

**HOW TO BENEFIT
FROM
THE HOLY LITURGY**

By His Grace Bishop Mettaous.

Abbot of St. Mary & El Syrian Monastery

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**Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ King of Kings and
Lord of lords**

Icon designed by Dr. Youssef Nassief and Dr. Bedour Latif



*H.H. Pope Shenouda III, 117th Pope of
Alexandria and the See of St. Mark*

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, one God. Amen.

Introduction To The English Translation Of

“HOW TO BENEFIT FROM THE HOLY LITURGY”

This book has been translated especially for the benefit of all the children and youth in the lands of immigration.

I believe this book is very important for every deacon and member of the congregation who dearly loves the Lord and earnestly seeks to benefit from every moment spent in church, so that they may feel comforted by the heavenly joys the church offers and receive spiritual fullness from the ‘meals’ they partake of :-

- ✠ the meal of doctrinal liturgy of the catechumens
- ✠ the meal of spiritual worshipping in the liturgy of believers, or the sacrificial liturgy
- ✠ then the communion of the Holy Body and Blood of our Lord God Emmanuel, which we partake of in a worthy manner and have Christ abiding in us, as the Lord promised : ***“He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him”*** (John 6:56).

May this book be a source of blessing for all who read it, so that they may learn how to benefit from the Divine Liturgy.

Through the intercessions of our mother St. Mary and the prayers of His Holiness our beloved father Pope Shenouda III.

The grace of the Lord bless us.

Bishop Mettaous
Abbot of El Syrian Monastery.

HOW TO BENEFIT FROM THE HOLY LITURGY

By His Grace Bishop Mettaous, Abbot of St. Mary & El Syrian Monastery

Introduction To The First Edition

In our Coptic Church, the Holy Mass, in her essence of group prayer and worship, is the house of God and the door of heaven, the house of angels and the congregation of the saints.

During the Holy Mass, angels and archangels, the Cherubim and the Seraphim, together with all the heavenly hosts are present and are surrounding the altar with great glory. At the awesome moment when the priest calls on the Holy Spirit to transform the bread and wine present on the altar into the holy Body and Blood of our Lord, He is present amidst the praising of His holy angels.

The time we spend in church during the Mass is a slice of heaven on earth. The glory might be hidden from our eyes because we are still in the flesh, but many desired to see His glory and indeed did see and are witnesses to their testimony.

Yet despite all these glories, many express that they do not benefit from attending the Holy Mass. So, how can one benefit from the Mass?

Before answering this, we must first understand what hinders receiving benefit ...

i. **Coming late to Church** - If one comes to church late, they will deprive themselves of receiving the Holy Communion. They will also deprive themselves of listening to the Gospel readings, the beautiful hymns, and the deeply spiritual prayers said during the Divine Liturgy; prayers that uplift one's heart and spirit to heaven, giving comfort and peace from all worldly cares. For this reason, the Lord Himself advises us to come to church early : *“Those who seek Me early will find Me”* (Proverbs 8:17).

ii. **Not participating in the responses during the Mass** - One may come early, but attend as a spectator and not a participator. Hence they will not feel a part of the liturgy and leave feeling they have not received any spiritual benefit. Whoever attends the Mass is an important servant of the Mass, and this is clarified during the Servant's Absolution when the priest says : *“May Your servants, the ministers of this day, hegumens, priests, deacons, clergy, all Your people and my weak self be absolved...”*. Hence the congregation is one of the three important personalities present during the Mass - the clergy, the deacons, and the congregation. If one of them is absent, it is not possible to celebrate the Holy Mass.

Everyone present during the Divine Liturgy should share and participate in the responses with all their heart, soul and senses in order to receive from God the overflowing comfort and peace He will provide for us. Therefore, before the

actual responses are the words, ‘The congregation responds,’ not ‘The deacon responds’.

iii. Lack of concentration or contemplation during the responses - Many times the hymns and responses are said in recitation instead of in contemplation, and hence our mind may become distracted from focusing on the prayers of the Mass. Every participant, whether clergy, deacon or believer should pray with attention, understanding and in a spirit of contemplation, so that together with the Apostle Paul we say, ***“I will pray with the spirit and I will also pray with understanding, I will sing with the spirit and I will also sing with understanding”*** (1 Corinthians 14:15).

iv. Occupation with administrative matters instead of with spiritual matters - Some people, during the Mass, occupy their minds with administrative matters, like the selling of the ‘korban’ (small holy breads), or collecting alms, donations, and so on. Amidst these thoughts they do not give themselves a chance to listen to the Mass and partake in the hymns and responses. To those, the Lord Jesus says : ***“These you ought to have done without leaving the others undone”*** (Luke 11:42), and also, ***“To everything there is a season...”*** (Ecclesiastics 3:1). Hence, although the Apostle Paul tells us, ***“Those who lead, with diligence”*** (Romans 12:8), and at the same time, they participate in prayers and worships, according to what the Apostle also tells us in the same chapter: ***“fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, continuing steadfastly in prayer”*** (Romans 12:11,12).

v. Prayer of the whole Mass in the Coptic language - Some complain that they do not understand anything or benefit because they do not understand the Coptic language

it is prayed in. Hence, the preference is for praying the Mass in the language most common to all, and leaving a part to be said in Coptic, for it is our original language and our heritage, and so it is important for us not to neglect it. It is important however, that the congregation try to learn the Coptic language, for it is the language of our fathers and grandfathers.

vi. **Lack of partaking of the Holy Communion** - Some people attend the Mass only out of habit, and deprive themselves from receiving the Holy Sacraments, sometimes for months or years. The church advises that all those, who have confessed and are spiritually prepared should receive the Holy Communion according to the words of our beloved Lord: *“Drink from it all of you...”* (Matthew 26:26,27). Those who do not partake of the Holy Communion deprive themselves from the community of believers and from a great blessing.

vii. **Taking the Holy Communion without having confessed** - A person may come to receive the Holy Communion, while having on their conscience sins that are not confessed. This guilty feeling deprives the person from receiving spiritual consolation and benefit. The person receiving the Holy Communion should be repentant, pure and ready.

This book, my beloved reader, is a humble trial to overcome the obstacles which prevent you from gaining the spiritual benefits of attending the Mass. It is also a journey to take you to the depth of the unity of the Mass and Holy Communion. It explains how you can prepare yourself to be ready and deserving of the holy sacrament of Communion,

and it also explains the responses of the deacon and congregation, in addition to some spiritual contemplations.

This book, “**How to benefit from the Holy Mass**”, compliments my last book, “**The Spirituality of the Rites of the Holy Mass**”, which focuses on the prayers and rituals of the priest. This book, however, focuses more on the responses, practices and contemplations of the deacons and congregation during the Holy Mass.

“For those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24).

We ask our beloved God to bless this book so that it may become a source of blessing to all who read it, so that it may encourage contemplation, understanding, concentration and depth of prayer during the Holy Mass, and so that we may proceed to receive the Holy Communion in worthiness with a contrite spirit; hence attaining uncountable blessings and comfort.

With the blessings of our beloved father His Holiness Pope Shenouda III.

INTRODUCTION

Many complain that they do not receive benefit from attending the Divine Mass. In this book we will try to walk you through, my beloved Christian, step by step the procedures before, during and after the Mass, and contemplate together the rituals, and fervent prayers which must be understood in order to benefit.

We record all these contemplations and practices from what we read, hear and experience, in the hope of providing for you benefit and solving some of the problems many of us face.

The Liturgy of St. Basil will be the focus of our discussion and contemplation, for it is the one most commonly used.

1. PREPARATORY PRACTICES

The day in the church rite, starts from the evening prior to the celebration of the Holy Mass, so, for example, in order to attend the Sunday Mass you must be prepared from the Saturday.

How do we prepare?

The church rules necessitate your coming clean and pure, both from within and on the outside; you must be in the best image externally and internally, as you are appearing before

God, the King of kings, Lord of lords and Master of all earthly masters.

External cleanliness means bathing, clean clothes, and decent dressing. Internal cleanliness means purity of heart, through peace and reconciliation with others, then repentance and confession. If you have an appointment with your confession father you must be prepared beforehand by sitting with yourself, and remembering the sins you committed with and without intention.

You make a note of them with all honesty, remembering what St. Antonious said, *“If we remember our sins God will forget them, if we forget our sins God will remind us of them.”*

You can write your sins on a piece of paper, as well as any questions you may have to ask your confession father. Therefore, having made a note of all the sins you have committed since your last confession, you repent before God for these sins.

For those who are new or beginners in the life of repentance, the best period for confession is fortnightly, then gradually every month. It is very dangerous for the believers, especially youth and beginners, to be neglectful in their confessions, and delay the period between confessions, for this neglect leads to spiritual lukewarmness, lack of scrutiny in self examination and forgetfulness of certain sins intended to be confessed. And the greatest danger is a person who often receives Holy Communion without regular confession.

Going To Church

When you hear the bells of the church declaring the beginning of the Vesper Prayers, or you know the time at which these prayers begin, change to wearing modest clothing so that you may attend the prayers and hymns of the Vespers.

Take with you three small books: the Agbia, the Coptic Liturgy, and the book of Doxology. (In some churches, these books may be available for you to use during the service).

Along the way to church, recite certain psalms, and bring your senses and mind to concentrate on them so that you are not distracted by anything useless. Learn psalms by heart so you can pray them inaudibly, at any time, and wherever you are.

There are three short, beautiful psalms from the Agbia...

✠ Psalm 121, from the Sunset Prayer :

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the house of the Lord." Our feet have been standing within your gates O Jerusalem! Jerusalem is built as a city that is compact together. Where the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, to the testimony of Israel. To give thanks to the name of the Lord. For thrones are set there for judgment, the thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. "May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls. Prosperity within your palaces." For the sake of my brethren and companions, I will now say, "Peace be within you." Because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good. Alleluia.

✠ Psalm 83, from the Sixth Hour Prayer :

How lovely is Your tabernacle, O Lord of hosts. My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord. My heart and flesh cry out for the living God. Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young. Even Your altars O Lord of hosts, my King and my God, blessed are those who dwell in Your house. They will still be praising You. Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, whose heart is set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the valley of Baca, they make it a spring. The rain also covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength. Every one of them appears before God in Zion. O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer, give ear O God of Jacob! O God, behold our shield, and look upon the face of Your anointed. For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the Lord is a sun and shield: The Lord will give grace and glory: No good thing will He withhold: from those who walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in You! Alleluia.

✠ Psalm 14, from the First Hour Prayer :

Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who walks uprightly and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart, he who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbour nor does he take up a reproach against his friend. In whose eyes a vile person is despised, but he honours those who fear the Lord. He who swears to his own hurt and does not change. He who does not put out his money at usury. Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved. Alleluia.

Upon reaching the church, make the sign of the cross, then quietly enter so as to disturb anybody. Enter the church, the house of God, in reverence and righteousness remembering what the gospel mentioned about Simon the Elder, ***“He came by the Spirit to the temple, he took Him (Jesus) in his arms and blessed God”*** (Luke 2:25-28).

When entering the church, say with the Psalmist, ***“But as for me, I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your mercy. In fear of Your I will worship towards Your holy temple”*** (Psalm 5:7). When you reach the altar, make the sign of the cross, and prostrate three times saying, *“I worship You Christ our God, with Your gracious Father, and the Holy Spirit, because You have come and saved us.”* Then reverently stand before the altar and pray the, ***“Our Father...”*** Touch the hem of the curtain's veil and reverently kiss it as it is a symbol of Christ's garment about which the woman with the flow of blood said, ***“If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well.” Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up and she felt in her body that she was healed of the affliction”*** (Mark 5:25-34). Take a blessing from the priest by kissing the cross and his right hand holding the cross. Then quietly take your place in the church and start partaking in the prayers. You can use the Coptic Liturgy book.

If you enter the church at the time of the Gospel reading, you must stand reverently at the door of the church, listen to the gospel with the others and after the gospel is read you may go forward and kneel before the altar.

In the book of, 'The Mystery of the Trinity in the Ministry of Priesthood', it mentions that, *"If anyone approaches the door of the church and hears the reading of the gospel, he should stand still until the end of the reading."*

2. PRAYERS AND HYMNS OF THE MATINS AND VESPERS

These are groups of prayers, supplications and thanksgivings, requesting the Lord's blessing for the Mass service, so that the minds and souls of the believers may be prepared to enter worthily to attend the Mass with all its spirituality. For every Mass there is a Matin and a Vesper Prayer, preceded by the wonderful Tasbeha prayers. The only exception are the weekday Masses, (Monday to Friday), and during the Holy Lent for they conclude late in the afternoon.

Canonical Hours

Those commonly said in Vespers are the prayers of the Ninth Hour, the Sunset Prayer, the Prayer before Sleeping, as well as the Prayer of the Veil which is said in the monasteries.

During the prayer of the Ninth Hour, you must remember that this prayer was instituted by the church to commemorate the hour of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh on the Cross, which was for our salvation. Darkness fell on all the earth at the sixth hour until the ninth hour, indicating the end of Satan's kingdom when our Lord trampled him and death through the cross, and God freed His people from the

bondage of sin and the devil. The statement, "***The Lord reigns,***" is repeated in many psalms. In Psalm 110 we pray, "***The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand till I make Your enemies Your footstool. The Lord shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies.'***"

When the psalms are distributed, pray them in reverence and understanding, and pray in spirit and truth.

During the reading of the gospel of the Ninth Hour, which is called the 'Gospel of Blessing', listen in reverence, for it tells of the blessing of the five loaves and two fish by the Lord Jesus. This Gospel is also known as the 'Feeding of the multitudes'. The church chose the gospel of feeding the multitudes to be read at the ninth hour, as most of the church's fasts end at the ninth hour, reminding us that when we eat, we should request the blessing of our Lord Jesus.

Listen carefully to the Troparia (prayers) read after the gospel as they are very spiritual. Partake in their responses (Thoksa batri ke euo... Amen), giving glory to God while bowing and making the sign of the Cross.

In the second part of the Troparia, we pray saying, "*Let me partake of the grace of Your sacraments so that when I taste Your goodness, I offer You praise unceasingly.*" Why don't you my beloved, partake in these supplications humbly and reverently, if you intend to receive the Holy Communion the next day, so that it can be part of your spiritual and psychological preparation.

Prayer Of Lord Have Mercy

At the completion of every prayer of the Agbia, the church repeats, 'Lord have mercy' forty-one times. It is a marvellous example of perseverance in prayer which does not return empty, as the Lord Jesus taught us in the story of the unjust judge who avenged the woman for her persistence (Luke 18:1-7), and the story of the friend who came by at midnight : ***"I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs. And I say to you, ask and it will be given to you, seek, and you will find, knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened"*** (Luke 11: 8-10).

The Greek for Lord have mercy is 'Kyrie-ley-son', which is composed of two words: Kyrie, meaning Lord, and ley-son, meaning to have mercy. My advice to you my beloved, is that whenever you pray 'Lord have Mercy' forty one times, try to remember the thirty nine lashes that grazed the holy back of your beloved Jesus for your sake. Remember the crown of thorns which was placed on His holy head in mockery and scorn and remember how He was beaten on His holy head so that the crown of thorns pierced His bleeding forehead, and do not forget that cruel stab in His holy side which caused His pure Blood to be shed on the earth.

These are the sufferings that the church reminds us of while we recite this short but effective prayer of '*Lord have mercy.*' Some people just repeat this prayer without knowing that it actually represents the thirty nine lashes on the Holy Saviour's back, plus the crown of thorns and the stabbing

spear, so the total is forty one wounds which the beloved Lord Jesus endured for our sake. So, its repetition reminds us always of Christ's incredible love for us. Let us pray '*Lord have mercy*' saying :

- ✠ You who were lashed for us, have mercy on us.
- ✠ You who were stabbed by the spear for us, have mercy on us.

Try my beloved, to ease the severe pain which the Lord Christ endured for you, through your repentance and persistence, pleading for His mercy.

Father Antonious Rageb says about this meaningful short prayer: "We recite, '*Lord have mercy*' so many times. Our whole life is not enough to recite and beg the compassionate mercy from our loving God. Let your repetition in prayer become a beautiful incense, seek mercy for yourself, for all your matters and also for others. Specify each time a certain matter for which you need the Lord's mercy :

- ✠ Lord have mercy on me because of my evil thoughts;
- ✠ Lord have mercy on me from mental distraction;
- ✠ Lord have mercy on me in this tribulation;
- ✠ Lord have mercy on Your church from corrupt foxes;
- ✠ Lord have mercy on Your children from the seduction of sin.

Thus the incense of your prayers rises and is accepted by the Lord."

The prayer of '*Lord have mercy*' includes all the requests and needs of the person, whatever they may be, and at all times. '*Lord have mercy*' said 41 times is then followed by the

prayer, *"Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts..."* as it incorporates many beautiful requests:

- ✠ persistence in asking for God's mercy, *"O Holy Trinity have mercy upon us"*;
- ✠ asking the Lord for His help and protection, *"O Lord God of hosts be with us"*;
- ✠ asking for absolution and the forgiveness for our many sins, *"Which we have done willingly and unwillingly, the hidden and the visible"*

We then conclude with the Lord's prayer, ***"Our Father who art in heaven..."***, for this is the prayer that was taught to us by our beloved teacher and Lord Jesus Christ.

At the end of the Ninth Hour prayer, pray the absolution as it is a powerful prayer, requesting the Lord to, *"Raise our minds above worldly care and bodily desires to the remembrance of Your heavenly Commandments. Fulfil Your love to humanity O God. Receive our prayers at all times and this prayer of the ninth hour."*

The Sunset Prayer and the Prayer before Sleeping

Contemplate on each word of the Agbia prayers, so that God can give you understanding and consolation, and so you may benefit from your Agbia prayers.

It is also important for us to remember why each hour of the Agbia was instituted :

- ✝ The Ninth Hour Prayer commemorates the atoning death of Christ on the Cross.
- ✝ The Sunset Prayer commemorates the taking down of the Lord's holy body from the Cross. It reminds us that the sun of our lives must set one day when we leave this world to be with our God Jesus Christ, so let us be prepared for this day with care, vigilance and repentance.

The Gospel of the Sunset Prayer narrates how the Lord Jesus healed the mother in law of St. Peter from a fever and how He cast out demons. Let us take this opportunity to ask the Lord to heal our sicknesses, both physical and spiritual, and to cast away from us the power of the adversary and his evil hosts which cause us to sin.

At the end of the Sunset Prayer, we pray the absolution whereby we thank the Lord for He granted us to pass the day in peace and brought us thankfully to the night and made us worthy of seeing His light until sunset. He did not allow for us to perish suddenly without repentance, but in His love He kept us alive so that we live to the end of the day to see and enjoy His light.

The Prayer before Sleeping is prayed after the Sunset Prayer as the church instituted it to commemorate the laying down of the body of our Lord Jesus in the tomb, for sleep is considered a little death and the bed we sleep on signifies the tomb into which we shall be placed into after death. A particular saint used to speak to his bed each night saying, "*O bed you might become my tomb this night.*"

The subject of death reminds us to always lead a repentant life, and this prayer is a prayer of repentance. The Troparia prayed after the Gospel of the Prayer Before Sleeping says,

"Behold I am about to stand before the Just Judge in fear, because of my numerous sins, for the life spent in pleasures deserves condemnation. Repent, therefore, O my soul so long as you dwell on earth ... Yet I imitate the tax collector beating on my chest saying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner!'" The Troparia is then followed by the prayer, *"Lord by Your grace protect us this night from sin..."*

The praying person presents a true repentance in the absolution as they intend to sleep and surrender themselves in the hands of the Lord, who is the honest guard. For as they intend on receiving Holy Communion the next morning, they must be repentant in order to be worthy of receiving the sacrament. Therefore in the absolution we pray, *"Lord forgive us for the sins we committed against You this day whether they are by action, by words..."* (think how many sins you have committed through your actions or words, whether swearing, lies, insults or otherwise, and repent to God), *"by thought"*, (think how many sins of thought you committed this day. You might have condemned someone, or envied or angered someone, or even had a profane thought. Repent to God and say, Lord I have sinned forgive me my sins of...), *"or by any of our senses..."* (how many sins did you commit today through your sense of sight, hearing, touch or otherwise? Remember all these sins and repent to God). Then complete the absolution, in faith and persistence.

The Prayer of the Veil

This prayer is said in the monasteries by the monks after the Twelfth Hour Prayer (Prayer before Sleeping). It is

composed of twenty eight psalms, selected from the psalms in the Agbia psalms. It also includes three parts from Psalm 118, which is said during the Midnight prayer. It is then followed by the Gospel, the Troparia and the absolution.

The Troparia in the Prayer of the Veil reminds us of the awesome judgment where people will be gathered, angels standing, books opened, works revealed, and thoughts exposed. It is prayed with great humility, *"Who will quench the flame of fire away from me? Who will enlighten my darkness if You do not have mercy on me O Lord?"* Then we request the intercession of the Virgin Mary, whose prayers are acceptable on our behalf. Thereby we will be victorious against our enemies and the wicked one will flee from us.

The absolution in the Prayer of the Veil is very contemplative, for we ask God to, *"Give us rest in our sleep, repose for our bodies and purity of our souls. And protect us from the darkness of sin, pitch and gloom, soothe the painful motions, quench the heat of the flesh and suppress the agitation of the body. Grant us a wakeful mind, humble thoughts, a virtuous life and an undefiled, unstained bed..."*



1 Raising of Incense

Raising of Incense

THE VESPERS

After completing the Agbia prayers, the choir starts the the Vesper (Tasbeha); it is shorter than the Midnight Tasbeha. It begins with a beautiful tune : Ni-Ethnos-Teero, which is Psalm 117, ***"Oh, praise the Lord all you Gentiles. Laud Him all you peoples! For His merciful kindness is great towards us. And the truth of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord Alleluia."*** It is called the Sunset Psalm and is the first psalm in the Sunset Prayer.

Why don't you learn these beautiful tunes and urge others to learn it so all those in the church can pray together in one voice.

After this tune, the Tasbeha starts. It is composed of the Fourth Hoas, then the day's Epsalia or anniversary (or both together), then the Tazakia of the day, Lobsh, Tarh and conclusion.

Partake in the Tasbeha, normally said in Coptic, and praise together in one voice, just as the Apostles advised, ***"That you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"*** (Romans 15:6), resembling the heavenly hosts who praise before the Divine Throne.

If you do not know the Coptic language very well, or the Tasbeha praises, follow the chanters with your Tasbeha

Book, and repeat the verses of the Psalia and Tazakia. These verses were instituted specifically as recitations for the whole congregation to say during the Tasbeha.

While following the Tasbeha praises, you may contemplate on its deep meanings.

THE VESPER PRAYERS

After completing the Tasbeha, the raising of the Vesper incense begins.

Follow the prayers in the Liturgy book attentively. Partake in the responses with the congregation singing the hymns with the choir, as the congregation are to be active participants, and not passive audiences during the Vesper service or Holy Mass. The responsibility of the chanter (deacon) is to lead the congregation the responses, and to chant the special festive tunes.

The Vesper prayer starts with the Prayer of Thanksgiving as it is an important prayer by which the church starts every service with.

We notice that the priest prays this prayer in the plural form saying, *“We thank You for You have protected us...”* Therefore, as the priest prays for us, every person ought to lift up their hearts and feelings in gratitude to our Lord.

After the priest proceeds to raise incense three times around the altar, he says the Prayer for the Departed. During the prayer, we must contemplate on the following :

- ✠ The prayer for the departed is said during the evening incense (specifically at sunset) to remind us that we shall one day join the departed, so we must always be ready;
- ✠ To ask the departed to pray for us that God will help us complete our earthly struggle peacefully;
- ✠ To remember the resurrection, as when the priest says, ***"Raise up their bodies also, on the day which You have appointed, according to Your true promises, which are without lie."*** We believe that the resurrection will come for us, as God will appear to recompense each one according to their deeds.

After completing the litany, the priest proceeds around the altar with the censor once, then proceeds around the church, raising incense towards the gospels, icons, tabernacle and congregation.

The priest places his cross on each person blessing them saying, ***"The blessing of the incense be with us. Amen."***

Meanwhile, the congregation must reflect a true repentance saying, ***"I ask You my Master Jesus Christ to forgive my sins which were committed knowingly and unknowingly."***

The priest once again raises the incense at the altar, praying inaudibly for our repentance saying: ***"O God who accepted the confession of the thief on the cross, accept the confession and repentance of Your people for the sake of Your Holy Name that is called upon us, and according to Your mercy and not according to our sins."***

Solomon prayed a similar prayer for his people saying *"...each one knows the plague of his own heart, and spreads out his hands toward this temple: then hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive, and act, and give to everyone according to all his ways, whose heart You know (for You, only You, know the hearts of all the sons of man)"* (1 Kings 8: 38-9). This prayer of repentance, as well as the intercession of the priest are offered before God. So, my brethren, you should offer God a pure repentance in order to be able to benefit from these deep, interceding prayers.

During the raising of incense, the congregation sing the doxologies which are the glorifications to the holy Virgin mother of God, the angels, the martyrs, the saints, and all the various church feasts and occasions.

May we all partake and glorify God and His saints, asking for their intercessions and prayers.

The Prayer of 'Evnoti-nay-nan' (God have mercy upon us)

After the raising of incense, the congregation says the Orthodox Creed, chanting the last sentence, *"And we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come, Amen."* Meanwhile, the priest holds the cross together with three lit candles in his right hand. This signifies that the One who was crucified on the cross is Jesus Christ the light of the world, who sanctified Himself to enlighten those living in darkness and in the shadow of death. Also,

through the cross, He took us into His wonderful light, from the darkness.

The priest makes the sign of the cross on the congregation on all sides, three times inaudibly, then says the prayer of ***'God have mercy upon us,'*** making the sign of the cross in all four directions with the cross and the lit candles, symbolising that Jesus Christ enlightened His people, who live in all four corners of the earth, through the cross, saving them from the darkness of sin and granting them eternal life.

During these rounds of the raising of incense, the congregation say ***"Amen"*** three times, in humility, believing that the priest's prayers ask for mercy, blessings and forgiveness.

The congregation then chant ***"Lord have mercy"*** three times. It is a very beautiful tune that touches the heart and soul, as the congregation cry for mercy and compassion.

Prayers using special tunes are heavenly music. The struggling church on earth partake with those who carry the golden harps in the victorious, heavenly church, before He who is seated on the Throne.

Our fathers were so fond of the tune, *"Evnoti-nay-nan"* and *"Kyrie-lay-son"* that one stated, *"It is impossible that God hears this marvellous tune without having mercy on His people."*

My beloved, recite with the priest inaudibly during Vespers, ***"Lord have mercy upon us. Settle Your mercy upon us. Have compassion on us. Bless us, guard us, help us. Take***

away Your anger from us. Visit us with Your salvation. And forgive us our sins."

Also chant with the congregation the joyful tune of, "**Lord have mercy,**" while beating your chest in persistence and humility like the tax collector. Do you feel you return to your house justified like the tax collector?

The Gospel

After granting peace to the congregation, the priest prays for hearing the holy gospel. It is a powerful prayer which intensifies in power and spirit. The priest mentions the blessing of the Lord to His disciples for they saw and heard what prophets and righteous men had desired to see and had not seen. We must, therefore, thank our Lord Jesus Christ because He made us worthy to hear the words of grace coming from His Divine mouth and recorded in His Holy Gospel. We ask Him with the priest to make us worthy to hear the holy gospel and act according to His word. In this way, we gain the blessing promised in Revelation saying, "**Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy... for the time is near**" (Revelation 1:3). In this way, we thus become a dynamic fifth gospel, "**You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; you are manifestly an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart**" (2 Corinthians 3:2-3).

The priest then prays, "**Those who have already fallen asleep, repose them. Those who are sick, heal them...**" We

remember our departed beloved ones and the sick, so that God may repose the former and heal the latter. We thus become a blessing for ourselves and others too. These contemplations concentrate our thoughts in prayer, so we protect ourselves from boredom and evil thoughts. Then we repeat with the congregation, "***Lord have mercy,***" bearing in mind its previous meaning. We ask the Lord to bestow His divine words in a heart with good earth, to bear good fruit.

The deacon now says, "***Pray for hearing the Holy Gospel...***" Let us pray fervently so that the words of the gospel find its place in every heart, becoming a good seed falling on good earth to bear fruits : "***some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty***" (Matthew 13:8). Let us pray that everyone in the church finds special spiritual food and divine consolation in the words of the gospel when opening their hearts, mind and ears.

We must stand reverently to listen to the living word of God. We have to listen attentively for a special message God may be trying to tell us - as He did with St Anthony who sold all his possessions and gave to the poor. We may find certain answers for confusing situations and spiritual solutions to our problems. This can be said in confidence after much experience from spiritual people.

During the gospel reading, two deacons stand beside the reader with two lit candles to denote the light of the gospel which must shine on every heart leading to eternal life. "***For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light...***" (Proverbs 6:23) and the Psalmist said, "***Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path***" (Psalm 119:105).

The Sermon

The sermon of the Vesper Prayer is :

- ✠ About the gospel read during the Vespers. It introduces the liturgy gospel and all the oncoming readings. The liturgy gospel is the centre of all the readings throughout the Mass.
- ✠ Sunday's sermon may be for a specific purpose, such as directed to youth, servants or general. The topic must have been previously agreed upon.
- ✠ It may be a bible study and explanation on the holy Bible, or explanation on doctrines or rites, etc. It may not be related to the Vesper gospel.

In any case, you must carefully listen to the sermon and benefit spiritually so that you may grow in your life with God.

THE LITANIES

Litanies (plural of litany) is a Greek word meaning prayer. After the Gospel and sermon, the priest prays five litanies :

- i. Peace
- ii. Fathers
- iii. Place
- iv. Air, waters, plant
- v. Gatherings

✠ **Litany of Peace** - the priest says, "***Remember, O Lord the peace of Your one, holy, universal and apostolic church,***" which is repeated by the deacon in order to harmonise the prayers. The congregation respond, "***Lord have mercy.***" The Psalmist exalts the mercies of God saying, "***Your loving kindness, O God is better than life***" (Psalm 63:3). Through His mercy, "***we live and move and have our being***" (Acts 17:28). Without God's mercy and providence, there is neither earthly nor eternal life. On the contrary, there is death, emptiness and destruction. The mercy of God is followed by goodness, spiritual and material blessings, righteousness and beauty. St Paul the Apostle stated, "***But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ...***" (Ephesians 2:4-5). God full of mercy gives us this grace to live with Christ. "***How shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?***" (Romans 8:32).

We ask the Lord to have mercy on the Church and its people - including the leaders, subordinates, servants and general congregation. No one is divided, but united in love. We need that external peace to protect us from the evil hosts as it is, "***the church of God which He purchased with His own blood***" (Acts 20:28), "***The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it***" (Matthew 16:18).

✠ **Litany for the Fathers** - the priest prays this litany and the deacon urges the congregation to pray for the fathers of the church. They say, "***Lord have mercy,***" remembering the Patriarch, Metropolitans and Bishops,

praying that the Lord give them health, strength and keep them for the Church for many years and peaceful times.

We ask the Lord to have mercy on the Church's fathers by giving them grace and wisdom to guide His holy Church. For them to keep the Orthodox faith until the end, and to shepherd their flock through example and teaching.

✠ **Litany for the Place** - when the priest prays this litany, requesting its safety and peace, the deacon asks the congregation to pray for the safety of, *"this holy place of Yours, and of the world, this city of ours, all the cities, districts, islands and monasteries."* The congregation respond, *"Lord have mercy,"* asking for God to have mercy on the world; giving it peace, safety from famines, plagues, earthquakes and other disasters. We pray for the islands surrounded by sea that God protects it from sinking, and the monasteries in the wilderness that God protect them from attacks of barbarians and evil wars. We pray that the monks and nuns have peace and safety, so that they may pray for the safety and salvation of the world.

Then the priest prays the rest of the litany saying, *"And every city, every region, the villages and all their ornaments. Save us all from famine, plagues, earthquakes, fire, captivity of barbarians, sword of the stranger and rising up of heretics."* We should inaudibly repeat these prayers with the priest. For example, if he says, *"Save us from famine,"* we should answer, *"God save us from famine, plagues, floods, fire and wars. Save the faith and the Church from heretics. Amen."* At the end, the

congregation responds, "*Lord have mercy.*" We pray with this gathering all that was requested throughout the litany.

✠ **Litany of air, water and plantations** - (In Egypt, the litany prayers are said in accordance to the seasonal time of cultivation and harvesting, or the rising of the River Nile). The priest prays for the waters of the rivers and for the cultivation of crops, seeds and herbs, and for the air of the heaven and plants of the field. The deacon responds accordingly, urging the congregation to pray also. We then respond with, "*Lord have mercy*" three times.

- Lord have mercy on the waters to be plentiful to make happy and fruitful the land by the Nile, to avoid drought.
- Lord have mercy on the plants and herbs to grow and multiply to bear much fruit, to be kept from worms and stealing, so that happiness prevails on all.
- Lord have mercy on the air of heaven so God may give it adequacy as it nourishes and matures the fruit in due time. As winds whether hot or sudden damage the fruit.

Note:

While the priest prays for waters of the river in the due season, the deacon recites reverently and the congregation respond, "*Lord have mercy,*" thrice, not once like the pervious litanies.

What is the reason?

First, thrice for the waters of the river to request its abundance, in persistence. Repetition of one prayer many times denotes persistence and knocking on God's door to respond to the important and persistent request.

Second, while the congregation prays to God for mercy on the waters, they do not forget the plants, herbs and air of heaven. So three times, one for the waters, second for the plants, third for the air as they are related to each other. Water needs wind to carry clouds for rainfall into the Nile sources to flood, also the plants need water and air to grow and mature, also air needs plants to intake oxygen and the most important constituent is water to cool and modify the air.

All these factors are necessary for man's livelihood, for when he is in need of nothing, he increases in every good deed, thanking God for being generous in giving and distributing, according to our needs.

✠ **Prayer of the Gatherings** - when the priest prays for the church's meeting, and the deacon asks the congregation to, "***Pray for this holy Church and for our congregation,***" the congregation responds, "***Lord have mercy***", meaning :

- Lord have mercy on all of us, and keep us from internal divisions that weaken and deteriorates our gathering;
- Lord have mercy on us and make us regular in attending these spiritual meetings, "***Not forsaking the assembly of***

ourselves together, as is the manner of some"
(Hebrews 10:25);

- Lord have mercy on us and let the door of Your Church open before our faces until the end of ages;
- Lord have mercy on us by blessing this assembly and making it a reason of blessing and salvation to all the attendants who hear Your word, who pray and supplicate unto You in Your holy house, Your dwelling place forever.

So my beloved, when you partake in prayers with the congregation saying, "***Lord have mercy,***" as previously explained, your prayers rise like incense before God, requesting the abundant divine mercy of God.

You may pray inaudibly with the deacon's response, and audibly with the congregation to conclude your prayers. For example, when the deacon says, "***Pray for the peace of the one holy, universal and apostolic Orthodox Church of God,***" you may pray inaudibly, "*Lord have mercy on the Church from internal divisions or external persecutions or from worldly spirits and evil currents,*" then when the congregation respond, "***Lord have mercy,***" everybody asks God to have mercy on the Church and her congregation.

Do this with the rest of the prayers, so your prayers become focused and fervent, and not monotonous.

Absolution

After completing the litanies, the congregation prays, "***Our Father who art in heaven...***" Pray with contemplation, as this is the special prayer taught to us by our beloved Lord. It is a prayer which asks for all our physical and spiritual needs.

When the deacon says, "***Bow your heads before the Lord,***" bow your head and accept the absolution from the priest of God, according to the authority given to him from God by the laying of the apostolic hand and the breath of the Holy Spirit.

The priest says three absolutions - two inaudibly while facing the east and standing in front of the altar and the third is said audibly facing the west. The priest asks for the absolution and forgiveness for the believers, the servants of God, who are bowing their heads before His holy glory, bowing before His mighty, holy hand.

During these absolutions, think about your sins, asking God to forgive them. Think about your weaknesses and request God to heal them. Pray inaudibly some prayers of repentance such as :

✠ **Psalm of Repentance - "*Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving kindness, according to the multitude of Your tender mercies...*"**

✠ The prayer of Manasseh the King, who implored to the Lord his God, humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers who heard his supplication : "***O Lord, God of our fathers, of Abraham and Issac and Jacob and their***

righteous posterity, You who have made heaven and earth with all their order, who has shackled the sea by Your word of command, has confined the deep and sealed its mouth with Your glorious name, at whom all things shudder and tremble before Your power, for Your glorious splendor cannot be borne, and the wrath of Your threat to sinners is irresistible, yet immeasurable and unsearchable is Your promised mercy, for You are the Lord Most High, of great compassion, long suffering and merciful, and righteous altogether, who sorrows for my evil. You, O Lord, according to Your great goodness has promised repentance and forgiveness to those who have sinned against You, and in multitude of Your mercies. You have appointed repentance for sinners, that they may be saved. Therefore, You O Lord, God of the righteous has not appointed repentance for the righteous, for Abraham and Issac and Jacob, who did not sin against You, but You have appointed repentance for me, who am a sinner. For the sins I have committed are more than the sands of the sea; my transgressions are too many O Lord they are multiplied! I am unworthy to look up to the heights of heaven because of the multitude of my iniquities. I am weighed down with many an iron felter, so that I am rejected because of my sins, and I have no relief, for I have provoked Your wrath and have done what is evil in Your sight. Setting up abominations and multiple offences. And now I bend the knee for Your kindness. I have sinned O Lord, I have sinned, and I know my transgressions. I earnestly beseech You, forgive me, O Lord, forgive me. Do not destroy me with my transgressions. Do not be angry with me forever or remember my iniquities, do not condemn me to the depths of earth, for You, O

Lord, are the God of those who repent, and in me You will declare Your goodness; for unworthy as I am, You will save me in Your great mercy, and I will praise You continually all the days of my life.”

✠ **A prayer of repentance from the Agbia** - *“My Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ, treasure of mercy and spring of salvation, I come to You confessing my sins. I confess that, insolently, I dared to defile Your Holy Sanctuary with my sins. Now I seek Your mercy and love, for Your mercies sake.”* During the prayer, we must contemplate on the following :

- The prayer for the departed is said during the evening incense (specifically at sunset) to remind us that we shall join the departed, so we need to be ready for that day;
- To ask the departed to pray for us that God will help us complete our earthly struggle peacefully;
- To remember the resurrection as when the priest says, ***“Raise up their bodies also, on the day which you have appointed, according to Your true promises, which are without lie.”*** We believe that the resurrection will come for us, as God will appear to recompense each one according to their deeds.

After completing the litany, the priest proceeds around the altar once, then proceeds around the church, raising incense towards the gospels, icons, tabernacle and congregation.

The priest places his cross on each person blessing them saying, ***“The blessing of the incense be with us. Amen.”***

Meanwhile, the congregation must pray a true repentance saying, *"I ask You my Master Jesus Christ to forgive my sins, which I have committed knowingly and unknowingly."*

The priest once again raises the incense at the altar praying inaudibly for our repentance saying, *"O God who accepted the confession of the thief on the cross..."*

Solomon prayed a similar prayer for his people saying, *"...And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment..."* (Hebrews 9: 27).

You ought to know that only the repentants who deserve forgiveness, benefit from these absolutions, and it resembles the prayers of the Lord Jesus on the Cross, when He prayed for the forgiveness of those who were crucifying Him : *"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do"* (Matthew 23:34). Very few benefit from this prayer or absolution, like St. Longinus who repented and believed in Christ and was a great martyr.

Sing with the Church at the end of the service hymns, which are usually in the Coptic language, and have great meaning : *"Amen. Alleluia. Glory be to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forever, and to the ages of ages, Amen." We proclaim and ask the Lord Jesus Christ to bless the waters of the river* (this statement varies according to seasons and Church celebrations). *May Your mercy and Your peace be a fortress unto Your people, save us and have mercy on us. Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy, Lord bless us, Amen. Bless me. We offer*

unto You a 'metania' (repentance). Forgive me. Then say the blessing.

Go towards the priest, and kiss the Cross and gospel he is holding, then his hand.

- ✠ Kiss the Cross as a sign of your love to the Cross and renewal of your covenant with the Crucified Lord who forgave your sins (by the absolution read by the priest) through the worthiness of His blood shed on the Cross;
- ✠ Kiss the Gospel as a sign of submission to the Gospel of God, promising to fulfill His Commandments;
- ✠ Kiss the hand of the priest as a sign of your respect and sanctification of the priesthood of God and the divine Sacraments held by the hand of the priest, also as a sign of your submission and love to the priest as your spiritual father who watches your salvation as he is the visible means of getting this great grace of forgiveness of sins through the authority given to him from God and the absolution he reads for the repentants.

The priest then holds the Cross with his right hand and the Gospel in his left hand, lifts it above his head for blessing and says, "***May God have compassion on us...***"

During the blessing, bow your heads to accept the blessing in humility and need. At the end, proclaim with the congregation, "***Amen, ese-shobi,***" meaning "***Amen, let it be***", acknowledging all the priest blessings for you and others through the intercessions and prayers of the saints,

then pray with the congregation the "*Our Father...*" reverently.

The Release

When the priest releases the congregation, proceed towards the sanctuary, bow and kiss the veil of the temple, before going in peace.

If you have an appointment for confession, take a corner in church, until the priest is ready, then proceed, taking your turn for the mystery of repentance, which is one of the Seven Sacraments of the church.

CONFESSION

One of the most important individual roles of a priest, is the confession session with his congregation, through which he can get into contact with each individual privately.

Confession is the true Christian discipleship, which qualifies the believer to all the spiritual graces, supporting them in all their spiritual growth. One of these spiritual graces is the Holy Communion.

When our Lord Jesus Christ instituted the Lordly supper in the upper room in Zion, He only gave the Holy Communion to His disciples. Likewise, no one should partake of the Holy Communion except those who are disciples of Christ, and who have a confession father, for through him we learn spiritual practices and Christian virtues.

When the priest starts the confession session, take your turn and wait.

While waiting, keep yourself busy with some spiritual readings, so that you might keep your mind free of any evil thoughts, or the temptations of the devil, who at that particular moment will try his utmost to prevent you from confessing, and hence consequently prevent you from receiving the Holy Communion.

When it is your turn, approach in reverence, kissing the cross and the priest's hand. You should be ready for confession, keeping in mind, or on a piece of paper, the sins you are going to confess, as well as the questions you want to ask.

Confess your sins in detail, and do not hide anything, regardless of how embarrassing the sins may be. Remember the Apostle's words: ***“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from our unrighteousness”*** (1 John 1:9). Do not condemn others, or circumstances around you, or justify yourself, for ***“If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us”*** (1 John 1:10).

Confess all your sins, as the Prophet says, ***“Pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord”*** (Lamentations 2:19). The Prophet used the metaphor of “water” specifically, because water never leaves any traces or marks in the cup after it is poured out. Likewise, when your confession is complete and honest, it will never leave any stains inside of your heart.

You should know that you are confessing before God, not before a human being, because the Holy Spirit is present at that moment to listen and grant forgiveness.

The priest is like a spiritual doctor, who will help cure you of your sins and weaknesses by giving you advice to your problems, for as the Apostle said: ***“Confess your trespasses to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed”*** (James 5:16).

The same way that a patient never hides any illness from their doctor, so that the doctor can give the appropriate medication, we must be even more honest with our priest in describing our spiritual illnesses, so that he can help us in our spiritual life and growth.

Remember King Solomon's words: "***He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy***" (Proverbs 28:13).

Repentance is a second baptism. St Athanasius the Apostolic says, "*As a baptised person is enlightened with the grace of the Holy Spirit, so also he who confesses his sins through the priest, receives remission of sins through the grace of Christ.*"

After you finish confessing, kneel before the priest in reverence, pray one or so of the prayers mentioned before, such as Psalm 51, King Menassah's prayer, or the prayer of Repentance in the Agbia, then say the "***Our Father...***"

Repeat these prayers in contriteness, humility and hope in the forgiveness of your sins, so that you might not repeat them again.

During this, the priest puts the holy cross on your head, praying the three absolutions, the blessing, then the "***Our Father...***"

✠ In the first absolution he asks for God's help, support and grace be upon you, in order to give you the strength and power to crush Satan and his wicked tricks under your feet quickly.

✠ In the second absolution, he asks God to grant you His divine grace and peace, which you lost because of your sins.

He also asks God to return you once more to His fear, so that you will choose the way of holiness which is Christ, rather than the way of destruction which is with the evil one.

He asks God to grant you here on earth His divine riches, such as the Holy Bible, the Holy Communion, and an inheritance in His eternal kingdom, as well as granting us earthly comfort, so that our good Lord may smell the sweet aroma of the incense of thanksgiving arising up from you, and being presented before His throne.

Finally, he asks God to bestow on you the various spiritual virtues, so that you, together with the priest, might deserve the Kingdom of Heaven.

✠ In the third absolution, he asks for many gifts and blessings for you:

- That God may grant you His rich mercy
- That God may cut all the bondages of sins, so that Christ might free you, ***“Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed”*** (John 8:36). When you feel the grace and freedom of Christ, you can say with the Psalmist, ***“You have loosened my bonds, I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord, now in the presence of all His people, in the court’s of the Lord’s house, in the midst of you O Jerusalem”*** (Psalm 116:16-19).
- He asks for the absolution and forgiveness of all the sins you have committed, saying, ***“If we have committed any sin against You, whether knowingly or unknowingly, or through anguish of heart, in deeds or words, O Master who knows the weakness of men, grant us forgiveness, purify us and absolve us.”*** Here, the priest asks for the grace of the

forgiveness of sin, absolution, blessing and purity, as effective remedies for the wounds of sin.

- Then he asks for permanent protection for us from falling into sin once more, this protection is the fear of God, as He says, ***“Fill us with Your fear.”***
- He asks that your journey in the world be towards God, and not towards the world and its lusts, so he says, ***“Direct us to Your good will.”***
- Stand up, my repentant one, after bowing, feeling the greatness of the gift of forgiveness, kiss the cross and the priest’s hand, depart from this divine meeting amidst the praising of the heavenly hosts, and the rejoicing of the saints.
- Go to your house in peace, thanking the Lord for His numerous graces and mercies bestowed on you.

You might repeat the following Psalm 124:

“If it had not been the Lord who was on our side,” Let Israel now say – “If it had not been the Lord who was on your side, when men rose up against us, then they would have swolled us alive when their wrath was kindled against us; then the waters would have overwhelmed us, the stream would have gone over our soul, then the swollen waters would have gone over our soul. Blessed be the Lord who has not given us prey to their teeth, but our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of fowlers. The snare is broken and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord who name heaven and earth.”

Upon arriving at your house, pray your usual daily prayers, have a light supper, and prepare yourself for the Holy Communion the next day.

Sleep early, so that you might be able to wake up early the next morning, and go to church, according to His precious promise: ***“I love those who love Me, and those who seek Me diligently will find Me, riches and honour are with Me”*** (Proverbs 8:17,18).

God loves those who get up early to meet Him, and pray with Him, remembering His words to Moses the Prophet: ***“So be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself to Me there on the top of the mountain...Then Moses rose early in the morning, and went up to Mount Sinai as the Lord had commanded him”*** (Exodus 34:2-4).

Notes on the Mystery of Confession:

Some people are used to confessing during the Liturgy's readings, but this, however, is inappropriate because of the shortness of time, especially if the priest is serving alone. In addition, this does not give enough chance for you to confess all your sins, nor give the priest enough time to give you the appropriate spiritual practices or advices.

What is more dangerous is that some people do not confess at all, but still proceed to the Holy Communion, asking only that the priest give them the absolution. With great sorrow, some priests approve of giving the absolution, without asking these

people whether they have confessed or not. These people are adding to their sins, which will lead to a horrible judgement.

Now I wonder... What is the use of the absolution without confession? Is it a magical prescription to forgive unconfessed sins?

Also, there is another strange attitude amongst members of our churches, and that is, people who have already confessed, come early to church, and still ask for absolution... Why? I hope that the priests might correct this common mistake.

You should know, my beloved, that if you go to church after the Gospel reading, you cannot have Holy Communion, as is taught by the church rites. If you come between the readings of the Matin Absolution and the Absolution of Servants, and the reading of the Gospel, do not ask for an individual absolution for the following reasons:

- i. You have already confessed, and are ready because the priest has previously prayed the absolution for you;
- ii. The priest shall pray general absolutions for everyone after the Fraction Prayers. So, because you will not be present and you will offer true repentance with the whole church, you are not in need for individual absolution.

MIDNIGHT PRAYERS AND MIDNIGHT PRAISE

Some churches practice midnight prayers and 'Tasbeha' (praise) during its normal ritual time, that is, at dawn on the day of the Holy Mass. The Midnight Prayers are followed by the Matins and the Divine Liturgy.

Some churches have the Midnight Prayer and Tasbeha after Vespers, and conclude about 11pm when the congregation go home. They then return early the following morning to pray the First Hour of the Agbia.

In many cases a person can organise their time to attend the Midnight Prayer and Tasbeha.

Your attendance during the Midnight Prayer - whether at night or at dawn - is of great spiritual benefit and gives preparation (psychological, mental and spiritual) to attend the Mass and receive the Holy Communion. If you miss any of the services in preparation for the Mass, there might be a lack in the expected spiritual benefit of the Mass.

1. Midnight Prayers

Its aim is to meditate on the divine teachings and heavenly laws that lead a person to repentance and preparation for the day of Judgment.

The three services in this prayer represent the three times that Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-44).

✠ **The First Service** - Psalm 119 speaks entirely about the word of God; the laws, testimonies, commandments and statutes. This psalm advises us to take care and keep the commandments of God and practice them in order to live as God wants us to.

We find a young man cleansing his way by taking heed of God's word which, ***“I have hidden in my heart, that I may not sin against You.”***

The Gospel of the ten virgins advises the believers to be vigilant in order to be prepared to receive the true bridegroom Jesus Christ, who will lead us to repentance, purity and, ***“holiness, without which no one will see the Lord”*** (Hebrews 12:14).

✠ **The Second Service** - The psalms of the Sunset Prayer are read with the exception of the first two. They call us to repentance.

The Gospel is about the sinful woman who loved Jesus much and struggled with tears, humility and love until her sins were forgiven.

The Psalms and the Gospel speak of repentance which is the aim of every believer. We should try to be like the sinful woman in her complete repentance. ***“Resist to bloodshed, striving against sin”*** (Hebrews 12:4).

The church teaches us in the Troparia to ask of God to make us worthy to be like this repentant woman, and like her, hear the words: ***“Your sins are forgiven. Go in peace.”***

By repentance, the believer becomes prepared to see the Lord Jesus Christ on the day of Judgment and live with the Lord in His eternal kingdom.

✠ **The Third Service** - The Psalms of the Twelfth Hour are read. These Psalms are ones of praise and rejoice, for the coming of the Lord is near, at which time He will reward His faithful servants.

In the Gospel our beloved Lord Jesus assures us saying, ***“Do not fear little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”*** But He does not give the kingdom except to honest servants who watch their Master’s possessions, who keep His commandments and guard their salvation and the souls of the servants their companions. But the servants who are neglectful, who prefer worldly cares, eating, drinking and getting drunk, their Master will come on a day they do not expect and will cut them off from His flock and appoint their portion with the unbelievers and devils.

Thus the believer ought to warn himself with these things, while praying the Troparia saying, ***“Wake up my soul and be careful, your judgment is present - consider the awesome time of judgment!”***

2. **Midnight Tasbeha**

Following the Midnight Praise, believers start the Midnight Tasbeha. I advise you, my beloved, to partake in these praises. Pray with all your heart, these beautiful Coptic tunes. When you learn the praises and partake in chanting them you will find them to be a source of great and overflowing spiritual comfort, and you will gain the saying: *“Blessed are those who dwell in Your house, they will be praising You”* (Psalm 84:4). Remember the Psalmist saying: *“Those who seek Him will praise the Lord”* (Psalm 22:26). If you seek the Lord and yearn for a loving relationship with Him, partake in praising and glorifying Him and rejoice with the Psalmist saying, *“My mouth shall praise You with joyful lips”* (Psalm 63:5).

Midnight Tasbeha during all the days of the year is composed of :-

1. **“TEN-THENO”** : the same as what is said after Psalm 50 in the Midnight Prayer. In the Tasbeha it is said in Coptic tunes with special verses. The church urges us to awake from idleness and praise the Lord of Hosts and ask Him to accept us and forgive us our sins.
2. The **FIRST HOAS** : is the song of Moses the prophet which he sang with the Israelites after crossing the Red Sea (Exodus 15). As Moses saved the Jews from the bondage of Pharaoh, the Lord Jesus saved us from the dominion of Satan and the tempestuousness of the world. Therefore we ought to praise Him at all times.

3. The **SECOND HOAS** : is Psalm 135, with the chorus: *“Thank the Lord for the Lord is good and His mercy endures forever.”* This is repeated at the end of every verse of the Hoas. The Hoas is a thanksgiving praise by the church to God for His goodness and His everlasting mercy.

4. The **THIRD HOAS** : is the song of the three young men in the fiery furnace. The church sings this hymn as if to lead the whole creation, earthly and heavenly to praise and glorify God. There are two chorus in the Third Hoas :-

- *‘More blessed and more exalted forever’* repeated six times;
- *‘Praise Him and exalt Him forever’* repeated 34 times. Total is 40, which is a perfect number, symbolising the perfect praise offered by the church to her God.

5. **CONGREGATION OF SAINTS** : The struggling church here on earth asks for the intercessions and prayers of the victorious church together with all her saints: St Mary the mother of God, then the angels, the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs and saints. Doxologies are then said in the same manner of commemoration to glorify the saints and ask for their prayers.

6. The **FORTH HOAS** : is comprised of the last three psalms : 148, 149, 150. It resembles the Third Hoas regarding the leadership of the church and the whole of creation praising and glorifying God.

7. **EPSALIA** : every day of the week has a special Epsalia which serves and glorifies the name of our Lord. It has a

fixed response at its beginnings and its end so that the congregation may respond easily. For the various church seasons, such as the fasts, the Lordly Feasts, feasts of saints, etc, there are specific Epsalias to serve the occasion.

8. **THEOTOKIA** : these are seven. There is a Theotokia for every day of the week. It is a special glorification for St Mary the mother of God, glorifying the mystery of the divine incarnation and the miraculous virgin birth. It also includes symbols and prophecies about St Mary, her pregnancy, and her giving birth to the incarnated God for our salvation. The word 'Theotokia' comes from the Greek word 'Theotokos', meaning the Mother of God. Every Theotokia concludes with its unique part, expressing the meaning of the words.

9. **DEPHNAR** : resembles the Sinaxarium in that it commemorates feast days of saints with praises for them.

10. **CONCLUSION** : concludes the wonderful Midnight Tasbeha. The 'ADAM' is the tune chanted on Sundays, Mondays and Tuesdays. 'WATOS' is the tune chanted on Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. 'Adam' is the first word in the Monday praise. The 'ADAM' tunes are reviving and uplifting, reflecting what Sunday expresses in our church - the victory of resurrection, and Monday which signifies renewal. The word 'WATOS' is the first word in Thursday's Tasbeha. The Watos tunes are more solemn than the Adam tunes, and hence reflects the days its expresses : Wednesday was the day in which Judas plotted against Christ. Thursday was the day when the Lord was delivered into their hands. Friday was the day of crucifixion, and Saturday was the day Christ's body lay in the tomb.

11. **THE CREED** : followed by Amen, Lord have mercy, with its wonderful humble tune.

12. The priest prays the Midnight Absolution audibly while the congregation listens carefully to this beautiful prayer which pleads for everything and everyone.

THE MATINS OR MORNING INCENSE

This begins with the morning service which is instituted to commemorate the hour at which our Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead on Sunday morning. We thank the Lord who let us pass the night in peace and kept us safe until morning. The church teaches us to pray persistently and fervently, and this is evident when we begin our prayer by saying:

O Come , let us worship,

O Come, let us ask Christ our God (we are requesting)

O Come, let us worship,

O Come, let us ask Christ our King (our request becomes stronger)

O Come, let us worship,

O Come, let us implore Christ our Saviour (imploring Christ means we are pleading to Him for help)

This is according to the teachings of our good Saviour, when He said; ***"Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened"*** (Matthew 7:7,8).

One of the saints said, *"I have a habit of collecting my thoughts and calling them to prayer saying, let us worship Him, let us kneel down before Christ our God."*

In this prayer, the Church draws a plan for us to follow throughout the struggles of the day. Its aim is to guide our thoughts to the fourth chapter of the Epistle of St. Paul to

the Ephesians, so that we may meditate on his words and apply them to our duties and relations during the day...

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to have a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit just as you were called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism."

As we recite this prayer in the early morning, we read the Gospel of St. John, chapter 1, which says, ***"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."*** At this time, the sun begins to rise and when it appears, it reminds us of God our True Light who gives light to every man who comes into the world. This is what we say in the first contemplative Troparia of the Morning Prayer. In the second Troparia, we ask God to enlighten our senses and thoughts by saying :

"When the morning hour approaches, O Christ our God, the True Light, let the senses and thoughts of the light shine upon us, and let us not be covered by darkness." In the third Troparia, we glorify the Virgin Mother of True Light coming to the world, by saying: ***"You are the honourable Mother of the light. Everywhere under the sun, people offer you glorification, the Mother of God, the second heaven."***

After completing the Morning Prayer, the congregation pray the morning Doxology. This is a wonderful prayer, rich in meaning. We sing it with joyful hearts and we may liken it to

a brilliant piece of symphony. Its rich meaning compliments the Morning Prayer. We say two complete Troparia from those of the Morning Prayer and we also pray the following : ***"Have mercy upon us according to Your will forever. The night had passed away, we thank You O Lord and ask You to keep us this day without sin and deliver us."***

✠ In this dawn, facilitate our inner and outer ways by Your joyful protection.

✠ By your peace, O Christ Our God, You passed us through the night and brought us to the beginning of this day because we trusted You.

✠ What is good and what is beautiful except brothers dwelling together in unity.

✠ Agreed in true evangelical love like the Apostles.

✠ Like the precious oil on the Head of Christ, running down on the beard, running down on the edge of His garments and feet.

✠ Those whom the Holy Spirit united together, like a violin, praising God at all times.

Why don't you meditate on all these meanings, my beloved, while you pray the Morning Prayer, and sing the wonderful morning Doxology which lifts you spiritually up to the heavens.

After completing the morning Doxology, the priest begins the raising of the morning incense, which resembles the evening incense, except for minor differences, for example :

In the evening incense, the priest prays the litany for the departed, while in the morning incense of Matins, he prays two litanies:

i. **Litany for the sick** - According to St. John Chrysostom, the church is considered like a hospital, and usually it is in the morning when the hospital opens its doors to welcome the sick and heal them. During the litany for the sick, pray for anyone you know who may be sick, whether they are relatives, friends or neighbours. Remember them by name and ask for them to be relieved of their sickness. Then pray with the congregation in the response, "***Lord have mercy***" fervently and with humility so that God may accept your prayers for those you have mentioned and will have mercy on them and heal them.

ii. **Litany for the travellers** - this is said in the morning, for in the past, people travelled during the daytime for reasons of good visibility and less risk of encountering criminals along the way. Of course that was well before travel became possible during night time. King David the psalmist said, "***When the sun rises man goes out to his work and to his labour until evening***" (Psalm 104:22,23).

While reciting the litany for travellers, remember not only those you know who are travelling, but also those who may have migrated to a foreign country. Ask the Lord to keep them safe and accompany them throughout their journeys, so that they may return to their homes joyful and safe. Then pray with the congregation in the response, "***Lord have mercy.***"

On Sundays and feast days, we replace the litany for travellers with the litany for the oblations, as the church assumes that during these days, all of its children attend the church for prayer and celebration bringing their oblations and offerings. The church lifts up these oblations, offerings and prayers to God so that He may accept them and reward each person with the heavenly instead of the earthly, and the eternal instead of the temporal.

While reciting the prayer for the oblations, we plead with the Lord to accept all our offerings, whether they be money, time, effort, love, or anything we may sacrifice for the sake of God, *"hidden or manifest, those in abundance and those in scarcity, to the needy brothers of Christ. May God accept their offerings and bestow on them the grace of happy life in this age, and eternal life in His Kingdom."*

Then the morning incense prayer follows in the manner of the evening incense in the prayer of EVNOT-NAI-NAN (God have mercy upon us). This is followed by the litany of the Gospel, the five short litanies, the absolution and finally, the blessing.

My beloved, attend the prayers of the Matins with reverence, following every prayer and litany with your Liturgy book, as you did during the Vespers.

May God open our minds and our hearts to contemplate on what the Spirit says to the churches.



2 The Offertory

LITURGY OF THE CATECHUMENS OR DOCTRINAL LITURGY

Donning the Service Vestments :

The liturgy of catechumens begins with the priest blessing his vestments and the vestments of the deacons. This is done three times with the sign of the cross. Then the priest and the deacons start donning their beautiful white vestments which symbolise purity of the heart and life. During this process, all pray Psalm 29, “ *I will praise you, O Lord....*” and Psalm 92, “ *The Lord reigns, He is clothed with majesty....*”.

The above mentioned Psalms embraces many befitting statements for donning priestly vestments and preparation for ministering to the divine Sacraments. For example, in Psalm 29, it is written:-

- ✠ “*I will praise you, O Lord, for You have lifted me up...*” As this is said, all the servants are thanking the Lord before entering His Holies and serving His Sacraments, thanking the Lord for making him worthy to serve Him, despite his unworthiness. Thus, he is praising, glorifying and blessing the name of the Lord.

- ✠ “*Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.*” This Psalm speaks about weeping for repentance and remorse for all sins and confessing them before the priest of God the night before, so as to be prepared for Holy Communion. In the morning, all enter the Sanctuary in joy as the Psalmist says, “*Then I will go*

onto the altar of God, onto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise You, O God my God" (Psalm 43:4). The servants respond ***" You have turned for me my mourning into joy; You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, to the end that my glory may sing praise to You and not be silent."***

If the believer repents to God in humility and with a contrite spirit, God will turn their mourning into tears of joy and happiness, for the salvation which Christ has given us from the bondage of sin and evil. The Lord will take off the sackcloth of sorrow and cloth him with the purified white vestments of priesthood to serve the Lord in the temple of Holiness. Thus, he sings with joy because he has proven he has resisted sin and therefore can receive the Holy Communion in order to protect himself from Satanic wars. During this, Psalm 23 is prayed: ***"You prepare a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over."***

✠ In Psalm 92, the Psalmist says: ***"The Lord reigns, He is clothed with majesty; the Lord is clothed with strength..."*** When the priest or deacons wear the white vestments for service, they confess that the Lord is clothed with majesty and girded with power; hence He is the king of the whole earth. And the deacons and priests are like the servant angels who appeared at the tomb of Christ. While wearing the white vestments to administer the Sacraments and receive Holy Communion, he is girded with strength to win in his struggle, as promised in Revelation 3:5 ***"He that overcomes, the same shall be clothed in white garments; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life..."***

All altar servants, whether priests or deacons wear the white vestments to resemble the angels in the way they look and praise, and thus they convert the earth to heaven and the Church to the heavenly Jerusalem , ***"Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary."*** Psalm 96 in the Third Hour prayer says, ***"Whenever we stand in Your holy temple, we are considered as those who abide in heaven"***. In the church, prayers are said, the Holy Spirit dwells on the Sacraments, and the church is filled with heavenly bright angels as truly this is the house of God and should be adorned in Holiness forever.

✠ Dear brother, if you are a deacon, do not bury this gift and leave this holy ministry. Prepare yourself with the appropriate clothing, bring it with you when you come to church for service, come forward reverently to the priest, so he can bless the vestments. Then wear the purified vestment and read the two Psalms contemplating on their meaning. It is important to note that a deacon is not permitted to wear his vestment without a blessing from the priest, as the blessing of the vestments by the celebrant priest has two meanings :

- Blessing the vestments and sanctifying them by prayers with the sign of the cross, thus the priest blesses the servant;
- The priest is giving his permission for the deacon to serve and have Holy Communion.

In the past, one deacon asked the saintly Father Barsonofius (Sixth Century saint), *"Father, as you are ordaining me to serve around the holy altar, tell me what to think about while standing in front of God and helping serve with the priest, especially if I am holding the Holy Chalice? And should I have a specific garment for the altar service?"*

The Saint answered, *"My son, these are spiritual matters as the deacon must be like the Cherubim, all eyes and mind thinking about heavenly matters. This should be done in awe and fear praising God while carrying the blood of the eternal King. He is like the Cherubim who proclaims the TASBEHA guarding the fearful sacrament like what the angels do in heaven with their wings. Remember those wings signify the enlightening of the mind from the heavy earthly matters to blissful heavenly matters, crying without fatigue in his inner self, proclaiming the TASBEHA of victory for the majestic glory of God, praying reverently saying: Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts, Heaven and Earth are full of your Holy Glory."*

From the voice of this awesome preaching, the devil falls and escapes in fear from the mention of God's name, his hosts also escape shamefully and the soul becomes free from their dominion. Thus, then the soul can recognise the TRUE LIGHT and know Gods beauty and splendour. It then yearns to be filled with His Holy Body and Blood to enjoy the voice of David the prophet : ***"Taste and see that the Lord is good."*** Then the soul rejoices and glorifies the Lord, as one has become purified by the precious Body and Blood of Christ, which protects the soul from all pain and anguish.

Thus, when you stand to serve the Holy Sacraments, or are carrying the holy censor, or are folding the altar garments, or

organising the altar and its coverings, or if you accompany a priest who carries the Holy Obligation to a sick person, as a deacon, you should always be in awe and always keep in your mind and thoughts constantly that you are a Cherubim who is consecrated for the service.

As for the garment, obtain for yourself a spiritual garment with which you can please God. About being a deacon the church says, *"Now after being a deacon, which is of a higher rank than that of Leviticus, who served the vanishing sacraments, you are serving in the rank of St Stephen, in the holy altar on which the pure Body and sacred Blood of our beloved Saviour is placed."*

CANONICAL PRAYERS OF THE HOURS

Once completing the donning of the vestments for the Liturgy service, the prayer of the Canonical hours are said from the Agbia.

- i. Each Sunday throughout the year that falls on non-fasting days, the third and sixth hour prayers are said.
- ii. During the weekdays of all other fasts, the third, sixth and ninth hour prayers are said.

The following, is a contemplation on the meaning of the third and sixth hour prayers, as we previously contemplated on the ninth hour prayer in the Vespers.

Saint Paul, said to his children of the church in Galatia, *"My little children, of whom I labour in birth again until Christ*

is formed in you" (Galatians 4:19). This means, I sacrifice for you by teaching you the word of life and salvation, placing the image of Christ before you, always to remind you of the incidents of the Lord's life, from His birth, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. Reminding you of His words and teachings so that Christ might be formed in you and that your faith can become stronger in Christ. The church implements this with her children. This is reflected in the seven prayers in the Agbia, where the believer prays daily, contemplating and recalling Christ. Thus, Christ is formed and His image vivid in their minds, incidents, daily sayings, etc. The teachings of Christ are alive in their memory all day, every day. As written in Revelation 22:4, ***"And they shall see His face; and His name shall be on their foreheads."***

The Third Hour Prayer

The church instituted these prayers for commemorating these incidents in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ:

- ✠ The condemnation of Jesus Christ before Pilate and the sentence of His crucifixion, despite the witnessing of Pilate regarding His innocence. Jesus did not argue but was silent like a lamb taken to be slaughtered. Psalm 25 in the Third Hour prayer says, ***"Vindicate me O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity. I have also trusted in the Lord, I shall not slip. Examine me O Lord, and prove me."***

- ✠ During the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ to heaven, the Psalmist says, ***"Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His Holy place? He which***

has clean hands, and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol..." (Psalm 23). These are all the qualities of Christ ascending to heaven, standing at the right hand of God. In Psalm 24, King David says, *"Lift up your heads, O you gates; And lift them up, you everlasting doors; And the King of Glory shall come in. Who is the King of Glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory."* This verse is read before the Gospel during the Resurrection Feast.

In this psalm, a multitude of heavenly hosts asks another multitude to lift up the doors of heaven so the King of Glory may enter, who is ascending from the earth. The Lord strong and mighty in battle, has fought and conquered the devil, freeing all the imprisoned, beginning with Adam, and bringing them back to Paradise.

✠ The Holy Spirit came down on the disciples. *"The voice of the Lord is over the world. The voice of the Lord is full of majesty"*, and also *"In His temple everyone says 'Glory'"* (Psalm 28).

- The Gospel of the Third Hour speaks about the promise of the Lord of Glory to send His Holy Spirit to His disciples. He calls Himself the TRUE VINE and we are the branches that grow in Him by the Holy Spirit which we receive in the Sacrament of Confirmation - the Myron. Through this, we bear more fruit.
- In the contemplative Troparia, we ask the Lord not to take His Holy Spirit away from us, but to abide within us. We ask the Holy Spirit, who is the Comforter to dwell within us, through the intercessions of the Mother

of Light St Mary, and the pure apostles, so that we may be purified from iniquity, and the Holy Spirit may give us peace.

- In the Absolution, we thank the Lord God of all mercy and the Lord of all comfort, for raising us up for prayer at this holy hour - the blessed hour in which the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples - and we ask Him to bestow on us the grace of His Holy Spirit to purify us from the iniquities of the body and soul.

Sixth Hour Prayer

The church has instituted this prayer to commemorate the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ, who suffered and died for our salvation. We find in the psalms of the sixth hour verses expressing the sufferings endured by our beloved Lord Jesus Christ.

✠ ***"Save me oh God by Your name...For strangers have risen up against me and oppressors have sought after my life"*** (Psalm 53)

✠ ***"Whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword"*** (Psalm 56)

✠ The cross was the throne for the Lord of Glory who reigned, ***"The Lord reigns, He is clothed with majesty"*** (Psalm 92)

- ✠ ***"Bow down Your ear, Oh Lord and hear me...in the day of my trouble I will call upon You, for You will answer me"*** (Psalm 86)
- The Gospel of the Sixth Hour is the start of the famous Sermon on the Mount. The Lord speaks about the blessings which shall be bestowed on all who share in carrying His cross. For example :-
- ✠ On the cross Jesus was in the depth of spiritual poverty, humility and humiliation, and so through these virtues which He Himself experienced, expresses His words : ***"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."***
- ✠ Christ on the cross was in the depth of sorrow : ***"My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death"*** (Matthew 26:3), and hence He consoles the downcast by saying, ***"Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted."***
- ✠ Christ on the cross was very meek : ***"He was oppressed and was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before His shearers in silence, so He opened not His mouth"*** (Isaiah 53:7). The Lord wants to teach us the virtue of meekness and so says, ***"Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth."***
- ✠ Christ on the cross was hungry and thirsty - not for bread and water, but hungered for our salvation, so He called out, ***"I thirst"*** (John 19:28). And so He blesses those

saying, ***"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled."***

- ✠ The crucifixion of Christ is the apex of Divine mercy for our falling mankind, for on the cross, ***"Mercy and truth have met together"*** (Psalm 84, a Sixth Hour psalm).
- ✠ Out of mercy, our Lord Jesus Christ preferred our salvation to show the kindness of God the Father and His satisfaction about His earthly life, so it is mentioned in the sixth hour Psalm, ***"Because Your loving kindness is better than life"*** (Psalm 62). He sacrificed His life willingly, so that we might enjoy His mercy. For this reason He blesses the merciful saying, ***"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."***
- ✠ Our beloved Lord and God Jesus Christ, whose heart is pure and void of all evil, this purity was manifested on the cross when He asked His Father to forgive His oppressors and enemies saying, ***"Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing"*** (Matthew 23:34).
- ✠ Our beloved Lord Jesus encourages us to live a life of purity in order to become holy as He is holy, saying, ***"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"*** (Matthew 5:8). And in another place it is written, ***"How long will it be until they attain to innocence?"*** (Hosea 8:5).
- ✠ Our beloved Lord established peace on the cross and united the heavenly and the earthly, as the Apostle says, ***"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself,***

not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:19). "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled we shall be saved by His life" (Romans 5:11). And the Apostle Paul proclaims in joy saying, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). Our beloved Lord Jesus wants us to become peace-makers as He reconciled us and made us His ambassadors: "Blessed are the peace makers for they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9).

All His life, our Lord Jesus Christ endured persecution, torture, false accusations and reproach in order to teach by example truth and righteousness. He then endured the torture of crucifixion; the beatings, lashings, false judgments, before violently subjecting Him to the words and most humiliating death of all - the death on the cross. In His love, Christ wants us to share in His suffering: *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* Then He consoles us saying, *"Blessed are you when they revile you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My name's sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven."*

Then in his letter, the Apostle Paul blesses those who are persecuted for righteousness saying, *"If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you"* (1 Peter 4:14), and,

"Because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that you should follow His steps" (1 Peter 2:21).

By the cross He was the Light of the world, attracting all to Him as He said, ***"And I, being lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to Myself"*** (John 12:32). And from the cross He descended to Hades and saved those who were sitting in the darkness and shadow of death, ***"Who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light"*** (1 Timothy 6:16). Despite this, He called us saying, ***"You are the light of the world"*** (Matthew 5:14). Christ ascended the lighthouse of the cross, and so attracted all people from darkness to His light, and here He resembles the believer who puts the light on a lamp stand to give light to all who are in the house.

The contemplations of the Sixth Hour prayer focus on our crucified Lord saying:

***"Break the bonds of our sins Lord Jesus and save us"
"O Lord may all our pains be ended through Your life giving and healing sufferings. May our minds be saved from foolishness and worldly desires to the remembrance of Your heavenly laws."***

This is a very deep request! Take it as practice if evil thoughts attack you, or any foolish desire becomes burdensome for you. Look to the cross and Christ and meditate on His crucifixion which He endured for us; the crown of thorns placed on His holy head, His blood which ran from His wounds, and His side which was pierced. Remember His wounds and proclaim to the Lord, ***"End my pains by Your healing and life giving sufferings"***, and you

will immediately feel the love and help of the Lord, making you victorious.

In the TROPARIA we kneel in contriteness and humility asking for the forgiveness of our sins.

In the absolution we thank God for allowing us to stand in prayer before Him at the time of commemorating His crucifixion for our sake, and we ask Him to give us an unblemished life of peace and goodness in order to please His holy and glorified name forever. Amen.

Father Antonious Ragheb parallels the Canonical hours to a wedding feast by saying, "The introduction of the prayer is the wedding garment that leads our thoughts and emotions to enjoy the delicacies of this feast. This garment is composed of a tunic, belt and shoes."

The tunic is the Lord's prayers granted to us from the Lord of the feast who advised us to pray saying, "***When you pray say 'Our father in heaven'***". A tunic covering us from head to toe covers all our supplications to God, ourselves and others around us, a complete tunic that comforts the righteous soul to wear it in peace and joy.

The belt, or girdle is the prayer of thanksgiving which must surround the Christian completely in all their prayers; giving thanks always for everything in the name of Christ. Through it we declare God's favours to us in everything, and we deny ourselves and confess that all help and support comes from the Almighty God.

The shoes are the Psalm of repentance (Psalm 51); it is a psalm of humility and repentance, asking forgiveness for

what has corrupted us in this world. We pray this Psalm and ask the Lord to enable us to continue travelling through the wilderness of life without being hurt.

This is the garment of the heavenly feast with which the praying faithful enters to its spiritual delicacies of heavenly bread and pure water.

On the spiritual table are many delicious spiritual foods offered by David the Psalmist in his beautiful and contemplative psalms of praise, of thanksgiving and for help, and so on.

Do not just look at the spiritual banquet but also eat from it. Taste of its sweetness and enjoy it so that it may benefit your inner self.

We then find heavenly bread with which we end our spiritual meditation, and this is the Gospel which is appropriate for the hour.

So if you enjoy the pleasures of the Old Testament, and the blessings of the New Testament, you will find in the banquet:

✠ **Pure Water** : meditations suitable for the hour of prayer in the Troparia, so take from this pure water so that you may cool yourself. This banquet has a wonderful spiritual atmosphere.

✠ **Perfumes of holiness and of faith** : we sing the songs of angels, and repeat the faith of the Fathers, during which the Christian person feels that they are sharing with the angels and the saintly fathers in their praise. When you say the Creed, put in your heart that thousands and

thousands of angels are glorifying the Lord of glory, and that you are surrounded with a "*cloud of witnesses*" who have existed throughout the ages. Holiness and faith are beautiful perfumes.

There is incense in the feast: prayers which ascend in a special order. Repeat "*Lord have mercy*" many times. If we repeated 'Lord have mercy' all our life, it would not be enough to ask for God's compassionate mercy. Let its repetition be as spiritual incense, not a mere recitation. Ask mercy for yourself and others. Relay to God all matters that are in need of God's mercy. Pray, "*Lord have mercy upon me and save me from my evil thoughts. Lord have mercy upon me and save me from my absent-mindedness. Lord have mercy upon me and save me from tribulations. Lord have mercy upon me and upon Your church and save her from wolves. Lord have mercy upon me and save all children from the seductions of sin.*"

Hence, your prayers become as incense ascending to God.

You conclude the feast with your heart and mind becoming enlightened by the beauty of your garment. Your prayers which ascend to the heavens are the whispers of a heart that thanks, asks, loves, rejoices, repents and determines in truth.

THE OFFERTORY

✠ Choosing the 'LAMB' presents the agreement of the Divine Trinity to the hypostasis of the 'SON'. This happened to redeem the falling race of Adam. Adam angered God by breaking His commandments to obey the deceit of Satan.

This great divine work which the Lord did for us proves clearly how merciful God is to us. He, "***Did not spare His own Son, But delivered Him up for us all***" (Romans 8:32). And "***For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life***" (John 3:16).

During the offertory the congregation chants "***Lord Have Mercy***" 41 times, fervently until the celebrant priest chooses the 'Lamb'.

The congregation does this to perpetuate the Lord's mercy and sacrificing love, as He had mercy on those who believed, and saved them from the original sin of their ancestor Adam.

The congregation asks the Lord to forgive them their sins which they committed in human weakness, and to fulfil His love to mankind and make them worthy to enjoy the blessing of redemption, forgiveness of sins and inheritance of the kingdom of heaven with the saints.

- ✠ My beloved, pray "*Lord have mercy*" during the OFFERTORY with persistence, asking the 'LAMB' who is without blemish to purify you from every blemish, and to make you worthy to partake of the sacraments and to have eternal life.

- ✠ After completing the "Choice of the 'LAMB'" the priest 'baptises' the 'LAMB' with some water. This is symbolic of the Baptism of Christ. And then the priest recites the names of those whom he wishes to mention, particularly those on whose behalf the offering is raised; whether they be living, departed, sick or in distress. The 'LAMB' of God takes away the sins of the world to deliver them from their troubles and pressures.

- ✠ Come reverently my beloved, and give your name to the priest. Ask him to remember you in his prayers. Write your name on a small piece of paper. Even the names of your dear ones who are in times of trouble, or who are sick, distressed, or sitting exams. The priest will place these papers on the altar, and will ask God to answer peoples prayers according to His will. We often hear from the priests, about the power of the prayer of the Mass and how miraculously fast problems are solved.

- ✠ The priest holds the 'Lamb' wrapped in the silk corporal, above his head while standing at the Royal door facing westward and says : "***Glory and Honour, Honour and Glory to the Holy Trinity...***" You should then kneel down with your head to the ground before the 'Lamb' of GOD until the 'Procession of the Lamb' is completed.

- ✠ The priest starts the Mass by doing the three signs of the cross. Following this is the Prayer of Thanksgiving, and prior to this the priest blesses the congregation with the sign of the cross saying, "***Peace be with you all.***"

You should bow in reverence at every sign of the cross, and make the sign of the cross on yourself until the peace of God is bestowed upon you and sanctifies your body.

- ✠ It is important to understand that the more you participate in the prayers, the more you will be praying in spirit, and therefore feelings of monotony will flee.

- ✠ During the signs of the cross you should bow your head and do the sign of the cross, when they mention thanksgiving you thank the Lord. Upon supplication you should lift your hands and earnestly supplicate God. On the mention of repentance you should beat your chest like the tax collector who remembered his sins.

- ✠ After the procession of the Lamb, the priest says the Thanksgiving Prayer and thanks God who made us

worthy of this grace and partakers of the inheritance of the saints. Services of the Holies are mentioned as well as the Holy Sacrament of Communion which the angels yearn to see.

- ✠ After completing the first part of the thanksgiving prayer, the deacon begins by saying "***Let us Pray.***"
- ✠ So my beloved, why don't you take this special invitation as an opportunity for prayer, so that your spirit can communicate with God.
- ✠ When the congregation chants, "***Lord have Mercy***", partake in this. Ask the Lord to have mercy on you and give you the grace of prayer in Spirit and in your relationship with God. Talk to the Lord with love and try to feel His existence in the church.
- ✠ The deacon then says to the congregation : "***Pray that God may have mercy and compassion upon us, hear us, aid us, and accept the supplications and prayers of His saints on our behalf at all times, and make us worthy to partake of the Communion of His Holy and blessed Mysteries for the forgiveness of our sins.***"

The congregation responds saying, "***Lord Have Mercy.***" During the response of the deacon, you should recite inaudibly: "***Have mercy and compassion on us, hear us and accept Your saintly supplications for my weakness. Give me true repentance Lord to go forward to partake of your Holy blessed Sacraments, without falling into condemnation, and without committing new iniquities to add to my many transgressions, if I unworthily receive communion. Give me forgiveness of my sins, burn my iniquities, heal my physical and spiritual pains, for the growth of my spiritual life. Deepen my life of unity with You.***"

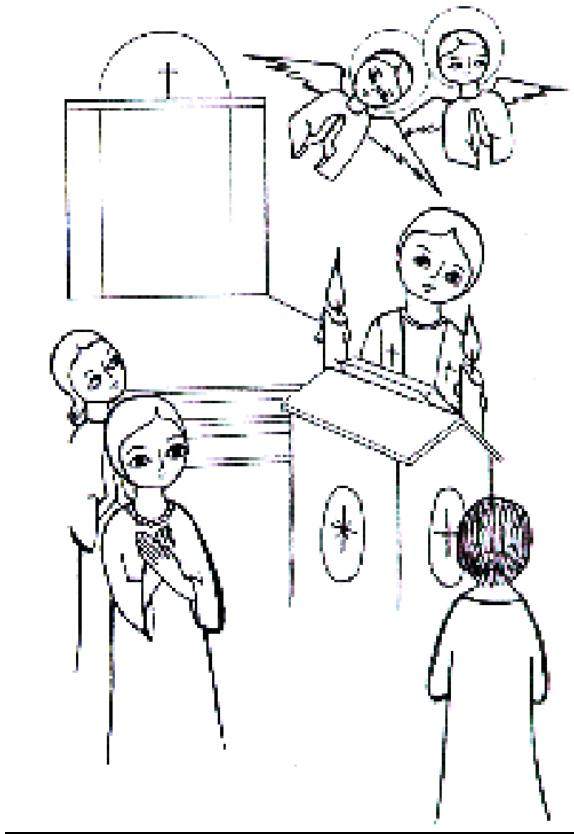
Recite, **“Lord have mercy ”** with the congregation, collecting all your previous requests as the mercy of God is the key to His blessings and grace.

- ✠ Concentrate with the priest as he completes the Prayer of Thanksgiving. Share with him the request to God to give you His divine peace and holy fear to cast away all envy, all temptation, all works of Satan, all intrigues of the wicked, and to grant you the endowments and benefactions to enjoy all blessings, to keep you from tribulations which leads to destruction and being cast out of His Heavenly Kingdom.
- ✠ After completing the Prayer of Thanksgiving, the priest covers the 'LAMB' with a clean corporal, and likewise the Chalice, then covers all the altar with the 'Prosperine' (which is a large altar covering), then he goes out of the sanctuary with the deacons to pray the Absolution of Ministers.
- ✠ All the congregation bow to accept the absolution and forgiveness of sins. During the absolution, pray inaudibly prayers of repentance which were previously mentioned in the Evening Incense.
- ✠ After completing the Absolution, the congregation gain a feeling of forgiveness from their sins for which a collective repentance was given, and they accept this absolution from the priest.
- ✠ The priest enters the sanctuary to start the raising of incense.
- ✠ When the priest comes out with the censor and proceeds to raise incense toward the entire congregation to bless them, repeat the prayer previously mentioned during the procession of the Evening Incense, ***"I ask you my Lord Jesus Christ to forgive my sins which I committed knowingly and unknowingly."***

- ✠ Repent to God with all your heart, so that you benefit from the prayers said by the priest as he is offering incense and blessing the congregation. This is called 'The Mystery of the Confession of the Congregation.'
- ✠ This is repeated in the two processions of incense; during that of the Pauline Epistle and the PRAXIS (Acts of the Apostles). Incense is not raised during the Catholic Epistle reading.
- ✠ During the incense processions, the congregation chant some hymns, such as the hymn of Intercession. This is a chance for you, my beloved, to chant with the congregation, thus you will not be a passive audience, but an active participator. Just because you are not a deacon it does not mean you are not a servant. You should realise this fact when you hear the priest saying in the beginning of the Absolution of Ministers : ***"Your servants - those who serve you on this day- the hegumens, priests, the deacons, the clergy, the whole congregation, and my weakness..."***

You are a servant who partakes in the Mass, and so therefore you must perform your role during the service of the Mass honestly.

It is for your own good to respond with the prayers, for you will feel spiritually revived and feel the comfort of the Lord. In this way, no feelings of boredom or wandering thoughts will be experienced.



3 Liturgy of the Word

READINGS OF THE LITURGY OF THE CATECHUMENS

The liturgy of the catechumens include these readings:

- ✠ **Pauline Epistle** - from Epistles of St. Paul
- ✠ **Catholic Epistle** - from Epistles of St. James, Peter, John and St. Jude.
- ✠ **Praxis** - a chapter from the Acts of the Apostles
- ✠ **Sinaxarium** - including biography of saints of the day
- ✠ **Gospel of the liturgy** - which is chosen from one of the four Gospels and this reading is the focus of all the readings said during the liturgy.
- ✠ **The sermon** - relates to the Gospel reading

The Readings

i. **The Pauline:** is read by the ‘Oghnostos’ (who is at the beginning of the rank of deacons), and the readings are taken from St. Paul's Epistles, sent to specific people such as Timothy, Titus or Philemon, or to specific churches, such as the Romans, Corinthians, Ephesians, and others.

ii. **The Catholicicon:** is read by a senior Oghnostos or ‘Ebizeacon’, because it is taken from the universal epistles. So, St. James’ Epistles is sent to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad (James 1:1). Also, St. Peter's First Epistle is sent to the Pilgrims of Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithignia (Peter 1:1). St. John's First

Epistle is universal, and not specific. St. Jude's Epistle was sent to those who are called sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ (Jude 1:1).

iii. **The Praxis (Acts):** is read by a deacon, because it is the Book of the Apostles' struggle, where they sanctified their lives and blood. It is also the Book of the Holy Spirit's work in the church.

This does not mean that there are priorities of readings, or that some are more important or beneficial than others, because, "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for connection, for instruction in righteous*" (2 Timothy 3:16), but it is just a matter of discipline.

iv. **The Sinixarium:** this is a historical book, so it should be read by the priest himself, to be given the image of the Church's readings in the Liturgy.

v. **The Coptic Gospel:** read by the celebrant priest, who will offer the Lamb, whether he be the Bishop, a Hegumen or a priest, because it is a part of the Liturgy and it teaches us about the sayings and life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

vi. **The Arabic/other language Gospel:** read by a high rank deacon, such as an archdeacon, and it is preferable that he also be the deacon serving in the altar during the Liturgy.

The reason that the Coptic Gospel should be read by the celebrant priest or bishop, while the Arabic Gospel is read by

a deacon, is that the Coptic Gospel is the original reading, but the Arabic (or other) is just a translation of the Coptic.

vii. **The Sermon:** addressed by the highest rank present in Church, that is, the Bishop, or the hegumen or the priest. Sometimes, the priest may give permission to the deacon to give the sermon.

My beloved, listen to these divine readings with concentration, so that they may cure your wounds, answer your queries, and give solutions to your problems. Try to learn a verse or two which attracts your attention during the readings.

Put this verse in your heart, with the Psalmist, saying, "***Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You***" (Psalm 119:2). Put this verse in the three weights of flour, that is, your body, soul and spirit, so that the yeast may work in the dough, thus all your inner and outer senses may be purified, while the priest prays in the Mystery of the Pauline: "***Purify our hearts and sanctify our souls, cleanse us from every sin, which we have done willingly and unwillingly.***"

The Lord has clearly indicated the importance of effective listening to the Divine sayings, in purifying and sanctifying a person, "***You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you***" (John 15:3).

During this time, the priest is also supporting you through his inaudible prayers, which he says on the altar, praying that God may open your mind, and give you understanding to listen and comprehend what the spirit says to the Churches.

So, in the Mystery of the Pauline for example, he says, ***"Grant us and all Your congregation a clear mind, and understanding, in order to know and understand the benefit of Your teachings, which are being read to us now"*** (alluding to St. Paul's Epistle).

In the Mystery of the Gospel, the priest prays for the sake of the congregation saying, ***"...make us worthy to hear Your Holy Gospel and keep Your commandments, to bear fruits a hundredfold, sixty fold and thirty fold through Jesus Christ our Lord..."***, and at the end he says, ***"Your law, rights, commandments, holy orders, confirm them in their hearts, let them know the power and depth of the words they have heard."***

The readings and the sermon are rich meals, don't miss them or ignore listening to them. The word of God is the light to our feet and path, food for our spirits and bodies, as, ***"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God"*** (Matthew 4:4). That is why the Apostle advises us, ***"...not forsaking the assembly of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much more as you see the Day approaching"*** (Hebrews 10:25).

The Hegumen Antonious Ragheb says, ***"The readings resemble the five loaves of bread and two fish: In the Holy Liturgy the five chapters of the Holy Bible which we listen to : the Pauline, Catholicon, Praxis, Psalm and the Gospel, are the loaves of grace, while the two fish are the Sinixarium and the sermon."***

We eat and are filled, we are then to on-pass this grace of God's great mercies to whoever did not attend the Holy Liturgy.

The readings and the sermon prepare the soul, body and spirit to partake of the Holy Communion, so therefore the Church states that whoever is not present for these readings, should not partake of the Holy Communion.

It is written in the book of 'The Principles of the Church Rules' to Ibn El Assal: *"Whoever is late coming to Church, and does not attend the reading of the Gospel, should not partake of the Holy Communion."* St. Sawinis Ibn El Moqagaa says, *"... also whoever misses the readings and the Prayer of Reconciliation from the very beginning will be punished as Judas Iscariot, because the readings and the Holy Liturgy are prepared before the Communion, in order to sanctify the soul and body, thus making a person worthy to partake of the Holy Body and Blood."*



4 The Three Great Litanies

THE THREE GREAT LITANIES

After the sermon, the priest starts praying the three major litanies: of Peace, the Fathers and the Gatherings. These litanies are full of strong pleadings, for the safety of the Church and the whole world, for protecting the Church's fathers, and for the gatherings of the church, so that they may be conducted without any obstacles from the Church's enemies or devils, or the inner diversions and bad counsels.

Concentrate on each word said by the priest, and say, "*Amen O Lord*" always after each prayer said for the church, the fathers or the gatherings of the believers. You should also pray some inaudible prayers, as done during the litanies of the Vesper and Matin incense, as explained before. Then repeat with the congregation the universal prayer, "*Lord have mercy*" in enthusiasm believing and asking the Lord to respond to all the pleadings of the priest, said during these litanies.

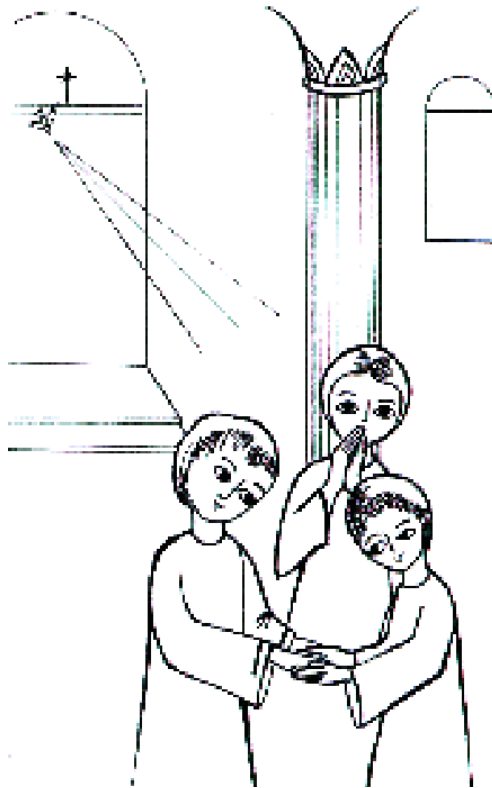
THE LITURGY OF THE BELIEVERS

This is the most important part of the Mass. It is considered the holiest of the holy, for which we prepare from the evening Vespers in order to make us worthy to be prepared physically, psychologically and spiritually, so that we may benefit and feel consoled.

The Liturgy of the Believers begins with the **ORTHODOX CREED** recited by the whole church, audibly and in one voice, in a powerful and effective manner. Reciting the

Orthodox Creed at the beginning of the Liturgy of the Believers is of utmost importance to ensure that we please God, ***"Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him"*** (Hebrews 11:6). By reciting the Orthodox Creed we declare our faith in one God in the Holy Trinity, the work of redemption fulfilled by His only begotten Son, and the work of the Holy Spirit in our sanctification and purification.

My beloved, recite the Orthodox Creed with the whole church carefully. Believe every word as it is the fruit of the work of great Ecumenical Councils instituted by great church fathers who were guided by the Holy Spirit.



5 Prayer Of Reconciliation

5. PRAYER OF RECONCILIATION

By entering into the Prayer of Reconciliation, we enter into the real environment of the holy Mass and we must pay attention to stand in reverence and fear. We shall mention some contemplations to help you in concentration and meditation, but I advise you not to worry about contemplations alone, but let the tunes of the liturgy console you as it is splendid in spirit, even if the priest partly prays in the Coptic language, and you may not understand.

With everyone reciting their own parts quietly and reverently, the exchangeable harmony of the Liturgy between priest, deacon and congregation, will make each person in the church feel closer to heaven than to earth and puts them in a state of true transfiguration and communication with God.

This prayer is called the "Prayer of Reconciliation" as the priest mentions the wonderful work of Jesus to reconcile man with his creator, *"For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace"* (Ephesians 2:14,15), and, *"Made peace through the blood of His cross"* (Colossians 1:20).

He also mentions the story of salvation made by the Lord Jesus for mankind when He destroyed that death which entered into the world through the envy of the devil, and He filled the earth with peace which is from heaven.

My beloved, be thankful to the Lord while listening to these marvellous words of the Prayer of Reconciliation. Consider the salvation made by the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross and keep it personal for me and you, as the Apostle said, "***The Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me***" (Galatians 2:20), and, "***This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the chief***" (1Timothy 1:15).

Then the word of SALVATION is magnified before your eyes and great is your gratitude to God who saved you, with His life-giving manifestation, enlightening you, your life and your eternity.

When the priest says the words, "***Glory to God in the Highest...***," recite it with him fervently and lovingly, giving glory to God with the heavenly hosts and angels.

When the deacon says to the congregation, "***Pray for perfect peace, for love, and for the pure apostolic kisses,***" the congregation responds by saying, "***Lord have mercy.***" We ask the Lord to have mercy by giving us these great divine graces; the grace of perfect peace for the church externally and internally - the grace of perfect peace within our homes and families so that troubles and conflicts may end and wounds may heal. And for the grace of love, which is the bond of perfection of the children of the church with each other. If peace and love dwell within us, then the exchange of holy kisses will be like those of the apostles in the first church; unlike the kiss of Judas which was false and deceptive, shrewd and evil hearted.

While the deacon is chanting this response, why don't you, my beloved, request peace and love for yourself, your family, your neighbours and your friends, and especially those who are suffering from various conflicts and trials. Mention them by name, ask for them in persistence at these moments and God will be able to do by your prayers more than wise men can do.

In the second part of the Prayer of Reconciliation, the priest asks God to fill our hearts with his Divine Peace that surpasses the mind, to keep our hearts and thoughts in Christ Jesus, the King of Peace. And when He reigns in our hearts we can live peacefully with ourselves and others, bearing all their weaknesses, and we will have peace with God who is a loving Father for all of us. Hence, we will also enjoy psychological and physical health, and make us live in heaven while still being on earth (Deuteronomy 11:21).

When you hear the priest saying, "***By Your good will, O God, fill our hearts with Your peace...***", join him in seeking this divine peace with perseverance, as it is God's will for His children to live in peace and harmony.

Peace is the greatest gift one can have on the earth, and whoever receives this heavenly peace has a pledge of glorified eternal life.

This 'Prayer of Reconciliation' is called in some old liturgical books, 'Prayer of the Kiss', because the prayer concludes with the deacon saying to the congregation, "***Greet one another with a holy kiss***", and so the people greet each other. Men greet men and women greet women. The method of kissing is to place both of one's hands into the hands of

the person standing near him or her. This is done as a sign of love, reconciliation and peace. An old tradition in some churches states that when believers exchange a holy kiss with each other, each person is to say, "***Christ is in our midst***", and the other one responds by saying, "***Now and He will stay with us.***"

'Prayer of Reconciliation' refers to the reconciliation between us and God. "***Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation***" (2 Corinthians 5:18). As long as Christ reconciled us with God and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, let us reconcile with each other and greet one another with a holy, loving kiss, while standing in the presence of God, to prove our adoption and worthiness for his Fatherhood, and so make glad His loving heart. It is worth mentioning that at this moment, the congregation sings the appropriate hymn, "***Rejoice O Mary***" as the Virgin St. Mary is our compassionate mother, and the mother of the church rejoices when she sees her children loving one another and greeting one another with a holy kiss of love and peace.

When we kiss each other, the peace of God reigns immediately in our hearts and, "***Pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting***" (1Timothy2:8), so we can be assured of the acceptance of our prayers.

After this holy greeting, the congregation sing, "***Through the pleadings of the Mother of God, Saint Mary. Oh Lord, grant us the forgiveness of our sins. We worship you, O Christ, with Your gracious Father and the Holy Spirit, for You have come and saved us. The gift of peace, the***

sacrifice of praise." Here we require the acceptable intercession of the Virgin St. Mary before her beloved Son to forgive us our sins, so we kneel and glorify. We worship our Saviour and our redeeming Lord Jesus, together with His Good Father and the Holy Spirit; the Holy Trinity who are worthy of worship and glory.

The statement, "*A gift of peace, a sacrifice of praise,*" means God gives us His peace as a gift and His gift will fill us with peace and comfort. In return we offer Him thanksgiving and the sacrifice of praise, "*a fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name*" (Hosea 14:2).

Why don't you share with the congregation in this request fervently. My beloved, ask for the intercession of our mother St. Mary, as the church believes in her strong and acceptable intercession and asks for her assistance in so many prayers.

Then give a sacrifice of praise by confessing His name, and thanking Him for His mercies, as Jeremiah said, "*Because His compassions fail not, they are new every morning*" (Lamentations 3:226).



6 The Heavenly Hymn

The Heavenly Hymn

The Anaphora

The priest turns and blesses the congregation with the sign of the cross saying, "***The Lord be with you all,***" and the congregation responds, "***And with your spirit.***"

Here the priest asks God to dwell in the midst of His people and bless them. He also warns the congregation about this great divine dwelling, of Christ who is Emmanuel, meaning 'God is with us' or 'God is in our midst', is present and residing amongst His people.

My beloved, feel the presence of God in the midst of His people and reverently stand and proclaim with the congregation, giving your father the priest this same grace saying, "***And with your spirit.***"

The priest then says, "***Lift up your hearts.***" Lift your hearts to God and forsake the worldly worries to concentrate in worshipping and praising God. My beloved, benefit from this advice, and lift not only your heart to God, but all your existence, your mind, heart, hands, eyes and whole body as a sacrifice of love for Him who redeemed you by His blood. The congregation responds, "***They are with the Lord.***" When saying this response, think to yourself, is your heart at this moment specifically with God? If you have said this statement and your heart is busy with other cares, then you have lied to the Lord. The apostle advises us by saying: "***Do not lie to one another***" (Colossians 3:9). How much more lying are we going to do to God?

We must collect our hearts and lift them to God so we truly proclaim: ***"They are with Lord,"*** as the Psalmist said, ***"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in Your sight"*** (Psalm 19:14), and, ***"To You, O Lord, I lift up my soul, O my God, I trust in You, let me not be ashamed"*** (Psalm 25:1,2).

When the priest sees this, he thanks the Lord and urges the congregation to thank Him by saying, ***"Let us give thanks to the Lord."*** The congregation responds, ***"He is worthy and righteous,"*** that is, God is worthy of thanksgiving, glorification and praise, because He descended and dwelt among His people, and because of His grace, He helped us and made us able to love Him and worship Him with all our hearts. We thank Him for His many blessings which are enormous and uncountable.

Thank God, my beloved, during these moments, remembering His personal mercies for you, as the Apostle Paul said: ***"Cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God"*** (2 Corinthians 4:15).

The priest chants, ***"Right and Worthy, truly You are right and worthy..."*** You God are worthy for all thanksgiving, glorification and praise because You are the Creator of all things seen, and unseen. You who sits on the throne of Your glory, and is worshipped by all the holy powers! This hymn resembles the hymn of the twenty four spiritual elders who give praise before the throne of Christ saying, ***"You are worthy, O Lord to receive glory and honour and power. For You created all things and by Your will they exist and were created"*** (Revelations 4:9-1).

During the recitation of this prayer, meditate on its powerful meaning, and when you hear: "***Who is worshipped by all the holy powers***", make the sign of the cross and bow reverently to worship God together with all the holy powers.

The deacon then says: "***You seated, stand up.***" Upon hearing this call from the deacon, every one must stand more reverently and attentively to offer unto God a pure prayer together with the heavenly hosts.

The priest then says: "***Before whom stand the angels, the archangels, the principalities, the authorities, the thrones, the lordships and the powers.***" The priest mentions here seven out of the nine heavenly ranks who stand before God incessantly to praise and glorify Him.

The deacon asks the congregation: "***Look towards the East.***" When praying in the church, the congregation faces the East where the altar and the Sacrifice is placed. We face the East with our hearts as well as our thoughts. It is a warning for those who might think to wander or look elsewhere while inside the church, forsaking prayer and worship, and being mindless of the holy presence of God of whom we should be revering.

There is a response called the great 'Esbazeste' in the Liturgy of St. Gregory, where the deacon says, "***Let us stand well, stand in godliness, let us stand in prayer, let us stand in peace, let us stand in fear of God in awe and reverence, O clergy, and all the congregation in prayer and thanksgiving, in tranquillity and silence. Raise your eyes towards the East, that you may observe the altar beholding***

the Body and Blood of Emmanuel our God, which is placed upon it. Arise, O Angels and Archangels, the Cherubim, of six wings, and the Seraphim, full of eyes, covering their faces from the brilliance of His great glory, which surpasses sight and speech. They praise Him with one voice, proclaiming and saying, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts, Heaven and Earth are full of Your Holy Glory." This response gives us an idea about the awe of the church and the holiness of these moments, so together with Jacob we proclaim, *"Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it. How awesome is this place? This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven"* (Genesis 28:16,17). We stand in the church as if in heaven and proclaim with the Psalmist: *"Holiness adorns Your house, O Lord, forever"* (Psalm 93:58), and, *"In the congregation, I will bless the Lord"* (Psalm 26:12).

"For around You stand the Cherubim, full of eyes and the Seraphim of six wings, praising You continuously without ceasing saying..."

The priest now mentions another two orders of heavenly angelic rank, who differ from the previously mentioned seven ranks. Thus the total number of heavenly orders are nine, according to the doctrine and faith of the church, and the tenth rank is the order of saints from mankind. After the fall, our beloved Lord Jesus Christ restored Adam and his children to their previous dignity, for having been formed in the image and likeness of God, God created mankind to partake with the heavenly hosts in praising Him as He is pleased with this praise and unity.

As the wise King Solomon wrote, ***"The Lord made all things for Himself"*** (Proverbs 16:4), for the purpose of giving us His love and being united with us. The Prophet Isaiah wrote, ***"Whom I created for My glory, I have formed him, yes, I have made him. This people I have formed for Myself, they shall declare My praise"*** (Isaiah 43:7,21). The Apostle Paul said, ***"For by Him all things were created"*** (Colossians 1:16). For this reason, St. Gregory in his contemplative liturgy pleads, ***"Who confirmed the standing arrays of incorporeal creatures among men, who gave those on earth the praise of the Seraphim, accept our voice also with the invisible, count us with the heavenly powers. Let us also proclaim with them, having cast away from us every remembrance of unnatural reckonings, and cry out with voices that are never silenced and lips that never cease, and praise Your greatness."***

The deacon then says, ***"Let us attend,"*** warning the congregation to give more reverence and attention and quietness (Acts 22:2) in preparation for the hymn of the Seraphim. As Zachariah wrote, ***"Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord for He has aroused from His Holy habitation"*** (Zephaniah. 2:13).

Then the congregation says this hymn of the Seraphim, ***"The Cherubim worship You and the Seraphim glorify You, proclaiming and saying, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts. Heaven and Earth are full of Your Holy Glory."***

This praise was heard by Isaiah the Prophet from the mouth of the Seraphim in his revelation (Isaiah 6). We sing it to prove our partaking with the angels of heaven in praising God. When the angels look and see the beauty of God and

His Holiness, they can only praise Him by saying, "**Holy, Holy, Holy.**" Let us also look to the beauty of God, in faith, in His holiness when we sing this praise.

The Three Holy 'Agios'

The priest takes this praise, which was said by the congregation and recites it in a beautiful tune as he makes the sign of the Cross three times, firstly upon himself, then upon the servants on either side of the altar, and finally upon the congregation.

When the priest makes the sign of the cross on the congregation saying, "**Agios**", make the sign of the cross and bow before God reverently.

The prayer of `Agios' or `Holy' is the holiest and strongest of prayers, and the most chastening for the devil, who is the enemy of all holiness. It includes honouring God, and the word `Holy' means 'high' and "**who cannot lie**" (Titus 1:2), and "**Holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens**" (Hebrews 7:26). In the Syrian language, `Agios' means 'has no limit in greatness, love, justice and all divine qualities.'

As the saints in heaven praise Him saying, "**Great and marvellous are Your works Lord God Almighty, who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name, for You alone are holy**" (Revelations 15:3,4), and Hannah, Samuel's mother prayed saying, "**There is none holy like the Lord for there is none beside You, nor there is any rock like our God**" (1 Samuel 2:2).

Isaiah the Prophet heard the praise of the Seraphim: "**Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts**" (Isaiah 6:3), and the praise of the four living creatures carrying the Divine Throne (Revelations 4:8). The rank of the Seraphim is the highest of heavenly hosts, proving that the praise they sing is of the highest and greatest praise that can possibly be presented to the Divine Glory.

St. Ambrose says, "**We cannot find anything to honour God better than calling Him Holy, because He is the most Holy.**" These words are also reflected in Daniel 9:24. Our beloved Lord is the source of every purity and holiness.

The priest continues to pray, "**Holy, Holy, truly You are Holy, O Lord our God.**" To avoid elaboration, I leave you my beloved, to proceed and contemplate on this wonderful part that manifests the infinite holiness of God, followed by the story of our creation, the fall, God's mercy by sending His prophets, and then His incarnation at the fullness of time in order to redeem us from sin and give us the possibility of holiness once again.

Make a quick comparison between the holiness of God and the profanity of man, and ask Him to give you a life of holiness, as the Apostle said: "**But as He who called you is Holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy for I am holy'**" (1 Peter 1:15,16).

The congregation responds with, "**Amen**" believing the priest's proclamation about the holiness of God, His providence, His creating man in His image and likeness, in righteousness, holiness of truth, and the story of man who

fell by the seduction of the serpent, followed by the incarnation of the Son of God for our salvation.

The priest prays, "***He was incarnated and became man,***" while placing one spoonful of incense into the censer. This completes the previous part and is a contemplation on the incarnation of Christ and His great love for us, that knew no limits, for He sacrificed Himself for us on the cross. On the cross His Spirit united with His Divinity, He descended into Hades and freed all those who died in the hope of the coming Redeemer, beginning with Adam. For the Apostle says, "***By whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison***" (1 Peter 3:1).

Meditate, dear believer, in the words of this prayer that are full of life, and thank God who taught you the way of salvation and enlightened the way to ETERNITY.

Also meditate on the incense ascending from the censer as one spoonful is placed in it; a symbol of the divine love of God for us as He denied Himself, descended to our earth and was incarnated for our salvation. Try to exchange love with God and be fervent in loving Him, His commandments, His children and all His creation.

The congregation recites "***Amen, I believe.***" Truly we believe, witness and admit all His providence for our salvation, we believe in His incarnation out of love for us and His yearning for our salvation. We believe He gave us Baptism of water and Spirit, for the forgiveness of sins. We believe in His atoning death for us on the cross. He believe that He then descended to Hades in great light, in the lower divisions in the earth, breaking the doors of iron and

destroying the doors of copper, in order to free the righteous ones : ***"He led them out of captivity and gave gifts to men"*** (Ephesians 4:8). He freed them from the authority of Satan and returned to them the gift of lost paradise.

Meditate, my beloved, on all these meanings during the priest's prayer in this wonderful part during the recitation of the congregation, ***"I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with understanding"*** (1 Corinthians 14:15).

The priest continues, ***"He rose from the dead on the third day..."*** Previously the priest paused at the incident of Christ's crucifixion, His death on the cross, and the descent of His Spirit into Hades in order to save the righteous. He then completes the incident of His resurrection, and His second coming which will be fulfilled at the end of ages, when the Lord Jesus will judge the world and reward everyone according to their deeds.

We might forget all these important matters so the priest reminds us to prepare ourselves for the awesome day of the Lord. Prepare yourselves with repentance and purity and adorn yourselves with spiritual virtues, so that we are not cast out from the presence of Christ.

The priest reminds his congregation about the Second Coming and the general judgement. The congregation proclaim saying, ***"Let it be according to Your mercy O Lord, and not according to our sins."***

My beloved, beat your chest three times while calling to the Lord this prayer for rescue, together with the whole church, resembling the tax collector who did not like to lift his eyes

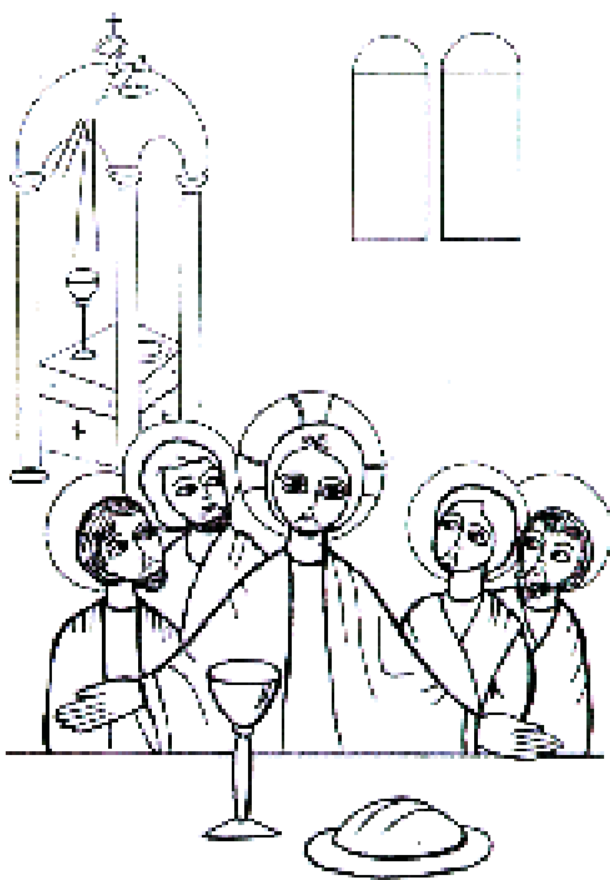
to the heavens (feeling the burden of his sins), but beat his chest saying, "***God be merciful to me a sinner***" (Luke 18:13).

Remember your sins, even the slightest sin is enough to cause you to perish. But it is the sacrament of repentance and the great mercy of God which accepts us.

Remember your situation at the day of judgement when people are gathered, angels standing, books opened, works realised and thoughts examined, "***Some to everlasting life*** (the righteous) ***and some to shame and everlasting contempt*** (the evil ones)" (Daniel 12:2).

Ask yourself, 'In which group am I going to be in?' Truly, we say, "***Let it be according to Your mercy, O Lord, and not on account of our sins,***" believing in God's mercy, but take care, the mercy of God does not work by itself, it accepts our repentance and helps us in our struggle against sin.

Mercy does not work with those who neglect their salvation, staggering in their eternal redemption. Depend on the mercy of God, just as the Psalmist David did, "***But I have trusted in Your mercy, my heart shall rejoice in Your Salvation***" (Psalm 13:5). "***Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us have fear, lest any of you fall short of it***" (Hebrews 4:1), because of negligence and not depending on God's mercy.



7 The Consecration

The Consecration

The following part of the liturgy until the beginning of the litanies is called the CONSECRATION or the Institution Narrative. It is considered the most important part of the Mass as it includes the dwelling of the Holy Spirit on the Sacraments and the conversion to the Holy Body and Blood of our Good Saviour.

The priest points to the bread and wine saying, "***He instituted for us this great mystery of godliness.***" Then he places the two corporals on the altar, then places his hands in the incense above the censer, and gives three rounds of the incense to the bread with his hands. On the third round, he also gives incense to the chalice, saying, "***For He was determined to give Himself up for the life of the world.***"

Look at this strange conflict, the unlimited love of Christ towards mankind, versus the hatred of mankind to the Lord Jesus Christ. On the same night that the people agreed to surrender the Son of God to death, the Lord Jesus cared to give life to the world. While they were preparing chains for Him to be crucified, He had prepared for them this Divine Feast and Redemptive Table. While they were thinking of crucifying and slaughtering Him, He was preparing a Sacrifice of Atonement for them. St Paul says, "***For I received from the Lord that which is also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread***" (1 Corinthians 11:23-25).

This is clear from the Gospels that the Lord Christ instituted the Sacrament of the Eucharist on Thursday evening, and

after a while the soldiers caught Him, and dragged Him to condemnation, which ended with His crucifixion on Friday noon.

How great is God's love to His creation, and how sinful is man in his ingratitude and denial!

Why don't we learn from this lesson and not repeat what the Jews did to our Saviour, but instead, respond to the constant loving calls of God, and accept His will, obeying His commandments so that we may benefit from this Divine Sacrifice.

The Sacrament of EUCHARIST is called the 'Great Mystery of Godliness' as it is the greatest of the Seven Sacraments in the Holy Church. It is the crown of all the sacraments of godliness, because it strengthens in us the feeling of God's love towards us, and His Sacrifice for us, also the feelings of humility, reverence and gratitude to this overflowing, divine love by which He ***"Did not spare His own Son but delivered Him up for us all"*** (Romans 8:32).

The path of godliness is not as easy as it may seem at first glimpse, but needs effort, struggle and Divine Providence so that we ask in the first supplication of the Liturgy of St. Gregory, ***"May the righteousness of faith multiply, straighten the path of godliness for us."***

The Sacrament of Communion is the most important Divine help in our struggle in the way of godliness and fear of God, as the wise King Solomon says, ***"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"*** (Proverbs 9:10).

The congregation responds, "***Truly we believe.***" We believe the mystery of redemption which was made by the Son of God on the cross, and we believe in this great Mystery which He instituted on the night of His sufferings as an expression of love to mankind and His Divine will to save them. We believe in this great Mystery instituted by the Lord as a remedy for all diseases, exposing all sins and strengthening the life of godliness, humility and reverence before the sacrificial love of God.

My beloved, remember all these matters while you proclaim, "***Truly we believe***" with the congregation.

The priest takes the Bread into his hands and says, "***He took bread upon His holy, immaculate, undefiled and blessed life-giving hands.***" Beginning with this statement, the Divine Liturgy teaches us the way in which the Lord instituted the great Mystery of godliness and redemption. The first thing that the Lord Jesus did was to take the bread upon His hands to bless it, sanctify it, and convert it to His Holy Body.

Contemplate on the description of the hands of the Lord.

Strive to make your own hands resemble them as much as you can. The Lord's hands were unblemished, and your hands, my beloved, have the sense of touch, which is one of the five senses; senses are the doors of the heart and mind. Try to keep them undefiled from lust and evil and prevent them from sin such as stealing, abuse, forgery and bribery. Thus your hands should be blessed like the Lord's hands which were described as life giving. For by His hands, He rose many from the dead and healed many sick and diseased.

You, my beloved, should make your hands life-giving as much as you can by helping or befriending the hungry, sick, needy or the downcast. Listen to the words of the righteous Job who said, *"If I have kept the poor from their desire, or cause the eyes of the widow to fail, or eaten my morsel to myself, so that the fatherless may not eat of it, but from my youth I reared him as a father, and from my mother's womb I have guided the widow. If I have seen anyone perish for lack of clothing, or any poor man without covering. If his heart has not blessed me and if he was not warmed with the fleece of my sheep. If I have raised my hand against the fatherless, when I saw I had help in the gate. Then let my arm fall from my shoulder, let my arm be torn from the socket"* (Job 31:16-22), also, *"Because I delivered the poor who cried out and the fatherless and he who had no helper, the blessing of a perishing man came upon me, (perishing because of hunger, cold or sickness), and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy"* (Job 29:12,13).

The congregation says, *"We believe that this is true, Amen."* We believe that the Lord's hands which carried the bread and converted it to His Holy Body, were holy, undefiled, blessed and life-giving, and we ask Him to give us hands like His hands, to do good, and abstain from every evil.

The priest places his right hand on the Bread that is on his left hand, lifting his eyes toward heaven, saying, *"He looked up towards Heaven to You, O God, His Father and Master of everyone..."*

Here the Lord teaches us to ask for His blessings by casting our eyes towards heaven, the throne of God, and beseeching that He may bless whatever our hands behold, for as the Psalmist prayed : ***"Unto You I lift up my eyes, O You who dwell in the heavens. Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hands of their masters, as the eyes of a maid to the hands of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God until He has mercy on us"*** (Psalm 123:1,2). The Lord delights when our eyes seek and long for Him, and so He says, ***"Look at Me and be saved, all you ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is no other"*** (Isaiah 45:22). The Lord Jesus Christ did this so many times to teach us this good habit. He looked toward heaven before starting any important mission. Like raising Lazarus up from the dead (John 11:41), when He prayed before the crucifixion (John 17:1), and when He blessed the five loaves and two fish (Luke 9:16).

Then the priest makes the sign of the cross over the Bread three times saying, ***"And when He had given thanks, He blessed it, He sanctified it."*** Each time the deacons and congregation respond by saying, ***"Amen."*** (There is a common mistake done in some churches, that only the deacons serving inside the altar, or even only one deacon, responds with ***"Amen,"*** although it is written in the Liturgy book that the congregation are to respond. Let us hope that everyone in the church responds with, ***"Amen,"*** together with the deacons, and hence confirming their belief in the consecration and signings of the cross by the priest. This ***"Amen,"*** then, would be a very strong prayer.

The congregation then respond, ***"We believe, confess and glorify You,"*** believing and confessing the sanctification and

conversion of the Bread which the Lord touched by His pure hands, when He thanked, blessed and sanctified it.

So the simple bread becomes the true Body of the Lord, given for the forgiveness of sins for all those who worthily partake of it. We glorify God who gave us this valuable gift for our souls, bodies and spirits. St. Paul says, "***For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation***" (Romans 10:10).

Participate with the responses of the congregation, my beloved, while deeply meditating spiritually, as the Holy Spirit flows into you when He sees your yearning to know Him and your honesty in loving Him and your reverence in standing before Him during these awesome moments of the Holy Mass.

The priest carefully divides the Bread (as explained in the Liturgy Book) saying, "***He broke it, and gave it to His own holy disciples and pure apostles saying, 'Take, eat of it, you all, for this is MY BODY, which is to be broken for you and many others, given for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in remembrance of Me.'***"

The careful act of dividing and separating the Bread, whether here or during the prayer of the FRACTION, reminds us of the sufferings of the Lord on the cross for us, and that is why the priest prays saying, "***Therefore, as we also commemorate His Holy Passions...***"

Let us think about the passions of the Lord while the priest recites these brilliant words, so we thank Him, humble

ourselves and learn the sacrificial love that does not ask for itself but for others.

The Lord gave us His HOLY BODY for the forgiveness of sins, so every one who is burdened by sin, comes to the Lord repenting, confessing and receiving the Holy Communion, is remedied from their sins.

The Lord ordered the disciples to perform this mystery in remembrance of Him, to commemorate His incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension into heaven. The prayers of the Liturgy that sanctifies the mysteries narrate the story of Jesus from beginning to end, to remind us always about those incidents of incarnation and salvation, to satisfy our souls as if with rich food.

The congregation responds by saying, ***"This is also true, Amen."*** This response are words of assurance and belief to the priest as he said that the Lord Jesus broke His Body and gave to His disciples to eat for the forgiveness of sins, to abide in Him, and receive eternal life according to His Divine Promise. ***"I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever and the bread that I shall give as My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world"*** (John 6:51). And, ***"Whoever eats My body and drinks My blood has eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him"*** (John 6:54).

The congregation says we believe all that you say, and hope to fulfil these sayings in us to make the mystery of

thanksgiving always without hindrances, proceeding to the Sacraments in humility and repentance, and preparation to gain forgiveness of our sins according to the Lord's promise and finally to gain Eternal Life.

My beloved, while reciting this response, ask for yourself, I and all your brethren proceeding for the Holy Communion, to gain these blessings of this great mystery, for the forgiveness of sins, abiding in the Lord and at the end, to gain eternal life.

Sanctification Of The Wine

The priest places his hands on the rim of the chalice and says, *"Likewise the chalice also after supper, He mixed it of wine and water..."* Here the priest makes the sign of the Cross over the chalice three times saying, *"And when He had given thanks, He blessed it, and He sanctified it."* And each time the deacon responds by saying, *"Amen."*

The tradition teaches us that the Lord mixed the wine in the Chalice with some water to symbolise the water and blood which came out of His holy side when He was stabbed with a spear after His death on the cross. This Holy Blood mixed with water, came out of His side in a miraculous way, for as we know, as soon as a person dies, their blood clots in their veins and arteries. Thus the blood of our Lord running in this miraculous way is the blood of the new covenant for purification and atonement for sins and iniquities.

The priest makes the sign of the Cross three times to signify that the Lord Jesus sanctified the Chalice by His will, the

pleasure of His Father, and the work of His Holy Spirit, to fulfil the conversion, truly and fully, and sanctification by the sign of the Cross, for the Cross is the seal of Christ and His life-giving sign.

Participate with the deacons and congregation in the response of, "**Amen**", believing the words of the priest that the Lord Jesus thanked, blessed, and sanctified the Chalice of the Blood of the New Covenant, and He is also present to sanctify this Chalice so that the mixture in it is the true Blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The congregation says, "**Amen, again we believe, confess and glorify.**" This means that as we believed and confessed the conversion of bread when the Lord touched, blessed and sanctified to become His living Body, we also believe and confess the conversion of the mixture in the Chalice which the Lord blessed and sanctified, to become His precious Blood shed for the life of the world. And as we glorified Him for the gift of His life-giving Body which He gave us, we also glorify Him for the gift of the life-giving Blood which He gave us, "**precious Blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish and without spot**" (1 Peter 1:19).

This Blood purifies consciences from dead works as St. Paul says, "**The Blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself, without spot, to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God**" (Hebrews 9:14). For all these blessings, restored in the precious blood, we glorify the Lord and exalt Him forever.

The priest holds the chalice in his hands, while he continues the prayer, saying, ***"He tasted, and gave it also to His own holy disciples and pure apostles saying..."***

Here the priest moves the chalice gently in the shape of a cross, from west to east, then from north to south, for we were strangers separated from God, and by the Blood He shed on the Cross, He brought us back to Paradise, which faces eastward, as the Apostle Paul says, ***"Now in Christ, you who once were far have been made near by the blood of Christ"*** (Ephesians 2:13). Moving it from the north to the south signifies that we were rejected like the goats on the north, and by the Divine Blood He took us to the right of God to be with His accepted and beloved sheep.

On moving the chalice, the priest says, ***"Take, drink of it you all, for this is My Blood of the New Testament which is shed for you and many others. Do this in remembrance of Me."***

The Blood of the Old Testament was the blood of bulls and goats unable to take away sin, as St. Paul says, ***"For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins"*** (Hebrews 10:4), but the New Testament is established on the Blood of the Son of God who ***"Takes away the sins of the world"*** (John 1:29).

The Lord Jesus offered His Blood to be given for the forgiveness of sins. He advises us to partake of it always in remembrance of His passion and salvation and wonderful redemption on the Cross.

The congregation confirms the priests words about the true life-giving Body of Christ given for the forgiveness of sins, for abiding in God and gaining Eternal Life. Here also, the congregation confirms that the Precious Blood is the blood which was shed for the life of the world and provided the means of reconciliation between God and man, qualifying us to approach God after being exiled from Him.

In the Revelation, St John saw multitudes standing before the throne of Christ, and when he asked about them the angel responded: "***These are the ones who came out of the great tribulation*** (the world and its worries) ***and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them*** (caring and loving)" (Revelation 7:14,15).

Also included in this response, is an inaudible supplication to God to qualify the congregation to be worthy to partake of this sacrament, in remembrance of the Lord Jesus, and to approach without hindrance or obstacles so that they may take life to their spirits and power to their souls, and remedy to their bodies, until they cross the sea of this world and reach the coast of eternity, peacefully to join the cloud of saints who washed their clothes in the Blood of the Lamb.

While reciting this response, my blessed one, think about these matters and ask with all your heart to have the forgiveness of your sins through this Precious Blood, to abide in Christ and obtain Eternal Life according to the true promises of our Good Saviour.

Look to the Lord's invitation in His words, ***"Eat of it you all and drink of it you all."*** He wants all to accept the mystery of partaking from His blessed Body and Blood on one condition, that they repent of all sins, and this condition of repentance and confession, before Communion, is clear in the virtue of the washing of the feet which the Lord fulfilled before the institution of the Sacrament of Eucharist. He washed the feet of His disciples, not for the purpose of cleaning physical dirt, but as a symbol of purification of the body, soul and spirit from the dirt before approaching the Holy Sacraments. So when Peter objected saying, ***"You shall never wash my feet,"*** Jesus warned him, ***"If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."*** He would have prevented Peter from partaking in the Sacrament of unity with His Body and Blood, as his sin would have still existed.

The priest motions towards the Body and the Chalice saying, ***"For every time you shall eat of this Bread and drink of this Cup, you preach My Death, confess My Resurrection and remember Me until I come."*** Here the Lord Jesus gives us the responsibility of preaching His death, His resurrection from the dead, and His awesome Second Coming which will be full of glory. We should remember this every time we celebrate the Holy Mass.

I think this confirmation and mission and continual remembrance of the Lord Jesus comes when we enter into a holy covenant with God by receiving the Sacraments of the New Covenant, feeling that our sins are forgiven and that we abide in Him. Then we cannot keep quiet but proceed to preach the excellence of the One who called us from the darkness to the true light (1 John 2:9) and tell everyone around us how much the Lord has done for us and had

compassion on us (Mark 5:19). This proclamation comes through experiencing death from worldly desires in order to experience His Resurrection. ***"For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His Resurrection"*** (Romans 6:5-8). We die from the world's lusts and sins in order to live, and yet, as St Paul says, ***"It is not I who live, but Christ who lives in me."***

This sacrament enables us to abide in Jesus and be united with Him, assuring us of the perfect unity with God in the Eternal Life.

As we yearn to abide and unite perfectly in Him, so we remember Him always until He comes, and we await His glorious coming with earnest expectation, for His second coming will fulfil our unity with Him forever.

The congregation responds with this wonderful hymn in answer to the Lord's words, ***"Amen, Amen, Amen. We preach Your death, O Lord. Your Holy Resurrection and Ascension we acknowledge. We praise You, we bless You, we thank You, O Lord, and supplicate You, O our Lord."***

They sing with an uplifted voice to the Lamb who was slaughtered for their salvation. They remember His life-giving death for their redemption, and confess His holy resurrection by which He defeated the terrifying enemy of humanity - death. They confess their belief in His ascension to heaven, where He is sitting at the right Hand of the Father, having entered, ***"the inner part behind the veil where the forerunner has entered for us"*** (Hebrews 6:20), ***"To prepare a place for us"*** (John 14:2). We live in the

expectation of His Second Coming, according to what He advised, ***"Do this in remembrance of Me."*** St. Paul says, ***"For as often as you eat this Bread, and drink this Blood, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes"*** (1 Corinthians 11:26).

The last sentence of this hymn, ***"We praise You ..."*** is addressed to the Holy Trinity, as explained by one of the church fathers: ***"We praise You, O Lord God. We bless You, O Son the Word. We thank You O Holy Spirit for all these great gifts, and we supplicate You, O Holy Trinity, our One God to accept this sacrifice from us, sending to us the gift of Your Holy Spirit."***

My beloved, recite this response reverently with the whole church, meditating on every word. Stretch out your hands and say to the Lord, ***"We praise You Lord, bless You and thank You for these great graces, which angels yearn to see."*** Supplicate unto Him with all your heart concerning your private needs or problems that need a solution, or blessing, guidance and divine leadership in your life. Lift up your hands and eyes and heart to God pleading with persistence so that He may give you your request.

The priest says, ***"Therefore, as we also commemorate His Holy Passion, His Resurrection from the dead, His ascension into the Heavens, He is sitting at Your right hand, O Father, and His second coming from Heaven, awesome and full of glory. We offer You these, Your oblations, from that which is Yours, concerning all things and for all things."***

The church remembers the Lord's passions, His resurrection, ascension to Heaven, and His second coming in each Mass, for many reasons:

- ✠ His Passions, crucifixion and death were the means of our salvation and redemption as Christ tasted Death for the sake of every one of us (Hebrews 2:9).
- ✠ His resurrection guarantees our forthcoming resurrection as St Paul says, "***But now Christ has risen from the death and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep***" (1 Corinthians 15:20).
- ✠ His Ascension to heaven opened to us the doors of heaven, for He went to prepare a place for us, and so taught us to lift our eyes unto Him always, like the apostles when they saw Him ascending. With Him we ascend in our hearts and minds to heaven where He sits at the right hand of the Highest.
- ✠ His second coming reminds us of that awesome judgement day, so that we may be prepared, "***like men waiting for their master when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately***" (Luke 12).

We await this Second Coming, through which He will take us to the place He prepared for us in His glory according to His Divine Promise, "***And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am you may be also***" (John 14:3).

Amongst all these powerful memories, and amidst our emotions ignited by His love for us, and His great providence, we offer Him these oblations from His gift given to us in this life, like wheat from which we make the bread; grapes to make wine; water to mix with wine; and much more for which we thank Him always. We offer these oblations as a sacrifice of Thanksgiving. Because of Your passions, death on the cross for us, resurrection and ascension to heaven, we offer thanksgiving to gain Your mercies, and the forgiveness of sins for those who are living, and those who have passed away.

It is clear to see, my beloved, that this is the most important part of the Mass, not only because of the holy memories, but because of the presence of the Holy Spirit which converts the oblations and sanctifies the people attending the Mass.

The deacon says, "***Attend to the Lord in awe and reverence.***" These moments, moments of the dwelling the Holy Spirit are the most awesome. Everyone must be prepared spiritually, psychologically and physically to the highest level, as the deacon says this call. They must be found ready and worthy for the dwelling of the Spirit on the Sacrifice and it's conversion, and His dwelling on you, sanctifying and purifying you. It reflects the voice of the Psalmist, "***Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling***" (Psalm 2:11), and Joshua says, "***Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth***" (Joshua 24:14).

The priest, deacon and congregation kneel in preparation for the dwelling of the Holy Spirit.

My beloved, kneel reverently and worship God in holy adornment in humility, seeking the fullness of the Holy Spirit to purify and sanctify you, as if you are with the apostles in the upper room of Zion where the Holy Spirit descended upon them in order to purify all their sins and remove all their weaknesses and fears, creating them as new people, full of the Spirit to the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:10).

While kneeling, recite with the congregation the wonderful praise, "***We praise You, we bless You, we serve You, and we worship You.***"

✠ **We praise You** - was repeated twice before, confirming the praise and glorification of the believers offered to God who is worthy of all glory and honour, for His blessings and unspeakable gifts.

Praising is the greatest kind of prayer that a human soul can give, joining the heavenly choir that continually praise God.

✠ **We bless You** - also repeated twice. We bless God and confess His great glory and deeds, together with His visible and invisible creation. We thank Him for His generous blessings and rich overflowing grace and His loving kindness toward us (Ephesians 2:7).

✠ **We serve You** - man's service to God is a response to God's love and His sacrifice for us, saving us from the grip of Satan and sin. Peter's mother in law was healed by Jesus from her high fever. The first offering of thanksgiving that she gave to the Lord was to arise immediately and serve Him (Luke 4:38).

The service which is implied in this response is the service of prayer, praise and glorification before God. Kneeling must be in spirit and truth for, ***"God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth"*** (John 4:23,24).

The whole church kneels in silence, awaiting for the dwelling of the Holy Spirit. The priest kneels before the altar, calling the Holy Spirit inaudibly to dwell on the congregation to sanctify them and to dwell on the bread and wine to transubstantiate them (Transubstantiation is when the substance of Bread and Wine changes into the actual Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ).

Take this special chance to specifically request your sanctification and purification, so that you may obtain the necessary preparation and humility to approach the awesome sacraments of Emmanuel, our God.

The Invocation Of The Holy Spirit

The priest inaudibly prays the Litany Of Invocation Of The Holy Spirit, while kneeling and extending his hands towards God: ***"We worship You through the pleasure of Your goodness, and we ask You, O Lord, our God, we Your sinful servants, that Your Holy Spirit may descend upon us..."***

Here he motions first towards himself, then towards the oblations before him while saying: ***"Upon us and upon these oblations which are placed here, purify them,***

transubstantiate them, and reveal them as sanctification for Your saints."

Here the Priest does as Elijah did in the past when he placed the burnt sacrifice on the altar and prayed saying, **"Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that You are the Lord God',... then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice and the wood and the stones and the dust and it licked up the water that was in the trench"** (1 Kings 18:37-38). This was proof of God's acceptance of the sacrifice of Elijah, and the reason of the peoples return to worshipping the living, everlasting God.

The priest requests the invocation of the Holy spirit upon him and the congregation by saying: **"That Your spirit may descend upon us."** So that the life of the believers may change from carnal to spiritual lives, and that they become worthy to receive from the divine sacraments that are holy and only given to the saints.

Another reason to request the invocation of the Holy Spirit upon the believers is to sanctify their minds, hearts and senses, to be able to know and believe that the oblations on the altar after transubstantiation, are the Holy Body and Blood of Christ Jesus, truly and without doubt. His Holy Body and Blood present on the altar, is the work of the Holy Spirit in the souls of the believers; it is a transcendental mystery which cannot be realised except by the Holy Spirit. As St. Paul said, **"No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit"** (1 Corinthians 12:3).

During the recitation of the Invocation of the Holy Spirit the deacon calls, **"Let us attend. Amen"**, calling the kneeling

congregation to complete silence during the awesome moments of the invocation of the Holy Spirit.

The priest stands and makes the sign of the cross over the body three times, saying, "***And this bread, He makes it into the Holy Body which is His.***" Here the priest supplicates to the Holy Spirit whom he called by reciting the previous sacrament to transubstantiate the bread to the true body of Jesus Christ. At that specific moment the transubstantiation occurs in the bread to become the body of Christ. Here the congregation cry out, "***Amen, I believe***", manifesting their faith true in the transubstantiation of the bread to the true Body. The response, being in the singular tense has specific power and significance, for it is each person's individual proclamation of their faith and belief in the transubstantiation.

Proclaim your faith, my beloved, strongly and definitely in that transubstantiation of the bread to the TRUE BODY OF JESUS CHRIST, do not let doubts aroused by the devil affect you at any time.

The reason for doing the sign of the cross on the sacraments before the Invocation of the Holy Spirit and sanctification, is that the Holy Spirit had not yet dwelt upon us, and we were unworthy to accept Him, until after the glorification of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. By His crucifixion and death we won the pleasure of the Heavenly Father, so He granted us His Holy Spirit, the greatest gift, as the Evangelist John says, "***For the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified***" (John 7:39), as He was not yet crucified. The cross first, then the dwelling of the Holy Spirit with His various gifts.

The priest prays inaudibly, bowing his head and raising his hands towards God, saying, "***Our Lord, God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, given for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life of those who shall partake of Him***", meaning that this is the Body of our Lord, God and saviour Jesus Christ, which is given for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life to whoever partakes of Him in preparation, repentance and worthiness.

Rejoice my beloved, because of these faithful facts and divine promises, and be determined to proceed to the end of the Mass, and to receive from this Holy Sacrament to gain these promises for yourself, that is for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

The priest stands and blesses the chalice three times with the sign of the cross, saying, "***And this chalice too He makes into the honoured Blood of the New Testament which is His.***" Here the priest begs the Holy Spirit to transubstantiate the mixture in the chalice to the true honoured Blood of our God Jesus Christ. At this moment specifically the transubstantiation of the mixture in the chalice into the TRUE BLOOD OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST takes place.

The congregation respond saying: "***Again I believe, Amen.***" And as I proclaimed my faith in the transubstantiation of the bread to the true Body of Jesus Christ, I now proclaim also my faith in the transubstantiation of the wine into the precious honoured Blood of Emmanuel our God. The Blood of the New Testament which is shed for us on the honoured cross. This is also done in the singular form to give everyone

in the church the chance to proclaim their personal faith, and not to be lost in the crowd of multitudes. The proclamation of personal faith is stronger than collective proclamation; it has its essence and power on the soul, considering Christ's redemption as a personal redemption for everyone. Christ was crucified, died, shed His Blood on the cross for me, personally and specifically. St. Paul expressed this by saying, ***"It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith in the Son of God!"***

"Who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

The priest bows his head and stretches his arms towards heaven, praying inaudibly saying, ***"Our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ, given for the forgiveness of sins and Eternal life to those who shall partake of Him."*** This means that the blood is the Blood of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ, given for the forgiveness of sins, and eternal life to those who partake of Him.

This last sentence, ***"to those who shall partake of Him"*** is said aloud by the priest to warn the congregation who are still kneeling in fear and awe awaiting the invocation of the Holy Spirit to sanctify them and to transubstantiate the oblations. Then the congregation arises, saying, ***"Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy."***

'Lord have mercy' is repeated by the congregation to proclaim their faith in the invocation of the Holy Spirit and the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the Holy Body and Blood of Christ, and that these Holy Sacraments

are truly given for the remission of sins and eternal life for those who partake of them worthily in repentance.

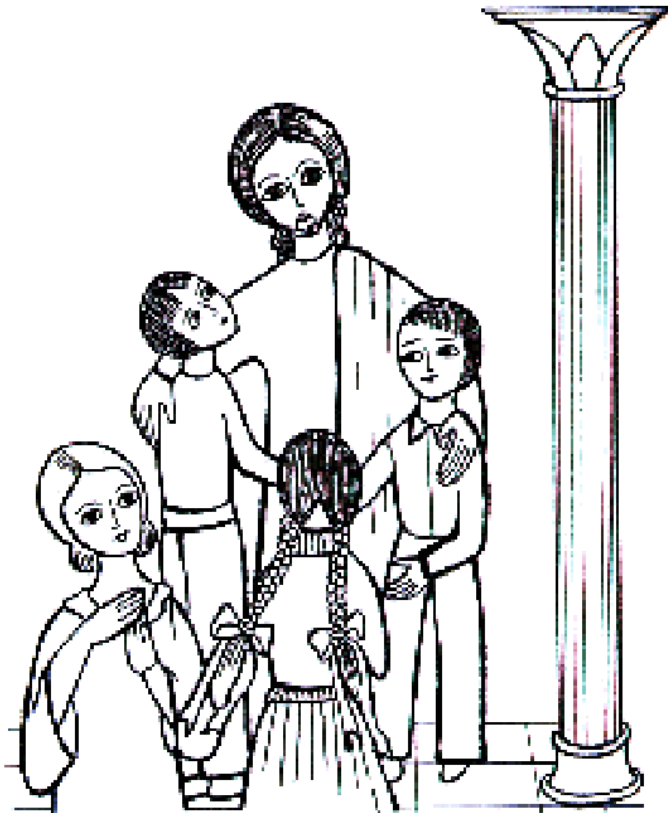
'Lord have mercy' is repeated three times by the congregation with repentance and humility to present a collective repentance before the Divine Presence, to become worthy of approaching the life-giving Sacraments.

My beloved, cry out with the congregation "***Amen***" to confirm your faith in the truth of the work of the Holy Spirit in the sacraments, renewing your belief in the mysterious transubstantiation that occurred and which nobody can believe except by faith. When you say "***Amen***" it means 'answer my prayer Lord, and accept my supplication for your mercy.'

Repeat "***Lord have mercy***" with the congregation three times in persistence to seek mercy saying, "***Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving-kindness. According to the multitude of Your tender mercies. Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin***" (Psalm 51:1-2). "***Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You and in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge***" (Psalm 57:1), resembling the church that proclaims at the end of every hour, "***Lord have mercy***" repeating and persisting until God has mercy and compassion.

Now the bread and wine have been transubstantiated into the Body and the Blood of the Lord Christ. The sign of the cross will no longer be made over them, because they are the source of blessing.

Look and contemplate, my beloved, on the simplicity of the Holy Spirit and the power of His Humility to answer the supplications of the priest as soon as he speaks. He dwells and transubstantiates the bread to the Holy Body and the wine to the Precious Honoured Blood of Christ.



8 Litanies And Commemorations

THE SEVEN LITANIES

Introduction of Litanies

Once the Body and Blood of Emmanuel our God are present on the altar, the priest prays this wonderful supplication: *"Make us all worthy, O our Master, to partake of Your Holies for the purification of our souls, bodies and spirits, that we may become one body and one spirit and may find a share and inheritance in all the saints who have pleased You since the beginning."*

The priest asks God to make him and the congregation worthy of partaking of His holy sacraments for the purification and salvation of their souls, bodies and spirits. Here the priest completes what he requested in the prayer of the Offertory saying, *"To become the body and blood, an enlightenment, remedy and salvation for our souls, bodies and spirits."*

And likewise, what was requested in the Prayer of the Veil : *"We ask and entreat to Your goodness O Lover of mankind, do not let this mystery which You provided for our salvation become a judgment for us or Your people, but forgiveness of our sins and iniquities."*

From this prayer we conclude that these sacraments which are given for our salvation, forgiveness of sins and eternal life, might become a condemnation and reason for weakness, disease and death if anybody dared to partake of them without repentance, confession and preparation. As the

Apostle Paul says, *"Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord... for he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner, eats and drinks judgement to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you and many sleep"* (1 Corinthians 11:27-30).

Benefits Of Worthy Holy Communion

In the introduction to the Prayer of the Litanies, the priest mentions many benefits for worthy communion, and he asks God in persistence for them.

- ✠ Purification of our souls, bodies and spirits.
- ✠ Unity of mind and heart: *" that we may become one body and one spirit"*

The priest repeats this same supplication and the previous one in the prayer of submission just before the Holy Communion saying: *"Make us all worthy to partake of your Holy body and Honoured blood for the purification of our souls, bodies and spirits, the forgiveness of our sins and iniquities and to become one body and one spirit with You. Glory and honour are due to You with Your gracious Father and the Holy Spirit now and forevermore, Amen."*

Here the Apostle advises us saying: *"Now I plead with you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined in the same mind and in the same judgements"* (1 Corinthians 1:11).

He also advises us about the communion of love as we partake of the mystery of the body and blood of Christ, saying, ***"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? For we, being many, are one bread and one body for we partake of the one bread"*** (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). He also advises us saying, ***"Endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling"*** (Ephesians 4:3-4).

Also the church prays for the unity of love saying, ***"May the unity of heart and love abide in us."***

In the Prayer of Submission, which is said after the Fraction, the priest says: ***"We ask and entreat Your goodness O lover of mankind, that since You have purified us and united us with Yourself through our partaking of Your divine mysteries..."***

If we unite with God, then we unite with each other in perfect brotherly love.

✠ ***The good share in the eternal life: "And find a share and inheritance with all the saints who have pleased You since the beginning."***

Worthy Eucharist protects us against the dominion of darkness, gives us victory over hosts of evil so we win eternal life and become, ***"qualified to be partakers in the inheritance of the saints in the light"*** (Colossians 1:12). And we live forever in the company of the saints who, ***"Are***

the ones who came out of the great tribulation and washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night" (Revelations 7:14-15).

All these blessings and graces are kept for you, my beloved, in the sacrament of Eucharist, if you partake of it worthily in repentance. Proceed to the Holy Communion to take for yourself the essence of life and eternal glory.

THE LITANIES

After this awesome introduction the priest begins to recite the seven Litanies of Peace, Fathers, Priests, Mercy, Place, Waters and Oblations.

We can say that the recitation of the litanies now is much stronger than at any other time because of the presence of the sacrifice on the altar, as St. Cyril of Jerusalem said, *"After we fulfill the spiritual, non-bloody sacrifice, we supplicate to God towards the sacrifice of forgiveness, for the peace of all churches and for the goodness and stability of the world and the kings...as a whole for whoever needs help. So our prayers are accepted before the throne of grace."*

Continue to strive in your standing and spiritual reverence and fervour and do not resemble those who lose their spiritual fervour, and sit down after the prayer of consecration carelessly thinking of trivial and inappropriate matters. They resemble people waiting with enthusiasm for a great king coming to them but when the king arrives, they do

not care to welcome him adequately but rather, consume their time with other matters unrelated to the king's reception or honour. This is definitely an insult to the king's dignity and may provoke his anger to revenge. May God protect us, Amen.

i. Litany of Peace

The priest pleads for the peace of the church, from inside and outside, as the Psalmist said, ***"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, may they prosper who love You. Peace be within your walls. Prosperity within your palaces. For the sake of my brethren and companions. I will now say peace be within you. Because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek Your good"*** (Psalm 122:6-9)

This litany is distinguished from the previous litanies of peace as the priest says about the church, ***"This which You have purchased to Yourself with the honoured Blood of Your Christ."*** This is what St. Paul said, ***"To shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own Blood"*** (Acts 20:28).

As St. Peter says about the believers who form the church, ***"Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things like the silver or gold from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious Blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish and without spot"*** (1 Pet 1:18-19). This gives us an idea about the value of the church and its preciousness in the eyes of Christ, its founder. This provokes and encourages us to pray more fervently for her peace and unity.

During the recitation of the litany of Peace, pray my beloved one, the same prayers for the church, which we mentioned previously concerning the litanies of peace during the evening incense. Then respond with the congregation, "***Lord have mercy***", for all that is required for the church's peace, unity, deliverance and truth.

ii. Litany of the Fathers

Here the priest pleads for the fathers of the church, the Orthodox bishops within her, headed by the holy Pope, hoping they are bestowed with power, grace and wisdom in shepherding the church of God which He purchased with His Blood, and to keep the Orthodox faith which was received from the saints.

During the recitation of this litany, pray the same requests mentioned in the evening incense, then respond with the congregation, "***Lord have mercy***", for all that is required for the church fathers for the good of the church.

iii. Litany of the Priests

Here the priest pleads for the servants of the church; the teachers, including the hegumens, priests, deacons, subdeacons and those who help the bishops in shepherding the flock and rightly carrying with them the word of truth so the Gospel may reach every person.

The priest supplicates to God the Lord of the church and her great Shepherd, to give the church honest ministers to become examples to the flock, teaching the congregation the

word of salvation according to the commandment of our good Saviour, ***"The harvest truly is plentiful but the labourers are few"*** (Matthew 9:37). The priest also pleads for the servants who struggle to serve the vine of the Lord, whatever their positions are, so the Lord may grant them strength and help them in this blessed work of service.

Then the priest pleads for all those who are living in virginity, whether they be monks, nuns or those consecrated for service. He asks for their purity and the angelical life which they await, in order that they may have a share and inheritance with the one hundred and forty four thousand virgins standing before the Divine Lamb, ***"And they sang as if it were a new song before the throne, the four living creatures and the elders, and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty four thousand virgins who were redeemed from the earth"*** (Revelation 14:1-3). Then he requests for the purity of all the faithful congregation to live a pure marital life without betrayal or deviation, so their houses may be houses of prayer and purity, and thus houses of blessing where Christ comes and dwells.

The Apostle specifies the purity of matrimony by saying, ***"Marriage is honourable among all and the bed undefiled"*** (Hebrews 13:4), meaning that those married should not defile their beds or body through committing adultery, ***"But fornicators and adulterers God will judge"*** (Hebrews 13:4).

The Apostle draws the evangelical style of matrimonial purity by saying, ***"Let each man have his own wife and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due to her and likewise"***

also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body but the husband does and likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer, and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (1 Corinthians 7:2-6). "For a time" implies the days of obligatory church fasts, private fasts or preparatory days for holy communion.

In the first request in the Liturgy of St. Gregory the priest prays for his children, both those who are celibate and the married saying, ***"Purity to those in celibacy, a good life to those in matrimony."***

During this litany which is full of special requests, follow the priest and respond by saying ***"Amen"*** at the end of each request.

- ✠ Upon saying, ***"Bestow upon Your holy church to shepherd Your flock in peace"***, respond with, ***"Amen Lord"***
- ✠ Upon saying, ***"All the ministers"***, respond with, ***"Amen"***
- ✠ Upon saying, ***"All those who live in virginity"***, respond with, ***"Amen"***
- ✠ Upon saying, ***"And the purity of Your faithful people"***, respond with, ***"Amen"***

Pray that the Lord helps those in His service and ministry, helps the virgins to keep pure, and protects the married from satanic wars, so that they may have happy lives and homes.

iv. Litany of Mercy

The priest prays, *"Remember O Lord to have mercy upon us all"*, asking God's mercy upon His congregation and upon himself, so God may have His mercy upon them according to His loving kindness, according to the multitude of His tender mercies because, *"With the Lord there is mercy, and with Him abundant redemption"* (Psalm130:7).

Beat your chest, and share with the congregation in this supplication as it is very tender to the heart of God, as a saint once said, *"There is no supplication more beloved and acceptable for God than someone asking for the forgiveness of their sins"*

v. Litany Of Place

The priest requests for deliverance and safety of the place, city or village where the church is, as the Prophet Jeremiah advised saying, *"Seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive. And pray to the Lord for it, for in its peace you will have peace"* (Jeremiah 29:7).

Where there is peace in a city there are believers living peacefully and in safety : *"Lead a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and reverence"* (1 Timothy 2:2).

The priest prays for every place, city, village and monastery of our Orthodox fathers in all the world, so that they may be kept in safety and peace.

During this request, pray for every place according to their needs, for example, the needs of a monastery situated in the wilderness are different from those situated on islands or near the sea, as was detailed in the Litany of Place in the Evening Incense. Respond with the congregation, "***Lord have mercy***", for all the above mentioned requests.

The priest completes the litany by saying, "***And those who are dwelling in them, in God's faith***", referring to the Christians dwelling in those places.

This request applies more to the monks living in the wilderness, without whose faith in God and His providence, and trust in His love, without their hope in His kingdom ready for those who struggle in His holy name, they would not have migrated to such remote places, which is away from any consolation or comfort; preferring to live in asceticism, spiritual strife and vigil for the greatness of their love to Christ the King.

During this request, remember my beloved, all the monks living in the wilderness, and pray for their perfection so God may give them aid, power and victory in their struggle.

vi. Litany of Waters (vegetation and the wind)

Every one of these specific factors has a time for church prayers, at the end of each of these three prayers the priest completes the rest of the litany: "***Raise them to their measure according to Your grace.***"

During this litany, ask God to, *"give us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our heart with food and gladness"* (Acts 14:17), and, *"Supply all our needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus"* (Philemon 4:19). In the evening incense these private prayers are further explained.

vii. Litany of Oblations

The priest requests the heavenly reward and divine grace for all those who have presented to Him these oblations, carrying them to the church and those on whose behalf they are offered, like the sick, oppressed and the departed, and those by whom they have been presented like the priests, deacons and ministers of the altar who partook in preparing the oblations and raising them on the altar.

During the recitation of this litany, the priest motions towards the oblations placed before him, as they are the greatest of the offerings of the believers to the church. The offerings, by its broad meaning, include all that is offered to the church for its needs and the needs of her servants, like flour to make the bread, wine to fill the chalice, candles, curtains, reading books, vessels of the altar and money offerings like tithes, vows or donations.

Note:

Some people may wonder, 'Why does the priest call the mysteries "Oblations", even after being transubstantiated to the Holy Body and Blood of the Lord?' We say this is possible, for the sacrament of Holy Communion has many names, such as, 'The sacrament of the Holy Bread.' His

Grace Bishop Gregorios, the Bishop of Scientific Research, wrote a book entitled, "The spiritual values of the sacrament of Bread," referring to the Eucharist.

It is also possible to name something or a person by a name or quality which they had before conversion, such as in the story of the man who was born blind. When the Lord healed him and he regained sight, some Pharisees came to Him to investigate his remedy saying, "***What do you say about Him because He opened your eyes?***" (John 9:17). The Bible called him the 'blind man' even though at that time he had his full vision recovered.

In the incident of the resurrection of our good Saviour, an angel appeared to the women and said to them, "***You seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He is risen. He is not here***" (Mark16:6).

We notice the angel called Him 'Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified', although He was taken down from the cross a long time ago, buried and then arose.

My beloved, during the recitation of this litany and the response of the deacon who says, "***Pray for these sacred and worthy oblations and our sacrifices and those who offered them,***" ask for the acceptance of this pure, non-bloody sacrifice for the forgiveness of the sins and iniquities of the whole congregation. Ask for those on whose behalf they are offered, if they are sick, oppressed, needy or reposed, so God may grant them according to each one's heart, if asked according to God's will.

Also pray for those who have presented these oblations so God may give them the heavenly in place of the earthly, the incorruptible in place of the corruptible and the perpetual in place of the transient, as the Apostle says, ***"Do not forget to do good and share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased"*** (Hebrews 13:16).

The Synaxis of the Saints

After completing the litanies, the priest says the prayer of the Synaxis, so called as it includes the most famous church fathers, righteous and holy. The priest begins by saying, ***"Since this O Lord is the command of Your only begotten Son, that we partake in the commemoration of Your saints..."***

This means God is pleased and wants us to partake in the commemoration of these saints who pleased Him in their lives. But how do we take part in the commemoration of these saints? By commemorating their lives, struggle, sayings and truly attempting to resemble them and follow in their steps in order to share with them an inheritance in the eternal life.

During recitation of the Synaxis, stand in reverence, concentrate and contemplate on every word and name said by the priest in order to benefit from the prayer of the Synaxis.

Try, while listening to the Synaxis to remember even a glimpse of the life of the saint whose name is mentioned by the priest, or contemplate on an aspect of their struggle,

remember a famous teaching or an important virtue that distinguishes them, so that you may keep your concentration during the Synaxis.

Let us try to apply this together, I am going to mention some of the saints in the Synaxis and a small aspect of each one's life...

The priest says, "*Graciously O Lord remember all the saints who have pleased You since the beginning. Our holy fathers the patriarchs...*" remember Adam, Abel, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. "*...the prophets...*" remember Moses, Isaiah and Jeremiah, "*...the apostles...*" remember some of the twelve disciples and their intercessions, "*...the preachers...*" such as St. Phillip and other past and recent preachers.

"*...The evangelists...*" such as St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke and St. John and their great contribution to the church in writing the gospel, life and teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. "*...the martyrs...*" who are many, such as St. George, St. Mina and St. Demiana. "*...the confessors...*", these are the believers who faced much tribulation and torture for their faith, they were not martyred but lived to endure terrible sufferings and permanent infirmities. There are many Confessors, such as St. Samuel the Confessor and abbot of the Kalamoun monastery near Fayoum, and St. Paphnadius the Confessor and bishop of Teeba.

"*...And the spirits of the righteous who perfected their faith...*", there are so many, such as Pope Mettaous, the first great patriarch, Pope Abraam another great patriarch, and the great Father Mikhail Ibrahim. Remember also St.

Arsanious who was a righteous monk, and the deacon Habib Farag who was a great servant.

“...Above all the holy perpetual virgin, the holy mother of God St. Mary...” remember aspects of her life, such as her humility, quietness, her purity, and her only advice which was recorded in the Bible : **“Whatever He says to you, do it”** (John 2:5). Try to fulfill this by keeping the commandment of the Lord Jesus in the Bible.

“...St. John the forerunner, Baptist and martyr...”, remember his bravery in truth till death, his humility and self denial when he said, **“He must increase and I must decrease”** (John 4:30).

“...St. Stephen the archdeacon and first martyr...”, remember his bravery, faith and forgiveness towards his enemies when he asked for it while being stoned saying, **“Do not charge them with this sin”** (Acts 7:60).

“...The beholder of God and evangelist, Mark the holy apostle and martyr...”, remember his contribution to Christianity in writing the gospel of Mark, his journey to preach with Peter, Paul and Barnabas, and finally what he did for the Coptic Orthodox church in preaching in our country and being martyred in Alexandria.

“...The holy patriarch Severus...”, who was the patriarch of our sister church, the Syrian Orthodox Church. He was exiled from his land because he held fast to his Orthodox faith, and so came to Egypt where he died and was buried. Try to remember and learn from his patience and longsufferance. **“...Our teacher Dioscorus...”**, who was the

hero of Orthodoxy. He suffered torture and insults for his Orthodoxy and was exiled and died in exile. Learn from his example by abiding in the true doctrine which was handed down to us by the saints. “...**St. Athanasius the Apostolic...**”, who was the protector of the Orthodox faith. Remember what is said of him: “If it had not been for Athanasius, the whole world would have become Arians.” Thank God for preserving the true faith through St. Athanasius the Great, who resembled the apostles in their struggle.

“...**St. Peter the martyr and high priest...**”, remember his love for his people and his fear for them when he advised the jailer to dig the jail from the rear and take him to his martyrdom secretly, so that the people gathering in front of the prison may be protected from seeing their father being tortured.

“...**St. John Chrysostom...**”, remember his bravery in truth against the impertinent Queen Andoksia. Remember his fervent spiritual sermons which are still read and remember to this day. It was because of his sermons that he was given the title ‘of the golden mouth’.

“...**St. Theodosius...**”, who was the 33rd Coptic patriarch. He protected Orthodoxy and was severely tortured for this. Learn from him to abide in the correct doctrine so that you, “**Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines**” (Hebrews 13:9). “...**St. Theophilus...**”, who was the 22nd Coptic patriarch. He was a spiritual person who loved monasticism and always took the time to visit the monks who dwelt in the wilderness. He would sit with them and talk about salvation. “...**St. Dimitrius...**”, who was the

12th Coptic patriarch, and is famously known as ‘Dimitrius the vine dresser’. He is credited for establishing the Coptic calendar and organising the fasts and Christian feasts correctly. He gave the church a great service. Try to learn from him by serving the church with your talents and abilities, however little. When God blesses them by a touch from the Holy Spirit they become great as what happened with St. Dimitrius who was illiterate at first. “...*St. Cyril...*”, who was the 24th Coptic patriarch. He was given the title ‘the great pillar of faith’. Remember his struggle in the first ecumenical council in Ephesus against Nestorius the heretic. Also remember his pure Orthodox teachings which still enriches and enlivens the church. He is the greatest teacher of the mystery of Divine incarnation and the greatest defender of the motherhood of St. Mary to Jesus Christ, the Incarnate God. It was said about him, "His mind was marinated in the divine books."

“...*St. Basil...*”, who was the archbishop of Caesarea, and the writer of the liturgy of St. Basil, which is famous in our church. He is a distinguished personality in the universal church and a pillar of pillars. “...*St. Gregory the theologian...*”, who was the bishop of Sazema. He served for a while in Constantinople, and wrote many powerful theological essays. Hence he earned his title, ‘the theologian’. “...*St. Gregory the miracle performer...*”, who was called as such because of the numerous miracles God performed through him. He was ordained bishop to the new Caesarea in the province of Pontius and was a great, spiritual man. “...*and St. Gregory the Armenian...*”, he was the most famous Armenian patriarch who was martyred without blood shed due to the enormous torturing he faced, and yet he was as steadfast as a rock.

“...The three hundred and eighteen fathers assembled at Nicea...”, the Council of Nicea was the first Ecumenical Council, and was held in the year 325 AD. Its aim was to defeat the heresy of Arius. The members were three hundred and eighteen who rejected the heresy and defended the true Orthodox faith. St. Athanasius was the great hero of the Council and he instituted the script of the Nicene Creed of Faith. **“...The one hundred and fifty at Constantinople...”**, this was the second Ecumenical Council, which was held in the year 381 AD, to condemn Macedonius the enemy of the Holy Spirit and other heretics. Their heresies were rejected by the Council, and the last section of the Creed was instituted, beginning with, **“Truly we believe in the Holy Spirit...”**. **“...and the two hundred at Ephesus...”** The Council of Ephesus is the third Ecumenical Council, which was held in the year 431 AD to condemn the heresies of Nestorius and Pelagius. They were rejected by the Council and excommunicated. The introduction to the Creed was instituted during this Council, which begins with, **“We honour you mother of true light...”** Pope Cyril the Alexandrian was the bright star at that Council.

“...Our righteous father the great Abba Anthony...”, who was distinguished by his quiet, spiritual bravery which penetrated deep within the wilderness. Despite fierce Satanic wars, he was victorious, through the strength and providence of the Lord, and so established a great spiritual monastic system in Egypt, earning the title of ‘the father of all monks in the whole world’. St. Anthony cared to keep the divine commandments and fulfill them. He advised all his disciples the monks to live according to the commandments and to

keep a verse from the Holy Bible to which their deeds may reflect.

“...*The righteous Abba Paul...*”, who was the first hermit to live a solitary life in the wilderness for about ninety three years without seeing a fellow human. The church gave him his title ‘the first hermit’, because of his long solitude in the wilderness and his spiritual struggle and great asceticism.

“...*The three saints Abba Macarius and all their children the cross bearers...*”. The three Macarius’ are as follows :-

- ✠ Abba Macarius the Great, who was Egyptian, and known as the father of the monks of the wilderness of Scetes (Sheheet), distinguished by his humility and love which thinks no evil. He always covered the mistakes for others, so much so that he deserved to hear a voice from heaven saying, "Blessed are you spiritual Macarius, you resemble your Creator in covering the weaknesses of others". Try to learn this blessed and beautiful virtue, my beloved.

- ✠ Abba Macarius the Alexandrian, father of the monks of cells. He was a contemporary of St. Macarius the Great. The most distinguished characteristic about him was his strict asceticism, his love of fasting and struggle in prayer. He was always cheerful. Try to learn these qualities, while asking his help in prayers.

- ✠ Abba Macarius the Bishop of the province of Kao in Upper Egypt. He was martyred for his Orthodox faith at the time of the Patriarch Dioscorus. He was characterised by perfect simplicity in appearance and dressing, so much so that many did not believe he

was a bishop. Try to learn from him the virtue of simplicity, so that Satan does not tempt us with the sin of pride. Ask for his help in your prayers.

“...and all their children the cross bearers...”, these were saintly monks who wore the holy Cross as a sign of spiritual struggle and victory.

“...Our father Abba John the hegumen...”, the spiritual brother of Abba Bishoy. Both were disciples of the great saint Abba Bamon. Abba John received the order of hegumen and became the provider in the wilderness, while living a heavenly life on earth. Once some fathers heard him praying in his cell and heard praises of angels and the fragrance of incense coming out of his cell. At another time one of the elders saw him sleeping in the heat of the noon and beside him was an angel relaxing him with a fan. The reason for these wonderful gifts was his wonderful humility, obedience, honesty in worshipping and care for prayers, continually contemplating on God. Try to learn his virtues.

“...Our father Abba Bishoy, the righteous, perfect man, the beloved of our good Saviour...”, he was the star and light of the wilderness. He was characterised by humility and goodness so much so that he deserved to be called ‘the perfect man, beloved of our good Saviour’. The Lord appeared to him many times as a guest. At one time, St. Bishoy washed the feet of our Lord Jesus Christ, and at another time he carried Him on his blessed shoulders up a mountain. Why not learn from Abba Bishoy the virtue of meekness, for as the Lord said, **“they shall inherit the earth.”**

“...Our father Abba Paul of Tammoh...” Abba Paul of Tammoh was the disciple of Abba Bishoy, and they are always mentioned together in the church's praises and prayers. What characterises Abba Paul is his spiritual struggle in the ascetic life, until the Lord Himself appeared to him saying, ***"Enough struggle My beloved Paul,"*** and Abba Paul lovingly answered, ***"Let me exhaust my body, my Master for Your name's sake, as You exhausted Yourself for mankind, You the God and Son of God gave Yourself for us, we the unworthy sinners!"*** So the Lord consoled him and strengthened him. ***"...and Ezekiel his disciple..."***, we do not know much about him, but it is enough for him to be the disciple of St. Paul of Tammoh, and it is definite that he resembled his great spiritual father in his spiritual struggle, humility and obedience which enabled him to live in submission and obedience for a long time. Try to learn from the life and spiritual struggle of St. Paul of Tammoh, and the obedience of Ezekiel his disciple, and ask for their help in your prayers.

"...My masters the holy Roman fathers Maximus and Domitius...", who were the sons of King Valentianus. Leaving the King's palace, throne and greatness, they became monks in the desert of Syria. Then they came to Egypt and became disciples of St. Macarius the Great, the father of the wilderness of Scetes, and lived their life in strict asceticism until they passed away. We can learn from them to renounce worldly concerns, such as money, possessions, authority, leadership, honour and praise, so that we may win rather the everlasting honour in eternal life with Christ the King of glory.

“...The forty nine martyrs, the elders of Scetes...”, who were martyred by the hands of the barbarians on one of their raids in the desert. Their bodies are buried in a large tomb in the Church of the Elders, in the monastery of St. Macarius in the wilderness of Scetes. They were a good example in their readiness for death at any moment without fear; we wish to learn from these heroes.

“...The strong saint Abba Moses...”, whose example is one of true, pure repentance. He was transformed from the depths of evil to the highest level of purity and holiness, so that he may become a witness of the work of God's grace that works and renews all people, if the Lord finds them ready. We remember Abba Moses for his repentance, repentance with all its significance and benefits. The greatest virtue we learn from St. Moses is the life of repentance without which no one can see the Lord.

“...and John Kame the priest...”, he was a pure saint who loved virginity so much that when his father forced him to marry against his will, St. John made an agreement with his wife to live in celibacy. They lived together in purity to an extent that each night, they deserved to see an angel protecting their bedroom. Also, the Lord planted a vine to overshadow them as a visible symbol of their angelic purity. Finally, St. John sent his wife to a nunnery and he himself went to become a monk in the wilderness of Scetes, completing his life in purity, and becoming a father of a monastery. We can learn from Abba John Kame the virtue of purity, either in celibacy or in marriage, as St. Paul described in the seventh chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians.

“...Our father Abba Daniel the hegumen...”, who was the protopriest of the wilderness of Scetes in the sixth century. He was characterised by great insight, spiritual wisdom and distinction, granted to him by God. These gifts enabled him to lead great multitudes of monks in their spiritual life. God also gave him the talent of knowledge of virtues and vices of people to facilitate his leadership of others and know their hearts, so as to guide them. Try to learn from him the virtue of spiritual wisdom and Divine distinction. This comes by continuous reading in the Holy Bible, in a spirit of submission and prayer, so that the Holy Spirit may teach you what you need. This also comes by reading the sayings and teachings of the fathers, knowing their struggle and manner which was guided by the Holy Spirit. Knowledge comes by the life of discipleship, and guidance by the spiritual fathers.

“...Our father Abba Isidor the priest...”, who was the great saintly priest of the wilderness in the fifth century, the golden era of monasticism. He was full of wisdom and patience. He once said, "From the time I became a monk, I never allowed anger to come out of my mouth." He helped the poor, encouraged the oppressed and bore everyone patiently. He, ***"strengthened the weak hands, made firm the feeble knees, said to those who are fearful hearted, be strong, do not fear. Behold your God will come and save you"*** (Isaiah 35:3-4). It is mentioned about him that any father who had a son and failed to chasten him, sent him to St. Isidor, who would counsel him and save him.

“...Our father Abba Bakhomius, the father of the community...”, there were two conflicting qualities in the character of St. Bakhomius, his extreme strictness and his extreme humility. He was very strict in administering his

monasteries, which resembled military camps in their order and obedience, but he was also distinguished by his great modesty, without the sovereignty of one over the other. Learn, my beloved these two virtues from St. Bakhomius, for few can attain them. **“...and Theodore his disciple...”**, who was an obedient son and the personal disciple of Abba Bakhomius. He absorbed all the characteristics of his personality, as it is mentioned in the Gospel: ***"It is enough for a disciple to be like his teacher"*** (Matthew 10:25). Theodore (Tadros) had a rare obedience, so much so that he became an ideal disciple. We can all learn from him simple obedience towards our physical and spiritual fathers, as obedience saves us a great deal of trouble in reaching our goals without stumbling along the way. By obedience we take a ready counsel supported by experience and free of negatives.

“...Our father Abba Shenouti the Archimandrite...”, who was the abbot of the monasteries in the province of Sohag in Upper Egypt. He was distinguished by his patriotism, pride of his nationality and heritage. He encouraged whatever was Coptic (Egyptian) and resisted anything foreign. He did his utmost to confirm the Coptic language, and assisted the Egyptians to a great extent in their struggle against foreign colonism. His high spirituality, and love for monasteries and solitude, earned him the title ‘the Archimandrite’, or ‘head of the hermits’. We can learn from St. Shenouti the love for our country, our people and our church, with all her heritage, language, rites, tunes, and spirituality. **“...and Abba Besa his disciple...”**, who was the successor of St. Shenouti in the administration of the monasteries, and was obedient and sincere to his spiritual father during his life and after his departure. He managed the monasteries in the same style and

spirit of Abba Shenouti. All his essays and letters to the monasteries included a speech or a teaching of his late spiritual father St. Shenouti. We can learn from Abba Besa his love of the spiritual life and teachings, for by them we are guided as if by a bright lamp.

While these are the names always mentioned in the Synaxis, or the Commemoration of Saints, there are, of course, many more, but are not usually mentioned.

The priest concludes the Synaxis with this wonderful prayer : ***"And all the host of Your saints through whose prayers and supplications, have mercy upon us and save us for the sake of Your Holy Name which is called upon us."*** The priest here asks for mercy and deliverance and providence from God, for himself and the congregation, through the supplications and prayers of all the saints whose names were mentioned, even though they are but a few from a vast number of saints whose names were not mentioned.

He truly asks for all this in the worthiness of the great and holy name of Christ, which is called upon us. As we are called Christians we carry His name. So the priest guarantees the acceptance and response to his prayers according to the Lord's promise: ***"Whatever you ask in My name, that I will do"*** (John 14:13,14). In the Old Testament God also promised, ***"If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and forgive their sin and heal their land. Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to prayer made in this place"*** (2 Chronicles 7:14-15).

Take this valuable chance and these blessed promises and ask God for all your needs according to His good will, seek Him with lowliness and humbleness, so He gives you whatever you need and responds to your will.

The deacon then says, *"Let the readers recite the names of our holy fathers, the patriarchs who have departed, O Lord repose their souls and forgive us our sins."*

In the past, names of the patriarchs who departed were written on many tablets and upon hearing this call every reader took out a tablet and read the names, asked for their mercy and repose as a reward for their services in the church and shepherding the people of God. We do not know when this tradition stopped but we can still pray to God for the departed patriarchs on hearing this call in the church. May God reward them for their spiritual strife and struggle in the church.

THE DIPTYCH

The times in which the Diptych must not be recited in the known fasting tune, are on Sundays, and during the fifty days after Easter. After the priest completes the Synaxis, and during the previous response of the deacon, the priest says the following diptych inaudibly: *"Remember also O Lord, all those who departed and reposed from amongst the priesthood, and from all the orders of the laity. Graciously O Lord, repose all their souls in the embrace of our holy fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Sustain them in green pastures, by the waters, comfort in the paradise of joy, the place where grief, sorrow and sighing have fled, in the*

light of your saints." He then places one spoonful of incense into the censer presented to him by the deacon, and he then mentions others who have departed.

Once the deacon has responded, ***"Let the readers name our holy fathers who have departed..."***, the priest would have completed the recitation of the Diptych inaudibly, then the congregation respond, ***"Glory be to You O Lord, Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy, Lord bless us, Lord repose them, Amen."***

This is a specific response for the Diptych of the departed and not for the Synaxis as some understand. Due to the misunderstanding that this is a response for the Synaxis of Saints, some have added, ***"May their holy blessings be with us all, Amen,"*** to the beginning of the response. This sentence was not originally present in the old liturgy books, neither in print or in scrolls. The liturgy of the society of the church's children mentioned it between brackets to denote that it is not original, but rather, recently added. Logically though, it is not possible for this response to refer to the Synaxis of the Saints, (***"Lord repose them Amen"***), for they have reached the highest levels of repose, comfort and happiness in the paradise of joy and their names are placed in the Synaxis so that we may ask for their intercessions.

If this response is meant for the recently departed then we should not say, ***"May their holy blessings be with us all Amen,"*** because we do not know their fate and the church has not confessed their holiness. It is not logical to ask for their repose and then to ask for their blessings. This response is meant for the recently departed, and not for the saints, as it is said after the Diptych and not the Synaxis. Another proof

is the absence of the sentence, "*May their holy blessings be with us all Amen,*" in the original liturgy books.

I hope this sentence will be deleted, and the hymn restored to its original, concise meaning. The Bible advises us saying, "*Do not remove the ancient landmark which your fathers have set*" (Proverbs 22:28).

And the Lord also said, "*Stand in the ways and see and ask for the old paths, where the good way is and walk in it, then you will find the rest of your souls*" (Jeremiah 6:16).

If there is a private Mass for a departed soul, the previous inaudible Diptych is not mentioned, but this audible one from the Liturgy of St. Cyril, with the great solemn tune, "*And those and everyone, O Lord whose name we have mentioned, and those whom we have not mentioned. Those who are within the thoughts of everyone of us and those who are not within us and those who have departed and reposed in the faith of Christ.*"

Here the priest places one spoonful of incense into the censer while reciting audibly, in the above mentioned tune, the names of the departed. The deacon recites the Litany of the Departed, "*Pray for our fathers and brethren who have departed, may the Lord repose their souls and forgive us our sins.*" The congregation respond, "*Lord have mercy.*"

Then the priest prays, in the solemn tune, the first part of the Litany of the Departed, "*Graciously O Lord, repose all their souls in the embrace of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Sustain them in green pastures by the waters,*

comfort in the paradise of joy. The place from which grief, sorrow and sighing have fled in the light of Your saints."

Then the congregation responds, "*Glory be to You O Lord, Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy, Lord bless us, Lord repose them, Amen.*" This response is clear in the liturgy book without the sentence, "*May their holy blessings be with us all, Amen.*"

The Method of Draining the Censer after the Diptych

After the priest places one spoonful of incense into the censer for those who have departed, the deacon takes the censer and places it in its designated area within the sanctuary so that all the incense may rise before the Lord God, within His Holy Sanctuary. This incense rises together with the prayers mentioned for those souls of His servants who have departed, so that the Lord may grant them mercy and repose.

The censer stays in its place until all the incense within it rises, then the deacon empties the ashes. The censer should not be emptied while the incense is still rising, for the incense signifies mercy for the departed before God.

Common Rites

Common rites regarding the use of the censor are as follows:

✠ After placing the Diptych incense in the censer, the priest or the deacon offers it before the icons of the saints in the church.

✠ After placing the Diptych incense into the censer, the deacon takes it and walks through the rows of congregation, blowing into the censer.

One may ask: 'What is the reason for offering incense before the saints' icons, if the incense is meant for the departed and not for the saints?' and, 'What is the reason for the deacon walking amongst the congregation and blowing into the censer?'

His Grace Bishop Gregorios, the Bishop of Scientific Research, responds to both questions as follows: *"The deacon ought to carry incense to the congregation who are outside the sanctuary, so that they can pray for their loved ones who have departed in His name. Then the priest takes the censer, and prays for the repose and mercy of the departed, and the incense rises with the prayers of the saints upon the golden altar which is before the throne of Christ"* (Revelations 8:3,4 and 5:8).

The most preferable is for the celebrant priest to come to the congregation with the censer, followed by a deacon who carries a dish containing the beads of incense. The people then take from it according to the number of people they know who have departed, pray on it and give it to the deacon, who then gives it to the priest who offers it in the sanctuary. If there is only one priest celebrating the Holy Mass, then a deacon will take the beads of incense to the people, followed by another deacon who will collect them

and give them back to the priest for offering and praying to the Lord for the departed.

Therefore, we conclude...

- ✠ The deacon goes out to the congregation with a plate of incense beads, not the censer, before the Diptych and not after, to collect from the believers the beads of incense, distributed for the Litany of the Departed. He then prepares it for the priest, and at the moment of the Diptych, the priest places it in the censer to request God's mercy for the departed.

- ✠ This incense is not to be offered before saintly icons or amidst the congregation, but for the mercy of the departed souls of the church believers.

Notes:

- i. The deacon must not take the censer after the incense of mercy has been placed in it and pass through the congregation blowing in it. This distracts the people from the sacrifice on the altar and the continuance of the Mass.

- ii. It is preferable for the censer to hang in its place after the incense of mercy has been placed in it and left until it is completely free from the smoke of incense. Then the deacon takes it, after the Mass, and empties the ashes.

- iii. It is necessary to empty the censer after using it in every Mass, so that it may 'fast' in preparation for the next Mass. If it is left without being emptied, either by mistake or forgetfulness, it should not be used for the next Mass, but instead be replaced by another censor which has 'fasted'. This

fasting must be done by all the altar vessels such as the water jug and the chalice. All vessels must be completely dried and wiped after washing them at the end of the Mass. The veil must be kept upside down to dry and the water jug must be emptied and left to dry upside down at the end of the Mass. This is fasting.

iv. The rite of the deacon going out to the congregation with the plate of incense during the Mass is not practiced now, but it is still practiced in the prayers of Prostration at the evening of Pentecost Sunday.

It is done as follows...

i. At the end of Tasbeha (Praises), and before the beginning of the prayer, the deacon ignites some coal which is placed in a certain bowl. He then takes the plate containing the incense beads, and passes through the congregation so that everybody may take a few beads.

ii. Each person mentions the names of those they know who have departed, and with each name they take a bead and place it in the other hand. This is done until all the departed have been remembered. The deacon then passes through with two empty plates; one for the incense of the departed and one for the surplus incense beads.

iii. The deacon returns to the altar, placing the incense plate containing the incense beads with the names of the departed on the table before the priest, who is praying the Thanksgiving Prayer in order to begin the first Prostration.

iv. After the Thanksgiving Prayer, the priest proceeds towards the vessel prepared for placing the incense for Diptych of the departed, and places some of this incense in it saying, ***"Glory and honour, honour and glory to the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, repose and comfort for Your servants who have departed in the Orthodox faith since the beginning. Graciously O Lord repose all their souls in the embrace of our holy fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the paradise of joy, in the heavenly Jerusalem. And give them, with us, a share and inheritance with all Your saints."***

v. This procedure is repeated again after the Prayer of Thanksgiving in the second Prostration, so the priest places the rest of the incense beads which were counted according to the souls of the departed while saying the above prayer.

vi. About distributing incense beads to the congregation so each may take a few beads in remembrance of the departed whom they would like to mention, the book of Laqan mentions, ***"Everyone gives incense for their departed."***

Those O Lord...

Whether the priest prays the Diptych audibly or not, he must pray the Diptych of the Liturgy of St. Basil as follows:

" Those O Lord whose souls You have taken, repose them in the paradise of joy, in the land of eternal living, in the heavenly Jerusalem. And we also, the foreigners in this place, preserve us in Your faith and grant us Your peace until the end."

In this paragraph, the church fulfils her holy work towards all her children, the departed and the living. Interceding for her departed children for the Lord to repose their souls, and to give them the eternal kingdom in the heavenly Jerusalem. ***"The tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people and God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, there shall be no more death, nor sorrow nor crying and there shall be no more pain for the former things have passed away"*** (Revelations 21:3-4). Here the great care of the church for her children is manifested not only in their lives but after their departure as well.

The intercession of the living for the departed is a fixed doctrine in the church. St. John Chrysostom witnessed the prayer for the departed as an apostolic tradition, and said: ***"The apostle did not uselessly oblige performance to commemorate the departed at the time of completion of the awesome sacraments, because they well know how beneficial and useful it is."***

As a compassionate mother, the church cares for her departed children, asking for their repose and does not forget her living children, but asks God to keep them in the Orthodox faith until the end, giving them His Divine peace which, ***"Surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ"*** (Philippians 4:7).

How beautiful are the feelings of the humble church when she describes herself and her children as ***"foreigners in this place"***. The world in which we live is a foreign land for us,

as God said to Moses, ***"I have also established My covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, in which they were strangers"*** (Exodus 6:4). And the Psalmist humbly confesses saying, ***"I am a stranger in the earth, do not hide Your commandment from me"*** (Psalm 119:19). He also admits himself as a stranger in his own house, ***"Your statutes have been my song in the house of my pilgrimage"*** (Psalm 119:54), he also supplicates in his strange house saying, ***"Hear my prayer O Lord and give ear to my cry. Do not be silent at my tears for I am a stranger , a sojourner as all my fathers were"*** (Psalm 39:12).

The Apostle Paul says, ***"Therefore we are always confident knowing that while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord"*** (2 Corinthians 5:6). Our true home is the heavenly Jerusalem where we shall dwell with God our Father forever. The Apostle says, ***"For our citizenship is in heaven, for which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ"*** (Philippians 3:20). I wish we could resemble the heroes of faith who confessed they were strangers, and pilgrims on the earth, plainly they seek a homeland, a heavenly country, ***"Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them"*** (Hebrews 11:13-16). As long as we are strangers in this world, let us put our only hope that final happiness is to, ***"Set our minds on things above, not on things on the earth"*** (Colossians 3:2) and listen to the advice of the Apostle who says, ***"Conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear"*** (1 Peter 1:17).

Dear friend, during the recitation of this prayer try to live with its words with all your heart and contemplate on the

valuable gems in it. Ask for the repose of your departed loved ones, by name. Confess to God that you are a stranger in this world and one day you will proceed to your real homeland, as those who have proceeded us in departure. Then reverently ask God to keep you in His faith until the end, granting you His peace to complete your struggle.

After completing this part, the congregation responds, ***"As it was, so shall it be, from generation to generation and to the age of ages, Amen."***

As the priest witnesses humbly that we are strangers in this world, the congregation also bears witness that we are temporal strangers, but infinity and eternity is only for God who is the same, ***"Yesterday, today and forever"*** (Hebrews 13:8), and we are strangers whose, ***"Life is even a vapour that appears for a little time and vanishes away"*** (James 4:14), so they sing the wonderful hymn which implies that God was from the beginning and shall be forever. ***"He who is blessed and omnipotent, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honour and everlasting power, Amen"*** (1 Timothy 6:15-16). When Moses asked God about His name, He said, ***"I am who I am"*** (Exodus 3:14). It is a Hebrew expression that means, ***"Who is and who was"***, God also says about Himself, ***"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end"***, says the Lord, ***"Who is and who was and who is to come, the almighty"*** (Revelation 1:18).

We pray at the beginning of the Mass saying, ***"O Master and Lord, God of truth, who existed before the ages and reigning forever"*** (Anaphora).

My beloved, pray this hymn with the congregation, with understanding and attention, giving God the due glorification as He is everlasting, with no beginning and no end.

Guide Us Into Your Kingdom ...

In this prayer the priest says, "***Guide us into Your kingdom, that as in this, as likewise also in everything, Your great and holy name be glorified, blessed and exalted in everything. Honourable and blessed, with Jesus Christ Your beloved Son and the Holy Spirit.***" This part was mentioned in one of the old handwritten liturgy books as follows: "***Guide us into Your kingdom, that and through this, as likewise also in everything, Your great and holy name is glorified, blessed and exalted in everything, with the honourable, and blessed Jesus Christ Your beloved Son and the Holy Spirit.***"

The second text is more correct than the first, relative to the accurate Coptic text and its meaning. We shall try to find some deep meanings treasured in this wonderful prayer, based on the second text. "***Guide us into Your kingdom...***", the priest asks for guidance to the good way that leads him and his congregation towards the heavenly kingdom to dwell with God forever in glorious joy. "***...that and through this, and likewise also in everything, Your great and holy name is glorified, blessed and exalted...***", as many were guided to the heavenly kingdom, walking the correct path, and adorned with spiritual virtues. This is reason enough for glorifying God, praising Him and exalting His Name, as the Lord Jesus Christ said, "***Let your light so shine before men, that they***

may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). God works within the soul, so one may do good, virtuous and useful deeds, as the Apostle says, *"For it is God who works in you both to will and to work on behalf of His good pleasure"* (Philippians 2:13).

God is glorified much more because He gave us His Holy Body and Blood as spiritual food and drink, to save us and guide us to eternal life and His everlasting Kingdom. By this pure offering, He dwells in the midst of His people, giving them eternal life for whoever partakes worthily, and blessing on whom the oblations were offered; hence His holy name may be glorified and blessed in everything.

As God is glorified in the salvation of many who obey His commandments, and behave accordingly, partaking of His Holy, life giving sacraments, He is also glorified in the perishing of many who refuse His commandments and close their ears from the voice of His Fatherly Divine advice, just as what happened with Pharaoh in the days of Moses the Prophet, *"As the Lord said to Moses, 'Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel, go forward but lift your rod and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea. And I indeed will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them. So I will gain honour over Pharaoh and over all his army, his chariots and his horsemen'"* (Exodus 14:15-18). So God was glorified in the salvation of Israel and their crossing the Red Sea and their rescue from Pharaoh. He is also glorified in the drowning of the rebellious Pharaoh who resisted the voice of God, and hence all his army and horsemen drowned.

The two sons of Aaron the priest were burnt by the fire of God, when they offered profane fire before God. And Moses said to Aaron, ***"This is what the Lord spoke saying, 'By those who come near Me I must be regarded as Holy, and before all the people I must be glorified'"*** (Leviticus 10:1-3).

God is glorified by the right and left, in the salvation and the perishing of people, because He is the creator of all, provider of all, and almighty God with word of His power.

This prayer says, ***"Through this (by Your guidance and salvation) and likewise also in everything (referring to the state of perishing of the rebellious and resistant), Your great and holy name is glorified, blessed and exalted in everything."***

Truly God's name is Holy in everything, as we pray in the Liturgy of St. Gregory, ***"Holy, Holy You are Lord and Holy in everything."***

In the Absolution of the Sunset Prayer we say, ***"...to praise and pray to You, at all times and everywhere we glorify and praise Your Holy Name, Your Father and the Holy Spirit forevermore, Amen."***

God is Holy and glorified in everything, as the Apostle says, ***"If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him minister with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ"*** (1 Peter 4:11).

After the believer describes the name of God the Father as, ***"Great and holy in everything,"*** they continue adding, ***"Glorified and blessed,"*** truly the name of God is glorified and blessed from His creation, human and animal, and He is also blessed as a source of every blessing, grace and credit as He is the treasure of goodness and giver of charity.

"Jesus Christ Your beloved Son and the Holy Spirit", here the believer joins the other two hypostasis of the Father in glorification, praise and divine perfection. The Holy Trinity is the great and holy name in everything, the honoured and blessed, the name which ought to be glorified, blessed and exalted in adoration and praise. To understand this prayer read it as follows, ***"Guide us into Your Kingdom, that and through this and likewise also in everything, Your great and holy name be glorified, blessed and exalted in everything Honourable and blessed, with Jesus Christ, Your beloved Son and the Holy Spirit."***

Hear this prayer my beloved, and meditate on all these meanings when the priest prays this part of the liturgy, which is full of praise and glorification for the name of the glorified, blessed and honoured God, who is most worthy in everything.

After the priest completes this prayer with its beautiful meaning and full of reverence, he bows his head toward the other serving priests and deacons and says, ***"Peace be with you all."***

Giving peace here means the establishment of grace which we asked for in calling the Holy Spirit and the transubstantiation of the sacraments. This grace is given to

partakers of the Communion of the Holy Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, ***"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guide your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ"*** (Philippians 4:7).

We notice this is the first time the priest says, ***"Peace be with you all,"*** without making the sign of the cross. The reason is because after the dwelling of the Holy Spirit upon the mysteries and the transubstantiation into the Holy Body and Blood of our God, the Lord Himself is present and the priest is now standing in the presence of the High Priest, our beloved Lord Jesus Christ. We notice that the statement, ***"Peace be with you all,"*** is repeated many times from there on without any signing of the cross.

The only permissible signing of the cross, after the dwelling of the Holy Spirit, are on the Mysteries, such as when the sign of the cross is made on the Body by the Blood and the Blood by the Body.

Respond with the congregation, ***"And also with you,"*** requesting God to fill the priest with peace and comfort, so that His Divine peace may overflow onto you and all others. In this way, problems and disputes will be eliminated from families and individuals, and everyone, ***"May lead a quiet and peaceful life in godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth"*** (1 Timothy 2:2-4).



9 Fraction and Communion

INTRODUCTION TO THE FRACTION

The priest prays the introduction of the Fraction by saying: "*Again, let us give thanks to the Almighty God...*", he thanks God who made him and his children worthy to stand in the holy presence of God, and raise up their hands before God in praise, and thanksgiving and prayer. He thanks Him for His grace by which He made the believers worthy of partaking of the holy Body and Blood of the Son of God, for the healing and redemption of their souls, bodies and spirits.

Then he fervently asks God to make him and his people worthy to partake of the Communion of His divine and immortal mysteries, so that the Communion does not become a reason for judgment to them if they partake of the mysteries in an unworthy manner (1 Corinthians 11:30).

The congregation respond: "*Amen*", thanking God for His marvellous blessings; the crown of which is the sacrament of Communion, or the sacrament of Thanksgiving, and asking God to give him true repentance and necessary worthiness to partake of these life-giving mysteries.

My beloved, recite with the congregation this response "*Amen*", and give thanks to God for His mercy, asking Him to make you worthy for receiving the Communion of these mysteries, so that you may enjoy all their blessings and effects.

The priest lays down the corporals on the altar, and takes the Body with his hands and says, "*The Holy Body.*"

The whole congregation kneels saying, "***We worship Your Holy Body***", as the priest declares the jewel he is holding with his hands is the true Body of Christ Emmanuel, our true God, presenting a true adoration in word and deed to the one who loved us and suffered physically, for our salvation.

Here the priest dips his finger into the Blood and makes the sign of the cross in the chalice while saying, "***And the honoured Blood.***"

The congregation kneels proclaiming, "***And Your honored Blood***" (that is, we worship Your divine, honoured Blood which was shed on the cross for our salvation).

The priest makes the sign of the cross on the Body with the Blood and says, "***Pertaining to His Christ, the Almighty Lord our God,***" signifying the passion of the Lord on the cross, and His Blood which was shed from the effects of the nails, lashes, crown of thorns, and stabbing by the spear, which tricked down His holy body at the time of crucifixion until His pure body was covered in blood.

In one of the Coptic manuscripts of the Liturgy books, the word "*Almighty*" relates to the Lord Christ and not God the Father. The Lord Christ was described as "*Almighty*", in some parts of the liturgy of St Gregory, for example :-

✠ In the introduction of the Fraction, the priest speaks to the Lord, "***Our God who gave His holy disciples and pure apostles... now again, O our Master bestow upon us and on all Your people... our almighty Lord our God.***"

‡ In the Fraction the priest prays saying, "***Blessed are You O Christ, our almighty God, Saviour of Your congregation, the perceptible word and the visible man.***" This proves the equality of God the Son, to God the Father, who is the first hypostasy in all qualities and divine perfection.

The deacons says, "***Amen, Amen, let us pray***" warning the congregation to pray in spirit and truth during these holy moments, while kneeling down in reverence.

When you hear this response, lift your heart to God, my beloved, ask Him for a life of repentance and forgiveness of sins, and worthiness to partake of the Holy Communion. Ask Him also for all your spiritual needs. The congregation says, "***Lord have mercy.***" This is said at the appropriate time, for the whole situation represents the crucifixion of Christ, and the shedding of His Holy Blood for the salvation of the world. This situation presents the climax of divine mercy and love for mankind. Let us grasp this valuable chance to ask mercy from God, for this mercy was granted to us on His crucifixion.

The priest gives peace to the congregation, without making the sign of the cross on them saying, "***Peace be with all***", giving peace here has a special significance, for at this moment Christ was crucified, there was great confusion in the world as the sun darkened, the earth quaked, rocks were split and everyone was in fear and terror. But the priest gives peace to the congregation and comforts their hearts amidst these painful memories and terrifying disturbances. My beloved, make the sign of the cross, and accept peace together with all the congregation, from the Lord of peace

Himself. *"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

The congregation answers saying, *"And with your spirit,"* requesting peace for their father the priest, so that this peace may overflow to others. This is in accordance with what is mentioned in the Apostolic Order, *"If the bishop or priest asks peace for others, he must first have peace, or else how can he give to others what he does not have?"*

After this, the congregation rise in reverence and submission to the holy divine Mysteries present on the altar, things which angels desire to see...

The priest starts to divide the holy Body while saying the Fraction.

THE FRACTION

The Fraction is a supplication to God who is pleased with the sanctification of the obligations, which have been purified by His Holy Spirit, so that they may purify and sanctify the bodies and souls of His servants. Thus, making us worthy of partaking of the Holy Body of Christ, and stand before Him as children before their loving father, with a pure heart, and perfect love, so that we may dare with favour and without fear to pray unto Him: "*Our Father...*"

The prayer of the Fraction are many and varied, some are annual, others specific for fasts, Lordly feasts, feasts of St Mary, the angels, saints and others.

The dividing of the Body symbolises the pains which the Lord suffered. The portions which the priest makes in the Body are called the "wounds". To prove this meaning the priest places one third on top of the two thirds so that they form a Cross, then divides the Holy Body to form a Cross.

The marvellous reverential method in which the Fraction is recited, is enough to uplift one to the heavens, to live heavenly moments whilst still living on earth.

The prayers of the Fraction are divided into sections. Whenever the priest completes a section, the congregation proclaims with enthusiasm and spirituality, "*Lord have mercy.*"

During Fraction Prayer, the division of the holy Body takes place. It is worthwhile for you during this time to contemplate on the sufferings of the Lord which He endured

for you, ***"They struck Him on the head with a reed and spat on Him"*** (Mark 15:19). Contemplate on the crown of thorns which hurt His holy head. Contemplate on the blood which was shed from His holy body, ***"From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it. But wounds and bruises and purified sores. They have not been closed or bound up or soothed with ointment"*** (Isaiah 1:6). Search into yourself and say, ***"All this You endured my beloved Lord for my sins, Lord have mercy on me a sinner!"***

Follow the words of the priest, meditating on their meaning, sharing in with the supplication. When he says, ***"Purify us also, our Master, from our hidden and manifest sins, and may every thought displeasing to Your goodness O God, lover of mankind, be away from us..."*** repeat to yourself the words, ***"Purify me from my hidden and manifest sins and keep away from me all evil thoughts which do not please Your goodness."*** Then the priest prays, ***"Purify our souls, bodies, spirits, hearts, eyes, our thoughts, our minds and our intentions."*** Repeat after every word, ***"Amen."*** Hence you will receive the benefits of the supplications in the beautiful Fraction Prayer.

Share with the congregation in the great prayer, repeating, ***"Lord have mercy"***, and mention all your supplications.

How strong is praying, ***"Lord have mercy"***, throughout the sections of the Fraction! As we know, the Fraction speaks about the passions of the Lord on the Cross. His infinite mercy on mankind is the reason and subject of the Lord's passions on the cross. When we say, ***"Lord have mercy,"*** during the Fraction, we remember the Lord's great mercy by which He surrendered Himself on the cross for us. So we ask

the Lord to fulfill this mercy in us and make us worthy to benefit.

- ✠ Each time you recite and repeat, with the congregation, the prayer, "***Lord have mercy,***" between the sections of the Fraction Prayer, ask for matters that need mercy from God, for example, you can ask for your repentance, and ask for the forgiveness of your sins. You can also ask for spiritual guidance and progress, and for the success of your service. And you can ask for a friend who may be in trouble. Put all these matters in the hands of God and in His compassionate eyes, and you will find mercy and help.
- ✠ After the priest completes the Fraction prayer, the whole church prays the "***Our Father***" in one voice so that the prayer maybe effective and powerful.
- ✠ Pray with reverence and attention to this most magnificent prayer which is the most honourable and acceptable to God, as the Lord Jesus Himself taught it to us by His blessed mouth.
- ✠ Renew in your heart the emotions of love to God who is the aim of all goodness, who loved you so much and called you His child.
- ✠ Say joyfully with the priest the "***Our Father...***"
- ✠ By mentioning the words "***Our Father***" you remember that you are His child and that those around you are His children as well. When you feel your relationship to God, you will also feel related to all His other children. Treat

them in true love, as your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. For we are all His children, and He is ***"Our Father who art in heaven..."***

✠ Pray and meditate on the seven beautiful and eternal supplications in this awesome prayer:

- i. ***Hallowed be Thy name***
- ii. ***Thy kingdom come***
- iii. ***Thy will be done***
- iv. ***Give us this day our daily bread*** - signifying the actual bread for all our physical needs, as well as the bread which gives us spiritual nourishment, that is, the word of God, for our beloved Lord said: ***"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God"*** (Matthew 4:4). It also signifies the partaking of the Holy Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, for He is the Bread of Life which came from heaven, and whoever partakes of it shall have eternal life (Matthew 6:15-51).
- v. ***Forgive us our trespasses***
- vi. ***Lead us not into temptation***
- vii. ***But deliver us from evil***

The prayer is then concluded, ***"Through Jesus Christ our Lord"***, in order to assure us that the prayer is accepted by God the Father, for our beloved Jesus said: ***"Most assuredly I say to you, whatsoever you ask from the Father in My name, He will give you"*** (John 6:23).

Prayers of Submission and Absolution

After completing the Lord's Prayer, the priest begins to pray three reverent prayers inaudibly. In the first prayer, he asks for himself and his people saying, *"Lead us not into temptation, neither let any iniquity overcome us, but deliver us from unprofitable deeds, and abolish the tempter and cast him from us the cause which drives us to sin."*

At its conclusion, the deacon invites people to repentance by saying, *"Bow your heads before the Lord."*

All the congregation kneel before God, as it is a moment of repentance and confession, so that we may be worthy to accept the Prayer of Absolution from the priest. Hence the people respond, *"We bow before You, O Lord"* or *"Here we are Lord, bowing our heads, confessing our iniquities and sins, asking for Your Divine mercy to wash us, so that we may become whiter than snow."* We may pray the prayer of repentance, which is mentioned in the absolution of the Evening Vesper prayers. Alternatively, we can pray Psalm 150, or, *"O God, absolve, remit and forgive us our sins which we have done willingly and unwillingly,"* then say the, *"Our Father who art in Heaven..."*

My beloved, offer unto God a true repentance during these awesome moments, bow your head and your soul under God's mighty hand, that He might lift you up, accept your repentance and forgive your sins, according to His divine promise, *"But on this one will I look on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word"* (Isaiah 66:2).

The priest prays the second Prayer of Submission inaudibly, thanking the Lord for preparing for us these Divine Mysteries which the angels desire to behold. Then he asks God to unite us with Himself through our partaking of His Holy Body and Blood, according to His Divine promise, ***"He who eats My flesh and drinks My Blood, abides in Me and I in him"*** (John 6:56).

To unite together in brotherly love as the Apostle Paul wrote: ***"For we being many, are one Bread and one Body, for we all partake of that one Bread"*** (1 Corinthians 10:17).

Then the priest asks that we may be filled with the Holy Spirit, confirmed in His upright faith until the end, and to be filled with the longing for His true love, and be repentant and faithful, in order to be ready to meet Christ.

The deacon says, ***"Let us attend in fear of God!"*** Let us listen during our Submission Prayers, lifting our hearts to God in silence, as the Spiritual Elder wrote: *"Silence your tongue, to comfort your heart. Silence your heart, your spirit talks."* And also, *"The mouth of the silent reflects the mysteries of God."*

During your submission and silence, while waiting to accept the absolution from the priest, offer unto God your repentance, in order that you may be worthy enough to proceed and partake of the Divine Mysteries. Hence, you will receive forgiveness and the full benefit of the Absolution.

The priest gives peace to the kneeling congregation saying, ***"Peace be with you all."*** And while still bowing, the congregation respond, ***"And also with your spirit."***

Here, all are kneeling, and feeling sorry for their sins, and so the priest bestows on them peace, as an introduction to the joy which awaits them, after having read the Absolution and receiving forgiveness of sins and redemption from the heavy yoke of sin.

Rejoice my beloved, and rest in peace when you receive peace from the priest, and respond with a loving heart towards your father, saying, ***"And with your spirit."***

The congregation is still in submission, presenting a collective repentance, while the priest starts the absolution prayer inaudibly: ***"O Master and Lord, Almighty God, healer of our souls, bodies and spirits..."***

He requests from God to accept the repentance of His servants who are standing before Him, humbly confessing their sins and prays that they may be absolved from every sin, every curse, every denial, before they proceed to partake of the Divine Mysteries. He prays that their names be inscribed with all the Saints in the Kingdom of Heaven.

This is the goal of our spiritual struggle, that God may accept our repentance, and absolve us from every sin and inscribe our names with all His Saints in the Kingdom of Heaven. This is our ultimate joy! Just as when the seventy apostles returned with joy saying, ***"Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your Name"*** (Luke 10:17), the Lord said to them, ***"Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are***

subject to you, but rejoice rather because your names are written in Heaven" (Luke 10:20).

Then the priest remembers his children who asked him to pray for them. Not only would he have written their names down, but would have also remembered them in his heart and mentions them before the Sacrifice, who carries sins, problems and the worries of the world. He prays that God may give remedy for the sick and repose for the departed, joy for the oppressed, success for students, and peace for the troubled.

Finally, in meekness and humility, he mentions himself: *"Remember also, O Lord, my weakness, and forgive me my numerous sins, and where sin abounds, may Your grace there be highly abundant. Do not deprive Your people of the grace of Your Holy Spirit for the sake of my own personal sins and the abominations of my heart, but rather absolve them all."*

Then the priest says the introduction of the Litanies of Peace and Fathers, inaudibly, then says the introduction of the Litany of Gatherings as follows: *"Remember, O Lord, our gatherings to bless them."*

The deacon raises the Cross, responding to the priest, *""You are saved. Amen. And with your spirit."*

This response is divided into two parts, the first is for the priest: *"You are saved. Amen. And with your spirit."* The second is for the congregation: *"Let us attend in fear of God."*

As the deacon hears the priest presenting repentance to God in reverence saying, "**Remember also, O Lord, my weakness and forgive me my numerous sins....**", he sees his humility and lowliness before the sacrificed Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, and so he too immediately gives witness to his own repentance and salvation by saying, "**You are saved. Amen.**" He then joins in giving comfort to the priest by replying, "**And with your spirit**". Or alternatively, peace and comfort for your honest, repenting spirit, that reminds me of Nathan the prophet, with David the Prophet and King. When David confessed his sins to God before Nathan, he said: "**I have sinned against the Lord,**" and Nathan said to David, "**The Lord also has put away your sin, you shall not die**" (2 Samuel 12:13).

Here I ask myself, was it Nathan's authority to say to David the Prophet and King, "**The Lord also has put away your sin. You shall not die**" ?

David was a great king and prophet, and his heart was according to God's heart; even more than Nathan himself. But because God sent him, he went and spoke to David, as God told him. In other situations we find him giving to David obedience and submission. When investigating the subject of ordaining Solomon king on his father's throne, Nathan the prophet came in before David the prophet, he bowed down before the king with his face to the ground and said, "**My lord, O King ... even me your servant**" (1 Kings 1:23-27).

Raising the cross denotes the salvation of the priest, in accomplishing by the cross and worthiness of the Divine Blood shed for him, not by the words of the deacon.

Then the deacon says to the congregation kneeling down before God, "***Let us attend in fear of God.***" This is the second time the deacon tells the congregation to listen in the fear of God. As a while ago, and specifically before reading the absolution, he said: "***Let us attend in the fear of God.***" He repeated it at the end of the absolution, due to the importance and significance of the situation, which obliges us to be silent and revering, bowing our heads before the Lord and the divine Mysteries, in order that we may find mercy and acceptance before God.

The congregation begs the rich mercy of God saying, "***Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy.***" Seeking God's mercy is necessary, as despite our struggle in repentance, we are found worthy to partake of these divine Mysteries, because of God's great mercy. For this reason we beg in persistence, seeking God's mercy not once but thrice, signifying the completeness of the Holy Trinity.

Beat your chest my beloved and seek God's mercy for your salvation, and for the partaking of the Holy Communion.

Signs Before The Confession

The celebrant priest takes the Espadikon (centre of the Bread which symbolises the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ) between the tips of the fingers of his right hand, and carefully lifts it up, while bowing his head, saying, "***The Holies are for those who are Holy.***" Then he makes the sign of the cross over the Chalice with the Espadikon. He then dips it into the Honoured Blood and carefully lifts it again and makes the sign of the Cross on the Holy Body present on the

Paten, saying, "***Blessed be the Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Amen.***"

✠ Lifting the Espadikon above signifies:

- The lifting up of the Saviour from the cross for the salvation of all, "***That whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life***" (John 3:15) ;
- The Resurrection of the Saviour from the dead to raise us with Him to be amongst those in heaven ;
- The greatness of these Holies, for whoever partakes of them must be virtuous, holy, ready and repentant. That is why the priest lifts the Espadikon and says, "***The Holies are for those who are holy.***"

One church cannon states, "*If prayers are integrated, let the priest say through the first deacon: 'Who is pure, approach the Holy Mysteries, and who is not pure should not approach them, so that he is not burned by the fire of Divinity. Whoever causes a friend to stumble, or has an adulterous thought, or is drunk with wine, do not approach.'*"

✠ When he says, "***Blessed be the Lord, Jesus Christ***", he makes the sign of the cross over the Holy Body with the Espadikon, as blessing is always accompanied by the sign of the cross, which is the sign of Christ, glory be to Him.

✠ After making the sign of the cross on the Body by the Espadikon which has now been dipped in the blood, the

priest moves the Espadikon, thereby touching all the wounds which he made in the Body during the Fraction. It is as if he is trying to soothe the wounds of the Master which, He bore for us.

Here the priest and the whole church with him, have to remember that nothing can soothe the wounds of the Master, or their inflammation, except our return to Him through repentance and surrendering ourselves to Him. We must please Him and obey his commandments. For as the Church explained, when the Lord said on the cross, "***I am thirsty***", it was not water He thirsted for, so much as He thirsted for the salvation of our souls and our return to Him.

My beloved, think of these meanings while hearing the priest saying, "***The Holies are for those who are holy.***"

The congregation responds with this reverent response: "***One is the HOLY FATHER. One is the HOLY SON. One is the HOLY SPIRIT. Amen.***" As the priest warns the congregation saying, "***The Holies are for those who are holy***", the congregation respond, "***We are not saints, but unworthy sinners, but the only Holy and Holiest is God, Trinitarian hypostasis.***" We simply say that the required holiness to proceed to Communion for the holy Mysteries, is Orthodox faith with purity of doctrine, life of repentance and spiritual discipleship, which is the firm foundation of proper Christian life.

Recite my beloved, with the congregation this wonderful spiritual song, "***One is the Holy Father...***" as if you are standing with the Seraphim chanting with them their eternal

praise: ***"Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of Your glory!"*** (Isaiah 6:3).

As the priest sees the reverence of the congregation, his humbleness and feelings of unworthiness, together with the presence of the awesome holiness of the Mysteries, he gives the congregation peace and security by saying, ***"Peace be with you all,"*** and the congregation responds, ***"And also with your spirit."***

Recite quietly this supplication with the congregation, to your father the priest, wishing him Divine peace, as by his peace you have yours.

The priest makes the sign of the cross over the Body once again with the Espadikon dipped in the Blood, and says, ***"The Holy Body and the true honoured Blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of our God, Amen."***

The Congregation answers: ***"Amen"***, believing the words of the priest.

The celebrant priest then makes the sign of the Cross over the Body the third time with the Espadikon, saying, ***"The Holy, honoured Body and the true Blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of our God, Amen."***

The congregation responds saying again, ***"Amen."***

The priest overturns the Espadikon and holds it between his fingers turned upside down. He lifts it to the Chalice, makes the sign of the Cross on the Blood, and places the Espadikon into the Blood, saying, ***"The Body and the Blood of***

EMMANUEL, our God. This is true. Amen" The congregation responds, "***Amen, I believe,***" believing all that the priest has said. It is worth mentioning that this response is mentioned in the singular form. This means that every individual believes and has personal faith that these Holy Mysteries are the Holy Body and Blood of Emmanuel our God, truly and without any doubt or hesitation.

Note:

i) Making the sign of the cross on the Holy Body by the Espadikon three times, then lifting the Espadikon to place it in the Chalice, symbolises the three days which the Lord Jesus spent in the tomb, and on the third day rose from the dead.

ii) Overturning the Espadikon and placing it in the Blood upside down, so that it is submerged in the Blood present in the Chalice, symbolises the action of Crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ, glory be to Him, for at His Crucifixion they lay Him on His back so that they can nail Him to the cross. Therefore, the blood from Him flowed from His wounds, upon His Body, upon where He received lashings, upon where they placed the crown of thorns on His head, and upon where they pierced His side. His entire, precious body was completely immersed in His pure blood. This is likened to a butcher who slaughters a lamb and immediately it is drenched in its blood. So too was our beloved good Saviour, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, as the priest says in the liturgy of St. Gregory, "***You have gone as a lamb to the slaughter, even to the cross.***"

THE CONFESSION

The celebrant priest raises the Paten very carefully with his hands and says the Confession: ***"Amen. Amen. Amen. I believe. I believe, I believe and confess to the last breath..."***

Note:

This prayer is called 'Confession', as it includes the confession of the whole church, by the priest, that the Mysteries on the altar, in the paten and in the chalice, are the Body and Blood of the Lord.

During the priest's confession, the congregation kneel before God, to the Divine Mysteries carried by the hands of the priest.

Kneel, my blessed one, glorifying and honouring the Life Giving Mysteries, and concentrate with the priest who is praying the confession, and meditate and understand every powerful, divine word.

After the priest completes the Confession, he places the paten on the altar, and covers it with both his hands, as an example of the Cherubim who covers the Ark of the Covenant, which was the vessel of manna in the holiest of the holies, then kneels before the altar reverently saying these inaudible prayers:

"For all glory and all honour and all worship are due to the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, at all times and forevermore, Amen" ;

"Make us all worthy, O our Master to partake of Your Holy Body and Your Honoured Blood, for the purification for our souls, bodies and spirits, and forgiveness of our sins and our iniquities, that we may become one body and one spirit with You" ;

"Absolve and forgive us O God, our sins which we have done willingly and unwillingly."

These prayers are concluded with the Lord's prayer, "***Our Father ...***"

My beloved, why don't you learn these prayers, which are solemn but great in meaning, and pray them inaudibly with the priest while you are kneeling, giving glory to the One God, Trinitarian in hypostasis, asking forgiveness for your sins, supplicating unto the Lord to make you worthy to partake of these Holy Mysteries, and thereby increase your abiding and unity in Christ, so that you may become one body and one spirit with Him.

At the end of the Confession, the deacon holds the Cross in his right hand and an illuminated candle in his left, between them he holds a veil folded in the shape of a triangle and placed before his eyes. He then prays the deacon's confession: "***Amen, Amen, Amen, I believe, I believe, I believe that this is true Amen. Pray for us and for all the Christians who said to us concerning them, 'remember us in the house of the Lord'. The peace and love of Jesus Christ be with you. Sing a psalm, Alleluia. Pray for the merit of partaking of these holy, pure and heavenly Mysteries. Lord have mercy.***"

Note:

The Cross held by the deacon with his right hand, is the sign of the Son of Man. Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross for our salvation, so the Apostle would like us to place the sign of the Cross before us continually saying, ***"For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified"*** (1 Corinthians 2:2).

The illuminated candle held in his left hand symbolises the life of sacrifice that the Lord Jesus lived for us, this sacrifice is manifested in the tears that He wept for us and the sweat that came forth from His Body for us, and the Blood that is shed on the Cross, dripping until it covered His Holy Body. The Lord Jesus, the lover of mankind, sacrificed His tears, sweat and blood for us:

"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). The candle that illuminates and burns and melts drips drops of hot wax, reminding us of the Lord Jesus who wept for us, and sweated drops of blood. All this He did out of His love for us and at last, He did not withhold His Blood or His life to reconcile us with Him, so that He may return us to the lost paradise and the kingdom prepared for us before the foundation of the world.

The veil held by the deacon between his hands, he lifts and places it in front of his eyes because of the glory of Christ that dwells upon the altar, and he cannot face the splendour of this glory, so he covers his eyes like the Seraphim who cover their faces with their wings because of the splendour of the glory of God, which is invisible and unspeakable.

When the deacon says the Confession, he confirms his belief in the priest's profession, which is mentioned prior to the deacon's Confession. He declares his belief regarding the theological facts of faith about the truth of the Life Giving Body which the Lord took of the Virgin Mary, and gave it up for us on the Holy wooden Cross by His own will, and that His Divinity did not depart from His humanity for a single instant nor a twinkle of an eye, and that this Body is given for us, for our salvation, forgiveness of sins and eternal life to those who partake of it worthily.

The deacon then asks the congregation to pray for themselves and all the Christians who asked of us to pray for them, and he asks us to praise and sing during the communion of the feast of the wedding of the Lamb. Lastly he requests prayer for those who will partake of these heavenly Mysteries, in repentance and worthiness so that the Communion becomes a source of blessing, fulfillment and spiritual growth, and judgement or a reason for weakness, sickness and death, which is what the Apostle Paul warned us of in 1 Corinthians 11:29-30.

Finally, the deacon concludes the Confession with the powerful words, "***Lord have mercy,***" as it is by God's that we can come to church, "***But as for me, I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your mercy, in fear of You I will worship towards Your holy temple***" (Psalm 5:7). By the mercy of God, not by our own worthiness, we come into the holy temple to see the priest when he opens the veil of the sanctuary saying, "***Have mercy upon us O God, the Father Almighty, O Holy Trinity have mercy upon us.***" During the Communion, the deacon says, "***Lord have mercy,***" so our own communion may be according to God's

mercy. Do not treat us according to our sins O Lord because, ***"If You Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord who can stand? But there is forgiveness with You"*** (Psalm 130:3-4).

Before proceeding to take the Holy Communion, contemplate on the words of the deacon: ***"Pray for the merit of partaking of these Holy, Pure and Heavenly Mysteries"***, examine yourself before partaking of the Holies so as to take grace instead of condemnation.

It is worth mentioning that the Protestants think the Communion is merely a spiritual sharing between believers, and do not place restrictions or conditions of repentance on those partaking. Their elders do not warn their people that, *"none is supposed to partake of it except ready believers, who are without blame or stumbling. Whoever partakes of it without knowledge or understanding or confession of Christian faith or whoever partakes of it while carrying a hidden or conspicuous sin or certain guilt, faces the wrath of God and His penalty, and is a criminal in the Body and Blood of the Lord."* As for us Orthodox people, we believe in the transubstantiation and that what we partake of is not normal bread or normal wine, but the Holy Body and Blood of the Lord truly and in truth.

St. John Chrysostom gave an effective sermon about Communion with repentance and preparation, which is also mentioned by the church in the eleventh hour of Tuesday of the Holy Pascha: *"I want to remind you brothers of what I repeated by telling you about our partaking of the Holy Mysteries of Christ as I saw you in great degradation and lack of fear, worship and mourning, so I cry for myself and*

say, 'Do these people know for whom they are standing? Do they know what is the power of this Mystery? Then I unwillingly get angry, even if I could go out, I will leave you out of distress and if I rebuke one of you, he does not care but complains as if I oppressed him! How strange, for those who do oppress you and steal your goods, you don't rage against them like you rage about me who cares for your salvation, fearful for wrath of God to fall upon you as a result of your negligence towards this Great Mystery, do you know whom do you partake of? It is the Holy Body of the Word of God and His Blood shed for our salvation. If anyone partakes unworthily of them he will have penalty and perish like Judas who surrendered the Lord as he partook unworthily of the supper.'"

The congregation must lift their hearts to God asking for His blessing and mercy on all the worthy partakers, so that the sacrament may become a blessing in their lives, and they abide in Christ and Christ abides in them according to His true promise, ***"He who eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood abides in Me and I in him"*** (John 6:56).

My beloved, why don't you contemplate on all the previous prayers. While kneeling and with the confession of the priest and his inaudible prayers, then the confession of the deacon including the instructions to pray for all Christians and for the merit of partaking of these Heavenly Mysteries, take the blessing of praying for the needy.

Rise from your kneeling and sing with the congregation, ***"Glory unto You O Lord, glory unto You"***, giving glory to God who blessed the church with these Divine Mysteries, so that they become remedy, life and salvation for our souls,

bodies and spirits, and for the forgiveness of sins and abiding in Christ, and finally attaining eternal life (Romans 6:22).

Then the congregation chants Psalm 150, which is the Psalm of joy and exultation as the deacon says, "*Sing with praises saying Alleluia!*" Hymns and praises are then sung according to the church season.

Meanwhile the priest rises and asks absolution from his brothers the priests, and forgiveness from the deacons and congregation and starts giving the Eucharist to all those who are prepared.

My beloved, if you have confessed and are careful, proceed to the holy place for partaking of the Communion of the Divine Mysteries, the Bread of life.

The period between confessions must not exceed 3 - 4 weeks.

Care must be given concerning eating and sleeping ...

✠ Care for eating

The person who wants to partake of the Holy Communion, must fast at least nine hours beforehand, as mentioned in the Apostolic canons, "*No one receives the Eucharist except with purity and fasting, and if a person approached and took from the Communion carelessly, they will be cut off from the church of God forever.*"

The nine hours represent the nine hours the Lord Jesus suffered on Good Friday (from 9am to 6pm). At the third hour (9am) Pontius Pilate condemned the Saviour to be crucified, then the path to crucifixion began with a long series of tortures like lashing, the placing of the crown of thorns, scourging, striking with reeds, mockery, spitting on His Holy face and clothing Him with a purple robe. After all this, ***"They led Him away to be crucified"*** (Matthew 27:31). Even St. Mark the Evangelist records, ***"They led Him away to crucify Him"*** (Mark 15:20).

And so the Saviour suffered on the Cross until He gave up His Spirit, at the ninth hour (3pm). Even after His death, one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. Then He was taken down from the Cross at the eleventh hour (5pm), and after anointing His Body with the spices, He was laid in the tomb at the twelfth hour (6pm).

The period of His sufferance and torture was nine hours, and so we fast nine hours, remembering the nine hours Christ suffered for us. We commemorate and honour and the passions of the Lord for our salvation, so that we may be found worthy to partake of His pure Body which has been broken for us, and His Precious Honoured Blood which has been shed for us.

Children fast for six hours, in consideration for their young age. Infants fast for three hours, which is the normal period between weaning the infant.

Note:

In the case of afternoon Masses, such as during the Great Lent, adults should take care to fast from midnight, the night before.

Care of eating is also related to taking care when bathing and brushing teeth. The person who intends to receive Holy Communion must bathe the night before, and not in the morning, as bathing is considered breaking the fast because the body pores absorb water during bathing, and also some of the water might enter into the mouth accidentally.

Also brushing teeth in the morning of receiving the Holy Communion is not permissible, as some water might enter the throat and hence break the fast. In the case of certain mouth infections which necessitate brushing teeth in the morning, special absolution must be taken from the confession father. Bathing and washing the mouth is considered luxury and comfort for the body, while God ordered the Passover lamb (who signifies the Body of Christ) to be eaten with bitter herbs, in haste, with a belt on their waist, their sandals on their feet and their staff in their hand (signifying readiness and preparation, not rest and idleness), (Exodus 12:8-11).

✠ Care for sleeping

We refer here to bodily secretions, which prohibit the partaking of Holy Communion. This relates to secretions, through masturbating for example, or menstruating, in the case of a woman. These secretions are considered breaking the fast, however, it does not prohibit, them from attending the church or partaking in prayer with the congregation.

Concerning this, St. Severus, son of Moqafaa said, *"Although he is considered having broken his fast, it does not prohibit the prayer, or him entering the church or attending the mass but only prohibits partaking of the Holy Mysteries. As for married couples, they should not have sexual relations the night before receiving the Holy Communion, and the couple should remain as such during that day. The night prior to the Mass, they should be repentant, and prepare themselves physically and spiritually, and during the day they should be kept busy contemplating on the blessing they just received, and the great Divine Host who now dwells within them as a result. They are to spend the day thanking God for this great gift."*

It was said about St. Epifamios, Bishop of Cyprus, that he was calling the Holy Spirit in person during the Mass. One day he called Him but He did not overshadow the place, so he grieved very much and feared that God prevented His Spirit from him. He then looked at the deacon beside him and found him infected with leprosy, so he ordered him to go out of the church. After the service he called him and asked him the reason for the evil that occurred to him, and he confessed that he had relations with his wife the night before.

My beloved, while waiting for your turn to receive the Holy Communion, pray :

"O Sovereign of Life, and King of ages, the Word of God our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ, the true Bread which came down from Heaven, giver of life to those who receive it, make me worthy, without condemnation to partake of Your Holy Body and Honoured Blood, so that by partaking of the Holy Mysteries I become one with You to

the end, You the Son of God the Father, Glory to You with Him and with the Holy Spirit forever, Amen."

"O Sovereign of Life and King of ages, our Lord and God Jesus Christ, the true living Bread which came down from Heaven, who gave life to those who partake of Your Holy Body and Honoured Blood, bless Your servant with Your Heavenly Blessings so that I may be worthy to receive Your Holy Body and Your Sacred Blood worthily. Remind my heart of Your Grace and save me, to taste the sweetness of Your Heavenly Grace, hidden in this Mystery. Give me a steadfast faith, free of doubt to proceed to You, believing that this is Your Holy Body and Honoured Blood, O Emmanuel our God. Make me worthy to receive them without falling into condemnation, but for the forgiveness of my sins and uniting with You spiritually, and for the acceptance before Your Holy pulpit. Glory be to You with Your Gracious Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forevermore, Amen."

"Lord, I am not worthy to have You come under my roof because I am a sinner, but only say the words, "Your sins are forgiven," and my soul will be healed. I am barren and empty of any goodness, I have nothing but Your compassion, mercy and love to mankind. You descended from Heavenly Glory to our humility and consented to be born in a manger. O Holy Saviour, do not reject my humble and miserable soul which is waiting for Your Glorified coming. As You did not refuse to enter the leper's house to heal him, please Lord, come into my soul to cleanse it. As You did not stop the adulteress from kissing Your feet, please do not prevent me from coming near You to receive Your Holy Body and Your Sacred Blood. May this Holy Communion banish every corruption and mortify all my evil

desires. Help me to obey Your commandments and heal my soul and my body from every sin. May Your Spirit dwell within me and make me united with You so I may live for the glory of Your name. Amen."

THE HOLY COMMUNION

All that you have done, my blessed one, in your spiritual struggle and preparation for the holy Mass, whether it be repentance, confession, humbleness, fasting or prayers, is considered the pursuit, and now in partaking of the holy sacrament of Communion, you have attained the prize. You partake of the Communion, which is the living Sacraments of God, as a reward for your spiritual struggle, for as the Apostle Paul says, ***"I press towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"*** (Philippians 3:14). Here, take more care against any idle or evil thought, paying attention to what the Apostle Paul said, ***"Let no one defraud you of your reward"*** (Colossians 2:18).

When the priest comes with the paten, covered and containing the Holy Body, toward those who will be receiving the sacrament, bow and respond, ***"Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"***

After completing your 'Prayer before Holy Communion', take a small corporal (veil), that is given out specifically for those receiving Communion, and proceed and kneel before the Holy Body as you accept the sacrament from the priest. When the priest says, ***"The Body of Emmanuel our God, this is true, Amen"***, respond saying, ***"Amen,"*** thus you are

bearing witness that what you have received is indeed the Holy Body of the Lord Jesus.

After you receive the Holy Body cover your mouth with the corporal, as if to cover this precious jewel, until you have consumed the jewel.

When your turn comes to receive the Honoured blood, proceed towards the chalice carefully so the priest may give you the Sacred Blood, and feel and believe that you are approaching the blood from the divine side of Jesus Christ who was crucified, and drink of the Blood from the side of the Lord when He was wounded by a spear. When the priest says, "***The Blood of Emmanuel, Our God, this is true, Amen,***" respond saying, "***Amen,***" but do not place the corporal over your mouth after you receive the Blood.

You must then drink some water so that none of the Holy Communion remains in your mouth.

Then stand in a quiet place, offering prayers of thanksgiving ('Prayer after Holy Communion') to God who allowed you to receive His Holy Body and Blood, and gave you this spiritual gift. These are some prayers of thanks for you to pray quietly:

"Our mouth is filled with gladness and our tongue with joy upon the partaking of Your Immortal Mysteries O Lord. For that which no eye has seen, nor ear heard nor entered into the heart of man, that which God has prepared for those who love His Holy name, You have revealed to the young children of Your Holy Church. Indeed O Father, this is the pleasure placed before You for You are compassionate and

we send up to You the glory and the honour O Father, Son and Holy Spirit now and forevermore, Amen."

"I thank You my Lord Jesus Christ, the life-giver, of whose Body and Blood I am not worthy to partake of. I ask and entreat You, do not condemn me for partaking of Your Holy Body and precious Blood, but let them be for the forgiveness of my sins, blotting out of my iniquities, and for everlasting life. Save me from every evil deed, and grant me an inheritance in Your heavenly kingdom, as You are God the Saviour of those who call unto You."

"What is this ocean of Your goodness for those who fear You? And what is this compassion and great concern for those who love You? I thank You, my God who cares for me, and gave me this Heavenly, Immortal Food, and opened for me the way to Eternal Life. Kindle within me the fire of Your divine love, and preserve me in the grace of Your holy gifts, not for judgement, but for purity of soul, body and spirit, so that I live in You, through You, and for You, and bestow upon me the Christian perfection and righteousness which is pleasing to You. To You I send up glory, honour and worship with Your Good Father and consubstantial Holy Spirit, now and forevermore, Amen."

"My tongue praises and my soul glorifies the Lord. My heart rejoices for You have come to me Lord and dressed me in purity and allowed me to Your feast. May my union with You today be everlasting and through it I grow in strength of faith and hope. Let my communion be a symbol of the grace of Your Salvation, let it be a purification to my body and my soul and preparation for the everlasting love and joy. To You O Lord, I surrender myself and my will, call to You my senses and bless them and let my mind to be according to

Your will. Enlighten my heart, awaken my conscience, cast away all the shadows of evil, hush the storms, walk with me and guide me. Give me comfort, quench my thirst, look with love at all my shortcomings, abide with me for the day is coming to an end and stay with me for a new day. You alone are my aim and happiness, now and forevermore, Amen."

About the necessity of quietness and praying after the Holy Communion, one of the fathers says, "After receiving the Holy Mystery, we must not hurry to leave the church, or start talking. But let us be alone in silence and prayer for a few moments after the Holy Liturgical Prayer, to thank God and appreciate His eternal gift, for during these precious moments, we are most able to worship our God, and touch the presence of the Divine Host dwelling inside our souls. So as a one spiritually renewed, or converted, we leave the church and greet others so that they may know that the unspeakable Mystery has been fulfilled within us, which is the Mystery of love which proclaims much more our love for others."

After completing the thanksgiving prayers, go back to your usual place in the church and sing with the congregation the praises and hymns said during the Holy Communion time. After the Holy Communion has been given, and the angel of the Sacrifice has been dismissed, pray with the congregation the final ritual prayers.

If you are a deacon, you can take off your service vestments only after the angel of the sacrifice has been dismissed, and by no means beforehand.

It is better to chant Psalm 46, "Oh clap your hands all you peoples! Shout to God with the voice of triumph! For the

Lord most High is awesome, He is a great King over all the earth. He will subdue the peoples under us, and the nations under our feet. He will choose our inheritance for us, the excellence of Jacob whom He loves. God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises for God is the King of all the earth. Sing praises with understanding. God reigns over the nations. God sits on His Holy Throne. The princes, the people have gathered together, the people of the God of Abraham. For the shields of the earth belong to God. He is greatly exalted, Alleluia."

Let us contemplate on this marvellous psalm, so that you may meditate on its meaning while you say it...

"Oh clap your hands, all you peoples, shout to God with the voice of triumph." Clapping is a sign of joy and happiness, and what greater joy than a person receiving the Holy Body and Blood of Christ, so that you will abide in Christ and receive eternal life. Attending the Holy Mass and partaking of the Holy Mysteries is attending the supper of the wedding of the Lamb, accompanied by joy.

"He will subdue the peoples under us, and the nations under our feet." By partaking of the Divine Mysteries we receive power to overcome our enemies, both the hidden and the visible, these devils who fight us by seductions and lusts, we are victorious over our corrupt nature and evil intentions. People who want to harm us or persecute us, we can bear through love, service and sacrificing for them. When we receive Holy Communion, we take Christ within us, so that we can overcome the world, ***"Because He who is in You is greater than he who is in the world"*** (John 4:4), and,

"They overcame him by the Blood of the Lamb"
(Revelation 12:11).

"He will choose our inheritance for us, the excellence of Jacob whom He loves." What a great choice for the Lord to choose us to partake of His Holy Body and Blood, to abide and unite with Him for Eternal Life. The Lord who loved the spiritual beauty of Jacob, such as patience in affliction, persistence in prayers, trust in God and humbleness, also loves to see us bearing the fruits of the Spirit, to be adorned by virtues, wearing the wedding clothes and qualified to enter into the presence of the bridegroom.

"God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet." The Communion of the Holy Mysteries, the disappearance of the Holy Body and Blood of Christ after we had seen them before us on the altar, signifies the ascension of the Lord when He was taken from them and carried up into heaven. The ascension of the Lord was accompanied by joy, whether from His disciples who, ***"Returned to Jerusalem with great joy"*** (Luke 24:52), or from the Heavenly Hosts who were calling out, ***"Lift up your heads O you gates! and be lifted up you everlasting doors! and the King of Glory shall come in"*** (Psalm 24:7).

"Sing praises to God, sing praises! For God is the King of all the earth" How wonderful is this Psalm, which is full of happiness because of the great occasion of the Lord's Ascension to Heaven it proclaims! It repeats the word 'sing' five times in two versus only. Let us feel this great and glorified joy, after partaking of the Holy Communion.

“God Sits on His Holy Throne.” As the Lord sits on His Holy Throne on the right of Glory in Heaven, after His Ascension, He also sits on the thrones of our hearts, when we have the Holy Communion in faith and preparedness, thus our hearts will be heavenly thrones, and our bodies will be heaven.

“The Princes of the People have Gathered Together.” The princes of the people are God’s beloved strong ones, through His strength. When they partake of His Holy Sacraments, they gain power to do virtuous deeds, thus their life becomes exalted and enlightened, and people will see their good deeds and glorify their Father who is in heaven.

The Dismissal

When the priest dismisses the congregation by the sprinkling of the water, bow your head, so that the priest might sprinkle you with the water on your forehead with his blessed hand, which just carried the Holy Sacraments a little while ago.

When distributing the Eulogia (morsel of blessing), proceed quietly, to take this holy bread which was blessed when choosing the Lamb, then sanctified by attending the Holy Mass.

If it is a non-fasting day, kiss the Eulogia then eat it before leaving the church. If it is a fasting day, keep it in a small plastic bag or clean handkerchief till you break your fast, then eat it at home. It is worth mentioning that having Communion does not break the fast of abstinence. So, if the Mass ends early on a fasting day, the believer should still

keep abstaining from food until such a time when the fasting period ends. This time should be decided with the advice of your confession father.

Leave the church quietly, and at the church's door, make the sign of the cross on yourself and say Psalm 83: ***“How lovely is Your tabernacle O Lord of hosts...”*** It is one of the Sixth Hour Psalms in the Agbia.

Note:

We should not prostrate or bow after partaking of the Divine Sacraments, because we are in a joyous situation, carrying the Lord Jesus inside ourselves.

Try to keep your peace and quietness while departing. Many people involve themselves in idle conversations, thus losing the spiritual benefit of attending the Liturgy.

Go to your house, singing praises and giving thanks to God, who granted you His special grace on that day. It is even preferable to keep praising all day.

Try to keep this day without sin, living in fear and pleasures of God, through His presence with you.

What Should We Do After Partaking Of The Divine Sacraments?

His Grace Bishop Gregorious responded to a question regarding what we should do after partaking of the Divine Sacraments...

✠ **First: Spiritual Practices –**

- Rejoice for the grace you have gained after partaking of the Holy Communion. Contemplate on the honour of this Divine Sacrament;
- Concentrate your thoughts on good and pure things, and do not occupy your mind with any source of sin;
- Stay away from bad company or places that may cause you to stumble;
- Avoid too much joking and laughter, because this quenches the flames of grace inside you, as said by one of the spiritual fathers;
- Avoid anger and any non-spiritual excitements;
- Try not to talk about or condemn others;
- Try not to involve yourself in useless conversations, which are not beneficial for your spiritual growth. Practice the virtue of silence;
- It is preferable to spend the rest of the day in spiritual readings, prayers, hymns, relaxation, or even a nap, which in turn will help calm the heart and body.

✠ **Second: Bodily Practices –**

- Do not spit, or eat fruit/food containing seeds, such as olives or grapes, for it is not permissible to take these out of your mouth, after having received Holy Communion;

- Do not shower immediately after Communion; but wait for at least 9 hours, or preferably, a whole day;
- Do not brush your teeth on that day, but rather, do so the night before having Communion;
- Do not smoke;
- If you accidentally do any of the above, speak to your father in confession and receive his advice and absolution.

CONCLUSION

My dear brothers and sisters,

After being together on this blessed trip, from the time of the raising of Vesper Incense, to the end of the holy Mass, and also discussing the practices and meditations to keep in your mind and heart in continuous concentration and deep spiritual prayers, I doubt it is too much for a person who cares for their spiritual life and eternity to follow them and abide in them.

Let us all try to follow them, so that we may benefit from attending the Holy Liturgy and partaking of the Divine Sacraments.

Thereby, the following question will no longer be an issue in our life:

“How can we Benefit from the Holy Liturgy?”