



## Liturgy...What Is It?

**Author unknown**

Dear Faithful in Christ,

What a joy it is to gather each Sunday, on the day of the Resurrection of our Lord, to celebrate the Divine Liturgy -- that glorious act of worship in which we "plug into" the worship which is continuously going on in Heaven.

There is literally NOTHING on earth like the Divine Liturgy, the Holy Eucharist, which has been given to us by the Lord Himself, as the most perfect act of worship and thanksgiving, bringing us into Communion with our God and Father, through Jesus, and in the Spirit of God.

In the Liturgy, we do not re-enact the life of Christ, we partake of it, we enter into it, and we are united to it -- i.e. to Him and to His eternal Sacrifice for us, His Suffering, Death and His Resurrection. Even though His Sacrifice on the Cross happened once in history, we participate in it again and again through the heavenly Liturgy.

Through our simple act of offering back to God in thanksgiving basic elements of God's creation -- bread and wine -- we are offering our selves, our lives, and the whole creation to Him. We return to Paradise where all things glorified Him, all things were "communion" with Him, all things were offering themselves to Him, and all things worshipped and obeyed Him.

In the Liturgy, we see how everything is supposed to be, how everything was created to be...

Fire (candles) becomes praise and prayer, and a reflection of He who is "the Light of the World." The Light is a reflection of He who said: "Let there be light" and of Him who overcomes the darkness of sin. Sand from the earth humbly accepts to hold those candles so that God may be glorified and so that man may be saved.

Incense becomes prayer and a symbol of sacrificial love, the offering of our lives to God. Paint and color reflects the glory of God, and is formed into an image (icon) of He who united Himself to us in love by becoming Flesh.

The Priest's Vestments reflect the fact that the Son of God "clothed Himself" in the poor "garments" of our fallen human nature, making it bright and glorious and filled with Divine Light. Our clothing -- the garments of fig leaves which Adam and Eve wove for themselves to cover the darkness which had entered their bodies through sin -- become bright and spotless and holy Baptismal Robes (our bodies), since through baptism we have "put on Christ." The altar participates in the Altar in Heaven (see the Epistle to the Hebrews), in the Sacrifice of Christ "once for all" which is a continual reality in the "eternal now" of the Kingdom of God.

The voices of the faithful "mystically represent" the Cherubim, the Angels who continually cry "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Sabaoth, Heaven and Earth are filled with Thy glory!" Human words become the very Word of God in the proclamation of the Gospel.

The Priest, through whom the Holy Gifts are offered, becomes a mere vehicle through which Jesus Himself, "the High Priest" offers Himself to us. As the Liturgy says, It is "He who offers and is offered." Bread becomes Heavenly Food, even a mystical participation in the Flesh of the Divine Son of God.



Wine becomes Heavenly Drink, even the Blood of Christ. "Mine" and "Yours" (the selfish desire to possess things) becomes "Thine own of Thine own, we offer unto Thee, in behalf of all and for all!"

If God were to allow us to see the Liturgy without the "veil" which covers our eyes, we would be frozen with awe as was St. Seraphim, who as a deacon turning toward the people saw Jesus Christ Himself and could not move or speak for several days.

The Liturgy is not just a series of petitions or prayers one after the other, it is a whole, a unity, a SINGLE ACTION of offering our lives to God in Christ and through the Holy Spirit. It is a movement from earth toward Heaven, from this world into the world to come, which is already come in Christ. It is a corporate action through which the Word of God becomes "flesh" first through the Scriptures and the Homily (the first half of the Liturgy, or "Liturgy of the Word."); and then through the transformation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, by which we become the "Body of Christ" (the second part of the Liturgy, or the "Liturgy of the Faithful").

We the Faithful, the Priest and the "royal priesthood" of Christ, each having our own specific role and priestly dignity within the Body, offer the humble "bread and wine" of our lives to God, who returns them to us transformed, perfected, and as Communion with Him, and a foretaste of eternal life! What happens to the bread and wine is also to happen to us...

We prepare ourselves through purity and prayer before the Liturgy as the Priest prepares the bread and wine with prayer...

We come out of the world by cutting out the extraneous element of sin from our lives, as the Priest cuts out the portion of the loaf which is to become the Body of Christ, and cuts out a small particle representing our life, placing it on the Paten... We are offered on the Paten and in the Chalice our flesh and our blood (our sweat, our tears, our prayers, our failures, our weaknesses...)...

We are placed on the Altar of God...

We are joined to His Sacrifice on the Cross...

We are resurrected with Him and in Him...

We share in His Divinity, since He shared in our humanity...

We become "sons of God" by grace, as He is the Son of God by nature...

We are joined to His incorrupt Humanity...

We receive His Holy Spirit...

We are Consecrated...

We become His Body and Blood...

We are to become "Communion" through which Christ is distributed to others and through which others come into Communion with Him....

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