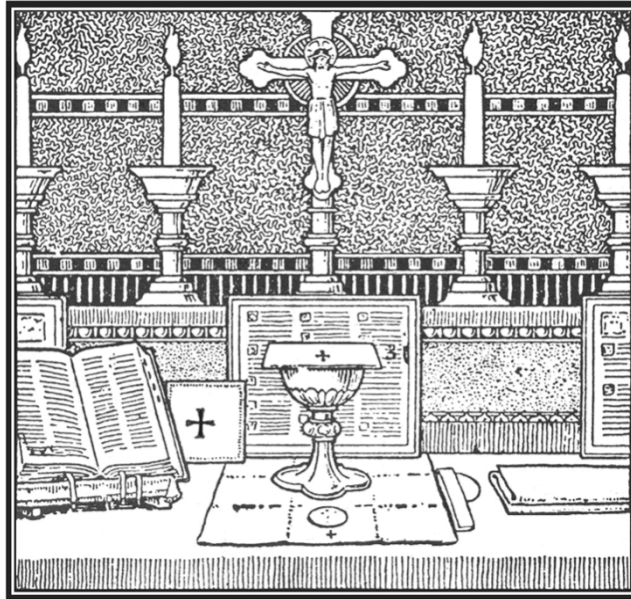


ABOUT THE LITURGY



The Eucharist

The principal worship service of the Orthodox Church is the ritual meal known as the Eucharist (from the Greek εὐχαριστία, meaning “thanksgiving”). The celebration of the Eucharist is as old as the Church itself, going all the way back to Jesus’ institution of the meal in the upper room with his disciples “in the night in which he was betrayed” (1 Cor 11:23-26). Beginning in Jerusalem and then spreading throughout the world, Christians have faithfully followed Jesus’ commandment to “do this in remembrance of me.” Why is this the principal form of Christian worship? Jesus’ own words answer this: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53). In the Eucharist, we offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1), and God makes present to us in the bread and the wine Christ’s one, complete, and sufficient sacrifice on the Cross, so that in them we may partake of Christ’s very life, his Body and Blood: “Take, eat, this is my Body which is for you...” (Luke 22:19-20).

As the Church grew to include various people groups and their languages, the original Eucharistic service from Jerusalem was developed and adorned by those various peoples according to their unique musical and artistic expressions, poetic traditions, and senses of beauty, dignity, and piety. The largely Greek speaking eastern half of the Roman Empire (later called the Byzantine Empire) would come to call the celebration of the Eucharist “the Divine Liturgy” (*Liturgy* from the Greek λειτουργία, meaning “work of the people”). In the western part of the Roman Empire, where the legacy of old Roman culture was more established and Latin was the *lingua franca*, the Eucharist came to be called the “Missa,” or “the Mass” in English. This word comes from the final dismissal of the service: “Ite, missa est” (or “Go, this is the sending out”). Though many of the sights, sounds, and particular words of the Eucharistic services of the Eastern and Western traditions are different, the structures of both are very much alike, because both grew organically out of that original primitive Liturgy of the earliest Christians in Jerusalem.

East and West

The basic shape of the Liturgy in both the East and the West is two-fold, consisting of the “Liturgy of the Catechumens” and the “Liturgy of the Faithful.” These are so named because in the first centuries of the Church catechumens (or those who were still being prepared to be received into the Church as full members) would be dismissed after the first part, leaving only the full members of the Church (the “faithful”) for the second part. Because the practice of dismissing the catechumens between each part has largely disappeared, the two main parts of the Liturgy are now sometimes called after what their focusses are: the “Liturgy of the Word” and the “Liturgy of the Eucharist.” In both Eastern and Western Liturgies, these two main parts can be further divided as follows:

The Liturgy of the Word

- Entrance - This includes the fixed features of the Great Litany and three antiphons in the East, and the Kyrie and Gloria in the West. It also includes chants proper to the day, being the Troparia and Kontakia in the East, and the Introit and Collects in the West.
- Proclamation - Passages of Scripture are proclaimed over the congregation, in both East and West accompanied by special chants (the prokeimenon in the East, and the gradual in the West) and at the Gospel a triple “Alleluia” chant with verses for the day.
- Homily - The general custom in both East and West is to follow the Gospel proclamation with a homily, usually based on the Gospel passage or theme for the day.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

- Creed - The word creed comes from its first word in Latin: Credo (“I believe”). The East calls the Creed the Symbol of Faith.
- Oblation - The gifts of bread and wine are reverently brought from the preparation table to the Altar. This is done solemnly but directly in the West, while in the East the gifts are processed out into the Nave in the Great Entrance. The Eastern Liturgy continues with the Cherubic Hymn, and in the West the proper Offertory chant of the day is sung, often followed by some appropriate hymn. The Western offertory prayers are prayed at this point, being analogous to what takes place before the Eastern Liturgy during the Prothesis.
- Consecration - In both Eastern and Western rites this begins with the priest’s admonition to the people: “Lift up your hearts.” And for both rites, the following Eucharistic prayers share the same essential features: addressed to the Father, includes Jesus’ words of institution, invokes the Holy Spirit to make the bread and wine Christ’s own body and blood, and concludes with a Trinitarian doxology.
- Communion - The faithful then receive both the bread and the wine (usually intincted and received together) while hymns are sung.
- Dismissal - After the Eucharist is properly consumed and the holy vessels cleaned, the priest blesses the people and sends them out.

A Guide to the Western Liturgy

The following is quoted from Appendix V in *The Book of Common Prayer* printed by Lancelot Andrewes Press, © 2009. Authorship is by “a monk of the Western Church.”

A Note on the Ceremonial - Human beings, as created to live in this natural world by God, have both body and soul, a physical aspect and a spiritual aspect. This means that worship of God, the highest and best human activity possible, corresponds to the nature of man. Worship involves the entire person, both body and soul. In the Divine Liturgy, man offers up to God a twofold worship: a spiritual worship, which consists of interior attention and contemplation, and a physical worship, manifesting itself in the sights, sounds,

bodily positions, and ceremonies. God, who created the physical world and placed man in it, makes his grace available to us through physical and material means, chiefly the Sacraments (outward physical signs of invisible spiritual grace). Christianity is an inescapably sacramental religion, just like its predecessor, the religion of the Hebrew Old Covenant. The Mass is both the continuation and the perfect fulfillment of the divinely ordained Liturgy of the ancient Hebrew Temple. It is also the reflection, upon earth, of the eternal Liturgy of heaven, the New Jerusalem, which the Apostle John beheld in his Revelation. The worship of the Temple was an extremely solemn and serious matter. It was not orchestrated as a form of popular entertainment [...]. Its rites and ceremonies, including the sacred vestments and precious vessels, the prayers and the chants, were exactly and minutely defined by the command of God himself. Similarly, the rites and ceremonies of the Mass, the divinely ordained Temple Liturgy of the New Covenant, are exactly and minutely defined by the authority of the Church. The holy Fathers and the Bishops, the Apostles' successors, are invested by Christ with an authority to "bind" and to "loose" (Matthew 16:19; 18:18). The Church therefore, as a steward of the grace of God entrusted to her, always obeys the command of the Apostle Paul: "Let all things be done decently and in order" (I Corinthians 14:40).

The Asperges - On Sundays, the Mass may be preceded by a brief rite of sprinkling with holy water, commonly called the Asperges (after the first Latin word of the rite). Outside of the Easter season, the Choir sings from Psalm 51, "Thou shalt purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean." In Eastertide the *Vidi Aquam* is sung, all of which is borrowed from the Book of Ezekiel, including, "I saw water proceeding out of the temple." The Asperges remind the faithful of the waters of Holy Baptism, the laver of regeneration from which they were born again by water and the Spirit.

The Preparation - These prayers of humble preparation, said by the Priest and his assistants at the foot of the Altar, express their devout sentiments and petitions before they approach the Altar of Sacrifice. The Preparation contains expressions of both repentance and hope, sorrow and joy, confession of sins and confidence in God's mercy. It is a poignant expression of the longing of the Christian soul to leave behind the sinful distractions of this world to "go unto the Altar of God" and be united with God forever. Commonly, at a Sung or Solemn High Mass in the parish setting, these prayers of preparation are said quietly by the Celebrant and his assistants while the Choir sings an opening hymn and the Introit Psalm.

The Introit - The term "Introit" is derived from the Latin word for "entrance." The Introit, a Proper (variable) part of the Mass, is a chant consisting of four basic parts: (i) an antiphon (commonly from the Psalms), (ii) a psalm verse, (iii) a verse of praise in honor of God the Holy Trinity (commonly called the Gloria Patri or Minor Doxology), and (iv) a repetition of the antiphon at the beginning. Its current function in the Mass is to announce or introduce the theme of the day in the Church's calendar. The Introit was originally a much longer chant, designed to accompany the entrance procession of the Celebrant and his many assistants, as they made their way to the sanctuary from the back of a large basilica church. Today, this processional function is often fulfilled by an opening hymn, followed by the current shortened version of the Introit.

The Collect for Purity - This prayer (which the Priest says as the conclusion of the preparatory prayers, or audibly at the altar following the Introit) is a continuation of the idea of the preparation. We who have come to Mass from the turmoil and confusion of the world must ask God to send his Holy Spirit "to cleanse the thoughts of our hearts" that we may be able to participate fruitfully in the Church's holiest and most important act upon earth.

The Summary of the Law - At the beginning of Mass, as part of our continued acclimation to the heavenly mysteries, we are presented with Christ's authoritative summary of the entirety of God's revelation in the Old Testament, which is the very essence of the Christian life: Love for God, and love for neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40). We cannot participate justly and fruitfully in the Eucharist unless we have our Christian priorities in

order: “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that Bread, and drink of that Cup” (I Corinthians 11:28).

Kyrie Eleison - The theme of humble preparation and penitence is completed with the recitation of the ninefold Kyrie eleison, Greek for “Lord, have mercy.” We ask God for the mercy and grace to fulfill this lofty vocation to love. The Kyrie is actually the remnant of a much longer ancient prayer, called a litany: a string of various petitions chanted by a Deacon, with the people’s response, “Lord, have mercy.” Many commentators note that the first three repetitions, Kyrie eleison, refer to God the Father; the second three, Christe eleison, to God the Son; and the last three, Kyrie eleison, to God the Holy Spirit. The ninefold repetition is seen as mirroring the heavenly praise of the nine choirs of Angels.

Gloria in Excelsis Deo - This ancient Christian hymn (known by its incipit, or first words in Latin) is based upon the hymn which the Angels sang announcing the Birth of Christ to the shepherds (Luke 2:14). It is also sometimes called the Greater Doxology (as opposed to the Minor Doxology, *Gloria Patri*), or the Angelic Hymn. The hymn consists of two parts: (i) words of praise addressed to the Three Divine Persons of the Holy Trinity, and (ii) words of supplication addressed to the Second Person of the Trinity, the true celebrant of the Eucharistic Liturgy, who is both High Priest and Saving Victim. The Gloria is sung on Sundays outside of Advent and Lent, and on Feast Days.

The Salutation - The Priest now greets the people with the words “The Lord be with you.” The response is “And with thy spirit.” This is the way that the earliest Christians, following an ancient custom of the Hebrews, greeted one another. This salutation and response will be repeated at particularly important times throughout the Mass.

The Collect(s) for the Day - The Priest now says one or more proper daily prayers called Collects (from the Latin word *collecta*). Each Sunday, each Holy Day throughout the year, and many important weekdays throughout the year (e.g. the weekdays of Lent) have their own specially appointed Collect, often reflecting the theme of the day. Scholars have offered different explanations for this term. Some have thought that the Collect essentially “collects” all of the petitions and holy desires of the Eucharistic assembly into one prayer, offered by the Priest to God the Father, in the Name of the Son, and in the Holy Spirit. Still others believe that *collecta* originally referred to the first station where the faithful gathered for worship, in the days when Mass was often preceded by a long procession to the church.

Amen - After the first and last Collects, the faithful [...] respond with an ancient Hebrew word, *Amen*, meaning “This is the truth,” or “May it be so.” It is important to remember that this response, this assent to the prayers of the Priest, is necessary, since the Mass is really the prayer of the whole Church, one “spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (I Peter 2:5).

The Lessons - The basic outline of the first part of the Mass, the Mass of the Catechumens, is thought to have come from the worship of the Jewish synagogue, with which our Lord, the Apostles, and the earliest Christians would have been intimately acquainted. The synagogue service was a service of Scriptural lessons (from the Law and the Prophets), the chanting of Psalms, and the delivery of a sermon. Naturally, the earliest Christians adopted this basic liturgical pattern and, over time, began to read their own New Testament Scriptures, together with the Psalms, as part of the service. Hence the Epistle and Gospel of the Mass, connected by the Psalm chants of the Gradual.

The Epistle - The First Lesson is the Epistle, another variable, proper part of the Mass. It is normally taken from one of the Epistles of Saint Paul, but sometimes it comes from the Acts of the Apostles or another Epistle of the New Testament (e.g. Peter or James). Occasionally, as in the weekdays of Lent, the Epistle is replaced by a Lesson (commonly called a Prophecy) from the Old Testament.

The Gradual - On most days throughout the year, the Epistle is followed by the **Gradual**, another Proper element of the Mass. It usually consists of two verses taken from the Psalms (in the early Church, it probably consisted of an entire Psalm). Often the Gradual is meant to reflect or re-echo the themes of the Epistle just heard, or anticipate the themes of the Gospel to be read. Ordinarily, the Gradual is followed by the **Alleluia** or the **Tract**. The Alleluia (with its verse from the Psalms or another source), from the Hebrew word for "Praise the Lord," is meant as an expression of joy and exultation and is sung only outside of penitential times. When the Alleluia is not sung, the Tract (a group of Psalm or other scriptural verses) is usually sung in its place. In the Easter season, both the Gradual and Tract are replaced by the Great Alleluia, a longer version of the ordinary Alleluia chant. On a few occasions throughout the year, a special rhymed hymn called the **Sequence** is sung before the Gospel.

The Holy Gospel - The reading of the Holy Gospel is one of the holiest moments of the Mass. Through its ritual and ceremonial, it represents Christ himself, "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6), who came down from heaven in order to save us, to reveal his Father to us, and to send us his Holy Spirit. The word "Gospel," the common translation of the Greek word *Evangelion* ("Good News"), is an old Anglo-Saxon term, composed of "god" (the old spelling of "good") and "spell" (a story or a narrative). The Gospel in the Mass is a Proper, a variable element of the Mass, always a selection from one of the Four Evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. Because Christ is present in a special way during the reading of the Gospel, we stand as a sign of reverence and attention. We also make three small Signs of the Cross with the thumb, on the forehead, on the lips, and on the breast: in order that the teachings and deeds of the crucified One may be inscribed forever upon our minds, may be professed with our lips, and may be followed with all our heart. At Solemn High Mass, the Deacon receives a blessing from the Celebrant, and, accompanied by the Subdeacon and servers with torches and incense, proceeds to the accustomed place to chant the appointed portion of the Holy Gospel. At [...] Sung Mass the Priest reads the Gospel.

The Homily - A major feature of the ancient Jewish synagogue service was the sermon, an explanation of the Law and the Prophets given by the rabbi (teacher). Our Lord Jesus Christ is the true Rabbi or Teacher sent from God; and at the inception of his public ministry, he delivered the most famous synagogue sermon in history, based on a passage from the Prophet Isaiah (Luke 4:15-32). The Bishop (or with his blessing), the Priest or Deacon at Mass gives the sermon, which is normally devoted to explaining the significance of the Gospel and the Epistle of the day. At this point, the first division of the Liturgy, the Mass of the Catechumens, ends.

The Creed - After the words and deeds of Christ have been proclaimed to us in the Holy Gospel, we profess our belief in Our Lord Jesus Christ, his Father, and his Holy Spirit, one Triune God, using the ancient words of the original version of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (named after the two Councils of the early Church which authored the text). The Creed, which is said every Sunday and on certain Feast Days, forms the link between the Mass of the Catechumens and the Mass of the Faithful. It is both a response of faith to the Scriptural readings and the basis for our participation in what is still to come. [...] At the words "And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary and was made Man," the clergy and the faithful genuflect out of their great reverence and gratitude for the Mystery of the Incarnation, God the Son, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, who "being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross" (Philippians 2:8). What is the appropriate response of those who have been saved by this God-man? "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (10-11).

The Offertory - The Offertory is the beginning of the Eucharistic Sacrifice proper. The Priest solemnly offers to God the bread and the wine, representative of our own offering of "ourselves, our souls and bodies," so that they can be returned to us as the Body and Blood of Christ. The Offertory begins with the Salutation, and the chanting or recitation of the Offertory Verse (a Proper part of the Mass). The Priest,

whose role it is to represent the entire Church before God, prays a series of special Offertory prayers in a low voice. First, he offers the bread (called the “host,” from the Latin word *hostia*, meaning “sacrificial victim”), raising it to heaven while asking God the Father to accept it for the salvation of himself, all those present, and for all the faithful in Christ, both living and dead. Next, he offers the chalice (cup) of wine, mixed with water, “that he who was partaker of our humanity may make us joint-heirs of his very Godhead, even Jesus Christ our Lord.” At Solemn High Mass, the Priest, assisted by the Deacon and Subdeacon, also offers incense to God, as a symbol of the “sweet-smelling savor” of the prayers of the people, ascending up to heaven. The Priest then washes his hands, as a sign of his preparation to offer the Eucharistic Sacrifice, having been cleansed from sin. The Priest turns to the faithful to ask for their intercession, “that this, my sacrifice and yours, may be acceptable to God the Father Almighty.” And finally, to conclude the Offertory, the Priest quietly reads the “Secret” prayers from the Missal.

The Prayer for the Church - The Apostle Paul commanded his disciple, Saint Timothy, the first Bishop of Ephesus, to include within the Liturgy “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, for all men,” as well as “for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (I Timothy 2:1-2). All of the ancient Eucharistic Liturgies of the Church contain general intercessions, pleading the Eucharistic Sacrifice on behalf of the Church throughout the world, of the civil authorities, of the clergy, of the sick and suffering, and of the faithful departed. The whole state of Christ’s Church includes all these and properly asks the intercessions of the Blessed Virgin [Mary] and All the Saints.

The General Confession - In speaking of the Eucharistic Liturgy, Saint Paul warned the Corinthian Church: “Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that Bread, and drink of that Cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s Body” (I Corinthians 11:27- 29). It is for this reason that the Church exhorts her frequent communicants to partake of the Sacrament of Confession on a regular basis. And the Church also appoints a General Confession and Absolution within the rite of Mass as a further and complementary way of preparing her children for the worthiest possible reception of the sacred mysteries of the Lord’s Body and Blood. The Christian faithful, through their heartfelt sense of repentance, obedience, and love, are now prepared to “draw near with faith and take this holy Sacrament” of the Eucharist, not to their condemnation (as Saint Paul warned the Corinthians) but to their “comfort.” The faithful are assured of their confidence in the forgiveness of sins and the blameless partaking of the Eucharist by the proclamation of the so-called “Comfortable Words” from the New Testament. Note that the words “comfort” and “comfortable” are not to be understood in the sense of a “comfortable chair,” but in the sense in which Our Lord calls the Holy Spirit the “Comforter” (Paraclete), the One who sends us heavenly strength, fortitude, and divine aid in our distress (John 14:16-17, 26).

Sursum Corda - The holiest part of the Eucharistic Liturgy begins now with a dialogue found both in the primitive Jewish Liturgy and in every ancient Christian Liturgy. The Priest exclaims, “Lift up your hearts” (*Sursum corda*) and the faithful respond, “We lift them up unto the Lord.” In the Divine Liturgy, we are to lay aside all earthly cares and ascend in heart and mind to the heavenly throne: “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:1-3). The Priest continues: “Let us give thanks unto our Lord God,” and the faithful respond, “It is meet and right so to do.” Since the word “Eucharist” is derived from the Greek word *eucharistia*, which means “thanksgiving,” the essence of the Mass is thanksgiving to God the Father for the gift of salvation bestowed in his Son and his Holy Spirit.

The Preface - The Priest continues with the Preface, another very ancient and beautiful prayer derived from the ancient worship of Israel. It is the solemn introduction to the Canon of the Mass, or Prayer of Consecration. The purpose of the Preface is to offer God praise and thanksgiving for his mighty acts in the

history of salvation. The Preface is a reflection of the eternal praise offered to the Trinity by the ranks of Angels and concludes with the chanting of the **Sanctus** (Holy, Holy, Holy), a sublime song which the Prophet Isaiah heard when he was caught up to witness the Liturgy of the heavenly Temple: “And the Seraphim cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isaiah 6:3). In the Western Rite tradition, there are “Proper Prefaces” appointed for different days throughout the Church’s liturgical year (Easter, Pentecost, Trinity Sunday, Christmas, Epiphany, etc.) Next, the **Benedictus** (Blessed is he) is the song of the Hebrew children which they sang as Christ the King entered Jerusalem to accomplish his deacease, in order that he might suffer, die, and rise again: “Blessed is he that cometh in the Name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest” (Matthew 21:9).

The Canon, or Prayer of Consecration - The Canon, or Prayer of Consecration, is the central prayer of the Mass, during which the elements of bread and wine, by the mercy and power of God the Holy Spirit, are changed into the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ. While the outward signs (sight, taste, touch) of the bread and wine remain, nevertheless, Christians, through the divine gift of faith, understand the reality of the Sacrament. The structure of the Prayer of Consecration is as follows: (i) an opening Thanksgiving for the redemptive Sacrifice of Christ; (ii) the recitation of the Narrative of the Institution of the Eucharist by our Lord Jesus Christ (accompanied by the Celebrant’s genuflections and elevations); (iii) the solemn Oblation of the Eucharistic Gifts with the Memorial (anamnesis, or mystical re-presentation) of Christ’s Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension; (iv) the Invocation (epiclesis) of the Holy Spirit to change the gifts into the Body and Blood of Christ, along with a petition for worthy reception; (v) the Oblation of the worshippers (“our selves, our souls and bodies”) along with a prayer for the benefits of Communion; (vi) a Commemoration of the Faithful Departed (with a catalogue of the names of Apostles and Martyrs of the early Church); (vii) a final acknowledgement of our unworthiness with a petition of the acceptance of the Sacrifice; and finally (viii) a concluding Trinitarian Doxology (accompanied by an elevation of the Sacrament), with the solemn “Amen” or assent of the faithful.

The Lord’s Prayer - At the heart of the Mass is the Lord’s Prayer [or Our Father] (*Pater noster*), the holiest of all Christian prayers, which Our Lord taught his disciples to pray. It is both the completion of the Prayer of Consecration as well as the first act of spiritual preparation for Holy Communion. After this, the Priest says a silent prayer for deliverance from evil (based on the last petition of the Lord’s Prayer); the Priest then performs the fracture of the Host (symbolizing the broken Body of the crucified Christ) and salutes the faithful with the “peace of the Lord.” He breaks off a small particle of the Host and mixes it in the chalice with another silent prayer.

Agnus Dei - In the Gospel of John, John the Baptist, also called the Forerunner, beheld the Lord Jesus Christ coming to be baptized in the Jordan river and announced him to the multitudes: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). The Prophet Isaiah, centuries before Christ, spoke prophetically of Christ as the One who will be “brought as a Lamb to the slaughter” (Isaiah 53:7). Jesus is the true sacrificial Lamb of God, prefigured in the slaughtered Passover (Paschal) Lamb of the ancient Temple. Just as the lamb’s blood was sprinkled upon the altar, and his flesh consumed by the Priests, so we in Holy Communion are true partakers of the Body and Blood of Christ, the true Lamb of God. And just as the Blood of the Paschal Lamb protected the Hebrews from the Destroying Angel (Exodus 12), so the Christian faithful are protected and preserved unto eternal life through the Sacrifice of Christ. When we sing the Agnus Dei (Lord have mercy) in the Mass on earth, we join with the song of the heavenly Liturgy: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing” (Revelation 5:12).

The Holy Communion - The rite of Holy Communion continues with the so-called “Prayer of Humble Access” [...]. The Celebrant then privately makes his own Communion with silent prayers, after which he shows the Blessed Sacrament to the faithful (“Behold the Lamb of God”) and invites them to come forward to partake in the consumption of the Sacrifice. The faithful respond with the words of the Centurion from St. Matthew’s Gospel, “Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof” and then add two

Communion devotions borrowed from the late Byzantine usage: “I believe, O Lord, and I confess” and [sometimes] “Of thy mystic Supper.” The Holy Communion is given to the faithful who kneel at the altar rail in reverence to the presence of our Lord in his Sacrament. It is the Orthodox Catholic custom to give both the Body and Blood to the Faithful.

The Ablutions - After the distribution of Holy Communion, the Priest returns to the altar to perform the ablutions (washings). The Priest first cleanses the chalice to remove any remaining drops of the precious Blood and then cleanses his fingers of any crumbs remaining from the holy Body. After making sure that every crumb of the Sacrament has been reverently consumed, he cleanses the sacred vessels and reserves the remainder of the Sacrament in the tabernacle. The Church appoints these ablutions out of deep respect for the Sacrament, which is truly the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. The Eucharist is a banquet, yet no ordinary meal. The Church follows the example of the holy Apostles at the miraculous feeding of the five thousand: “And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained” (Matthew 14:20).

The Postcommunion - The Priest now reads (i) one or more Postcommunion Collects (part of the Proper of the Mass) and (ii) the prayer commonly called the Thanksgiving (part of the Ordinary of the Mass). In these prayers, the Priest, in the name of the faithful, expresses gratitude for the divine gifts of Communion and asks God for various graces to continue in God’s friendship and preserve the spiritual benefits of Holy Communion in the soul.

The Dismissal and Blessing - The Deacon or Priest now dismisses the faithful from the Liturgy. “Depart in peace” is said in most Masses throughout the year. “Let us bless the Lord” is said in penitential Masses. In Masses for the Dead (Requiems), the dismissal is replaced by a final prayer for the faithful departed: “May they rest in peace.” And in all Masses (except Requiem Masses) the Priest invokes the final Blessing upon the faithful. §

[**The Last Gospel** - This Gospel, originally a private devotion of the Priest which in time was introduced into the public Liturgy, is almost always taken from the first fourteen verses of the Gospel according to Saint John. All stand and make the three small Signs of the Cross, as at the first Gospel of the Mass. When the Priest says, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,” we genuflect (as in the Creed) out of reverence and gratitude for the mystery of the Incarnation.]