the cross three times and says in a loud voice, **“And this Bread,**

He makes into His Holy Body.” He then kneels again and in reverence praying silently, “Our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ, to be given for the remission of sins and eternal life to those who shall partake of Him.”

The priest then says aloud, “**And this Cup also, into the Precious Blood of His New Covenant.**” The priest kneels down again and does the same like what he did before with the bread and when he says: “and eternal life to those who shall partake of Him”, the congregation rises and responds saying: “Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy.” **The bread has now become the Body of Christ and the wine has become the Blood of Christ, and remains so for the rest of the Liturgy.**

After the transformation the **blessings can come only from the Sacraments, therefore the priest can no longer do the sign of the Cross on the Sacraments.**

THE SEVEN MINOR LITANIES

After the Prayers of institution are completed, the priest picks up the two veils which he left on the altar when he began doing the signs of the Cross, and, taking one in each hand, he prays, “**Make us all worthy, O Our Master, to partake of Your Holies...**”

Then he prays the Seven Minor Litanies:

+ **The Litany of Safety:** in which he asks for the safety of the Catholic and the Apostolic Church, and for its protection from the schemes of Satan and his forces.

+ **The Litany of the Fathers:** which asks the Lord to grant the Pope and all the Orthodox Bishops strength, grace and wisdom in their service, and that they maintain the right faith which has been delivered by the saints.

+ **The Litany of the Ministers:** in which we pray for the priests who assist the bishops in rightfully disclosing the word of truth, and in shepherding, attending to and caring for the people and the salvation of their souls.

+ **The Litany of Mercy:** in which he asks that the Lord may have mercy upon him and upon all the people, according to His great mercies and abundant compassion,

+ **The Litany of the Place:** in which we pray for the safety and security of the cities and monasteries where our church is located, and for all the places, cities and monasteries in the whole world.

+ **The Litany of the Waters (or the seeds and plants or the air of heaven)** which is selected according to the appropriate season (Prayer for the rising of the waters: from the 12th of Paone to the 9th of Paope. The seeds and the plants: from the 10th of Paope to the 10th Tobe. Prayer for the air of heaven: from the 11th of Tobe to the 11th of Paone.) After each one of these litanies the priest says, “Raise them to their measure according to Your Grace ...”.

+ **The Litany of Oblations:** which refers to offerings in general, including whatever the believers bring to church to the needs of the church and its people. When praying this

litany, the priest points to the Sacraments as they are the crown and symbol of all what the believers offer.

COMMEMORATION OF THE SAINTS

The communion of saints represent the 'cloud of witnesses' which surrounds the believers and to which the Apostle Paul referred to in **Heb.12:1-4**. As we mention the names in the "Communion of the Saints" we remember their life stories and recall their virtues and love towards our beloved Lord.

Mentioning the departed saints in the Holy Liturgy is part of our faith that the Church, the Body of Christ, is alive even if those members already have fallen asleep yet we still consider them alive (it is not death but a departure) so they are with us in spirit and we call them the "invisible or unseen church" but they are members in the same Holy Body of Lord Christ...this is why we commemorate them and asking for their prayers on our behalf.

THE DIPTYCH (commemoration of the departed)

If the priest wishes, he says the diptych from St. Cyril's Liturgy, which is said in a mournful tune. If the priest does not pray this part he prays silently, after the Commemoration, the following passage, saying: "**And those O Lord and everyone whose names we have mentioned...**" He then adds a spoonful of incense to the censer and mentions the names of those whose souls are reposed.

Right after that, he prays the part "**Those O Lord whose souls you have taken repose them...**". In this prayer the priest is asking for the repose of the departed and also for the living to be kept in our Christian faith till the last breath.

Then he moves to the part "**Lead us throughout the way into your kingdom...**" which prepare for the fraction prayer and its introduction.

In Maundy Thursday's Liturgy neither the Commemoration nor the Diptych are prayed as the church is totally preoccupied in contemplating the Lord's sufferings and death. The above mentioned diptych, however, is not sung using the Mourning Tune on Sundays, feast days or Eastertide.

FRACTION AND COMMUNION

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

He takes the pure Body with his right hand and places it on the palm of his left hand. He puts his right index finger on the Body on the right side of the Spadikon where the Body is broken and says, "**The Holy Body.**" **The congregation then kneels and says, "We worship Your Holy Body."** He then lifts his index finger from the Body and dips the tip of his finger in the Honored Blood. He lifts his index finger slightly and makes the sign of the

cross once inside the chalice saying, **“And the Precious Blood.”** The congregation respond with, **“And Your Precious Blood.”**

When the priest begins to handle the Sacraments the deacons lit candles to illuminate the area around the Holy Body and Honored Blood, keeping them lit until the end of the Fraction. The Fraction is a prayer of thanksgiving to God for His inexpressible gift, as He gave us His Holy Body and Honored Blood as an eternal life to those who worthily partake of them. It is also a supplication that He may give purity to our hearts, souls and bodies so that we dare, in the intimacy of His Divine love, partake of them. The prayers of Fraction are numerous. Some Fractions are prayed all year round and some are for Major or Minor Lordly feasts, the Virgin’s feasts, the angels or saints’ feasts, for periods of fasting, and so on. The fractionation of the Holy Body signifies the sufferings which were inflicted upon our Lord Jesus Christ. The fraction prayer ends always with the **Lord’s Prayer**.

PRAYERS OF ABSOLUTION AND SUBMISSION

These are four prayers the priest recites them inaudibly during which the deacons are calling people to bow down before the Lord and asking them to attend carefully during these Holy moments.

During this time, usually the priest raise up his heart with all the prayers and requests of the congregation before God.

While the people are bowing their heads, confessing their sins and offering collective penitence, the deacon calls out: **“Let us attend in the fear of God”** so that the people prepare themselves to receive the absolution from the priest.

The priest then says, “Peace be with all.”

Before saying the absolution for the remission of sins, the priest gives the congregation peace as a pledge and introduction to the joy they are about to receive.

The congregation then responds with, “And with your spirit.” The Priest then prays the Absolution to the Father.

At the end of these prayers, the priest prays the Litany of the assemblies and then the deacon responds by saying: “saved Amen with your spirit...”

THE SIGNINGS BEFORE CONFESSION

The priest holds the Spadikon in his right hand, and while bowing his head, he makes the sign of the Cross over the chalice with the Spadikon saying, “The Holies are for the holy.” Then he slightly dips the Spadikon in the Blood and raises it again without letting any drop fall off it. When bringing the Spadikon back to the paten he opens his left palm underneath it in case any Jewel might fall from it or in case the Blood drips. The priest then signs the Body with the Spadikon that has been dipped in the Lord’s Blood and applies it to the wounds he made in the Body during the fraction by putting the Spadikon on each wound all round the Body while it lies in the paten. He does this while praying: “Blessed be the Lord Jesus Christ...” Dipping the Body in the Blood teaches us that this Body is for the Blood, and this Blood is for this Body.

After signing the Body with the Spadikon absorbed in Blood, the priest goes around the Body touching all the wounds he made on the Body during the fraction, in what is called **'the dyeing of the wounds'**, as if he is trying to soothe the wounds the Lord endured because of our sins. However, the priest and the congregation should realize that nothing dresses the wounds of the Lord and heals them except if we return to Him in repentance and submit our lives to Him,

The congregation responds with, **"One is the All Holy Father, One is the All Holy Son, One is the All Holy Spirit. Amen."**

For the second time, the priest anoints the wounds of the Body with the Spadikon saying, "The Holy Body, and the precious True Blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of our God, Amen." And the congregation in true faith responds with, "Amen." For the third time, the priest anoints the wounds of the Body with the Spadikon saying, "The Holy, Precious Body and the True Blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of our God, Amen", and again the congregation responds with, "Amen." The priest then turns the Spadikon upside down, holds it between his fingers, raises it to the Chalice making the sign of the Cross over the Blood with it, then puts it upside down in the Blood and says, "The Body and The Blood of Emmanuel our God, this is true Amen." The congregation says, "Amen, I believe", confirming and affirming the priest's saying and confession.

+ Signing the Body three times with the Blood soaked Spadikon before raising it and placing its back in the Chalice, refers to the three days that Jesus remained in the tomb before His Resurrection on the third day.

+ Turning the Spadikon and placing it upside down in the Chalice to be immersed in the Blood symbolize the act of crucifying Christ, the Lamb of God, who carries the sin of the whole world, when they laid Him on His back to nail Him on the cross.

THE CONFESSION

Having done this, the priest then raises the paten carefully and recites the confession, saying, **"Amen, Amen, Amen, I believe, I believe, I believe and confess to the last breath..."**. At the end of the priest's confession the deacon takes the Cross in his right hand, a lit candle in his left hand, and a veil between the two of them. He holds this before his eyes while saying the deacon's profession, **"Amen, Amen, Amen. I believe, I believe, I believe that this is true, Amen. Pray for us and for all the Christians..."**

During that, priest puts the paten back on the Altar and covers the chalice with a veil. He then kneels down before the altar and silently prays, until the deacon finishes the confession.

These prayers are to give glory to God Who, in His modesty, consented to give us His Body to eat and His Blood to drink. The priest does this with humility, contrition and declaration of unworthiness, and then he beseeches absolution and forgiveness before partaking of the awesome Mysteries.

The reason why the deacon holds the cross in his right hand, a lit candle in his left and a veil between them, is because as a deacon cannot gaze at the splendor of the Lord's glory so he covers his eyes like the Seraphim who covers his face with two of his wings from the brilliance of His Majestic Glory. As for the priest, he does not hide his face because he has been merited, through the sacrament of priesthood, to fraction and hold in his hands the Body of Christ.

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

DISTRIBUTION OF THE HOLY SACRAMENTS

The priest rises from kneeling before the Altar and receives absolution from his brothers the priests, by bowing and saying, "I have sinned, absolve me." He also receives forgiveness from the deacons and from the congregation by saying while bowing, "I have sinned, forgive me." Then he starts giving out the Holy Communion. He begins with the Holy Body, so that he communes himself with the front jewel of the Body (known as the Head). He does this in his capacity as the serving priest, and the head of the gathering. If an associate priest is present, the serving priest takes the Masteer (spoon) from the top of the throne of the Chalice and puts the back jewel of the Body (known as the limbs) in it. The associate priest approaches, bows before the Altar and the Mysteries which are on it, kisses the Altar then takes the Masteer with his hand which is covered with a veil. He brings his mouth close to the paten and communes the jewel which is in the Masteer. He then communes the altar deacons in the order of their ranks, from the right third of the Body. During this he says, "The Body of Emmanuel, Our God, this is true. Amen." The partaker then replies, "Amen."

The priest places the dome in the paten and covers it with a large veil, making sure the edges do not get inside the paten, and that no particle of the jewel sticks to it when it is covered. The priest carries the paten with great care, and from the left hand side he turns to the West and blesses the congregation, while saying, "The Holies for the holy. Blessed be the Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God and the sanctification is by the Holy Spirit. Amen." The people bow and cry out, "**Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord.**" The priest then puts the paten back on the Altar. The priest carries the paten again, and from the right hand side he turns West, blesses the people and says, "Holy Body and True Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of Our God. Amen." The congregation cries out while bowing, saying "**Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord.**"

From the right side of the altar, the priest, carrying the paten in his hands, goes to the men seeking the Holy Communion in the Northern part of the Sanctuary. The deacon precedes him, walking backwards with a lit candle in his hand, crying out, "Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord." If another priest is attending, he takes the Chalice to give the Blood to the partakers who have already received the Body. When the priest is not attending to the altar while giving out the Body, he charges a deacon to stand before the altar holding a lit candle. After the priest finishes giving the Sacraments to the men he goes to the women's area. Having given the sacraments to the ladies, he goes back to the altar and gives whatever remains of the gems to himself, to associate priests and to the

deacons in order of their ranks. When he finishes partaking of the Body he puts the paten on the left side of the altar, removes the veil that had been underneath it, and shakes it carefully inside the paten, then he picks up the small molecules of the gems which had adhered to the paten. He asks the associate priest or the deacon to join him in looking closely inside the paten. The two of them look carefully until they are both sure that the paten is absolutely free of gems. The deacon then says, "Hail to the Cross." The priest makes the sign of the cross inside the paten with his finger and says, "Hail to the cross of Jesus Christ."

After giving out the Holy Body and consuming all the remaining jewels in the paten, as mentioned before, the priest starts giving out the Precious Blood. He uncovers the Chalice, takes the veil that has been placed on top of it, and places it in his left hand, taking the Masteer from the top of the Throne and putting it inside the chalice. When the Chalice has been taken out of the Throne the priest holds it in his left hand which is covered with the veil. He then communes the Spadikon which is immersed in the Blood, after draining it from the precious Blood inside the Chalice. He then partakes of the Blood. If there is an associate priest he gives him the Chalice and the Masteer inside it. The associate priest partakes of the Blood, once or three times (his hand must be covered with the veil when holding the Masteer). After this, the priest gives the Blood to the deacons with the Masteer, once or three times while saying, "**The Blood of Emmanuel our Lord. This is true. Amen.**" The partaker responds with, "Amen." Then he gives the Holy Blood to the congregation; first the men, then the women. He then returns to the altar and drinks what is left from the Blood straight from the chalice without using the Masteer.

The whole Sacraments must be communed. Nothing is to remain for later or the next day. The command of the Old Testament's law regarding the Passover lamb says, "**You shall let none of it remain until morning**" (Ex.12:10). This does not apply to the part of the Sacraments which the priest keeps in the Gem's box to take immediately after the Mass to a sick person. In this case, the priest, without drinking water after the Holy Communion, goes to the sick person when the Mass is over to give him the Holy Sacrament. He then washes the Gem's box thoroughly and gives some of the water to the sick person to drink, before drinking the rest of it himself.

WASHING THE UTENSILS

After giving out the Precious Blood, the priest starts washing the utensils. He washes the Masteer (spoon) inside the Chalice and drinks the water. Then the deacon pours more water in the cup. The serving priest gives it to the associate priest who drinks it. Again, the priest thoroughly washes the inside of the Chalice with his hand, and pours the water in the paten. He then washes the outside of the Chalice, especially the spots which he touched with his hands, this washing is done above the paten. Next, he washes the Masteer, the whole of it, then the whole of the dome (or star) which sits upon the paten, paying particular care to the ends which touch the paten. He pours the washing water of the Chalice, Masteer and star in the paten, washes the paten thoroughly with his hand, then drinks the water. The deacon pours water in the paten which is in the hands of the priest, which the deacons then drink to resolve the Holy Communion.

After he has finished washing the utensils, the priest bows his head before the Lord and prays a special Thanksgiving Prayer after the Holy Communion.

DISMISSING THE ANGEL OF THE SACRIFICE

After the Thanksgiving Prayer, the deacon pours some water in the priest's hand who breathes on it three times while saying the three signings of the cross. If other priests are present they, too, blow on the water and repeat the second signing. The priest stands before the altar and dismisses the angel of the Sacrifice by sprinkling some of the water on the altar and sprinkling the rest upwards saying, "O angel of this sacrifice who ascends to the highest with this praise, remember us before the Lord that He may forgive us our sins."

After sprinkling the water and dismissing the Sacrifice's angel the priest starts to dismiss the congregation. First he places his hand, wet with water, on the Throne of the Chalice, then on his own beard, then on other priests' beards. He then places his hand on each deacon's head as a blessing before dismissing them. Dismissing the congregation can be done in two ways:

+ If only few people are in attendance, the priest places his hand on each person's head.

+ If there are many people he dismisses them by sprinkling water on them in an organized manner to avoid any noise. During the sprinkling of water the people should not leave their places. This is the most recent way of dismissing the congregation and it seems that this had to take place because of the growing number of worshippers and the difficulty of giving them the dismissal in the previous way.

The final blessing:

At the conclusion of all the collective prayers, the congregation chants "Amen Alleluia, Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit..." In the presence of the Patriarch or a Bishop they add the special part for them. After that, the priest stands by the door of the Sanctuary facing west and says the usual benediction (if it is the annual season, otherwise he recites the special benediction according to the season.). After the Lord's Prayer, the priest gives the dismissal saying, "And now, the love of God the Father, and the grace of the Only Begotten Son, our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, and the fellowship and the gift of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **Go in peace. May the peace of the Lord be with you all.**" The people respond with, "**And with your spirit.**"

(1) "The Spirituality of the Rites of The Holy liturgy in the Coptic Church" by H.G. Bishop Mattaous

(2) "Understanding the Liturgy" by Fr. Athanasius Eskander



(8) SACRED VESSELS

The entire section is quoted from "The Church House of God" by Fr. Tadros Malaty.

The Church of the New Testament, as Christ's Bride, offers several special vessels to be used in God's House, being aware they are God's own. They are consecrated by prayers, the word of God and by crossing them by the anointment of Chrism. When consecrated, they are only to be used for God's service.

1. THE CHALICE

The Communion Cup, into which wine mixed with water is poured, is consecrated into the Blood of the Lord through the Liturgy of Eucharist. The Lord Himself used the chalice (Mt. 26:26, 27) and the Apostles imitated Him. St. Paul the Apostle calls it "the Cup of Blessing" and "the Cup of the Lord" (1Cor. 10:16, 21). Tertullian refers to it as having the shape of lamb engraved outside it, to remind us of the Lamb of God Who purchased His Church and adorned her entirely with His Holy Blood.

CHALICE MATERIAL

The Early Christian Chalices were commonly made from wood or glass. By the third and fourth centuries, precious metals became common, and valuable chalices of Gold and silver set with jewels, were offered by believers as a sign of their love. Many Fathers asked their people not to exaggerate in offering these valuable vessels while there were many people in dire need.

THE SHAPE OF THE COPTIC CHALICE



The bowl of the Coptic Chalice has a bell-shaped form, the stem is long and rests on a circular stand

2. THE PATEN



It is called in the Coptic 'tdickc', and in Greek 'disxos', a small round tray, without a stand and having no engraving. It is usually made of silver or gold. It is said that the Church of Lorenzo, Genoa, possesses the dish used by the Lord at the Last Supper for the consecrated bread. It is a shallow glass bowl hexagonal in shape, with two small handles, made of deep green emerald. As was with the Chalice, evidence does not satisfy all the requirement of historical criticism. Some people believe that the Lord did not use a paten, but rather consecrated the bread upon His hand. However, as the Liturgy takes time, the church prefers to use the paten in order that the bread is not held for too long a time in the

celebrant's hand. This paten has a symbolic meaning, as it represents the Lord's manger and tomb.

3. THE DOME (STAR)



It is called in Arabic "Dome " and in Greek "asthr" or "astrixos"(asterisk), and consists of two silver arched bands, held by a screw, crossed over each other into the shape of a cross, usually surmounted by a small cross. It is said that St. John Chrysostom had introduced this article, which is placed upon the paten to keep the holy bread in a prescribed order, and to support the coverings. It represents the shape of the tomb and also reminds us of the star that appeared to the Wisemen.

4. THE SPOON



The Spoon in Coptic is called "pim/yt/r" and in Greek "labij". In it the Blood of Christ is administered to the communicants. It is said that in early centuries the celebrant used to put the Body in the hands of the communicants or in the mouths, and the Blood was drunk directly from the Chalice. Only in the sixth century was the Spoon (Mysterion) used.

5. THE CRUETS

Cruets are two vessels used in holding the wine and water for the Eucharist. They are mentioned in the inventory of gifts made by Constantine to the Churches of Rome.

There are three other cruets used by the Coptic Church, they are as follows:

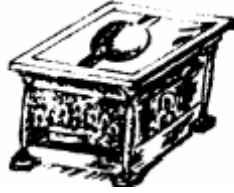
Firstly; one is used to hold the Chrism (Myron), the sacred cruet which only the priest or bishop can hold. It is usually preserved in the Sanctuary, and sometimes on the Altar.

Secondly; a cruet contains the Oil of "Kallilion" or "Gallilon", used in the liturgy of Baptism.

Thirdly; a cruet contains the oil Of "Apocalypses", that is the Oil which is used on the last Friday of the Great Lent (in the service of the Sick); and is used in the service of the Saturday of Joy (before Easter) when all the book of Revelation (Apocalypse) is read.

At the Coptic Church of St. Shenouda at Old Cairo, there is an ancient wooden box. It is circular and has three round holes which are probably for the three above mentioned cruets.

6. THE ARK



In the middle of the Alter, there is a wooden box, called in Coptic 'pitotc' which means 'a seat' or 'a throne', and is used as a Chalice-Stand. Usually it is cubicle in shape, about thirty centimeters high and twenty-five centimeters wide, the top is closed with high flaps. The beautiful carving is inlaid with ebony and ivory and is decorated with four small icons.

TITLES OF THE ARK

It is called 'the Throne' for it represents the presence of the Crucified Lord. It is also called 'the Ark', as it looks like the Ark of Noah through which the creature where saved. We are also saved by the Blood of the New Testament which is in the Chalice of this Ark. Its name also corresponds to the 'Ark of the Old Testament', for the last one contains the following articles:

Firstly, the Tablets of Law written with the finger of God to declare God's covenant with man. The new Ark now contains the true Blood of Christ, as the New covenant, that fulfils the Law and the prophets.

Secondly, Aaron's rod which flowered, as a symbol of the Virgin Mary who begot the Incarnate Lord, whose Blood is in this new Ark.

Thirdly, the jar of manna, as a symbol of the true Manna, the Life-giving Body and Blood of Christ. (John 6).

7. THE CIBORIUM

The Ciborium or the Antophorion is a small vessel of silver, circular in shape and having a cover, with measures about six centimeters in diameter. Its height is about six centimeters. Its purpose is to convey the Holy Body moistened with a few drops of the precious Blood to the sick or prisoners, or to any person who cannot attend the Divine liturgy and partake in the ceremony. However, this vessel is not used to preserve the Holy Communion for any other time than that required, for the Coptic Church rules forbid this custom. In particular circumstances, when the priest has to be late in holding this vessel to communicate a person, he places it on the Alter, kindles a candle and a deacon wearing his service vestments guards. According to the historian Renaudt, in his speech about Patriarch Philothius (63rd.): the Patriarch states that vessel holding the Holy Elements must be guarded by a priest.

8. THE BOOK OF GOSPEL



A copy of the New Testament covered with silver or gold and decorated by icons, has in the middle of one side, the icon of the Resurrection or Crucifixion and the other side, there is the icon of the Patron Saint or St. Mary and the Child Jesus. Sometimes on the corners, there are the four Evangelists with their symbols.

9. THE LITURGICAL FANS

In Latin 'flabellum' and in Greek ripdion, ripin or 'ecapqgon' (hexa-ptergion) means 'six-winged', because the figure of the six-winged Seraph usually appears on it. The use of the liturgical fans during the consecration continued in the West until the fourteenth century and has continued until now in some churches of Egypt, especially Upper Egypt.

According to the Apostolic Constitution of the 5th century, two deacons using fans of linen, fine skin or peacocks' feathers stand by the Altar to drive away insects and keep them from touching the sacred vessels. These fans now have a symbolic meaning. According to the Coptic rite, these fans are used during the recitation of the Seraphim's hymn as a sign of the presence of the Seraphim to participate with us in our praise to God.

According to a Coptic manuscript in the Vatican, twelve deacons carry fans during the procession for the consecration of the Chrism . In the Greek Church seven deacons wave seven liturgical fan in the service of Good Friday and in consecrating the Chrism.

It is interesting to note that some Orthodox Churches attached small bells in fans to give a sound on their waving, as a sign of the sound of the Seraphim's flying wings around the Glorified Christ. In the Coptic Church there are now only two metal fans in the form of a circle, somewhat like a halo around a saint's head. Each fan has a long handle and in the middle of the circle a Seraph is represented. These fans are used in the church processions.

10. CENSER AND CENSING



Under the Old Testament dispensation, the use of incense in divine worship was prescribed by God and controlled by the most Strict Regulation (Ex. 30:34-38). It was one of those ceremonies which belonged to the highly ceremonial rituals of Judaism; which took place within the holy place, and was upheld by the priest alone.

CENSING IN CHRISTIAN WORSHIPING

One of the first gifts offered to Christ while He was yet an infant, was the frankincense, a costly gift of love which should be offered to Him by His people today. The prophets of the Old Testament, foreseeing the glory of the Church in the access to her of the Gentiles, says, "The forces of Gentiles shall come unto you... they shall bring gold and incense and they shall show forth the praises of

the Lord” (Isa. 60:5, 6). “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...” (Malachi 1:10,11). Even in Heavenly worship, St. John the Divine, so incense being burned by an angle in a gold censer (Revelation 8:3, 4).

SYMBOLISM OF CENSING

1. Censing is a symbol of the Presence of God among his people, when we smell it we deeply say, “While the King was on His couch my hand gave forth its fragrance” (Cant. 1:12).

2. It symbolizes praying (Ex. 30:1 - 8) as a sacrifice of love. According to the Coptic rite, liturgies of Eucharist, Baptism, Healing, Marriage, Funerals are correlated with this sacrifice of love. In the fourth century, St. Chrysostom in his homily on St. Palagia of Antioch, alludes to the use of incense of the Funeral procession, and the act of the “Martyrdom of St. Peter of Alexandria” (311 AD) mentions the same.(2).

3. Censing also symbolizes the purification of people when God said to Moses, “Get away from the midst of this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment, Moses said to Aaron: Take your censer and put therein from off the Altar, and lay incense on it, and carry it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them, for wrath has gone forth from the Lord, the plague has begun...”

4. The burning of incense before persons and things is most honorific. It is meant according to the Armenian rite of the ninth century that the priest who carries the Eucharist to the sick is preceded by a cross and a censer. The same meaning is apparent incensing the Altar, the Gospel and the Bishop. The custom of censing the bishops may have been derived from imperial usage, since it was customary for torches and incense to be carried before the Emperor.

11. OTHER ARTICLES

1. A Small box for incense, usually of silver to carved wood.

2. The Ewer and Basin, are used for washing the hands of the celebrant during the liturgical services. They are usually made of bronze, but sometimes they are made of silver, and the ewer is sometimes a pitcher of clay.

3. The Qurban (oblation) - Basket is a small basket made from palm leaves in which the holy bread is placed, one of which the celebrant chooses as the ‘Lamb’. This basket is decorated with crosses and sometimes with strings of silver or gold.

4. Musical instruments: the Coptic hymns depend in the first place, on the natural instrument, I mean the throat. However we use some primitive instruments such as the triangle and the cymbals.