

The Scripture Readings

Commentary – The Epistle

DEACON: Let us attend. (*cf. Nehemiah 8:3*)

PRIEST: Peace be unto all. (*John 20:26; 1 Peter 5:14; 3 John 15*)

READER: And to Thy spirit.

DEACON: Wisdom.

READER: The Prokeimenon in the ___ tone.

The Reader and the Choir antiphonally chant the appointed verses from the Book of Psalms.

DEACON: Wisdom.

READER: The reading from (*the name of the book of the New Testament from which the apostolic reading is taken*).

DEACON: Let us attend. (*cf. Nehemiah 8:3*)

The Reader reads from the designated Apostolic Letter (Epistle) or the Acts of the Apostles.

PRIEST: Peace be unto thee that readest (*John 20:26; 1 Peter 5:14; 3 John 15*).

READER: And to Thy spirit. The Alleluia in the ___ tone... (*Psalms 150:6*)

The Reader and the Choir antiphonally chant Alleluia and the appointed verses from the Book of Psalms.

Commentary on the Letters of the New Testament read during the Liturgy

The word “epistle” simply means “letter.” These Scripture readings are also sometimes called “the Apostolic Reading.” The book from which they are read is called the Apóstolos (i.e., the “Epistle Book”).

Based on a lectionary – order of readings – that was established in the 7th century, during the course of the year the Church reads the writings of the Apostles in the order in which they are found in the New Testament.

We start at Pascha with the Acts of the Apostles written by Saint Luke the Evangelist as a companion volume to his Gospel. It is the earliest history of the Church and tells the story of how the Good News of the Resurrection of Christ traveled from Jerusalem to Rome itself, the center of the Empire, and focuses primarily on the missionary preaching and teaching of the Apostles Peter and Paul.

After Pentecost we read from the Letters of Saint Paul, more or less in the order of their length, beginning with his Letter to the Romans, and then the Letters of the other Apostles: Saint James, Saint Peter, Saint John and Saint Jude.

This takes us to the beginning of Lent and during Lent we read the Letter to the Hebrews.

In the reading of these letters we are reminded of the Apostles' witness to Christ and are called to imitate them in their willingness to offer themselves wholly to the proclamation of the Gospel. "Therefore I urge you, be imitators of me," the Apostle Paul wrote (*1 Corinthians 4:13*).

In the liturgical tradition of the Orthodox Church, only the Book of Revelation is never read during the Divine Liturgy.

Commentary – The Holy Gospel

PRIEST (IN A LOW VOICE): Illumine our hearts, O Master Who lovest mankind, with the pure light of Thy divine knowledge, and open the eyes of our mind (*cf. Ephesians 1:18*) to the understanding of Thy Gospel teachings. Implant also in us the fear of Thy blessed commandments, that trampling down all carnal desires, we may enter upon a spiritual manner of living, both thinking and doing such things as are well-pleasing unto Thee (*cf. 1 John 3:22*). For Thou art the Illumination of our souls and bodies, O Christ our God, and unto Thee do we send up glory, together with Thy Father Who is without beginning and Thine all-holy, good, and life-giving Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen. (*Ephesians 3:21*)

DEACON: Wisdom. Stand upright. Let us hear the Holy Gospel.

PRIEST: Peace be unto all. (*John 20:26; 1 Peter 5:14; 3 John 15*)

CHOIR: And to Thy spirit. (*cf. Philippians 4:23; 2 Timothy 4:22*)

The clergy remove their kalimávchia (hat) for the reading of the Gospel. The priest is normally covered when he gives a blessing.

DEACON: The reading from the Holy Gospel according to (Name).

CHOIR: Glory to Thee, O Lord, glory to Thee. (*cf. Psalm 29:1*)

DEACON: Let us attend.

The Gospel is read by the Deacon or, if there is no deacon, by the Priest-celebrant.

If a Deacon reads the Gospel, after he finishes, the Priest says: "Peace be to Thee who hast proclaimed the Gospel." The Priest then takes the Gospel from the Deacon, blesses the faithful with it, and places it on the Holy Table.

CHOIR: Glory to Thee, O Lord, glory to Thee. (*cf. Psalm 29:1*)

The Priest blesses the faithful with the Gospel, and places it on the Holy Table. A homily on the Gospel is preached at this time.

Commentary - the Gospel book, the Gospel and the four Gospels

THE PRAYER FOR THE FAITHFUL

Priest (in a low voice): Again, we bow before You and pray to You, O good and loving God. Hear our supplication: cleanse our souls and bodies from every defilement of flesh and spirit (2 Corinthians 7:1), and grant that we may stand before Your holy altar (cf. Exodus 29:37) without blame or condemnation. Grant also, O God, progress in life, faith, and spiritual discernment to the faithful who pray with us, so that they may always worship You with reverence and love, partake of Your holy Mysteries without blame or condemnation (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:27-32), and become worthy of Your heavenly kingdom (2 Thessalonians 1:5).

Priest: And grant that always guarded by Your power we may give glory to You, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages (Ephesians 3:21).

People: Amen (1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalm 106:48).

Commentary – The Prayer for the Faithful

With this prayer, the second part of the Divine Liturgy begins: the Liturgy of the Faithful. In the ancient liturgical tradition of the Church the catechumens – those preparing to become Christians – would at this time be dismissed, leave the Church building and often go to an adjacent building for further instruction. Only those who had proclaimed their faith in Christ, received instruction and been baptized as Christians were allowed to remain and participate in the Eucharist. Although prayers for the dismissal of the catechumens are no longer done in most Orthodox Churches today, in some places these prayers are being restored to the Liturgy during Great Lent for those who wish to enter the life of the Church through Baptism and/or Chrismation on Pascha. The prayers for the catechumens, Father Schmemmann has

written, —are above all a liturgical expression of a fundamental calling of the Church – precisely the Church as mission.‡ A Church without catechumens, without a sense of mission, is not fully the Church commissioned by Christ to proclaim the Gospel to all people (Matthew 28:19-20).

What does it mean to be faithful? Metropolitan Kallistos Ware has written: "In the Creed we do not say, "I believe that there is a God." We say, "I believe in one God." Between belief that and belief in, there is a crucial distinction. It is possible for me to believe that someone or something exists, and yet for this belief to have no practical effect on my life. I can open a telephone directory and scan the names recorded on its pages; and, as I read, I am prepared to believe that some (or even most) of these people exist. But I know none of them personally and so my belief that they exist makes no particular difference to me. When, on the other hand, I say to a much beloved friend, "I believe in you," I am doing far more than expressing a belief that this person exists. "I believe in you" means: I turn to you, I rely upon you, I put my full trust in you and I hope in you. Faith is not merely the supposition that something might be true, but the assurance that Someone is there. Faith, then, is a personal relationship with God; a relationship as yet incomplete and faltering, yet none the less real. Faith is to know God not as an abstract principle, but as a Person. To know a person is far more than to know certain facts about that person; there can be no true awareness of other persons without mutual love. Here, then, are the two least misleading ways of speaking about the God who surpasses our understanding: He is personal and He is love. And these are basically two ways of saying the same thing. Our way of entry into the mystery of God is through personal love.

Our God is beyond all we can think or express, yet closer to us than our own heart."

THE GREAT ENTRANCE

People: We who mystically represent the Cherubim (Ezekiel 10:2; Hebrews 9:5) sing the thrice holy hymn to the life-creating Trinity. Let us lay aside all the cares of this life that we may receive the King of all.....

(While the Cherubic Hymn is being sung, the Priest prays in a low voice) No one bound by worldly desires and pleasures (Titus 3:3) is worthy to approach, draw near or minister to You, the King of glory (Psalm 24:7-8). To serve You is great and awesome even for the powers of heaven (Daniel 4:35). But because of Your

ineffable and immeasurable love for us, You became man without alteration or change. You have served as our High Priest (Hebrews 4:14), and as Lord of all (Acts 10:36), have entrusted to us the celebration of this liturgical sacrifice without the shedding of blood. For You alone, Lord our God, rule over all things in heaven and on earth (1 Chronicles 29:11). You are seated on the throne of the Cherubim (Psalm 98:1), the Lord of the Seraphim (Isaiah 6:2) and the King of Israel (Matthew 27:42). You alone are holy and dwell among your saints. You alone are good and ready to hear. Therefore, I implore you, look upon me, Your sinful and unworthy servant (Luke 17:10), and cleanse my soul and heart from an evil conscience (cf. Hebrews 10:22). Enable me by the power of Your Holy Spirit (Romans 15:15) so that, vested with the grace of the priesthood, I may stand before Your holy table (cf. Exodus 25:23-30; 37:10-16) and celebrate the mystery of Your holy and pure Body and Your precious Blood. To you I come with bowed head and beg you: do not turn Your face away from me (Psalm 142:7) nor reject me from among Your children (Wisdom 9:4), but make me, Your sinful and unworthy servant (Luke 17:10), worthy to offer to You these gifts. For You, Christ our God, are the Offerer and the Offered, the One who receives and is distributed, and to You we give glory (Psalm 96:8), together with Your Father who is without beginning and Your all-holy, good and life-creating Spirit (John 6:63), now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen (Ephesians 3:21).

(The Priest censes the altar area and sanctuary, reciting in a low voice the “Cherubic Hymn, “ “Having Beheld Christ’s Resurrection” (on Sundays), and the 50th Psalm. Then the Great Entrance takes place.)

*Priest: May the Lord our God remember all of you in His kingdom (cf. Luke 23:42), always, now and forever and to the ages of ages (Ephesians 3:21).

People: Amen (1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalm 106:48).

(The priest enters the sanctuary , while the people sing the end of the Cherubic Hymn.)

People: . . . invisibly escorted by the angelic hosts (cf. Psalm 148:2). Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! (Psalm 150:6)

(The priest places the holy gifts on the holy Table, covering them and censuring them.)

Why do Orthodox Christians use incense in their worship?

Because it's Biblical!

Incense and the Altar of Incense in the Old Testament

The Book of Exodus, chapter 30

1 "Make an altar of acacia wood for burning incense. 2 It is to be square, a cubit long and a cubit wide, and two cubits high—its horns of one piece with it. 3 Overlay the top and all the sides and the horns with pure gold, and make a gold molding around it. 4 Make two gold rings for the altar below the molding—two on opposite sides—to hold the poles used to carry it. 5 Make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. 6 Put the altar in front of the curtain that is before the ark of the Testimony—before the atonement cover that is over the Testimony—where I will meet with you.

7 "Aaron must burn fragrant incense on the altar every morning when he tends the lamps. 8 He must burn incense again when he lights the lamps at twilight so incense will burn regularly before the Lord for the generations to come.

34 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Take fragrant spices—gum resin, onycha and galbanum—and pure frankincense, all in equal amounts, 35 and make a fragrant blend of incense, the work of a perfumer. It is to be salted and pure and sacred. 36 Grind some of it to powder and place it in front of the Testimony in the Tent of Meeting, where I will meet with you. It shall be most holy to you. 37 Do not make any incense with this formula for yourselves; consider it holy to the Lord.

Incense in heavenly worship around the Throne of the Lamb in eternity

The Book of Revelation, chapters 5 & 8

6 Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders (presbyters). 7 He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. 8 And when he

had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders (presbyters) fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

3Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. 4The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand.