

SOPHIA!

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DID YOU KNOW . . . that only THREE liturgical services – Baptism, Marriage and the Divine Liturgy – begin with the doxology “Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages, Amen.” This is because the Eucharist – the Sacrament of the Kingdom – is the fulfillment of Baptism and Marriage, both of which are sacraments of a “new life” in the Church.

TOPIC OF THE MONTH . . . THE DIVINE LITURGY (PART II)

Prayer Before the Icon of the Theotokos:

Forasmuch as thou art a well-spring of tenderness, O Theotokos, make us worth of compassion. Look upon a sinful people. Manifest thy power as ever, for hoping on thee we cry aloud unto thee: Hail! As once did Gabriel, Chief Captain of the Bodiless Powers.

Discussion Topics (continued):

1. *Antimens.* What does this word mean? What exactly are the Antimens? BIG Hint: They are absolutely necessary in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. (Turn over the page for the answer!)
2. *The Doors! The Doors! In Wisdom, Let Us Attend!* Discuss why the Deacon – or Priest – says these words. Originally, the doors to the church were closed to physically separate the non-baptized learners of the Faith (the catechumens) from the Eucharist. While that is no longer the case, discuss how we can understand the original meaning, without the physical division. How do we understand and prepare ourselves for the Eucharist?
3. *The Nicene Creed.* Recite the Creed and explain its meaning. Each part of the Creed has its own significance – some refer to God the Father, while others refer to Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit. Make an effort to distinguish to whom or to what each article is addressed and what it means.
4. *The Anaphora* – Read the priest’s silent prayers (which are contained in the Divine Liturgy books as published by the Antiochian Archdiocese). By reading these prayers, you are gaining a greater grasp of the mysteries and your participation in the Liturgy. Pay particular attention to the “epiclesis,” the prayer that asks the Holy Spirit be sent down upon the assembled congregation and upon the offered Gifts. St. John Chrysostom described this prayer as the priest standing before the altar “with his hands raised to heaven calling upon the Holy Spirit.” Discuss that only we human beings are capable of giving thanks for His existence and for the Gifts of our Creator. Also, discuss that we are proclaiming His Death and Resurrection – not only in the past, but also in the present.
5. *The Lord’s Prayer* – This is our model prayer that was taught to the Disciples and to us by Jesus (found in Matthew 6-9-13). Analyze each line and what it means to you. For instance, why do we say, “Our Father”? Finish the following statement – “If God is Father to each of us . . .” Discuss your statement with others (if there is a group). Take note of when this prayer is said during the Divine Liturgy and its significance. Note that we cannot receive Holy Communion if we do not remit for our sins or offer “forgiveness of transgressions.”

6. *The Elevation* – Take particular note of the quiet prayer which the priest says at this point. Study and discuss its meaning. (This is the point where the priest silently prays that Christ, by His “mighty hand,” should bless both those who distribute and those who receive Holy Communion.
7. *One is Holy, One is Lord: Jesus Christ, To the Glory of God the Father. Amen* – This prayer is said immediately before the Communion Hymn. Consider its solemnity of tone, speed, meaning and placement. This prayer is one to the Holy Trinity. However, why do we not cross ourselves here, as we do when we say “In the name of the Father, Son & Holy Spirit”? Discuss.
8. *Pre-Communion Prayers* – Review these prayers that are contained in the book of the Divine Liturgy, especially the prayer that begins, “I Believe, O Lord, and I confess . . .” Also concentrate on the silent words of the Priest during the preparation of Communion and his silent Prayer of Thanksgiving. What is the *priest* saying? What does it *mean*? What is occurring as these prayers are being offered?

[Communion & Confession will be discussed in future editions of Sophia!]

Biblical References:

Psalms 33, 34, 39, 50; Matthew 6, 9-13; 23, 24; John 1:12-13, 6:56, 20:22-23; Hebrews 9:3; 1 Cor. 9:26; 1 Cor. 10:16-18; 1 Cor. 2: 28-29; II Cor. 2:6; II Cor. 7:10; James 17

Recommended Readings:

The Orthodox Study Bible & the Red Pocket Prayer Book, published by the Antiochian Archdiocese
 Heavenly Worship, by J. Richard Ballew
 The Heavenly Banquet: Understanding the Divine Liturgy, by Fr. Emmanuel Hatzidakis
 A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy, by Nicholas Cabasilas
 Feast of Faith, by Archbishop Paul of Finland

Points to Ponder:

“We cannot build up the idea of the apostolate of the laity without the foundation of the liturgy.” – Dorothy Day (American journalist)

“When the Liturgy is being celebrated, the Sanctuary is filled with countless Angels, who adore the Divine Victim immolated on the altar.” – St. John Chrysostom

“If Christ Jesus, our Lord and God, is himself the high priest of God the Father; and if He offered Himself as a sacrifice to the Father; and if He commanded that this be done in commemoration of Himself, then certainly the priest, who imitates that which Christ did, truly functions in place of Christ.” – Cyprian of Carthage (Third Century Bishop)

“The perfect church service would be one we were almost unaware of. Our attention would have been on God.” – C. S. Lewis (British academic, medievalist, literary critic, and essayist)

NOTE ON ANTIMENS (from front page) – The word “Antimens” means “instead of the Table.” It is a rectangular piece of cloth that depicts Christ being laid in the tomb. The Antimens are usually bestowed on a Church at the time of its dedication by the Bishop. Also, each Priest, upon his Ordination, is given Antimens from the Bishop giving him the authority to serve the Liturgy. Into every Antimen is sewn a particle of a saintly relic in memory of the fact that in the early church, the faithful celebrated the Divine Liturgy on or by the tombs of martyrs, and also in remembrance of the saints, who intercede for us with their prayers.