

THE EUCCHARIST

1993

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*A CONCISE DISCUSSION
OF
THE DIVINE LITURGY*

PART I

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I previously wrote *Christ in the Eucharist* with an evangelic, ecclesiastic, and patristic emphasis. I have since felt the need for a more concise book about the Divine Liturgy that is specifically directed to the general public. This is what prompted me to write this series which is based on an introductory study of the subject that took place after Vespers at St. Peter and St. Paul Church in Santa Monica, answering some common questions and using my previous book, *Christ in the Eucharist*, to a large extent.

Father Tadrous Yacoub Malaty

THE DIVINE LITURGY IS EVANGELIC LIFE

Our gospel is not just a collection of theoretical beliefs or teachings that we adopted, and it is not philosophical thinking that appeases the mind and leads us to argumentative discussions. It is first, and above of all, a way of life. We live our beliefs, and experience the new life that comes to us by our union with God, our Father, in His Son through the Holy Spirit. Paul, the apostle, said: "For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but **also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance**" (1 Thessalonians 1:5). "You are our epistle written in our hearts, known **and read by all men**" (2 Corinthians 3:2).

We live this evangelic life, which Christ gives us through His crucifixion, in our inner thoughts and desires, our family life, our work, and even during our sleep; we live it in both individual and church worship. We experience the power of God and the work of the Holy Spirit in us, enjoying the work of the gospel in great assurance such that the Lord Christ is transfigured in us, even in our dreams.

The Divine Liturgy took precedence in the heart and worship of the early church, because its celebration with the participation of the people is the undying practice of evangelic life.

How does the believer view the Divine Liturgy (Eucharist)?

Celebration of the Eucharist is enjoyment of evangelic life:

- ❖ In it we offer God **unique worship** through our union with the Lord Christ who reveals to us His knowledge of the Father, so that we may also know Him, love Him, and unite with Him!
- ❖ In it we shed the deeds of our old human nature - ungratefulness - and **attain the thankful nature of Christ** so that we can thank and praise with all our soul.

- ❖ In it we **acquire the Savior Himself** so that we enjoy His glory and realize our salvation by Him and in Him.
- ❖ In it we **renew our covenant with God**, which sealed by the Blood that was sacrificed on the cross.
- ❖ In it we rejoice in the **spiritual feast of Passover**, which takes us from our land to His Heaven.
- ❖ In it we **practice ecclesiastic life** as a life resurrected in Christ and through which we enjoy union with Him and fellowship with those in Heaven.
- ❖ Lastly, in it we **celebrate the wondrous Sabbath**, the true day of the Lord where there is inner rest amidst the pains of this world.

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THE DIVINE LITURGY AND WORSHIP

God asks us to worship Him, not because of a need for prayers, praise or fasts, but first and foremost He wants us to know Him as a lover of mankind and to be attached to Him as a personal Savior to man. St. Augustine said "to know Him, so I love Him, so I unite with Him ... ;" we add "to be glorified with Him." This is the essence of our worship, to know Him so we can love Him, throw ourselves in His embrace, and be in His glory. In this way, we bear His likeness and become a living icon of Him.

The road to the Kingdom **begins with knowing God and ends with eternal glory when our knowledge of God becomes relatively complete.**

This is God's assurance when he said: "For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6, Septuagint). He wants us to bear His likeness - "love" - which we can not enjoy without knowing Him and accepting communion with Him.

The sacrament of Baptism is called "illumination¹," and is where we get to know the Holy Trinity. Through it, our inner vision is opened to see ourselves with our Christ in the heavenly Jordan. We become children of God, enjoying the kind fatherhood of the Father, the salvation of His Only-Begotten Son, and the work of the Holy Spirit which reshapes our inner human nature so that we bear the icon of Christ, in preparation for the eternal heavenly wedding. This is how Baptism prepares us for the mystery of the Eucharist, or participation in the Divine Liturgy, when we enter the Holy Place to see the Great High Priest, our God Jesus Christ, carrying us to His cross and leading us to His throne of blessing, and we participate in heavenly worship at a wondrous angelic level.

Our Christ carries us as members of His Body to His throne, so that we may know Him and He gives us His unique knowledge of the Father, to fulfill His words: "Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (Matthew 11:27).

As we participate in the Divine Liturgy, we are reconciled with the Father by being worthy of His Son's Blood; thus our eyes are opened to comprehend His supreme fatherly love.

✠ We praise You, Whom the Word ... knows You and reveals
You to the Saints¹.

Euchologium of Serapion

Thus in the Divine Liturgy as we acknowledge the Son and He acknowledges us, and we receive His knowledge of the Father, **knowledge of our union with Him**; it is not a purely theoretical or intellectual knowledge. We acquire knowledge of the Father's love; the Father who offered us His son in a sacrifice of love for our salvation.

In the Divine Liturgy, we also find the Holy Word offering His life as **a sacrifice of complete obedience** to the Father and **a sacrifice of genuine love** towards all the world, for in this sacrifice, the Lord Christ offered a unique worship because He Himself deserves every worship and adoration. It is worship that no heavenly creature or anyone on earth can offer. This is the sacrifice which the Lord Christ gave His church the right to offer; the church offers the sacrament of the Eucharist as Christ's sacrifice, that which cannot not be duplicated, so that God sees us offering the sacrifice of the holy cross, bearing Christ's worship, love, obedience, and His life and holiness.

✠ As we too commemorate His Holy Passion, His Resurrection ...
We offer You Your oblations from what is Yours³.

¹ *The Eucharistic Prayer.*

Liturgy of St. Basil

As **St. Irenaeus** said: "for we offer to Him His own, announcing constantly the fellowship and union of the flesh and spirit²."

² *Adv. Haer. 4:18.*

THE DIVINE LITURGY AND THE THANKFUL NATURE

After the fall of man, we acquired an ungrateful nature, not only towards God the Creator, but also towards our parents and those that flooded us with gifts! We became in need of a complete renewal of our nature so that we may bear a thankful and loving nature instead of ungratefulness and hatred.

When we participate in the Eucharist, we are led to the cross and our vision is elevated to our Christ, the fountainhead of love, so we sing "I sat down in His shade with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love." (Song of Songs 2:3, 4).

What is this fruit that gives us sweetness and delight other than the Body and Blood of the Lord in Which we acknowledge Him and He acknowledges us. Let us not be preoccupied with the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil from which the first Adam ate, but with the fruit of divine love which the Second Adam gives us.

Christ's Blood flows in our veins so that we can bear his thankful nature. He sheds our ungrateful spirit from us, and our souls rejoice as those in heaven, not knowing what to offer God, our Savior, other than prayers of thanks and gratitude.

The invitation is for everyone - priests and laity, young and old - to participate in the Divine Liturgy and enter the open doors of heaven to practice a thankful, joyful, heavenly life! Hence the Divine Liturgy is called the Eucharist or the Sacrament of Thanksgiving.

It was said "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots?" (Jeremiah 13:23). We ask Jesus Christ to change our skin and our nature. We bear Him and commune with Him so that He may change our rebellious and ungrateful nature into a joyful and thankful one.

THE DIVINE LITURGY AND SALVATION

What could be meant by salvation other than receiving the Savior Himself?! The salvation He gives us is not meant to just forgive our sins, but so that we gain possession of Him and enjoy the events in His life, as if they were our own: His birth from a virgin, His baptism in the Jordan, His suffering, His crucifixion, His death, His resurrection, and His ascension to heaven - I see all these events as taking place in my name and for my sake. Through Him I gain a new birth, I suffer and am crucified for the world, I die for sin, and then I am resurrected and sit with Him in heaven (Ephesians 2:6).

In the sacrament of the Eucharist, I gain the Savior with all the stages of His life, as if my own; Jeremiah said "My claim is my God, said my soul." I acquired Him crucified on the cross, resurrected from death, and sitting on the right side of His Father. Strangely, He established this sacrament before the events of the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, confirming that His salvation is not bound by time. His sacrifice transcends time, for His disciples received His glorious, resurrected Body even before the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. The church receives Him even now assuring us that His unique sacrifice is timeless - He is still in heaven as a sacrificial lamb Who intercedes for His church through His Blood on the cross (Revelation 5:6).

Thus the Divine Liturgy is unique because Christ's sacrifice is unlike the animal sacrifices which ended with the offering. Our sacrificed Christ arises alive in the midst of His Church, working with His cross, and capable of changing our nature! As **St. John Chrysostom** said "When you see It set before you, say to yourself: because of His Body I am no longer earth and ashes, no longer a prisoner but I am free. Because of this (Body) I hope for heaven,

and to receive the good things therein, immortal life, the portion of angels and converse with Christ³!"

The Divine Liturgy is in fact a sacrament of matrimony for the soul with Christ in preparation for the eternal marriage. In this marriage, there is a mutual partnership - we own Him and He owns us. He takes what is ours so that we may take what is His.

³ *On 1 Cor. hom. 24.*

THE DIVINE LITURGY AND ENTERING INTO A COVENANT WITH GOD

The Divine Liturgy is a renewal, confirmation, and practice of a covenant with God, as the Lord Christ said: "Drink from it, all of you. For **this is My blood of the new covenant**, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:27-28 & Luke 22:20 & 1 Corinthians 11:25).

What is this agreement or new covenant that is between God and the believer? What are its principles? What are its conditions and benefits?

1. When we participate in the Divine Liturgy, we abide by our covenant with God the Father, which was given by the Son **not by erecting a stone monument** (or a pillar of stone) like Laban and Jacob who demarcate recognized borders so that each would not trespass on the other's domain (Genesis 31:44-45); instead, He gave us His Body and His Blood to draw out the stone from our hearts. He established Himself as the **cornerstone** that binds us to the Father as well as one another. This is the Body that hung on the cross between heaven and earth, not as a boundary but to unite heaven with earth. He opens our earthy hearts so that we can enter what is heavenly; He opens the doors of heaven so that humans can enter. He unites and brings loves, not only between heaven and earth, but between peoples, removing feelings of alienation from God our Father, those in heaven, and our brothers on earth!

In ancient times, the veil (curtain) between the holy of holies and the holy place was so heavy that 300 priests had to carry it, but when the Body of God was hung on the cross the veil tore, heaven opened onto earth, and we gained the right to enter onto His blessed throne!

We thank God that during the Divine Liturgy we find the doors of heaven open and God's embrace awaiting us as we acknowledge His Only-Begotten Son.

2. In ancient times, blood was essential in establishing covenants. The prophet Jeremiah refers to a tradition for the participants to cut a calf in two and each having to pass between the two parts (Jeremiah 34:18). This carried the meaning of both revenge and sanctity. Slaughtering of the animal represents the killing of the one who betrays the covenant, and at the same time it is a sacrificial offering for the wrongdoer who thus becomes righteous.

This took place when God established His covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15).

The blood also has another significance, namely that **when the two parties eat from one sacrifice they are drawn together into a new kind of relationship.** Even if they are not blood relatives, when they eat from the same sacrifice, the same blood will flow in each of them!

In the Divine Liturgy His Blood flows within us, **making us all members of His Body, His holy bride who unites with Him.** We do not enter with the blood of animals which cannot purify or sanctify our souls, or bring us closer to God, our creator; instead, we find the Blood of the Son of God Who offered His life in a sacrifice of love that gives life. In His death, the Lord Christ did not perish like millions of ancient sacrificial animals, rather it was our death that perished and our corruption that was cast away; thus we received the power of resurrection.

Accordingly, we see the Divine Liturgy as the confirmation of a unique covenant. It is an agreement for an eternal, heavenly marriage, which nothing, not even death, can stop or weaken its effects. With this covenant, we enter into fellowship with the divine family; we become **the household of God** (Ephesians 2).

3. Whenever there was an covenant, especially between tribes, usually the two sides would sit at one table. This had special meaning, for when they shared the same food, the source of life, it

was as if they acquired a common life and belonged to one family. This was a banquet for reconciliation and the establishment of a relationship between them.

The Divine Liturgy is called "**the Holy Table,**" where the Lord Christ offers His Body and His Blood as food and drink, and we are renewed by Them so we can enter into a true union with God in His Son.



THE DIVINE LITURGY IS OUR NEW PASSOVER

In every Divine Liturgy, we chant with the apostles saying: "For indeed Christ our Passover, was sacrificed for us... " (1 Corinthians 5:7).

Jews celebrated Passover as a remembrance of passage, when the angel of death passed by their doors and did not touch them, and their people escaped Pharaoh's bondage and passed onto freedom by entering the promised land.

Passover was a feast that bore past memories as well as expectations of future divine works. They associated the night of the Passover with:

- ❖ the creation of the world
- ❖ Abraham's circumcision
- ❖ the sacrifice of Isaac
- ❖ Joseph being freed from prison
- ❖ their freedom from slavery
- ❖ the appearance of the Messiah
- ❖ the coming of Moses and Elijah
- ❖ the resurrection of the fathers
- ❖ the end of the world

In contrast, we celebrate Passover every moment of our life, especially when we celebrate the Divine Liturgy. We assemble around our Christ, the Lamb of God, rejoicing that He is our Passover Who leads us passed darkness into light, and from the kingdom of Satan into the joyful Kingdom of God, and from the death onto life - He gave us His resurrection, the mystery of joy, power and uninterrupted prayer.

✠ The Paschal mystery has been fulfilled in the Body of the Lord ...

He was led like a lamb and slaughtered like sheep. He ransomed us from the slavery of the world of Egypt, and freed us from the slavery of the devil Satan as from the hand of Pharaoh,

and sealed our souls with His own Spirit and our bodily members
with His own Blood ...

This is the One Who rescued us from slavery to liberty,
from darkness to light, from death to life, and from tyranny to the
Kingdom of Eternity ...

He is the Passover of our salvation ...⁶

Father Melito of Sardis

† † †

THE DIVINE LITURGY AND CHURCH LIFE

The church is nothing other than **the new life which arose in Jesus Christ**, and enjoyment of experiencing Christ's work for our salvation - the church is a continuation of the prophetic, priestly, and royal work of the Lord Christ.

As we celebrate the Divine Liturgy, we enter as if into a clay house (Jeremiah 18) to see our heavenly Christ, extending His hand to us, the mud, to make us a noble worthy that carries within it the Body and Blood of the Lord as a heavenly treasure.

In the Divine Liturgy, we meet the Lord Christ as the sacrifice; we become the church of Christ, His body, which shares in His pains, sufferings, and crucifixion so that it experiences His life and His resurrection!

Pain becomes a principle feature of our life, not as a commandment that we have to obey, but as a natural fruit of our acknowledging Him as the One Who was crucified and abides within us.

In the Eucharist, we become the Body of Christ, not symbolically, but as a true member of the Head (1 Corinthians 12:27), and as the branches of a trunk. **St. Augustine** said "there You are on the table! There You are in the chalice!"⁷ By this he meant that we are members in the body of Christ, that we are honored to offer our life to God as a sacrifice of love, and that we should sacrifice for Him.

St. Augustine again sees in the Divine Liturgy the Lord Christ like the high priest, offering to God, His father, His church as a universal sacrifice which shares in His love. In his work concerning the church, *City of God*, he states "this is the mystery that the church celebrates through the sacraments of the altar, wherein it is shown to her that in this Thing that she offers she herself is offered to God⁸."

In his first letter to me when he left for Los Angeles in 1969, the late Father Bishoy Kamel wrote "even as we are separated in body, we congregate together around the altar and the Holy Sacrifice."

This is our belief while celebrating the Divine Liturgy - it is a meeting of the entire church around the one altar and one Sacrifice. The apostle St. Paul said "For we, being many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread."(1 Corinthians 10:17). **St. Augustine** further adds "He instituted on His altar the sacrament of our peace and unity⁴."

Lastly, during the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, we come to know the heavenly nature of the church as we meet the heavenly Christ and He carries us to His heavenly canopy as a heavenly church. **St. Ambrose** said "They hasten to go to the Heavenly Banquet⁵," while **Theodore of Mopsuestia** stated "Then each time when the liturgy of this sacrifice is celebrated, we must consider that we are like one who is in Heaven⁶!" According to **St. Irenaeus** "Let us learn by experience that we possess eternal life from the excelling power of this Being (**the Eucharist**), and not by our own nature."

In the celebration, we are elevated above time and place, where we receive our Christ Who does not age and is not subjected to time, but allows us entry into His eternity.

The Divine Liturgy is an evangelic, ecclesiastic journey to heaven.



⁴ *Serm. 272 to the newly-baptized.*

⁵ *Myster. 43.*

⁶ *Catech. hom. 15:20.*

THE DIVINE LITURGY IS OUR TRUE SABBATH

God stressed the commandment for observing the Sabbath, which He designated as a weekly celebration to fill His people with the spirit of joy. In spite of that, many found it to be a difficult commandment. In celebrating the Divine Liturgy, we observe the commandment with a spiritual, heavenly understanding.

"Sabbath" meant "rest." What rest can the believer enjoy more than the **Eucharist**, which is the mystery of the crucified and resurrected Lord Christ descending into the midst of His people and granting salvation from sin?

✠ Until our Savior's coming, we shall observe the Sabbath spiritually, having rested from sin¹².

St. Clement of Alexandria

I remember the words of the late Father Bishoy Kamel, when he talked about how the priest collects all the sufferings of the people, not to bear them, but to lay them on Christ's altar during the Divine Liturgy; thus He Who was crucified bears them, giving us true rest, great peace, and glorious joy in the midst of the pains and sufferings of the ministry. The ministry of a priest without the Divine Liturgy would be impossible!

The Eucharist is usually celebrated on Sunday, the eighth day of the week or the first day of the new week; on that day, we entered into the terminal, eternal life through the ascension of our Lord (the number 8 represents what is beyond time).

The church called Sunday "the Lord's day," because on that day the Father rested when He found man righteous and sanctified by His resurrected, sacrificial Son; at the same time, man rests because he finds in the Eucharist reconciliation, love, and unity with the Holy Trinity.

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1. *St. Justin: Apology 1:61; St. Clem. Alex.: Paed. 1:6; St. Basil On the Holy Spirit, 15.*
- 2.
3. *Before the Epiiclesis.*

6. *Paschal Mystery, p. 26-39.*
7. *Serm. 229 to the newly-baptized.*
8. *City of God 10:6:23; Serm. 227.*

12. *Library of the Fathers of the Church, Vol. 43.*