

**A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO
THE WORSHIP OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH**

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FOREWORD

Those who wish to live Orthodox Christian theology, in other words, those who wish to live an Orthodox Christian life, have to attend Orthodox Church services. There is no need to search elsewhere, for all the teachings of the Church are contained in Her services. With all the liturgical books of the Orthodox Church translated and services held in English, it is precisely for those who wish to live and gain some understanding of the Church Year that we present the work below.

The following is not original, it is simply a compilation from already existing non-copyright sources. It is meant as an aid to those who wish to follow Orthodox worship and the Orthodox liturgical year. As such, it is based on the practices of by far the largest of the family of Orthodox Churches, the multinational and worldwide Orthodox Church of Russia, though we should remember that other Local Orthodox Churches have some variant customs.

All dates mentioned refer to the Orthodox Church calendar (also called the Julian, or old calendar), as kept in Jerusalem. The civil calendar (also called the Gregorian, revised Julian, Catholic, or new calendar), introduced only from the sixteenth century on, now runs thirteen days ahead of the Church calendar. It is true that some Non-Russian Orthodox still use the civil calendar for fixed feasts, but they are a small minority within the Orthodox Church as a whole.

This usage also partly explains the frequent differences between the date of Orthodox Easter and Non-Orthodox Easter. Orthodox Easter always falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox, dated according to the Church calendar, provided that this is after the Jewish Passover. If this date does not fall after the Jewish Passover, then Orthodox Easter is the following Sunday.

Throughout this Guide, we use the Orthodox Psalm numbering of the most ancient text of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint. This is used in preference to the Jewish or Massoretic Psalter, written down over a thousand years later and used by the Non-Orthodox world. Generally speaking, most Psalms in the Jewish numbering are one ahead of the Orthodox numbering. Thus, for example, the Orthodox Psalm 50 is Psalm 51 in the Jewish numbering.

We hope that this compilation will be of help and benefit to all those who use it and we humbly ask your prayers.

Fr Andrew,
Felixstowe,
England.

Sunday of St Mary of Egypt,
4/17 April 2005

PART ONE: THE CHURCH

1. The Church Building and its Layout

a) The Church Building

In the Gospels, Christ said that He would build His Church and that the gates of hell would not prevail against Her (Matthew 16,18). By 'Church' is meant all those who believe in Christ as the Son of God become man, all who are baptized in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, united in the Orthodox Christian Faith, as taught by Christ and His Apostles. All Orthodox Christians down all the ages and of all nationalities, form the Church, the Body of Christ, a great multitude of both the living and the departed. Those who believe in Christ do not die, but live with Him as members of His Church in heaven and pray for and with us, who are still on earth.

The English word 'Church', coming from the Greek 'Kyriakon', meaning 'House of the Lord'. This also means the building or spiritual centre, where people come to receive grace, through the sacraments, repentance, prayer, and to give thanks to God. We shall see that many of the other words we use in the Church are Greek in origin. This is because the earliest Scriptures that we have were written in Greek and most of the first Orthodox were Greek. Even today, nearly all Greeks are Orthodox.

After the Ascension of the Lord and Pentecost, the Apostles and the other Orthodox, had no special buildings for worship, but gathered in the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem (Luke 24,53), and then private rooms (Acts 1,13 and 5,42). This was because at any time a special building might be attacked by Jews (John 20,19) or heathen, who did not believe in Christ. For nearly 300 years after Christ, Orthodox mainly held services in secret places, 'catacombs', sometimes in caves and at night, because the pagan Romans did not allow the Christian Faith. Often Orthodox were terribly persecuted. They were tortured, thrown to wild beasts in circuses and martyred for their Faith in Christ. At last, 313 years after Christ, the Roman Emperor Constantine allowed Orthodox Christians to worship openly and build churches to the glory of God. The penitent Emperor was himself baptized on the eve of his death in 337.

Orthodox Christians had very few books at the beginning and, in any case, few people knew how to read and write. It was also dangerous to write them, for the books might fall into the hands of heathen and Orthodox would be punished. So people listened to the stories of the Saviour, the Tradition. Eventually, some of this Tradition was written down by the four Evangelists in their Gospels. To help people to understand and remember, there were also holy images, called icons, like those of the Mother of God, painted by the Apostle Luke. Symbols, pictures with meanings, were also used. The walls of the caves in which the first Orthodox buried their departed and gathered for prayer are covered with such images.

Thus, we see the Lamb, and at once we think of the Lamb of God slain for our sins (Jesus Christ); or a vine, the symbol of Christ, the true Vine; or the loaves and fishes, reminding us of His miracle; or a loaf, Christ, the Bread of Life; and many others. Later, when persecution of Orthodoxy stopped, people began openly painting more and more holy images, or icons, of Christ, His Mother and the saints. So everything in

churches, from vestments to the services, has a meaning and makes Christ and His teachings present amongst us.

The earliest churches often had the shape of a ship or ark of salvation. This reminds us that life on earth is like a sea, where we meet with many dangers in our fight against evil, and the Church is the ark which brings us to the heavenly harbour. Another is the circle or octagon, the symbol of eternity, without beginning or end, meaning that the Church, which is the Body of Christ, lives for ever. A favourite shape is a cross, for we are saved by the Cross of Christ.

The main part of any church, the altar or sanctuary, should be oriented, in another words, it should face east. It is from the east that we receive the light, the symbol of Christ, 'the Light of the world' (St John 1), 'the Sun of Righteousness', as is written in the last verses of the Old Testament (Malachi 4,2), and as we sing in our hymns. Larger Orthodox churches may have one or several domes, or cupolas, representing the vault of heaven, with a cross in the middle or above the sanctuary, and a bell-tower at the west end. They tell us that the church is like heaven on earth, for the church is where Christ, God come down from heaven to become man, is present. All Orthodox churches have a cross on the roof, commemorating our salvation by the Cross, for the church is built to the glory of Christ Crucified and Risen.

b) Layout

The inside of an Orthodox church is divided into three parts.

The first part, near the entrance, is called the porch or narthex. This has another door into the church itself. Here stand catechumens, those preparing for baptism and those who are not baptized.

The second and largest part is in the middle of the church, called the nave, is where people pray. There are no pews in Orthodox churches, but there are usually a few chairs at the back or benches around the walls for the elderly or the weak. Orthodox Christians stand in church out of reverence to the Risen Christ, Who is present among us ('Where two or three are gathered together in My name). In all their visions of Heaven the prophets and the Evangelist John the Theologian saw the saints standing in worship on either side of Christ the King, seated on His throne. So, when we worship in the House of God, surrounded by the angels and the saints, we also stand in His presence. Sitting is allowed only at certain parts of the services, or to those too weak to stand. It is the custom in monastic churches for women to stand on the left and men on the right. Both sexes should be modestly dressed, men in long-sleeved shirts and trousers, women in modest skirts or dresses and with covered heads, in obedience to the Apostle Paul (I Corinthians 11).

In the centre of the nave there may be a stand with the icon of the day on it. To the left or the right of the nave can be found a memorial table where memorial services are sung. Behind it stands a tall crucifix. At the front of the nave, and sometimes in the middle, there are icon stands where icons can be venerated. Beside them are candle stands, where the faithful can light candles in prayer. At the front of the nave, to left or right, there is another stand for confessions. The choir stands in the 'choir', that is, to the left or right of the front of the nave, usually behind small screens with large

icons and church banners (gonfalons), or else in a choir-loft or gallery, high up at the back of the church. No musical instruments are used in Orthodox worship.

A raised platform, usually two or more steps above the nave, runs across the eastern end of the church. This is called the solea. It generally juts out in the centre in a semi-circular area. This is called the ambon. The priest and deacon come out to read the Gospel and the litanies on the ambon. The solea extends back a little way, as far as the icon-screen, or iconostasis, which physically separates this third part of the church from the nave.

The third part of the church is called the altar, or sanctuary. The word altar means the 'high place', in other words it is a raised area, because it is the most important part of the church.

c) The Sanctuary and the Iconostasis

In Orthodox churches the sanctuary, which represents heaven, is separated from the rest of the church, which represents earth, by an icon screen. This is usually made of wood and called an iconostasis, because it is covered with icons. The iconostasis has three doors. The large middle double doors are called the holy doors, sometimes incorrectly 'the royal doors'. This is because Christ, the Holy King, Who is present in the Divine Liturgy, enters the nave through them. Only bishops, priests and deacons may go through the holy doors during the services. The side doors are called the north and south doors, or deacons' doors, and are used more often to go in and out of the sanctuary.

The icons in the iconostasis are in a special order. To the right of the holy doors there is always an icon of the Saviour. To the left of the holy doors there is always an icon of the Mother of God. The other icons are of special saints, including the patron-saint the church is dedicated to. On the holy doors themselves are smaller icons of the Annunciation to the Mother of God as 'the beginning of our salvation', and of the four Evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Above the holy doors there is usually an icon of the Last Supper to remind us of the Divine Liturgy, or Eucharist, that is, holy communion, given by Our Lord before His death and resurrection. This is celebrated in the sanctuary during the Liturgy and offered to us from within the holy doors. The deacons' doors have icons of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, or sometimes the deacons St. Stephen and St. Philip.

The iconostasis may have several rows of icons one above the other, each with its special icons. In the second row above the main icons there are icons of the Twelve Great Feasts in honour of Our Lord and His Holy Mother. In big churches there may be rows above this. In the third row there are the Twelve Apostles with Jesus Christ in the middle and the Mother of God and the Forerunner John the Baptist on either side of Him; in the fourth row, there are the Prophets of the Old Testament, and in their midst the Mother of God holding the Infant Christ, Whose coming they foretold. The whole iconostasis is crowned with a cross. So here we see the founders of the Church in the Old and New Testaments in one great picture, witnesses to the first and second coming and eternal reign of Christ Our Saviour. It also shows us those with whom we are united in one Church of Christ, and who pray for us, who still struggle on earth.

The most important feature inside the sanctuary is a square or rectangular table which stands in the middle. This is the altar itself, called the holy table or the holy throne, because God Himself is present here. The holy table may be made of stone, marble, wood or even metal, but in most churches it is made of wood. It is draped first in a white cloth of pure linen and then in another covering cloth. This may be changed to different colours on special feast days, when the other coverings in the nave are also changed. On the holy table are laid a cross, the Gospels and the corporal, known as the antimension. There is also the tabernacle, a casket with the Body and Blood of Christ for the communion of the sick. Underneath the holy table there is often a casket with the relic of a saint, because the first Orthodox Christians celebrated the liturgy on the tombs of the martyrs. Behind the holy table there is a processional cross, a seven-branch candlestick and an icon of the Mother of God. At the back of the sanctuary is the high place, where the bishop sits when he comes to the church. Beside it, to left and right, are seats for the priests.

To the left of the holy table, at the back, there is another table, called the 'table of preparation'. This is the table, on which the gifts of bread and wine are prepared for the liturgy and on which are put the little loaves of offertory bread, or prosphora, brought by the people.

The Cross, Icons and Candles

The Cross

The cross, the image of Christ Crucified and Risen, is the most sacred emblem of the Orthodox Church, because it was made holy by the blood of Christ, Who died on the cross to save us from sin and so raise us from the dead. That is why we venerate the cross, kiss it, place it in our churches and homes and wear it round our necks, where it was put at our baptism, so that we should never forget Christ's love for us.

We make the sign of the cross very frequently when we pray. We make it three times when we enter the church building. To make it, we join the tips of our thumb and two first fingers of our right hand, in memory of the Holy Trinity, and bend the third and little fingers to the palm, in order to express our faith that Jesus Christ was true God and true man. Then, with our right hand, we touch our foreheads to make holy our minds; our chests to make our hearts pure; our shoulders, that our bodies through our arms and hands may do good works. By this ancient sign of the cross, we give our mind, heart and body to the service of God. This is in obedience to the commandment: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind' (Matthew 22,37).

Icons

Icons are images of Jesus Christ in His human form, as was described by a very ancient tradition, of the Mother Of God, of the angels as they appeared to men, and of the saints. When we pray before the icons, cense them, kiss them, light candles before them, we venerate and do this, not to the paint and wood, but to those who are represented upon them. The icons are there as holy presences, windows or doors to heaven, and make the saints portrayed, present, rather as pictures make the people we love, present. Before use, icons are blessed and sprinkled with holy water, and so

become holy. They must be treated reverently and kept apart, not like ordinary pictures. Every Orthodox home should have an icon corner, with icons of the Saviour, the Mother of God, our patron-saints and an icon-lamp, and every room at least a small icon.

An ancient story tells us about the first icon of Jesus Christ, called 'Not Made by Hands'. When our Lord was on earth, there lived a prince called Abgar. He was a heathen, but had heard of Christ in Palestine. Abgar fell ill and nobody could cure him. In a dream he saw Christ and dreamed that he was healed by Him. So when he woke up, Abgar began to think how he could reach Him. His country was too far from Palestine and he was too ill to travel. He called his court artist and ordered him to go to Palestine, find the great Prophet and bring back a likeness of Him. Abgar felt sure that only by looking at His picture he would be healed.

The artist went and found Christ among a great crowd who had gathered round Him to heal their sick and hear Him preach. The artist started on his work, but try as he would he could not draw that wonderful Face, which was unlike any he had ever seen. Christ, of course, knew all the time what the man was trying to do and why, but He let him try. At last He sent a disciple to call the artist to Himself and asked what he wanted. The man fell at Christ's feet and told Him about Abgar. Then Our Lord took a white linen cloth, pressed it to His Face and gave it to the messenger. And there, on the cloth, was imprinted the image of Christ's Face. The artist hastened home with the precious cloth. When Abgar saw the human likeness of the Son of God, he fell on his knees before it and was healed. Later he was baptized.

Candles

Many candles burn in Orthodox churches. They are lit in the sanctuary during services, burn before the icons, and are carried in front of the book of Gospels and the cross or when the priest censens the church. On feast-days the church is brightly lit up, and sometimes the clergy and people stand with lighted candles. The services are made more beautiful and solemn by light. This tradition is very old. We know that a seven-branched candlestick burned in the tabernacle in the Old Testament. The lights remind us of Christ's words: 'I am the Light of the world', and those who believe in Him are the children of light (I Thessalonians 5,5). We no longer offer sacrifices of blood, as in the Old Testament, but the candle we light before an icon is a symbol of our prayer and faith, just as David compared his with incense: 'Let my prayer be set forth before Thee as incense' (Psalms 140,2). It is also a sign that we want our soul to be pure as light and our heart to burn with the flame of love to God, His Holy Mother and His Saints. St Seraphim of Sarov said: 'Let our heart glow with love and our life shine with light before Our Lord like the flame of a taper before His icon'.

3. The Clergy, Vestments and the Sacred Vessels

a) The Clergy

Our Lord Jesus Christ came to earth, as He Himself said, 'to seek and to save that which was lost' (Matthew 18,11). He chose His disciples and founded His Church. He taught men how to pray and established the sacrament of His Most Holy Body and Most Precious Blood. Before His Ascension, Our Lord handed over the task of

leading men to salvation to the Apostles and to those who came after them. 'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you' (Matthew 28,19-20).

Christ sent His Apostles the gift of the Holy Spirit, Who gave them grace and power to build and govern the Church of Christ. The Apostles were also given the power to pass on the grace of the Holy Spirit by the laying-on of hands to those whom they and the faithful found worthy to take their place. These, in their turn, passed it on to those who followed them. This is called 'Apostolic Succession'. As the Church grew, the Apostles appointed helpers, chosen by the faithful after prayers for guidance by the Holy Spirit, to choose men worthy to take up such holy service.

Three sorts of clergy were established in the Church: bishops, priests and deacons. Every Orthodox deacon, priest and bishop, looking back to the days of the Apostles, will find the line of the laying-on of hands, or ordination, unbroken, stretching back to the Apostles and Christ. This is why all Orthodox clergy are bearded, for they represent Christ, Who was of course also bearded. Monastic clergy, as well as many married clergy, also wear long hair, again in imitation of the Saviour.

Firstly, there are bishops. Bishops have full authority to teach and govern, to celebrate all the sacraments, to consecrate other bishops together, ordain priests and deacons, and to consecrate churches. The head of a large Local Orthodox Church is called a 'Patriarch' and other senior bishops are called 'Metropolitans' or 'Archbishops'.

Secondly, there are priests. They are ordained by a bishop. They may celebrate all the sacraments, except for the laying-on of hands (ordination), and all the church services, except for the consecration of a church. An Orthodox community, united with a priest, is called a parish. Senior married priests have different titles, such as Protopresbyter or Archpriest. A senior monastic priest is called an Archimandrite.

Thirdly, there are deacons. The word is Greek and means 'servant'. The first seven deacons were chosen by the wish of the apostles from among those 'of honest report', very soon after Christ's Ascension (Acts 6,3). They were chosen to relieve the Apostles from some of their duties and to assist them in the services. Deacons help the bishops and priests at the celebration of the sacraments, but do not celebrate them themselves. At the services they read the Gospel and the litanies, and cense the church. They look after the sacred vessels and vestments and help clean the altar. Senior married deacons are called Protodeacons. Senior monastic deacons are called Archdeacons.

Bishops, priests and deacons are ordained by bishops through the laying-on of hands, and receive the grace of the Holy Spirit according to their service. They wear an under-cassock and a cassock (riasa), which has wide sleeves. These clothes represent the tunics worn by the Saviour. Married clergy may wear any colour under-cassock, although black, the colour of repentance and sobriety, is the most common. Cassocks themselves are always black.

Others who assist in the church are subdeacons, readers, singers and servers (acolytes). Subdeacons and readers are ordained by bishops. Singers and servers must have the blessing of a priest.

b) Vestments

The robes the clergy wear for church services are called vestments. They put these on over their under-cassock at the liturgy, and over their under-cassock and cassock at other services. They are:

For the Deacon:

1) Tunic (sticharion) (2) Deacon's stole (orarion) (3) Cuffs.

For the Priest:

1) Alb (2) Stole (epitrachelion) (3) Belt (4) Cuffs (5) Chasuble (phelonion).

For the Bishop:

(1) Alb (2) Stole (epitrachelion) (3) Belt (4) Cuffs (5) Dalmatic (sakkos) (6) Pall (omophorion) (7) Mitre.

The deacon's tunic is an upper robe of coloured material with wide sleeves. The stole is a long, narrow strip of the same material, which the deacon wears hanging over his left shoulder. He holds one end in his right hand, and by raising it gives a sign to the choir and people to sing and pray. The cuffs are worn by the deacon and priest to fasten the sleeves of their under-cassocks. They also remind them of the bonds with which Our Lord's wrists were bound when He was led before Pilate.

The priest's alb is white (the word 'alb' means white), as a symbol of the purity of heart a priest should have. The stole is like a deacon's stole, but sewn together. It is made to be put over the head and hangs down the front. Without it the priest cannot celebrate any service. The cuffs are the same as a deacon's. The belt is worn round the waist and reminds us of the divine strength which sustains the priest in his service. The chasuble is a long, wide rounded, sleeveless robe slipped over the head. It is made of coloured materials like the stole. It signifies 'the robe of truth' in which Christ's servants should be clothed.

Besides the alb, stole, girdle and cuffs the bishop wears a dalmatic. It is a robe with wide sleeves, vein like that worn by the high priest in the Old Testament. Its symbolic meaning is the same as that of a chasuble. He also wears round his shoulders a pall, like a long scarf. It used to be made of white, fleecy wool as symbol of the lost sheep carried by the Good Shepherd. Without it the bishop cannot celebrate any service. The mitre, which the bishop wears on his head, is the sign of his authority. (Some elderly priests may also wear a mitre as a special distinction; other senior priests have other headware.)

The bishop also wears a long, wide, flowing mantle, usually of purple silk but not when he is in full vestments. Crosses, called pectoral crosses are always worn by

bishops and priests round their necks above their cassocks or vestments to remind them of Christ Crucified and Risen. Bishops also wear round their necks a panagia - a round image of the Mother of God. A bishop carries a staff as a sign of his duty to lead his flock in the right path. When a bishop celebrates a service, a small round carpet, called an 'the eagle', is placed under his feet. It has on it the picture of an eagle soaring above a city. It means that the bishop in his life and thoughts must soar above the earth like an eagle and point the way upwards to his flock.

c) The Sacred Vessels

The sacred vessels used for the Divine Liturgy are:

The chalice - the cup into which are poured the wine and water for the Liturgy. It has an icon of Our Saviour on the outside.

The paten - a small, round plate on a low stand. On the plate is an icon of the Birth of Christ. The loaf, or prosphora, which is used for the Liturgy and called the Lamb, is prepared, broken and consecrated on this plate, which represents, at different stages in the service, the manger or the tomb of Christ.

The star - two bent strips of metal crossed over each other and put on the paten to keep the little pieces of loaves in place when they are covered with a veil. It is called the star after the star of Bethlehem.

The lance - a spear-shaped knife with which the part of the prosphora called the Lamb is cut; it represents the lance which pierced Christ's side.

The spoon - with which the Body and Blood of Christ is given to the people.

Once these vessels are blessed and used, no one but bishops, priests and deacons may touch them.

Apart from the sacred vessels there is also the corporal, or antimension. This is a rectangular silk cloth with the icon of Our Lord's burial and a relic of a saint sewn into it. It has to be blessed by a bishop. It is spread on the holy table and the paten and chalice stand on it during the Liturgy. The Liturgy cannot be celebrated without it. After the service it is folded up and wrapped in another piece of red silk. Where there is no church, it can be used instead of a holy table to celebrate the Liturgy. When Orthodox are persecuted, we cannot have proper holy tables, which might be smashed or defiled. So instead we use these antimensia, blessed by a bishop, because they can easily be carried and hidden. If a priest has an antimension and bread and wine, he can celebrate the Liturgy anywhere - on a stone in the desert, in the forest on a tree trunk, on board ship or in a private room. In wars, army priests or chaplains always carry one and celebrate the Liturgy and give soldiers communion. There are also two small veils to cover the paten and the chalice and a large one, which is laid over both, and is called the large veil or aer.

There is also the censer. This is used to cense the holy gifts, the church the icons and the people, indicating holiness. The double and triple candles, called the 'dikiri' and 'trikiri', are used by the bishop to bless the people. The first reminds us of the two

natures in Jesus Christ, God and Man. The second points to the Holy Trinity. The fans are round metal discs with an images of cherubim and are held by subdeacons over the holy gifts during consecration when a bishop is celebrating. Originally, they were made of feathers and were used to drive away insects from the holy gifts.

PART TWO: THE SERVICES AND THE VIGIL SERVICE

1. The Services and the Cycles of Services

Origins and the Daily Cycle

Our Lord Jesus Christ gave His disciples the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6). In it He taught them how to pray and what to pray for. He also said: 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them' (Matthew 18,20). By this He showed that He wished people to gather together as brothers and sisters in Christ for worship and sacraments. After His Ascension His disciples followed His commandment. The Apostles, inspired, by the Holy Spirit and by the authority granted to them by the Lord Jesus Christ, taught people the true faith. Such prayer is common when all are united in love for our Saviour and all share in the sacrament of holy communion. Already the Apostles laid down the first order of worship, especially that of the Divine Liturgy, when the holy mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ is celebrated. The services we have were outlined in the days of the Apostles and their order laid down by the Church after them. The services of the Orthodox Church, apart from details, have remained the same for over 1,500 years.

There are several cycles or orders of Church services. Some services belong to the different parts of the day. Their order is complete each day and is repeated again on the next: this is the daily cycle. Other services, prayers and hymns are attached to each of the seven days of the week and form a complete weekly cycle, repeated each week. Other services, again, belong to fixed dates in the year (for instance, Christmas, Theophany, the Annunciation) and form the yearly cycle. There are also movable feasts, so called because their dates change each year. These are: Easter and all feasts connected with Easter, like Palm Sunday, Ascension Day, Pentecost etc.

Even if Orthodox cannot come to worship, they make each part of the day holy by prayer. The beginning of the day is counted not from the morning, but from the evening before. This is because, in the story of the Creation, the Scriptures say: 'And the evening and the morning were the first day' (Genesis 1,5). That is why the Church's daily cycle of prayer begins with the evening service, called Vespers. There are nine daily services, which are contained in a special book called the 'Book of Hours' or the 'Horologion'. These are: Vespers, Compline, the Midnight Service, Matins, the First Hour, the Third Hour, the Sixth Hour, the Divine Liturgy, and the Ninth Hour. It would be too difficult for people to come to church so often, so the Church has arranged the services into three groups: (1) evening (2) early morning (3) late morning.

The evening service consists of the Ninth Hour, Vespers and Compline.

The early morning service consists of Nocturns, Matins and the First Hour.

The late morning service consists of the Third Hour, the Sixth Hour and the Divine Liturgy.

Vespers is a service held in the evening to thank God for His mercy during the day and to ask His blessing for the coming night. It begins with Psalm 103, which describes the glories of creation. Then there are prayers for the whole world and for the Church, hymns in praise of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Mother of God and the Saints. Vespers end with the prayer of St. Simeon: 'Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace...' and 'Rejoice, O Virgin Birthgiver of God, Mary full of grace...'

Compline consists of Psalms 50, 69 and 142, in which we ask God to forgive us our sins and guard us during the night. The Great Doxology is read, the Creed and a prayer to the Most Holy Virgin Mary asking her to protect us in life and at our death.

The Midnight Service, also called Nocturns, should be said at midnight to remind us of Christ's vigil in the garden of Gethsemane before His Passion, and of the parable of the ten virgins watching at midnight for the coming of the Bridegroom. Monks and nuns rise for a midnight vigil of repentance and prayer so that the coming of the Lord will not find them unready. The Midnight Service consist of Psalm 50, 'Have mercy upon me, O God, and Psalm 118, which describes the happiness of the righteous; the Creed and the hymn, 'Behold, at midnight the Bridegroom cometh', and prayers for the departed. It is a service of repentance to remind us to watch for Christ's Coming.

Matins should be celebrated at dawn. We thank God for keeping us safe in our sleep and for granting us a new day. We also remember Christ's resurrection. Matins begin with a prayer for the country and its rulers. Then Six Psalms are read, there is a litany, more psalms, hymns in honour of God and His Saints, the Great Doxology and a litany or petition.

The Hours are short services read at the First, Third, Sixth and Ninth Hours of the day as they were counted in the Roman Empire. This was at 6.00 am, 9.00 am, 12.00 am and 3.00 pm. They consist of psalms, prayers and a special hymn on the meaning of the hour.

In the First Hour (also called Prime), we thank God for giving us the light of day and beseech Him to hear our voice as we call upon Him when we rise from sleep. It is also made holy by the memory that Jesus Christ was brought before Pilate at this hour.

In the Third Hour (also called Terce) we remember how the Apostles received the gift of the Holy Spirit at the third hour of day, and pray that we too may receive that grace.

The Sixth Hour (also called Sext) is the hour of Christ's crucifixion (Luke 23,44). We pray that our sins may be washed away by His precious Blood.

In the Ninth Hour (also called None) we remember Christ's death on the Cross (Luke 23,44). We pray that as He died for us so may we die to all evil things and lead good lives.

The greatest daily service is the Divine Liturgy, or Eucharist, that is the communion service.

The Weekly Cycle

Every day of the week has its own commemoration and special hymns and prayers. The services for each day, in a varied cycle over eight weeks, are contained in a special book called 'The Book of the Eight Tones' or the 'Octoechos':

The first day, Sunday, celebrates Our Lord's resurrection and in Orthodox countries is called 'the Day of the Resurrection' or 'the Day of the Lord'. So the Sunday service, beginning with Vespers on Saturday evening, has special hymns glorifying the Risen Christ. The Gospel reading at Sunday Matins is always about the Resurrection.

On Monday we remember the Archangel Michael and all angels. They proclaim God's glory in heaven and are His messengers on earth. We ask them to keep guard over us and protect us in the shadow of their wings.

On Tuesday we honour St. John the Baptist and the prophets who preached Christ's coming to earth.

Wednesday is the day on which Judas betrayed Lord Jesus, a day of sad memories and therefore a fast day. The hymn glorifies the Cross.

On Thursday we remember St. Nicholas, the great Archbishop, and all the Fathers of the Church, who, after the Apostles, guide Orthodox Christians. We ask his blessing and prayers for the Church.

Friday is another fast day, in remembrance of our Lord's Passion and death upon the Cross.

On Saturday, the last day of the week, we remember the most Holy Mother of God, the martyrs, healers, all the saints, and ask them to pray for us. We also pray for the departed, for their rest and peace in Christ, and that we too may join the communion of the saints in everlasting life.

And so, after remembering all God's Church in Heaven, we come again to Sunday, the first day, but also the eighth day, - Resurrection Day - with its glad message of everlasting life and joy to all who believe in Christ.

c) The Yearly Cycle

Every date of every month and every day of the year has some special memory attached to it - some event in the life of Christ, or His Holy Mother, or the Saints. There are also long fasts and days for remembering the departed. So special prayers, hymns and ceremonies are added to the usual daily services and alter them from day to day during the year. This is called the yearly cycle. The services for this cycle are contained in twelve books called the 'Menaia', with one 'Menaion' for each month.

The Church has special feasts (high days and holidays - holy days). On such days there are changes in the ordinary daily services, more lights and more ceremonies. Some feasts are in honour of Our Lord Jesus Christ, others of the Mother of God,

others of the great saints. Some always fall on the same date of the year and are called fixed feasts, others change dates from year to year and are called movable feasts. The greatest of these is Easter. The others are Palm Sunday, Ascension Day, and Pentecost, or Trinity Day. There are Twelve Great Feasts in the Orthodox Church, not counting Easter. Easter stands by itself, because it is the holiest of holy days, the feast of feasts.

Here are the Twelve Great Feasts: eight in honour of Our Lord and four in honour of the Most Holy Mother of God.

Beginning from the start of the Church Year in September, we have the Lord's Feasts:

The Exaltation of the Holy Cross - 14 September (27 September on the civil calendar).

The Nativity or Birth of Christ – Christmas - 25 December (7 January civil calendar).

The Baptism of Our Lord - Theophany - 6 January (19 January civil calendar).

The Presentation of Christ in the Temple by His Mother - The Meeting of Christ - 2 February (15 February civil calendar).

The Entry of Our Lord into Jerusalem - Palm Sunday - a week before Easter.

The Ascension of Christ - forty days after Easter.

Trinity Day - Pentecost or Whitsun - fifty days after Easter.

The Transfiguration of Christ - 6 August (19 August civil calendar).

The Feasts of the Most Holy Mother of God are:

The Nativity or Birth of the Mother of God - 8 September (21 September civil calendar).

The Presentation of the Mother of God in the Temple - 21 November (4 December civil calendar).

The Annunciation to the Mother of God - Lady Day - 25 March (7 April civil calendar).

The Dormition of the Mother of God – 15 August (28 August civil calendar).

2. Vespers at the Vigil Service

Origins

On Saturday evenings and the eve of great feasts, Vespers, Matins and the First Hour are joined together in a special service called the 'All-Night Vigil Service', or more simply the 'Vigil Service' or 'Vigil'. It is much more solemn than weekday Vespers.

The church is lit up, there is more singing and ceremonial, especially in those parts of the service in honour of Sunday or the feast-day. This service is properly called the 'All-Night Vigil' because in early times, and still today in some monasteries Orthodox spend the whole night in prayer till sunrise.

As in all Orthodox services, the Vigil Service shows in symbols, rite, readings, prayers and hymns, God's plan for the world's salvation from the beginning of creation. God created the world beautiful and man sinless and good, but He gave him a will free to choose between obeying His commandments or following his own desires and disobeying God. Man chose evil. God knew this would happen, and in His mercy sent His Only Son Jesus Christ to earth, to save and redeem mankind by His death and resurrection.

The First Part of Vespers at a Vigil

i) The Beginning of the Service and the Great Litany

This represents God's plan in the Old Testament. The priest and deacon put on their vestments. The deacon opens the holy doors. The priest takes the censer and, with the deacon walking in front of him, censes the holy table and the sanctuary. The deacon then comes out of the sanctuary and stands before the holy doors. The priest remains in front of the holy table.

The deacon says: 'Let us give attend, give the blessing'. The priest replies: 'Glory to the Holy, Consubstantial, Life-Giving and Indivisible Trinity, always, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages', and then calls the people to worship Christ our King and God. The choir sings verses of Psalm 103: 'Praise the Lord, O my soul: Thou art become exceeding glorious; Thou art clothed with majesty and honour.... O Lord, how manifold are Thy works: in wisdom hast Thou made them all...'

During this singing, the priest with the censer, and the deacon with the candle, walk round the church censing the icons and the people. The words of the Psalm describe the beautiful world God made for us. They make us think of the first man and woman, who were then innocent, and together with the angels praised their Maker. The open doors of the sanctuary, the lights and incense, remind us that man had not yet shut himself away from God by sin, but walked in His light and in the grace of the Holy Spirit.

After the Psalm the holy doors are closed. This reminds us how the gates of Paradise were closed on Adam and Eve after their sin (Genesis 3,24). The deacon, or priest alone if there is no deacon, stands in front of them and recites the Great Litany, or petition. It is called 'Great' because it has many petitions. Sometimes it is called the 'Litany of Peace', because the word 'peace' is used at its beginning and throughout it. We cannot pray without peace. We pray the Lord to give peace from above which we have lost through sin, and to fill our hearts with repentance and save our souls. We pray for the peace of the world; for the whole Orthodox Church, for the unity of all Orthodox, for our own and all countries. We ask Him to spare us from famine, war, sorrow, need and wrath, to help the sick, the sorrowing and those in captivity, and to protect and save us all by His grace. To each petition the choir replies: 'Lord, have mercy'. The deacon then bids us remember our Most Holy, Most Pure and Glorious

Lady, the Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary, with all the Saints, and commend ourselves, one another and all our lives unto Christ our God. The priest ends the litany by praising the Holy Trinity, to Whom are due glory, honour and worship. The Great Litany, read before the closed holy doors, shows us all the needs and troubles that came to man through his disobedience and fall.

ii) 'Blessed is the man' and 'Lord, I have cried'

After the Great Litany the choir sings verses from the first three psalms: 'Blessed is the man who hath not walked in the counsels of the ungodly. Arise, Lord, and save me, O God...Alleluia'. They express the longing for the happiness lost through sin and the hope of salvation. Then follows the Little Litany, which the deacon reads still standing before the closed holy doors. Again and again let us pray to the Lord to help us, save us, have mercy upon us and keep us and the praise of the Holy Trinity. The Little Litany serves to divide the different parts of the service and is often said.

Now comes the singing of the verses of Psalm 140, 'Lord, I have cried unto Thee, hear me' hear me, O Lord, when I cry unto Thee. Let my prayer be as incense before Thee: let the lifting of my hands be an evening sacrifice. Bring my soul out of prison that I may confess Thy name...', with hymns called 'stichira', ending with the Hymn to the Mother of God, called the 'Theotokion'. These verses from the Old Testament point to the lament and repentance of sinful man and his prayer for God's help. While the stichira are being sung, the deacon censes the holy table, the sanctuary, the iconostasis and the people: this represents the Old Testament sacrifices which kept alive in people's minds the thought of the coming Saviour.

iii) The Little Entrance, the Prokimenon and the Readings

At the last stichira the holy doors are opened and the lights go on. The deacon with a censer and the priest come out of the sanctuary by the north door and walk to the holy doors. A server with a lighted candle walks in front. Standing before the holy doors, the deacon exclaims: 'Wisdom. Stand Aright'. The priest makes the sign of blessing and they both pass silently through the holy doors into the sanctuary. This entrance represents the vision of the coming Christ, the Wisdom of God, dimly shown to the people of the Old Testament in symbols and images. We are told to 'stand aright' in worship with a steadfast mind and to thank God for His mercies. The choir sings the beautiful evening hymn to Christ of the early Orthodox, 'O Gladsome Light of the holy glory of the Immortal Father, the Holy, Blessed Jesus Christ. Having come to the setting of the sun and beheld the light of evening, we praise God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit...O Son of God, Giver of life, therefore the world doth glorify Thee'.

After this hymn the Prokimenon is sung. This is a short verse from the psalms before the readings. It points to the subject of the reading or the meaning of the feast. The holy doors are then closed. On the eve of feasts, readings, usually from the Old Testament, are read. They are called paremias or parables, because they refer in prophecies relating to the feast. On ordinary Saturday evenings, there are now no readings.

c) The Second Part of Vespers at a Vigil

i) The Augmented Litany, ‘Vouchsafe’, and the Litany of Supplication

After praising Christ, we again tell Him of our needs in two litanies. The first is called the Augmented Litany, because the choir sings ‘Lord, have mercy’ three times after each petition. In it, with our whole soul and mind, ‘we beseech the Lord Almighty, the God of our fathers’, to have mercy on the bishops and clergy and all our brotherhood in Christ, on our mother country, on all the faithful departed, all them that labour for the Church and the people present, awaiting God’s bountiful mercies. After this the reader reads a prayer, ‘Vouchsafe, O Lord’, asking for the Lord’s blessing on the rest of the evening.

In the Litany of Supplication, we ask for blessings, for the constant protection of our guardian angel, forgiveness of our sins, all things good for our souls and the peace of the world, that we may spend the rest of our lives in godliness and repentance, reach a peaceful Christian end and render a good account of ourselves on Christ’s day of judgement. To each petition the choir replies, ‘Grant this, O Lord’. This is why it is called the Litany of Supplication. At the end of every litany we always commemorate the Holy Mother of God and all the saints. This is to remind us that the Church in heaven and earth is one, and that the saints of God, and, especially the loving Mother of God, are always ready to help us with their prayers, just as we pray for each other on earth. The priest always finishes the litanies with an exclamation of praise to the Holy Trinity. After the litanies, hymns, or stichira, are sung in honour of the day.

ii) The Festal Litany or Lítia

However, after the Litany of Supplication at Vespers at the Vigil Service of big feasts, the priest and deacon with a lighted candle walk to the end of the church in the narthex or porch. Only then are special stichira sung and a special litany read. This is a custom from the early Orthodox Church, when penitents and unbaptized catechumens stood in the porch and could not enter the church. In this way they could for a short time at least take part in public worship. The litany consists of prayers for all Christians, bishops and clergy, rulers, ‘for every Christian soul afflicted and suffering and seeking God’s mercy’, the peace of the world, deliverance from wars, invasions and all calamities. We beseech the prayers of our Most Holy Lady and the saints.

The priest and deacon then move to the middle of the church to a small table. On it are placed five small loaves and little glasses with wheat, wine and oil. At the end of Vespers (see below) he priest will bless all these, asking that they may be multiplied throughout the world, will then walk up to the ambo and give the blessing. This reminds us of the blessed bread and wine and oil which in the early Orthodox Church were distributed among the people to sustain them during the All-Night Vigil. Nowadays they are still distributed and the people anointed with the blessed oil when they come to kiss the festal icon at Matins, as the Canon begins (See below at Matins).

iii) The End of Vespers at a Vigil

And so Vespers show us the promise of the coming Christ in the Old Testament. It ends with the promise fulfilled: After the stichira of the day, the prayer of St. Simeon

is read, when he saw the Infant Jesus in the Temple. (This prayer is sung once a year on the feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple). Also the prayers of introduction with 'Our Father' are read. Vespers ends with the glad tidings of Christ's coming birth and the Archangel's greeting: 'Rejoice, O Birthgiver of God and Virgin, Mary full of grace, the Lord is with Thee; blessed art Thou among women and blessed is the fruit of Thy womb, for Thou hast borne the Saviour of our souls'. The priest then gives the blessing. (On the eve of a festival the Troparion, or hymn of the day, is sung instead).

Matins at the Vigil Service

The First Part of Matins

i) The Six Psalms, the Great Litany, 'God is the Lord', the Troparion and the Psalm Readings

Matins begins at once after the blessing. It takes up the symbolic story where it was left off at Vespers. All the candles are blown out and the lights off. For it is now night and the reader stands before the closed holy doors and repeats three times the Angel's song on the night of the Birth of Christ: 'Glory to God in the Highest, and peace on earth, goodwill among men'. He then reads 'The Six Psalms' (3, 37, 62, 87, 102 and 142) in which man pours out his soul to God and seeks His forgiveness and guidance and puts his trust in Him. While the last three psalms are being read, the priest comes out of the sanctuary and finishes reading in silence twelve morning prayers for God's grace on his flock and all the world.

After the Six Psalms, the deacon or priest again prays for our needs in the Great Litany. This is followed by a hymn of praise to the Lord, Who came to earth for our salvation. 'God is the Lord and hath appeared unto us, blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord'. The Troparion, or hymn of the day, is also sung. On the eve of Sunday (Saturday evening) it is always a resurrection hymn, on feasts, one about the special event. They all point to the mercy granted us by Christ's coming on earth. Then some psalms are read. This is called a kathisma. It is a Greek word which means 'sitting', because people are allowed to sit during these Old Testament readings. Sometimes, in parish churches, these readings are shortened or even omitted, and there is only a Little Litany. As we have said, the first part of the Matins is said in a dimly lit church and with closed holy doors. It reminds us of Christ's early years on earth. People scarcely knew Him then, but longed for Him and groped 'in darkness' for His light to be revealed to them.

ii) The Polyeleion

The next part of Matins on the eve of Sunday glorifies Christ's resurrection, or the particular festival or saint whose day it is. It is the most solemn, joyful and brightest part of the service. Polyeleion is a Greek word. It means much mercy and also much oil, because we praise God's mercies and because all the lamps are lit in sign of joy.

After the Little Litany the holy doors are opened, the church brightly lit up. If there is a deacon, he comes out of the sanctuary with a lighted candle. The priest follows with the censer. The choir sings the glad verses of Psalms 134 and 135: 'Praise ye the

Lord, all ye servants of the Lord. Alleluia (3 times)...O give thanks unto the Lord of heaven, for His mercy endureth for ever...'. During the singing the priest, with the deacon if there is one, censes the sanctuary and iconostasis, then walks round the church censing all the icons and the people.

On the eve of Sunday, hymns of the resurrection are sung. They describe how the weeping women came to Christ's tomb at dawn, the glad tidings announced by the Angel: 'Why seek ye the living among the dead? For Christ is risen from the tomb...'. They end with a call to worship the Holy Trinity and praise the Mother of God.

On the eve of great feasts the icon of the feast or of the saint is placed in the middle of the church on a stand. The priest or deacon censes it and sing a magnification (megalynarion) in honour of the feast or saint. The choir repeats it. There is a Little Litany and sometimes more verses are sung.

iii) The Gospel

After the Little Litany comes the reading of the Gospel for the day. The deacon invites the people to attend. The Prokimenon of the day is sung. The deacon prays that we may be worthy to hear the holy Gospel and attend to the Wisdom of God (the words of Christ) and stand aright. The priest then names the Evangelist, the choir sings: 'Glory to Thee, O Lord, glory to Thee'. The priest then reads the Gospel on the the holy table, which now signifies the tomb of Christ. At Sunday Matins the Gospel is always about the resurrection and Christ's appearance to His disciples. There are eleven such Sunday Gospel readings which are read in turn all the year round. On the eve of feasts the Gospel is adapted to the particular holy day.

At Sunday Matins the Gospels, which represent the Risen Christ, is carried from the sanctuary to the middle of the church for the people to kiss. Meanwhile the choir sings a hymn of praise: 'Having beheld the resurrection of Christ, let us adore the Lord Jesus Who alone is without sin...Come, all ye faithful, let us adore Christ's holy resurrection. For, behold, through the Cross joy came into all the world...'.

On feasts (not Sundays) the Gospels are not brought out of the sanctuary. Instead the people come and kiss the icon of the feast which has been put in the middle of the church. The priest stands beside it and makes the sign of the cross on the forehead of the worshippers with holy oil 'in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit'.

A petition is then sung, that by the prayers of the Holy Mother of God and the Apostles our All-Merciful Lord may cleanse our many sins. Verses of Psalm 50 are also sung. The deacon reads a prayer for the Church, the people and the whole world, asking for the prayers of all the saints who are venerated in the church, to which the choir replies, 'Lord, have mercy' twelve times. When all the people have kissed it, the Gospels, which represent the Risen Christ, are carried back into the sanctuary, the holy doors are closed, and the Polyeleion ends.

The Second Part of Matins

i) The Canon

Next comes the singing and reading of the canon. This is a Greek word and it means a pattern, an example and also a rule. In church services this name is given to a number of sacred odes or songs in honour of Christ, His Holy Mother and His Saints. Each ode has several verses. The first verse of each ode is called an irmos, another Greek word which means a link, because it links up all the other verses which are composed on the same pattern. There are nine odes in the canon, but the second ode is not read, except in Lent. The subjects of the odes and the first irmos are taken from the Old Testament and the next verses are adapted to the event which the odes celebrate.

ii) The Odes

Although the odes are only read and sung in full during Lent, nevertheless, their subjects are still alluded to in the irmos. The subject of the first ode is taken from the song of Miriam after Israel's escape from Egypt. Each verse ends with the triumphant refrain, 'For He hath triumphed'. The Church glorifies Israel's deliverance from the power of Pharaoh as a symbol of our deliverance from the power of Satan. The second ode contains Moses' stern rebuke to the Israelites for their iniquities and is therefore only sung in Lent. The third ode is taken from the thanksgiving hymn of Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel. She was childless and God gave her the joy of a son. The Church, too, at first was barren and now rejoices over her many children. The fourth ode sings of the Prophet Habbakuk's vision of the coming to earth of Christ, the Lord of all the world. In the fifth ode the Church in the words of the Prophet Isaiah prays for Divine Light to the faithful. The sixth refers to the Prophet Jonah who called upon the Lord from the deep. And we, like him, pray that we may be delivered from life's tempests and the pit. The seventh and eighth odes contain the song of praise of the three youths in the furnace of Babylon with the refrains, 'Blessed is the God of our fathers' and 'Hymn and exalt the Lord and His deeds for ever'. The Little Litany is said after the third and sixth odes.

iii) The Magnificat and the Ninth Ode

The ninth ode is always in praise of the Mother of God. At the end of the eighth ode the deacon or priest comes out of the sanctuary with the censer, censes and then stands before the icon of the Holy Virgin and exclaims: 'In hymns let us magnify the Birthgiver of God and Mother of the Light'. He censes the icon, the iconostasis and the people. The choir sings the Magnificat ('My soul magnifieth the Lord...') with a refrain after each verse from another hymn to our Lady. In this she is called 'more glorious than the seraphim and beyond compare more honourable than the cherubim', for without defilement she has given birth to God the Word. Therefore we magnify her. The Little Litany follows.

c) The Third Part of Matins

The Praises

The third part of Matins consists of songs of praise to God and prayers for blessings. Verses of Psalms 148, 149 and 150 are sung: 'Praise the Lord of heaven; praise Him in the height...Let every breath praise the Lord... All ye angels of the Lord, praise ye

the Lord...'. Hymns or stichira on the subject of the day are sung inbetween. The last hymn of praise is, as always, in honour of the Mother of God.

ii) The Great Doxology

The Great Doxology or Glorification is very ancient. It was sung already when Orthodox had to gather in secret to pray in the night. At daybreak, before they dispersed to their homes or often to be seized and tortured for their faith, all united in the singing of the glory of our Redeemer, and feared nothing.

Here the holy doors are opened again. The priest, standing before the holy table, exclaims: 'Glory to Thee Who hast shown us the Light'. Still today in some monasteries, when Orthodox kept a truly All-Night Vigil, these words are uttered when the light of the rising sun breaks out in the east. The people reply with the Angel's song at the Birth of Christ: 'Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth and goodwill among men', and sing the Great Doxology to the Holy Trinity, with appeals for God's mercy to all men.

iii) The End of Matins and the First Hour

The Augmented Litany and the Litany of Supplication are said again. The priest gives the blessing. The First Hour is read immediately after. It ends with a prayer to Our Saviour to shed His Light upon us and guide our ways; and with a hymn to the Mother of God.

PART THREE: THE DIVINE LITURGY

1. The Origins of the Liturgy and the Preparation of the Gifts

Origins

The greatest and holiest of all the church services is the Divine Liturgy, when the holy communion is celebrated. The Greek word 'Liturgy' means the work of the people, or common prayer. The service is so called because all Orthodox ought to attend it. It is also called the Eucharist, which in Greek means thanksgiving, because the holy gifts of bread and wine are offered in thanksgiving for God's love and sacrifice for the world. The whole service represents in symbols the whole of Christ's life on earth, culminating in His Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension and the Descent of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself established the sacrament of His Most Holy Body and Most Precious Blood. As we can read in the Gospels, long before His Passion, He used to tell His disciples and people: 'I am the Bread of Life...if any man eateth of it, he shall live for ever...The bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world...Whoso eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day'. And so He prepared them for the great mystery of the Eucharist. In that 'upper room' at the Last Supper before He gave Himself up to be crucified for us all, He took the bread, blessed it, broke it and gave to His disciples, saying: 'Take, eat, this is My Body, which is given for you: do this in remembrance of Me'. Then He blessed the wine cup and said: 'Drink ye all of this; for this is My Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins' (Matthew 26). Our Lord established this sacrament to unite us all with Himself for ever through communion of His Holy Body and Blood.

After Christ's Ascension the Apostles and other Orthodox used to meet every day for the Eucharist. They prayed, sang psalms and hymns and broke the bread 'in remembrance' of Christ, according to His commandment. The order of the service was first laid down by the Apostles themselves, passed on to those who came after them, and learnt by heart. This was done to guard the Christian worship against the mockery and blasphemy of the heathen. The oldest order of the Liturgy to be written down and still kept is the Liturgy of the Apostle James, the first Bishop of Jerusalem. At last, more than 300 years after Christ, Christianity became the accepted Faith of the Roman Empire. Then the order of the Apostles' Liturgy was written down and arranged, first by St Basil, the Great, Archbishop of Ceasarea, and then by St John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople. These two forms have been celebrated ever since and very few hymns and prayers have been added to them.

The two are very alike, only that of St Basil is slightly longer. The only difference with that of St John is that the secret prayers at the consecration of the holy gifts are longer, so the singing is slower. Before Christ's words of the Last Supper, the priest says aloud: 'He gave it to His holy disciples and Apostles, saying...'. Instead of the hymn to our Lady, 'It is meet indeed to bless Thee..', another is sung which begins,

‘All creatures rejoice in Thee...’. The Liturgy of St Basil is celebrated ten times a year: on Christmas Eve or Day, Theophany Eve or Day (the Baptism of Christ), on St Basil’s Day (1 January or 14 January in the civil calendar), five Sundays in Great Lent, Holy Thursday and Holy Saturday in Passion Week.

Only a bishop or priest may celebrate the Liturgy. The Liturgy may be celebrated every morning of the year, except on most weekdays in Lent, at the beginning of the Nativity Fast, on Great Friday. However, in strict accordance with the ancient Tradition, it may not be celebrated more than once a day by the same priest, or on the same altar and antimension. In the days of the Apostles and early Church the Liturgy, like the Last Supper, was celebrated in the evening and the vigil lasted well into the night. When all late meetings were forbidden by the Romans, it took place at dawn. Now it can be celebrated at any time between dawn and midday.

b) The Three Parts of the Liturgy

The Liturgy consists of three parts: the Preparation (Proskomidia) of the bread and wine for consecration; the Liturgy of the Catechumens (those who are preparing to be received into the Church); the Liturgy of the Faithful.

The Preparation

The Preparation, or Proskomidia, is so called because the gifts of bread and wine for the Liturgy are brought as gifts to God in thanks or in prayer for themselves or others, living and departed. With them are handed in the names of those whom people want the priests to pray for, living or departed. We bring in the special little loaves, called ‘prospora’, or offertory bread, with names on slips of paper for the priest to read before the consecration of the gifts. In this way all those we specially want to be prayed for, both living and departed, are united with us in the Eucharist.

The gifts needed for the liturgy are bread and wine. The bread is of pure white flour mixed with water and leavened. As we have said, these loaves are called prospora. They are made of two parts, one on top of the other, to remind us of the two natures of Christ, Who was both God and man. The top part is stamped with a seal in the shape of a cross with the letters IC XP NI KA (‘Jesus Christ conquers’). Five prospora are used for communion in memory of the five loaves with which Christ fed the people in the wilderness. The wine must be red, pure and sweet.

The Eucharist is such a holy mystery that the bishops, priests and deacons who celebrate it must prepare themselves especially. The evening before, they read special prayers and keep fast (neither eat nor drink) until after the Liturgy. On coming to church in the morning, the priest prays before the holy doors that God will bless and strengthen him and send him grace for their service. He kisses the icons of Our Saviour and His Holy Mother, then bows, asking forgiveness for his sins. This is done because no one can take communion if he is not at peace. He then enters the sanctuary and puts on his vestments. With each item he puts on, he reads verses from the psalms which point to their special meaning. He then washes his hands as a sign of purity.

The priest comes up to the table of preparation. He takes one of the five prospora and marks it with the sign of the cross, saying: ‘In memory of our Lord and God and

Saviour Jesus Christ', and then with the spear cuts out a cubic particle and lifts it out of the bread. While doing this he reads the words of the Prophet Isaiah about Christ: 'As a sheep to the slaughter He was led to the slaughter...And as a spotless lamb dumb before his shearer, so He openeth not His mouth. . . .'. This particle is called the Lamb, because it represents the suffering Saviour, Whose emblem in the Old Testament was the Paschal Lamb. The Lamb is laid to the top of the middle of the paten and cut crosswise from underneath, the priest saying: 'The Lamb of God is sacrificed, who taketh away the sins of the world, for the life and salvation of the world'. After this he thrusts the spear into its right side, repeating the words of the Gospel: 'One of the soldiers with a lance pierced his side; and blood and water came out forthwith'. At this moment wine, mixed with a little water, are poured into the chalice. The Lamb is the only bread which is consecrated for communion.

The priest then takes the second prosthira and cuts out a small particle 'in honour and memory' of the Mother of God, 'through whose prayers' he asks God to accept this holy sacrifice. He puts it on the paten on the left of the Lamb, saying: 'The queen stood at thy right hand'.

From the third prosthira the priest cuts nine particles in honour of the nine ranks of saints: angels and archangels, prophets, apostles, fathers of the Church (bishops), martyrs, holy monks and nuns, unmercenary healers, the saint of the church with the saints of the day and Sts Joachim and Anna (the parents of the Mother of God), and St. John Chrysostom or St. Basil the Great, according to whose Liturgy is celebrated. These nine particles are set on the paten in three rows on the right of the Lamb.

From the fourth prosthira the priest takes particles with prayers for the living members of the Church, the bishops, the rulers of the land and all the living; these he sets below the Lamb.

From the fifth prosthira particles are taken in memory of the departed and put below the living.

Then particles from prosthira sent in with names by the people are placed in the centre of the paten. So in this symbolic way the whole Church in heaven and earth is represented gathered round the Lamb, 'the Bread of Life', Her King and Redeemer. When all the particles are on the paten, the priest puts the star over them to keep them in place, saying, 'And the star came and stood over where the Child was', remembering the star of Bethlehem. He then covers the paten and chalice with the small veils and the large veil (the aer) as a symbol that the glory of God covers and makes the world beautiful, and prays that God should cover us with His grace.

Then, in memory of the wise men who brought gifts to the newborn Saviour, the priest censens the gifts three times. He thanks God for granting us the Eucharist, asks Him to receive our gifts at His heavenly altar to 'remember those Who offer it and those for whom they offer'. This means the priest and people who present the gifts and those who are to be prayed for. This is the end of the Preparation. It is said in a low voice inside the sanctuary behind closed holy doors and curtain. Meanwhile, a reader in the choir begins reading the Third and Sixth Hours, to prepare people's minds for the Divine Liturgy.

The Preparation reminds us of Christ's secret birth. As soon as He came on earth, Our Lord became the Lamb ready to sacrifice Himself for our sins. He was also the King Who gathered all believers around Himself as His servants. That is why at different parts of the service the veils represent Christ's swaddling clothes or His winding sheet; the preparation table - the cave of Bethlehem and Golgotha; the paten - the manger and the tomb. The closed doors show that in the early years on earth, while He prepared to sacrifice Himself for our sins, Jesus lived hidden and unknown to the world which He had come to save.

2. The Liturgy Of The Catechumens

The Beginning of the Liturgy of the Catechumens and the Antiphons

The next part of the Liturgy is called the Liturgy of the Catechumens. This is because penitents and those who are preparing for baptism are allowed to be present at it. This part consists of prayers, hymns and readings from the holy Scriptures. Now we relive Christ's life on earth before the Passion.

If there is a deacon, he stands before the closed holy doors and says: 'Master, give the blessing'. And the priest from the sanctuary replies: 'Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto the ages of ages. The choir sings 'Amen'. The deacon or priest then reads the Great Litany, asking God to give us peace from on high which we need to enter His Kingdom and to lead peaceful lives among ourselves. As usual, all litanies end with the mention of the Mother of God and the Saints and an exclamation in praise of the Holy Trinity.

After praying for our needs, we sing to God antiphons, or anthems, of praise and thanksgiving, for His mercy. The greatest is the coming of Christ on earth to save us from death. The antiphons are divided into three parts in honour of the Holy Trinity, with the little litany between them. On ordinary Sundays the antiphons are verses from Psalm 102: 'Bless the Lord, O my soul...and forget not all His benefits...Who saveth thy life from destruction; and crowneth thee with mercy and loving-kindness. Then comes Psalm 145: 'Praise the Lord, O my soul. While I live will I praise the Lord: I will sing praises unto my God...'. The second antiphon ends with a hymn in praise of Christ and His All-Holy and Ever-Virgin Mother. For the third antiphon we sing the Beatitudes: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted...' to the end, to remind us of Christ's Sermon on the Mount, when for the first time He proclaimed to the people His new teaching of love. On feast-days, verses from other psalms are sung with prophecies pointing to the event.

b) The Little Entrance, the Hymns, the Thrice-Holy Hymn, the Epistle and the Gospel

The psalms and prophecies prepared us for the coming of Christ. Now we see His first coming before the people. The holy doors are opened. The priest takes up the Gospels and hands them to the deacon, who raises it and carries it out through the north door, the priest following. A server with a lighted candle walks in front. They stand before the holy doors and the priest prays secretly, while the deacon says: 'Wisdom. Stand aright'. The priest says in a low voice: 'Blessed is the entrance of Thy saints always,

now and for ever'. The deacon makes the sign of the cross with the Gospels and they enter the sanctuary. This represents Christ's first coming among the people. The candle-bearer or deacon reminds us of the Holy Forerunner John the Baptist, who spoke of Him Who would follow him. On ordinary Sundays, the choir, as if seeing Christ Himself coming towards them, bows down and sings: 'Come, let us adore and bow down before Christ: save us, Son of God...who sing unto Thee: Alleluia'.

Then the hymns of the day, Troparia and Kontakia, (with resurrection ones on Sundays) are sung. The priest now gives praise to God: 'For Thou art holy, O our God, and unto Thee do we give glory, to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. The choir replies 'Amen' and sings the Thrice-Holy Hymn: 'Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us', three times. The priest now stands behind the holy table facing the people.

A reader with the Epistles comes out to the middle of the church. The deacon calls: 'Let us attend', and the reader reads out the Prokimenon of the day, which the choir repeats. To show that one cannot otherwise listen to the Holy Word, the priest says, 'Peace be with you all', and the choir replies: 'And with thy spirit'. The deacon again commands attention; the reader names the Epistle to be read and reads the lesson of the day. While the Epistle is being read the priest sits in his seat at the back of the sanctuary as one who has the same right to teach as the Apostles. Meanwhile the deacon censures the sanctuary, the icons and the people. This is a symbol of the grace spread throughout the world by the teaching of the Apostles and the coming of Christ through the Gospel which will be read next. The reading ends with the singing of 'Alleluia', for God the Word Incarnate is now coming.

The deacon then brings out the Gospels from the sanctuary. A lighted candle is carried before them to remind us of the light of Christ's teaching and of Himself as 'the Light of the World'. The deacon lays the book on a lectern placed in front of the open holy doors. The priest stands within the doors and bids the people: 'Wisdom. Let us attend. Let us hear the holy Gospel. Peace be unto you all'. The deacon names the Evangelist, the choir sings, 'Glory to Thee, O Lord, glory to Thee', and the deacon reads the Gospel of the day. At the end we again give thanks to God: 'Glory to Thee'. During the reading the people stand with bowed head as if Christ Himself were speaking. The Gospels are then carried back into the sanctuary and the holy doors closed.

c) The Litanies

After the Gospel, the Augmented Litany is said for all members of the Church. If there are any offerings for the dead, a special litany for them is said, that their sins may be forgiven and they be granted rest in the kingdom of heaven. The reading of the Gospel ends the part of the Liturgy representing our Lord's life as a Teacher. It now passes on to recall His Passion and to the offering of the bloodless sacrifice, the mystery of the Eucharist. Only the 'faithful', the baptized, are allowed to be present. But before that there is the Litany for the Catechumens.

These were people preparing for baptism, and special prayers are said for them that God will enlighten them with His truth and make them worthy to enter His Church. After this litany the catechumens are told to leave the church: 'All catechumens depart. Thee faithful, again and again let us pray to the Lord'. Here ends the Liturgy

of the Catechumens. Now most Orthodox are baptized as infants and there are often only a few catechumens. But the litanies remind us of our great privilege and make us humbly feel how unworthy we are of it and how we must still pray for the still unbaptized world around us.

3. The Liturgy of the Faithful

The Beginning of the Liturgy of the Faithful

The Liturgy of the Faithful represents in symbols the Passion of Christ, His Crucifixion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension into heaven.

Now the faithful alone remain in the church. The deacon says three short litanies asking for heavenly peace and grace. Meanwhile the priest unfolds the antimimension, which will represent Christ's tomb, and spreads it on the holy table. He prays to himself that the Lord may accept and bless the gifts and make him and the people worthy to take part in His mystical communion.

After the litanies, the deacon says 'Wisdom', for Christ is present amongst us. The holy doors are opened. The choir sings the first part of the Cherubic Hymn: 'We who mystically represent the Cherubim, who sing to the Life-Giving Trinity the Thrice-Holy Hymn, let us now lay aside all earthly cares'. This means that we, the faithful, together with the invisible angels, will assist at the Eucharist. We must lay aside all our petty cares and try humbly and lovingly to think only of Christ, Who was crucified for us. While this is sung the priest prays silently before the holy table and the deacon censures the sanctuary, the icons and the people. Then the priest and deacon move to the table of preparation. The choir pauses. The priest hands the paten with the Lamb to the deacon, who raises it above his head. He himself takes up the chalice. They walk slowly in procession out of the north door and pass to the top of the steps outside the iconostasis. Lighted candles are carried before them. The holy gifts borne to the altar of sacrifice represent our Lord going forth to His Passion. We stand with bowed heads in awe and reverence.

The priest and deacon pause before the open holy doors and face the people and say aloud: 'May the Lord God remember in His Kingdom the bishops (by name), the rulers of the land, and 'all Orthodox Christians always, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages'. They enter the sanctuary and the choir finishes the Cherubic Hymn: 'That we may receive the King of all who comes escorted by unseen armies of angels. Alleluia'. This is called the Great Entrance. In the sanctuary, the paten and chalice are placed on the spread antimimension and covered with the large veil. The deacon recites verses on the Passion. The holy doors are closed and the curtain drawn. The priest continues to pray silently. The deacon comes out to say the Litany of Supplication, for the precious gifts that are set forth and for mercy.

After the Litany we are again reminded of what each of us should offer to God to make the sacrifice perfect: peace, love for one another, unity in faith. The priest says, 'Peace be unto you all', and the deacon adds: 'Let us love one another, that with one mind we may confess...the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Trinity Consubstantial and Undivided', replies the choir, for us all. We stand as one family before God, we confess our common faith in Him, the Father of us all. No unbaptized

may share with us the great mystery of His sacrifice. So formerly subdeacons and servers stood at the church doors to see that no stranger entered when the deacon proclaimed, 'The doors, the doors. In wisdom let us attend', and all the doors were closed. Now this is said to remind us to 'close' the doors of our soul and mind to all worldly thoughts.

b) The Confession of Faith and the Consecration of the Gifts

Here the curtain is drawn from the holy doors as a sign that faith alone lifts the veil from God's mysteries. The choir or all the people sing the Creed: 'I believe in One God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth...'. The priest meanwhile raises the veil from the paten and chalice and waves it gently over the holy gifts. Before the Creed the priest and deacon give each other the kiss of peace, saying: 'Christ is in our midst, is now and shall be'. It means that only if we love one another we may confess together our common faith and take part in the holy mystery.

We have confessed our faith. The moment of the sacrifice is at hand. Once again the deacon reminds us: 'Let us stand aright, let us stand with fear. Let us attend to offer the holy sacrifice in peace with pure and humble hearts. And the choir replies for us that we will offer to God 'the mercy of peace, the sacrifice of praise'. Here the priest turns and faces the people from the sanctuary and blesses our resolve: 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all'. The people bow their heads. 'And with thy spirit', replies the choir. Again the priest bids us leave all earthly thoughts and says, 'Let us lift up our hearts', and we reply, 'We lift them up unto the Lord'.

The great mystery of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ is about to begin. As Jesus Christ at the Last Supper first offered thanks to God before breaking the bread, so the priest says first of all: 'Let us give thanks to the Lord'. We bow in reverent thanksgiving, and the choir sings: 'It is meet and right to worship the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Trinity Consubstantial and Undivided'. Meanwhile the priest reads silently a prayer of thanks to God for all His great mercies, 'which we know and know not, manifest and concealed', for granting us the holy sacrament of His Most Pure Body and Most Precious Blood. He beseeches God to accept our gifts, though hosts of Cherubim and Seraphim are ever around his throne in glory, who, 'borne aloft on their wings'. Now he says aloud: 'Singing, crying, proclaiming the hymn of victory, saying' (the choir takes it up and sings): 'Holy, holy holy, Lord God of Sabaoth. Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest'. The star is now lifted from the paten.

The priest continues his secret prayer. He says: 'In company with these blessed hosts (the angels) we glorify Thee, Thine Only-begotten Son and Holy Spirit'. He recalls God's love for the world, that He gave His only Son that those who believed in Him might have everlasting life. He recalls how 'in the night in which He was betrayed, or rather surrendered Himself for the life of the world', He took the bread into His holy, pure hands, broke, blessed and gave it to His Apostles, saying: 'Take, eat, this is My Body broken for you for the remission of sins...'. These words the priest says aloud, while the deacon points to the paten and the choir reply 'Amen'. The priest then says to himself. 'Likewise, He took the chalice after He had supped, saying (aloud): Drink

ye all of this, for this is my Blood of the New Testament, shed for you and for many for the remission of sins'. The deacon points to the chalice. The choir sings, 'Amen'.

The deacon now with bowed head crosses his hands and raises or elevates the paten with the Holy Lamb and the chalice, while the priest recalls Christ's commandment to 'do this in remembrance' of Him, prays secretly, and remembering all Christ's mercy and all He has done for us - His Passion, the Cross, the Tomb, the Resurrection, the Ascension and the Second Glorious Coming - he says aloud: 'Thine own of Thine own, we offer unto Thee on behalf of all and for all'. This means that all we have comes from God, and that we, His servants, can but offer Him from His own gifts on behalf of all people. And the faithful reply: 'We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we thank Thee, O Lord, and we pray to Thee, O our God'. This is the most solemn moment of the holy mystery.

The choir sings this hymn slowly, while the priest prays in a low voice that God may send His Holy Spirit upon the offered Gifts and change them into the True Body and Blood of Christ. 'O gracious Lord, take not away from us Thy most Holy Spirit, Whom at the third hour Thou didst send down upon Thine Apostles, but renew us who pray unto Thee'. Then the deacon, bowing his head, points to the Bread, saying, 'Master, bless the holy Bread'. The priest makes the sign of the cross over the bread and says: 'And make this Bread precious Body of Thy Christ'. The deacon replies: 'Amen. Bless, Master, the holy chalice'. The priest blesses the wine, saying: 'And that which is in this chalice precious Blood of Thy Christ'. The deacon replies: 'Amen. Master, bless both holy gifts'. The priest makes a large sign of the cross over the paten and the chalice, saying in awe and trembling: 'Changing them by Thy Holy Spirit. Amen, Amen, Amen'. At this solemn moment, by God's will and power of the Holy Spirit, the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. The priest and deacon bow to the ground in adoration.

The people all this time stand, or on weekdays kneel, with bowed heads in reverence and awe before this mystery of God's love for us. It is as if we were present at the Last Supper of our Lord Jesus, His Crucifixion and Death for our sins. All this He has done for us, asking for nothing in return but our love, and that we should 'do this' - the sacrament of holy communion in remembrance of Him, to win everlasting life with Him. The priest continues to pray for those who are about to take communion that they may be cleansed by the Holy Spirit and have their sins forgiven.

He also remembers all the saints throughout the ages, that all who partake of the Body and Blood of Christ may be united together with our forefathers and all those departed in faith and hope of resurrection - Prophets, Patriarchs, Apostles, Martyrs and 'all righteous spirits made perfect', and out loud: 'Especially, our Most Holy, Most Pure, Most Blessed and Glorious Lady, the Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary'. The choir sings the hymn of the Mother of God: 'It is meet indeed to bless Thee Birthgiver of God, ever blessed and most pure and Mother of our God. More honourable than the Cherubim and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim, who without defilement didst bear God the Word, thee, true Birthgiver of God, we magnify'. The priest meanwhile prays for all the living, mentioning aloud the bishops, that he may rightly and in peace teach the word of God's truth in the Church. The choir replies: 'And all mankind'.

The mystic sacrifice is offered, all the members of Church living and departed are united together. The priest prays that all may 'with one mouth and one heart glorify and praise Thy most honourable and majestic Name, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages...'. 'Amen', replies the choir, a sign that we have all taken part in the offering of the sacrifice. The priest ends this most solemn part of the Liturgy as he began it - with a blessing: 'And may the mercies of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ be with you all'. 'And with thy spirit', replies the choir.

c) Preparation for Communion and the End of the Liturgy

After the consecration of the holy gifts those who are going to take communion prepare themselves to receive it. Not to be quite unworthy of this, we must keep minds and hearts on spiritual things. So the deacon comes out of the sanctuary and says the Litany of Supplication. It begins with a petition that God will accept the consecrated Gifts upon His heavenly altar and send us His grace and gifts of the Holy Spirit. We then pray for an angel of peace, the forgiveness of sins, and right through to the end of the Litany. The priest meanwhile prays that God may count us worthy to receive His holy mysteries, 'not unto judgement', but in 'communion of the Holy Spirit...and confidence towards Thee'. He then says aloud: 'Vouchsafe, O Lord, that with boldness and without condemnation we may dare to call on Thee, the heavenly God as Father, and to say...'. The choir now sings the Lord's Prayer. For now, after Christ's sacrifice for us, we may come to Him as His children and have the right to call Him 'Our Father'.

Once more the priest calls 'Peace be unto you all' and bids us bow our heads while he prays secretly that God may look down mercifully upon His people and send them His divine help. The curtain is again drawn across the holy doors, as the stone that sealed the tomb. The deacon exhorts: 'Let us attend', and goes into the sanctuary. The priest takes up the holy Lamb and lifts it above the paten and says: 'The Holy things unto the holy'. This means that only those who are holy can receive the sacrament. The choir reply: 'One is holy, One is Lord, Jesus Christ to the glory of God the Father. Amen'. Meaning that we are all unworthy in ourselves, because no one is holy of himself unless made holy through Jesus Christ. We are saved only through His mercy, for we are always unworthy.

Then, to represent Christ's sufferings on the Cross, the priest takes up the Lamb with great reverence and care and breaks it into four parts, saying: 'Broken and distributed is the Lamb of God, Who is broken but not divided, ever eaten and never consumed, and Who hallows those who partake'. He places the four parts on the paten in the shape of a cross: IC at the top, XC at the bottom, NI to the left and KA to the right. He then takes the upper portion with the letters IC, makes the sign of the cross, puts it into the chalice, and the deacon pours boiling hot water into it. The priest and deacon now take communion. The priest takes another particle of the Lamb and breaks it. They once more pray God to forgive them their sins, ask forgiveness of one another and read the prayers before communion. Then the priest, bowing low over the holy table with fear and reverence, takes a particle, saying, 'The most holy Body of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ is given to me, Priest (name), for the remission of sins and life everlasting', and consumes it.

Then the deacon approaches and asks the priest to give him a particle. The priest gives it him, saying: 'The most holy Body of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ is given to thee, Deacon (name)...'. The priest then takes up the holy chalice, saying: 'Moreover, the most precious Blood of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ is given me...'. using the same words as before, and drinks three times. He then gives communion to the deacon as he did before. After communion they both say a prayer of thanksgiving. The priest then cuts up the two other portions of the Lamb, places them in the chalice. During this time the choir sings a communion hymn. On Sundays it is 'Praise the Lord from heaven, praise Him in the highest. Alleluia', and other hymns. Or the reader may read the prayers before communion or read from the Canon of the feast.

The curtain is opened, for Christ is risen, the tomb is unsealed and the holy doors are opened. The deacon holding the chalice - Christ risen from the tomb - appears and calls the faithful: 'With fear of God and faith, draw near'. Draw near to the risen Lord Who is present, be joined to Him in the great mystery of communion. We bow to the ground as before Jesus Himself. The choir sings, 'Blessed is He Who cometh in the Name of the Lord. God is the Lord and hath appeared unto us'. Those who are to receive communion repeat after the priest the communion prayer which every Orthodox Christian should know by heart:

'I believe and I confess, O Lord, that Thou art in truth the Christ, the Son of the living God, Who came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. Moreover, I believe that this is indeed Thy most pure Body, and that this is indeed Thy most precious Blood. Therefore I pray unto Thee: Have mercy upon me, forgive me mine transgressions, voluntary and involuntary, knowingly or unknowingly: and deem me worthy to partake without condemnation of Thy most pure Mysteries, unto remission of sins and life everlasting. Amen. Make me this day a partaker of Thy mystical Supper, O Son of God. For I will not reveal Thy mysteries to Thine enemies, nor will I give Thee a kiss as did Judas, but, like the thief I will remember Thee: Remember me, O Lord, in Thy kingdom. Not unto judgement, nor unto condemnation be the partaking of Thy mysteries unto me, O Lord, but unto the healing of soul and body'.

Then one by one, with hands folded on the breast, left over right, we come up in fear, love and humility and receive communion from the priest, who says: 'The servant of God (Christian name) partaketh of the most holy Body and most precious Blood of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ, unto remission of sins and life everlasting'. (With small children the words are: 'unto health of soul and body and life everlasting'.) During communion the choir sings: 'Receive the Body of Christ, taste ye of the source of immortality'. Each then, without making the sign of the cross, gently kisses the chalice, makes a reverence and moves quietly away. They each go and take a small piece of prosphora and drink some wine from the nearby table, to make sure that they have consumed the Body and Blood. We should not kneel after communion; we have received Christ and our souls and bodies are glorified by His Holy Spirit.

After communion, the priest places the chalice on the holy table and adds into it all the particles from the paten, remembering our Lady, the Saints, the living and the departed - a symbol that all the members of the Church redeemed by His precious Blood are united with Christ. The priest then appears within the holy doors and

blesses the people: 'O God, save Thy people and bless Thine inheritance.' The choir points out what mercies we have received in the hymn, 'We have seen the true light, we have received the heavenly Spirit, we have found the true faith, worshipping the undivided Trinity, for He hath saved us'. The deacon and priest meanwhile stand by the holy table. The priest censens the paten and chalice, saying secretly: 'Be exalted, O God, above the heavens, and Thy glory throughout all the earth' three times.

He then takes up the paten, places it on the deacon's head, who bears it silently past the holy doors and puts it down on the table of preparation. The priest bows before the chalice, takes it up, saying in a low voice, 'Blessed is God', then turns to the people, raise it and says: 'Always, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages'. This represents the Ascension of Christ. The people bow, or on weekdays, kneel. The choir replies 'Amen' and sings the hymn of Pentecost: 'Let our mouths be filled with Thy praises, O Lord, that we may sing of Thy glory. For Thou hast counted us worthy to partake of Thy holy, divine, immortal and life-giving mysteries. Preserve us in Thy holiness, that we may learn of Thy righteousness all the day long. Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia. This represents Christ's last blessing and promise to His disciples: All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth, and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen' (Matthew 28).

Here the deacon says a short litany of thanks for communion. The priest meantime folds up the antimimension, makes the sign of the cross over it with the Gospels, lays it on the holy table and places the book upon it, saying: 'For Thou art our hallowing and unto Thee do we send up the glory, to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever...'. He then invites the people, 'Let us depart in peace', and the choir replies, 'In the name of the Lord', that is, with God's blessing. The priest now comes down the steps among the people to read the last prayer just below the centre, or ambo, of the raised platform, that is, beneath the steps in front of the iconostasis. He asks God to hallow those who love His house, to give peace to the Church, the whole world and all His people, to bless and guard His inheritance.

The choir sings, 'Blessed is the name of the Lord, now and ever', three times. The priest comes out of the holy doors and gives the sermon. After this he gives a blessing. He then says the dismissal: 'Glory to Thee, Christ, O God our hope, glory to Thee'. The choir sings: 'Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit... The priest comes out with the cross and turns to the people, saying: 'May Christ, our true God, by the prayers of His most Holy Mother and the saints (by name), have mercy upon us and save us, for He is good and loves mankind'. The people come up to kiss the cross and receive small pieces of prosphora. These are particles from the five prosphora which were cut at the Preparation. It is done in memory of the love-suppers of the early Church in which all took part. It was and is given to those of us who did not have communion, so that we too might in a way join those who had.

After the prayers of thanksgiving are read, the priest and deacon read their last prayers and consume what is left of the holy gifts with proper reverence. They then take off their vestments, kiss the holy table, venerate the icons and leave the church.

PART FOUR: FASTS AND FEASTS

1. Fasting and Feasting

For about half the year the Church bids us fast and pray particularly intensely. This means that we do not eat meat, fish, eggs, cheese, butter and milk - all the animal products. On very strict fast days we are not allowed wine or oil either. (Fasting is relaxed for the sick, small children and pregnant and breast-feeding mothers). Devout married couples, but only by mutual agreement, also abstain from marital relations, in accordance with the recommendation of the Apostle Paul (I Corinthians 7,5). We give up our animal, carnal natures, for we are called to re-enter Paradise, for Adam and Eve, and all men until Noah, did not eat meat. And Adam and Eve did not have marital relations in Paradise. Fasting means not only abstaining from food, but above all abstaining from the passions and bad thoughts, being unselfish and repenting of our sins and faults, by deepening our prayer. It means training our bodies and souls to subdue their desires and learn not to care for material things, so that we may be fit to receive spiritual grace. And the money that we save from eating more modestly and less, we give as alms. Almsgiving is a great help to our souls.

In the Old Testament, kings and prophets and all the people fasted and prayed before setting out to do great deeds. St. John the Baptist fasted all his life in the desert, where he fed on locusts and wild honey, to prepare himself to preach Christ's coming. Christ Himself fasted for forty days in the wilderness to set us an example, and told His disciples that the evil spirits of passions and sins could only be driven out by prayer and fasting.

So the Church follows Our Lord's teaching and sets apart special days and times for self-denial and repentance, called fasts. Usually these times are before great feasts, to prepare ourselves for the holy event we celebrate, and in honour of them. Some fasts last only one day, others several weeks. Wednesday and Friday of nearly every week are fast days in remembrance of Christ's betrayal by Judas and of His Passion and Death. (However, there are a few fast-free weeks in the year, like those after Easter or Christmas). Other one-day fasts are on the eve of our Lord's Baptism; the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross; the feast of the Beheading of St. John the Baptist, in memory of his life of fasting and martyr's death.

There are also four fasts, each lasting some weeks. The fast to prepare for the great festival of the Birth of Christ is called the Christmas or Nativity Fast. It is also known as 'Advent' or St Philip's Fast, since it begins on the feast-day of the Holy Apostle Philip, and lasts for forty days, from 15 November to 24 December inclusive (28 November to 6 January on the civil calendar). The fast in honour of the Mother of God lasts a fortnight, from 1 to 14 August (14 to 27 August inclusive in the civil calendar) – the feast of her Dormition or Falling Asleep. A fast in honour of the Holy Apostles Peter and St. Paul and their martyrdom begins the week after Trinity Day and lasts until 29 June (12 July on the civil calendar). This is St. Peter and St. Paul's Day. The longest fast is Lent, known as the Great Fast, which begins seven weeks

before Easter, so that we may all prepare in prayer and repentance for our Lord's Passion, and with clean hearts share the joy of His Resurrection.

Besides Easter and the Twelve Great Feasts, nine of which are fixed, three of which are, with Easter, movable (Palm Sunday, the Ascension and Pentecost), there are others in honour of Our Lord, Our Lady and great saints. The main ones are: the Protecting Veil of the Most Holy Mother of God on 1 October (14 October on the civil calendar); the Holy Archangel Michael and all Angels on 8 November (21 November in the civil calendar); St. Nicholas, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia, on 6 December (19 December in the civil calendar) and 9 May (21 May in the civil calendar); the Circumcision of Christ on 1 January (14 January in the civil calendar); the Three Great Hierarchs on 30 January (12 February in the civil calendar); the Nativity of St John the Baptist on 24 June (7 July in the civil calendar); the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul on 29 June (12 July in the civil calendar) (in honour of the Apostles there is a fast which begins a week after Trinity Day and lasts until 28 June); the Beheading of St. John the Baptist on 29 August (11 September in the civil calendar) (a day of fasting); also the church's patronal feast, if it is not one of the above, and the feast days of local saints or icons.

2. The Fixed Feasts

September to November

i) The Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God - 8 September (21 September in the civil calendar)

Her parents, Sts. Joachim and Anna, had no children for many years. They prayed long that God should send them a child, and promised that if they had one they would give it to serve God. He heard their prayer and a daughter was born to them, who afterwards became the Mother of God. Here is the Troparion of the feast:

'Thy Nativity, O Mother of God and Virgin, hath proclaimed joy to all the universe; for from thee rose the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, Who destroyed the curse, gave the blessing and abolished death, bestowing on us eternal life'.

ii) The Exaltation of the Precious and Life-Giving Cross - 14 September (27 September in the civil calendar)

This feast is in honour of the Holy Cross, which was found by the Empress Helena, mother of Constantine the Great (according to one tradition she came from Britain). Church history tells how Helena always longed to find the Cross on which Christ was crucified. She went to Jerusalem to look for it over three hundred years after the Crucifixion. She went to Golgotha and ordered men to dig where tradition said it had stood. A Cross was found, but how could they be sure it was the true one? There is a tradition that a funeral was passing by. It was stopped and the dead man was laid upon the Cross. He came to life. Then the Archbishop and the priests raised the Cross above the crowds who had flocked to the spot. The Empress and the great mass of people fell on their knees, bowing to the ground and crying: 'Lord, have mercy on us'.

The Holy Cross remained in Jerusalem in the Temple of the Resurrection on Golgotha for nearly three hundred years. In the year 614, the Persians plundered Jerusalem, burnt the Temple and carried away the Cross with other treasures. When peace was made, the Cross was given back to the Greeks. The Emperor Heraclius, barefoot and in sackcloth, with a great mass of people following, bore the Cross to Golgotha, where it was set up and adored. Since then the day has been a feast. It is also a day of strict fasting in honour of Our Lord's Passion, and to remind us that all Orthodox must follow Christ, each bearing his own cross of trials or sorrow.

At the Vigil on the eve of the feast, at the end of the great hymn of glory, the priest takes up the cross, which is decorated with flowers, from the holy table, places it on his head and carries it out of the sanctuary to the middle of the church. The deacon carries a lighted candle and censer. The cross is laid on a stand and censed. Then the priests and people bow to the ground three times, while the choir sings: 'Before Thy cross, we bow down, O Master, and we glorify Thy holy resurrection'. After that the people come up to kiss the cross. It remains exposed for a week. This is the Troparion of the Cross:

'O Lord, save Thy people and bless Thine inheritance, granting victory to Orthodox Christians over our enemies, and by Thy Cross preserving Thy habitation'.

iii) The Presentation in the Temple of the Most Holy Mother of God – 21 November (4 December in the civil calendar)

Joachim and Anna had promised to give up their child to the service of God. So when she was three years old the Holy Virgin Mary was brought to Jerusalem to the Temple. She came with her father and mother. At the foot of the steps she was met by other girls, all carrying lighted lamps and singing psalms. The holy child mounted the steps to the sanctuary alone. There the high priest himself met her. Inspired by the Spirit, he actually led her into the Holy of Holies, where he himself entered only once a year. It was a sign that she herself one day would become the 'Temple of the Most High' - the Mother of God. After the Presentation, says the tradition, she returned home with her parents. At seven years old she returned and lived with other maidens near the Temple. Troparion:

'Today is prefigured the goodwill of God and the preaching of the salvation of mankind: the Virgin plainly appeareth in the temple of God, and already proclaimeth Christ to all. To her let us too cry out with loud voice: Rejoice, O fulfilment of the providence of the Creator'.

December to February

i) The Nativity of Christ (Christmas) 25 December (7 January in the civil calendar)

We know the story of Christ's birth on earth: how the Holy Virgin Mary and Joseph travelled to Bethlehem; how no room was found for them anywhere in the little town; and how they sheltered in a cave. There the Son of God was born and laid in a manger. We hear of the shepherds tending their flocks by night; how suddenly a great light shone upon them and an angel of God told them the glad news that the Saviour

of the world had come to earth. Hosts of angels sang 'Glory in the highest'. And later the wise men of the East followed the Star and came to worship the Christ-Child.

Of all the fixed feasts, the Christmas services are perhaps the most joyful and bright. To be worthy to greet it, the Church calls us to prepare for Christmas with a forty day fast, called 'Advent' (which means the coming), which begins on the 15 November (28 November in the civil calendar). Already from the 21 November (4 December in the civil calendar) the Nativity Canon is sung at Matins at the Vigil Service. This is the irmos of the first ode: 'Christ is born - glorify Him! Christ comes from heaven - greet Him! Christ is on earth, be exalted! Sing unto the Lord, all the earth, and sing joyfully, all ye peoples, for He hath triumphed in glory'.

On the last two Sundays before Christmas the Church honours the Old Testament faithful who believed in the coming Redeemer. The first of these Sundays is called the 'Sunday of the Holy Forefathers'. This is in remembrance of all the Righteous of the Old Testament, the Old Testament Patriarchs, from Adam to Joseph, the Virgin Mary's betrothed, and of all the Prophets, from Samuel to the Forerunner of Christ, John the Baptist. The second is called the 'Sunday of the Holy Fathers', and is in remembrance of Christ's earthly ancestors through the Virgin Mary.

The day before Christmas is a day of strict fasting. Many people have nothing to eat or drink till dusk: they watch for the first star in memory of the Star of Bethlehem. If the day before Christmas falls on a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday or Friday, the services begin with the 'Royal Hours'. They are different from the ordinary Hours because special psalms are read, which point to the feast. Then, after the hymns, at each hour there are special Old Testament readings, an Epistle and a Gospel about the birth of Christ, are read. All four Hours are joined together. They are called Royal because Emperors and Kings used to go in procession to this service. They are held only before the main events of our Lord's life on earth: the Nativity, Baptism, and Great Friday. After the Hours comes Vespers joined to the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great. If the day before Christmas falls on a Saturday or Sunday, the Royal Hours are read on the Friday before. At the end of the Liturgy of St Basil, the icon of the Nativity and a lighted candle are placed in the middle of the church and the Troparion and the Kontakion of the feast are sung.

In the evening, that is Christmas Eve, comes the Vigil Service. The Vigil Service for the Nativity begins not with Vespers, but with Great Compline (longer than ordinary Compline), when the Prophecy of Isaiah is sung: 'God is with us! Take heed, O ye peoples, and submit, for God is with us! For unto us a Child is born...And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace', with the oft repeated refrain of Great Compline, 'for God is with us!' to tell of the joy of the faithful that God Emmanuel is come to live in their midst. At Matins the church is full of light and the priest wears shining vestments. All the hymns and the Canon sing of the glory of the Infant Christ. Christmas is a special holy day for children. That is why children are brought to communion to receive the grace of the Christ-Child and to draw nearer to Him. On Christmas Day itself the Liturgy is celebrated.

Here is the Troparion:

‘Thy Nativity, O Christ our God, hath shone forth to the world the light of wisdom: for in it those who served the stars, were taught by a star to adore Thee, the Sun of righteousness, and to know Thee, the Dayspring from on High. O Lord, glory to Thee’.

And the Kontakion:

‘Today the Virgin giveth birth to Him Who is above all creation; and the earth offereth the cave to Him whom none can approach. Angels with shepherds give glory, and wise men journey with the star, since for our sakes hath been born the young Child, the God from before eternity’.

ii) The Baptism of our Lord (Theophany) – 6 January (19 January in the civil calendar)

We know from the Gospel story how Christ came to St. John on the bank of the river Jordan and told him to baptize Him ‘to fulfil all righteousness’. So John baptized Him. And as Jesus came out of the water, the voice of God the Father was heard from heaven calling Him His ‘beloved Son’. And the Holy Spirit in the form of a Dove came down from the Father, from Whom He proceeds (John 15,26) onto the Son. This festival is also called Theophany, a Greek word which means the Revelation of God, because the great mystery of the Holy Trinity – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, is now revealed.

The Theophany services are like those of Christmas. On the day before Theophany, a strict fast day, first there are the Royal Hours as at Christmas. Later, after Vespers and the Liturgy of St Basil the Great, there is the great blessing of the waters. A large vessel full of water stands in the middle of the church, with candles around. In front of it the Cross and the Gospel are laid on a small table. After the Liturgy the priest and the deacon, the servers with lighted candles and censer, come out of the sanctuary, while the choir sings the stichira: ‘Lo, the voice of the Lord is heard upon the waters: come, all ye, and receive the spirit of wisdom, the spirit of truth, the spirit of the fear of God from Christ revealed’. Readings from the Old Testament are read about the symbol of ‘the living waters’ which will make the wilderness blossom again; the Epistle is about baptism ‘by the cloud and the sea’, and the Gospel about our Lord’s baptism. A litany is said. We pray God to send His Holy Spirit and consecrate the water; to heal and make pure all those who drink of it.

Then the priest reads a prayer, which glorifies God Who created the world by His mighty word: ‘The sun praises Thee, the moon glorifies Thee, the stars wait upon Thee, the waters work for Thee, the Lord of all, Who so loved the world that he came down to earth to save it’. The priest prays that God ‘in His loving-kindness will send His Holy Spirit and make holy this water’. He also prays for the rulers and bishops of the country, the people, and all the world. Then the priest raises the cross and plunges it three times in the water, while the choir sings the Troparion of the Baptism: ‘When Thou wast baptized in the Jordan, O Lord, the worship of the Trinity was made manifest: for the Voice of the Father bore witness unto Thee, calling Thee His beloved Son; and the spirit in the form of a dove confirmed His word. O Christ our God, Who hast appeared and enlightened the world, glory to Thee’.

At the end of the service the people drink the holy water and their foreheads are sprinkled with it as they kiss the cross. They also take some to their homes. This ceremony is in commemoration of Christ's Baptism, and originally many catechumens were baptized on this day. On the evening of the day before Theophany, Theophany Eve, Great Compline and Matins are celebrated at the Vigil, just as on Christmas Eve.

On the day of the Baptism of Christ itself there is the Liturgy, of St. John Chrysostom or of St. Basil the Great, - it depends on the day of the week. Instead of the Thrice-Holy Hymn is sung: 'All ye that have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ, Alleluia'. Where possible, after the Liturgy there are processions to the seashore, to rivers, lakes or open wells, and the waters are blessed by plunging the cross into them. This is in memory of the ancient custom in Jerusalem, when the Patriarch and people went to the River Jordan to hold this service. Therefore this is called 'the procession to the Jordan'.

iii) The Presentation of Christ In The Temple ('The Meeting Of The Lord') – 2 February (15 February in the civil calendar).

This feast takes place exactly forty days after Christmas. It was a law of the Old Testament that forty days after his birth an eldest son should be dedicated to God and presented at the Temple of Jerusalem. So the Infant Christ was also brought there by His Mother and Joseph. There lived at the time in Jerusalem a holy old man called Simeon. He had long been waiting for the coming of Christ the Saviour, and had been promised by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he had seen Him.

On the day Jesus that was brought to the Temple, Simeon was moved by the Holy Spirit to come there too. When he saw the Infant, he took Him in his arms, blessed God, and said: 'Lord now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation'. He called Jesus the Saviour of the world, the Light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of the people, Israel. He also foretold to the Mother of God that a sword would pierce her soul, meaning Her Son's death on the Cross. An old prophetess, Anna, who lived near the Temple, also came there and spoke of Him to all who were awaiting the Messiah in Jerusalem.

Here is the Troparion:

'Rejoice, O Birthgiver of God, Virgin full of grace; for from thee hath risen the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, enlightening those in darkness: make glad also, O righteous elder, who receiveth in thine arms Him who setteth free our souls, bestowing on us resurrection.

March to August

i) The Annunciation to the Most Holy Mother of God (Lady Day) - 25 March (7 April in the civil calendar)

When she had finished her preparation in the Temple, the Holy Virgin Mary lived in Nazareth. Her parents had passed away and she was betrothed to an old man called Joseph, who was her guardian. There she kept house and spun, but spent much time in

prayer and reading the Scriptures. Church Tradition says that one day she was reading the Prophecy of Isaiah that Christ would be born on earth of a virgin, and said to herself. 'Who will this wonderful maiden be? How happy I should be if I were allowed to serve her'. And suddenly, as the Apostle Luke tells us, the Archangel Gabriel appeared before her, with the greeting, 'Rejoice, thou that art full of grace! The Lord is with Thee, blessed art Thou among women'.

The gentle and meek Holy Virgin was awed by the sight of the Archangel and wondered what he meant. The Archangel then said that she had found grace with God, and by the power of the Holy Spirit would give birth to a Son, Who would be called the Son of God. St. Mary, always humble and obedient to the will of God, replied: 'I am the Lord's handmaiden; so be it unto me according to thy word'. The feast of the Annunciation is one of the greatest holy days. The Church calls it 'the beginning of our salvation' - of Christ's coming to earth.

It nearly always falls in Lent, sometimes during Great Week. But the radiant joy of the service is not dimmed even when it happens on Great Friday. Even on this day of sadness and mourning there is a Liturgy. The priest wears pale blue vestments (as for all feasts of the heavenly Mother of God), and the hymns tell of the gladness of our coming salvation. It is sometimes called 'a second Easter', because it marks the beginning, while Easter itself is the crown. There was a legend that on Lady Day even birds did not build their nests, but praised the Lord in song. This is the Troparion:

'Today is the beginning of our salvation and the revelation of the mystery from eternity: the Son of God becometh the Son of the Virgin, and Gabriel proclaimeth good tidings of grace. Let us, therefore, cry out with him to the Birthgiver of God, Rejoice, thou that art full of grace, the Lord is with thee!'

ii) The Transfiguration of Christ - 6 August (19 August in the civil calendar)

Not long before His Passion, our Lord took His disciples Peter, James and John up to Mount Tabor to pray. While Jesus prayed, a wonderful change came over Him: both in His divine and human natures, He was transfigured by the Holy Spirit. His face shone with a radiant light, and His clothes became white as snow. Moses and Elijah appeared on each side of Him and spoke with Him. The disciples gazed in wonder. And suddenly a voice was heard from Heaven saying.. 'This is My beloved Son: hear Him'.

The disciples fell on their faces in fear. But Jesus touched them, and when they looked up the light had faded and our Lord looked just as usual. Jesus Christ showed himself in glory to His disciples to strengthen their faith before His approaching crucifixion and death. He knew that they would be frightened and bewildered to see Him seized and tortured like an ordinary man, and that they might doubt. So in His loving-kindness He did this to give them courage. The link with the Passion is still maintained, for this feast falls exactly forty days before the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross in September. This is the Troparion:

'O Thou who wast transfigured upon the mountain, Christ our God, showing to Thy disciples Thy glory, as they were able to bear it: may Thy everlasting light shine forth

even on us sinners, by the prayers of the Birthgiver of God, O Giver of Light, glory to Thee’.

After the service it is a custom to bless the fruits of the earth, which are brought to church. In Palestine it was the season of the grape harvest, and the first-fruits were blessed in token that ‘the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof’. In England it is the custom to bring apples or other fruit to church for blessing on this day.

iii) The Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God – 15 August (28 August in the civil calendar)

We know how when the Lord was nailed to the Cross, His Mother kept watch beside it with the John the Apostle, and how Jesus said to him: ‘This is thy mother’. From that time on St John took the Mother of God to his home and cared as a son for her, till she passed away in Jerusalem. Church Tradition tells us that the time of her repose was announced to her by the Archangel Gabriel. She wished to bid farewell to the Apostles, and, inspired by the Holy Spirit, they all came in time from the places where they were preaching.

All, that is, but Thomas; he arrived three days after her body had been buried in Gethsemane. He wished to see her body, but when the tomb was opened it was empty. The same night, tradition tells us, when all the Apostles were together for the breaking of the Bread, she appeared to them, surrounded by angels, in heavenly glory. The Church believes that Christ has raised his Mother from the dead before the general resurrection. A fortnight’s fast in honour of Our Lady, the Queen of Heaven, is kept to prepare us for the day of her passing from earth. The Troparion is:

‘In giving birth thou didst keep thy virginity: in falling asleep thou didst not forsake the world, O Birthgiver of God. Thou art passed over into Life, thou who art the Mother of Life, and by thy prayers thou dost deliver our souls from death’.

PART FIVE: FROM LENT TO EASTER AND ALL SAINTS SUNDAY

1. Lent

Lent and the Weeks before Lent

i) Introduction

All the movable feasts depend on Easter, which is the feast of feasts, the centre of the Church Year. All the services are adapted to it. Some are to prepare us to greet it in the right spirit, others continue its celebration afterwards and show us the blessings it has given us. A long fast called Lent, or the Great Fast, prepares us for the holy day of Christ's resurrection. It lasts seven weeks: forty days in memory of Our Lord's fasting in the desert, and Passion Week, also called Great and Holy Week, in honour of His Passion. Palm Sunday and the Sundays which come inbetween are part of it too. A special book contains all the services of Lent, it is called the 'Lenten Triodion'. Three weeks before Lent the Church prepares us with special prayers, hymns and readings.

ii) Zacchaeus Sunday and the First, Second and Third Sundays before Lent

The first sign of the approach of Lent is the Sunday when we read the Gospel of Zacchaeus the publican or tax-collector (Luke 19,1-10). This is a Gospel of repentance and tells us that this is what we will need in order to meet Lent.

The next Sunday, the First Sunday before Lent, is the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee. The Sunday Gospel tells us this story to show us how conceit and pride in virtues do not count in God's eyes. A sinner, if he is humble and confesses his faults and repents, is nearer God's love than the man who prides himself on his outward good works and despises his fellow-men. The hymns and Canon of the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee speak to us of humility. To move our hearts to repentance, special hymns to Christ and His Most Holy Mother are sung at the Matins of the Vigil from this Sunday until the Fifth Sunday in Lent: 'Open the gates of repentance to me, O Giver of Life, for my soul longeth for Thy holy temple, though its own bodily temple is wholly defiled. But Thou, in Thy bounty, cleanse it according to Thy loving-kindness'. 'O Mother of God, lead me into the path of salvation, for I have hardened my soul by shameful sins, and have spent all my life in sloth. Save me, then, by Thy prayers from all impurity'.

On the week following this Sunday there is no fasting, not even on Wednesday and Friday. This is to remind us not to fall into the formalistic and ritualistic sin of the Pharisee, who sinned because he kept only the letter of the law, but failed to keep the spirit also.

The Second Sunday is the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, because the Sunday Gospel tells that parable. It shows us what happens to those who forsake the Father's house and follow their own will and passions. But it also teaches us never to doubt our heavenly Father's love and forgiveness if we come back to Him. To remind us that we have lost our heavenly home through our sins, the song of the captive Jews (Psalm

136) is sung at Matins after the Polyeleion: 'By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion'.

On the Saturday before the Third Sunday, the Sunday of the Last Judgement, there is a special memorial service for the departed. They can no longer do acts of repentance, so it is for us to ask for God's mercy upon them.

The Gospel for this Third Sunday is of Our Lord's prophecy about the end of the world, His Second Coming, and the Last Judgement. This is to remind us that though we trust in God's loving mercy, He is also the just judge of all we have done on earth. He will not look on our cleverness, riches, fame and success; all our Lord will ask of us is whether we have done the simplest things that can be done by any one, however poor or small - just to be kind and helpful to other people, simply and humbly, without being proud of our goodness. For the Pharisee, too, was good, he gave alms and made a great show, but he loved only himself and despised poor and humble people.

From the Monday after this Sunday of the Last Judgement we give up eating meat, but can still have fish, eggs, cheese, butter and milk, with pancakes for example, before giving them up as well, for Lent. This is why some people also call this Sunday 'Cheesefare Sunday' and the week 'Cheesefare Week'. This week is the door to Lent. To accustom the faithful to Lenten services there is no Liturgy on Wednesday and Friday. Instead, the service of the Lenten Hours is held. The Prayer of Ephraim the Syrian is said at each hour, everyone kneeling and bowing to the ground three times: 'O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, faint-heartedness, lust for power and idle talk. But revive rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience and love to Thy servant. Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own errors and not to judge my brother, for Thou art blessed unto ages of ages. Amen'. In all the prayers and hymns of this week we are urged to watch over ourselves and fight our greed and self-indulgence.

iii) Forgiveness Sunday

On the Saturday before the final Sunday before Lent, Forgiveness Sunday, we commemorate all the saints who achieved holiness through fasting and the ascetic life.

On this last Sunday before Lent, Forgiveness Sunday, the Gospel relates Christ's words about true fasting: how we must never boast or show off that we are fasting, but give up things we like cheerfully and without talking about it, do kind deeds secretly, forgive all who have offended us. There is special Forgiveness Vespers on this Sunday, when hymns of repentance and verses of the psalms are sung to call us to repent of our sins. At the end of the service the priest reads a special prayer asking God to grant us true repentance. He then faces the people, asks them to forgive him if he has offended them in any way, and bows to the ground. The people do the same. It is the custom that family members ask each other's forgiveness on this day, so as to start Lent at peace with everybody.

Services during Lent

i) General Characteristics

Services during Lent are very different from the usual ones, because Lent is a time of repentance and sadness. So all the services are arranged to touch our hearts and minds to repent of our sins, to make us remember how far we have strayed from Lord Jesus, how little we deserve His love. The services are much longer, lights are dim, there is little ceremony or singing, the holy doors are mostly closed, the clergy wear dark vestments. Most of the services consist in reading of psalms and the Old Testament, prayers for the forgiveness of sins, kneeling and bowing to the ground. The prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian, 'O Lord and Master of my Life...', is repeated at each service.

As the Liturgy is a joyful service, it is not celebrated except on Saturdays and Sundays - on Saturdays, that of St. John Chrysostom; on Sundays, that of St. Basil the Great. Instead, a Liturgy called the Liturgy of the Presanctified is celebrated every Wednesday and Friday.

ii) Weekday Services in Lent and the Lenten Hours

Weekday services in the Great Lent are arranged in three parts: evening -Compline; morning – the Midnight Service and the First Hour; midday – the Third, Sixth, Ninth Hours and Vespers. On Wednesdays and Fridays the Liturgy of the Preanctified is joined to Vespers.

The Lenten Hours are different from the ordinary Hours. They are longer; besides the usual psalms, there is a cathisma, or reading from the Psalter; then the Troparion of each hour is sung three times - everyone kneels and bows to the ground. At the end of each Hour, the priest comes out of the sanctuary and says the prayer of St Ephraim. After each petition he and the people kneel and bow to the ground. He then says 'Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner', twelve times; then he again repeats the Prayer of St Ephraim, and all the people bow to the ground at the end. At the Sixth Hour there is a reading from the Prophet Isaiah. At the Ninth Hour the Beatitudes (from Christ's Sermon on the Mount) are sung, with the refrain, after each, of the prayer of the thief who repented: 'Remember me, Lord, when Thou comest into Thy kingdom'. Here are the Troparia of the Lenten Hours:

First Hour: 'At daybreak hearken unto my voice, O Lord and King'.

Third Hour: 'Lord, Who didst send down Thy most holy Spirit at the third hour upon Thine Apostles, take Him not from us, O Blessed One, but renew Him in us who pray unto Thee'.

Sixth Hour: 'Thou, that on the sixth day and hour didst nail to the Cross the sin Adam, dared in Paradise, tear asunder also the scroll of our offences, O Christ our God, and save us'.

Ninth Hour: 'Thou that at the ninth hour didst taste death in Thy flesh for our sake, mortify the lusts of our flesh, O Christ our God, and save us'.

iii) The Liturgy of the Presanctified

This 'Liturgy', which is not really a Liturgy at all, is celebrated on Wednesdays and Fridays during Lent and on the first three days of Passion (Great and Holy) Week. In the sad days of repentance the joyful ceremonial service of the full Liturgy is not suitable. Yet in such days we also need to be strengthened and comforted by our union with Our Lord through communion. The word 'Presanctified' means 'consecrated before'. That is to say, there is no consecration of bread and wine. The Lamb which is given for communion had been consecrated at a Liturgy of St Basil on the Sunday before and kept in the tabernacle on the holy table. The Liturgy of the Presanctified was celebrated from early times, but was later written down by Pope (Patriarch of Rome) St Gregory the Great (the Dialogist) and others, some five hundred years after Christ.

After the Lenten Hours, Vespers begin as usual. The opening psalm is read, the Great Litany, the cathisma. While the choir sings the verses, 'Lord, I have cried to Thee', the priest takes out of the tabernacle the consecrated Lamb, places it on the paten, censes it, and carries it from the holy table to the table of preparation. He then pours wine and some water into the chalice, covers the vessels with the veils and censes them. After the evening entrance and the hymn 'O Gladsome Light', the holy doors are closed and there are two Old Testament readings, one from Genesis and the other from the parables of Solomon. Between them the holy doors are opened. The priest appears in the doors with a lighted candle and censer, saying, 'Wisdom, let us attend'. The people kneel. The priest then raises the candle and censer above them, and says in a loud voice: 'The light of Christ enlighteneth all'. This is to show that the people of the Old Testament were saved by their faith in Him Who was coming, just as we are saved by our faith in Him Who is to come. All the people bow to the ground before Christ - the Light of the world. The holy doors are then closed and the second reading is made.

After this the holy doors are again opened and three members of the choir stand before them. To awaken in us the spirit of sorrow for our sins, they sing to a special melody the verses: 'Let my prayer be set forth before Thee as incense and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice. Lord, I cry unto Thee. Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips. Incline not my heart to any wicked thing'. That is to say, we ask God to hear us when we call on Him in trouble; to make our prayer pure and holy; to help us never to tell lies or say unkind things, or make excuses for our faults. All listen, kneeling, while the priest stands before the holy table, while censing. At the end he, and the singers too, kneel down and repeat the first verse. He then says the prayer of St Ephraim, 'O Lord and Master of my life', and we bow to the ground three times.

Here Vespers ends and the Liturgy is taken up at the Augmented Litany. There is no Epistle or Gospel. Then come the usual litanies for the catechumens and the short one of the faithful. Originally, catechumens were allowed to hear Vespers. But although at this Liturgy there was no consecration, they could not be present when the sacrament was on the holy table. After the litanies comes the Great Entrance. The holy gifts, already consecrated, are carried from the table of preparation to the holy table. So we do not sing the Cherubic Hymn. Instead, another one is sung, which reminds us that it is Our Lord Himself Who is borne so, escorted by His angels: 'Now the heavenly Powers invisibly minister with us; for behold, the King of Glory is borne in. Behold the mystic sacrifice, made perfect, is borne aloft by angels. Let us draw near with faith

and love that we may become partakers of life eternal. Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.' All the people bow to the ground in reverence as the priest carries the holy gifts into the sanctuary through the holy doors in silence. He does not pause to remember the bishops and rulers of the land and the people as he does at the usual Liturgy, because the Lamb has already been offered. The holy doors are closed.

The priest repeats the prayer of St Ephraim the Syrian. All the prayers, the hymns and the act of consecration are omitted. So after the Great Entrance comes the Litany of Supplication. Our Father is sung, and the service continues as in the complete Liturgy, for the communion of the priest and people. Only the very last prayer beneath the ambo is different: in it the priest prays that we may keep the fast as good penitents and be worthy to worship Our Lord's glorious resurrection. The Liturgy ends with the usual blessing.

c) Sundays in Lent

i) The First and Second Sundays

During the first week fasting should be very strict. The services, too, are long. On the first four days, at Compline, the Canon of Repentance of St Andrew of Crete, is read. It has nine odes. They show us all the chief figures of the Old Testament, their good and bad deeds, warnings and examples for us to beware of or follow. Each verse has a refrain, 'Have mercy upon me, Lord, have mercy', sung like a sad dirge. The irmos, too, are mournful and urge us to repentance. The first four Saturdays in Lent are also days when we remember especially all the departed.

The first Sunday (and the following week) in Lent celebrates 'the Triumph of Orthodoxy', when the veneration of the icons was restored after they had been desecrated by heretics.

The Second Sunday and the week after it are dedicated to St. Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessaloniki in Greece in the fourteenth century, in memory of his fasting and holy life. He explained how we acquire the Holy Spirit sent to us by God.

ii) The Third And Fourth Sundays

The Third Sunday in Lent is called Holy Cross Sunday or the Sunday of the Veneration of the Cross. The long, mournful services, fasting and constant thinking of our sins might so cast us down that we lose sight of the far off glad Easter Day. So to cheer us in our efforts, to strengthen our faith that after sorrow gladness will come, the Church has dedicated the middle of Lent, this Sunday and the week following it, to the veneration of the Cross of Christ and His coming Resurrection.

After the Great Doxology at Matins of the Vigil of the Third Sunday in Lent, the priest takes the cross, decorated with flowers, from the holy table, raises it on his head and carries it out by the north door into the middle of the church. The deacon carries a lighted candle. The choir meanwhile sings, 'Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us'. The cross is placed on a stand in the middle of the church and censed. The priest and people bow to the ground before it, singing, 'Before thy cross we bow down, O Master, and we glorify Thy holy Resurrection'. (See the feast of the

Exaltation of the Cross in September). The cross remains in the middle of the church until Friday after the Liturgy and the special hymn is sung every day.

On the Fourth Sunday, and the week after, we remember St John of the Ladder, who wrote a book called 'The Spiritual Ladder', showing how we learn to practise Christian virtues and, as it were, step by step and so mount up to heaven.

iii) The Fifth Sunday

The Fifth Sunday, and the week following, are dedicated to St Mary of Egypt. She was a great sinner, but repented, giving up all her riches and going into the desert. There she lived all alone, fasting and praying for forgiveness, and became a great saint. The Church sets her as an example that no one should despair of their sins, because God in His mercy receives every sinner who truly repents. At Thursday Matins of this week the whole Canon of St Andrew of Crete is read right through, with a Canon to St Mary. This long service is called the Vigil of St Mary of Egypt. On Friday evening, the Matins of Saturday are sung and a special akathist hymn is read and sung to the Mother of God. This was first done in thanksgiving for Our Lady's help in times of trouble. It is now held to help us keep our trust in Her, our heavenly Protectress, the Mother of God. She prays for us to Her Son to defend us not only from our earthly enemies, but in our struggle with unseen spiritual foes. The service is called 'The Praises of Our Lady the Mother of God'.

On Friday of this Sixth Week, the forty-day fast ends, and a special hymn is read: 'Having now ended the soul-healing forty days, grant us, Thou Who lovest mankind, to witness the holy week of Thy Passion'.

2. Great and Holy Week

Introduction

i) General Characteristics of Great Week

We have now reached the great and solemn days of Passion Week, Great and Holy Week, when we remember how Christ was betrayed, seized, tortured and crucified, died and was buried.

The services of Passion Week, beginning with Lazarus Saturday, show us in symbols, readings and hymns the story of Our Saviour's love and sacrifice unto death for our sakes. Today we remember the resurrection of Lazarus, giving us a foretaste of Our Lord's own resurrection.

On the eve of Palm Sunday we shall stand with green branches in our hands and listen to the 'Hosannas' as one of the crowds in Jerusalem welcoming 'Him Who cometh in the name of the Lord', or the children waving palms and shouting for joy. In the Gospels of the first three days of Passion Week we shall hear Christ's last talks to His disciples and the people; His stern rebukes to the proud, cruel Pharisees and scribes; His prophecy of His second coming. We shall see the sinful woman creep into the house of Simon the leper, where Jesus was having a meal, to anoint His head in love

and repentance, and we shall compare her with Judas, the disciple whose greed pushed him to betray his Master for a paltry sum of money.

Then we shall follow Jesus to that 'upper chamber' where He and His disciples celebrated His Last Supper, but our first Eucharist of His Most Holy Body and Blood. And then to the Garden of Gethsemane. There the Son of Man prayed in anguish to be spared the suffering He Himself, as Son of God, had willed to endure for our sake. In that prayer He taught us all in all our trials to bow before God and say, 'Not my will, but Thine be done'. Together with His grieving Mother and John, the disciple He loved best, and with the other women, we shall watch by His Cross. We shall follow his bier to the grave in the garden, and there leave His Body to rest till the Resurrection's glorious moment.

Yet through all Passion Week's sad services, there runs the strain of bright hope of pardon, of triumph over sin and death, of Our Saviour's victory over darkness, which we shall share with Him.

ii) Lazarus Saturday

On Saturday we remember how Christ raised His friend Lazarus from the dead. He knew Lazarus was ill, but He waited till he died before He answered Martha and Mary's call for Him. Jesus knew that His own cruel death on the Cross was near. He knew how terrified and bewildered His disciples would be, how they might doubt that He was indeed the Christ. So He waited till Lazarus had been dead four days to bring him back to life, so that His disciples and people should see that He had power over life and death and was indeed 'the Resurrection and the Life'.

It was this miracle that prepared Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem and gave us the certain assurance of the resurrection of all the dead. The Troparion is:

'O Christ our God, before Thy very Passion Thou didst confirm the truth of the general resurrection, by raising Lazarus from the dead. Wherefore we also, like the children bearing the symbols of triumph, cry unto Thee, Thou vanquisher of death: Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord'.

iii) Palm Sunday

Palm Sunday is one of the Twelve Great Feasts. It celebrates Christ's entry, riding on an ass, into Jerusalem. When the people heard of His coming, great crowds rushed to the city gates to meet Him. They spread their cloaks on the road and strewed palm leaves in His path. Children waved green boughs and all sang, 'Hosanna (Praise) to the Son of David! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!' At the Matins of the Vigil of Palm Sunday, after the Gospel about the entry into Jerusalem, the priest blesses palm leaves, or green pussy-willow or box branches. The people hold them with lighted candles during the canon, in which the refrain 'Hosanna in the highest' is repeated again and again.

Beginning with Great Monday there are solemn days of mourning. Icon-stands and lecterns are draped in violet, the priests wear dark vestments with silver crosses. The

services are long with many solemn melodies, because we are to spend as much time as we can in prayer and remembrance of how Our Lord Jesus suffered for us.

Great Monday, Great Tuesday, Great Wednesday and Great Thursday

i) General Characteristics

The first three days of Great Week recall Christ's last conversations with His disciples and people. These talks inspire the readings and hymns. On the first three days the services consist of Great Compline, Matins, the Hours, and the Liturgy of the Presanctified with Vespers. Long Gospels are read at the Matins of each day (which take place on the evenings before) and the Liturgy. Also the whole (up to the Passion) of the four Gospels is read during the Hours in the first three days of Passion Week, and all the Psalms: the Psalms remind us how the coming and sufferings of Christ were awaited and foretold in the Old Testament. The Gospels tell of His life in the world; His teaching and miracles prove that He was indeed the Son of God the Saviour, Who of His own free will, and guiltless, suffered for our sakes. At Matins after the Great Litany we do not hear the usual glad verses, 'God the Lord has appeared unto us'. Instead, a mournful 'Alleluia' is sung.

And to urge us to watch and pray in these solemn days, this Troparion is sung:

'Behold at midnight the bridegroom cometh, and blessed is the servant whom He shall find watching. But unworthy is he whom He shall find slothful. Beware, therefore, O my soul, be not overcome with sleep, lest thou be given over unto death and shut outside the kingdom. But arise and cry: 'Holy, holy, holy art Thou, O God, through the Birthgiver of God, have mercy upon us'.

After the Canon, which speaks of Christ's coming Passion, another special hymn is sung. It is like a cry of our soul as if it saw from afar Christ's radiant mansions and felt how unworthy it was to enter them. It is:

'Lo, I behold Thy radiant dwelling place, O my Saviour, and have no raiment that I may enter in. Lighten Thou the raiment of my soul, O Giver of Light, and save me'.

ii) Great Monday, Great Tuesday and Great Wednesday

On Great Monday the Church tells us the story of the barren fig tree. It is the symbol of those who think only of outward goodness which does not come from the heart. The Gospel also tells of Christ's prophecies about the fall of Jerusalem, wars and tribulations and the end of our world.

On Great Tuesday we listen to Christ's replies to the wily questions of the scribes and pharisees, who tried to trap Him; to His stern rebukes of their cruelty and deceit. The parables of the ten virgins and of the talents remind us how we should always keep watch on our conscience and use in God's service any gift or talent we have received from Him. The Gospel then tells of Christ's prophecy of His Second Coming and Last Judgement. It ends with the awful warning: 'Ye know that after two days is the feast of the Passover, and the Son of Man is betrayed to be crucified'.

On Great Wednesday the Church remembers the act of love of the sinful woman who poured precious ointment on Christ's head, and, though she did not know it, 'prepared Him for burial'. And, in contrast, we hear of the dark act of Judas, whose greed led him to betray his Master. All the readings and hymns of the day warn us to beware of greed and love of money, which could tempt even a disciple of Christ. We too can betray Him, if we let greed and selfishness get hold of us, while every deed of humility and love at once brings us near to Him.

iii) Great Thursday

The Gospels of Great Thursday tell how Christ and His disciples came to Jerusalem to celebrate His last feast of the Passover; how He washed their feet. They tell the story of that Last Supper when Our Lord ordained the sacrament of His Most Holy Body and Blood 'for the remission of sins' of us all; His last talk with the Apostles, and how He told them they would all fail and forsake Him that night; Peter's rash promise that he would always remain faithful; Christ's vigil in the garden; how He was seized and led away to the high-priest's court; the scene in the courtyard; Peter's denial and grief; the high-priest's mocking, cruel questions; and how Jesus, wearing the crown of thorns, beaten and insulted by the soldiers, was led before Pilate.

The readings and hymns of the Matins of Great Thursday (on Wednesday evening) dwell much on Judas' betrayal, on 'the dark night' which settled in his soul. We pray that we may keep ourselves from greed and deceit, and be made pure by taking part in the holy Mysteries of Christ's Body and Blood. The Troparion after the 'Alleluia' at Matins speaks of this.

On Thursday morning the Liturgy of St. Basil is joined with Vespers. Before the Great Entrance, instead of the Cherubic Hymn, there is a special hymn of Great Thursday: 'Make me this day a sharer of Thy mystic Supper, O Son of God. For I will not reveal Thy mysteries to Thine enemies, nor will I give Thee a kiss like Judas, but like the thief I say to Thee, 'Remember me, O Lord, in Thy kingdom'. This is also sung before and during communion.

After the Liturgy, on Thursday afternoon, the ceremony of 'the washing of the feet' is kept in cathedrals. The Gospels are carried to the middle of the cathedral. Then the bishop in full vestments comes out of the sanctuary and takes his seat on a raised platform, the 'cathedra'. He is followed by twelve priests who sit six at each side of him. They represent the twelve Apostles. Two deacons bring out a basin, a jug of water and a towel. After some prayers, the main deacon reads the Gospel story of how Christ at the Last Supper rose, took off His upper garment, tied a towel round His waist and washed the disciples' feet.

While this is read the bishop rises, takes off his vestments, keeping only belt and stole, ties the towel round his waist, takes up the basin and washes the feet of each priest. He goes down one row and up the other till he comes to the senior priest, who represents the Apostle Peter. Here the deacon stops reading. The priest rises and repeats Peter's words: 'Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?' The bishop answers in Christ's words and they repeat the scene till the bishop washes 'Peter's' feet. Then the bishop puts on his vestments and himself reads Christ's words why He, their Lord and Master, had done this humble service to His disciples: 'For I have given you an

example, that ye should do as I have done to you'. This ceremony is a very ancient custom and is acted to remind us more clearly of the lesson given us by Christ: that no service is too low for those who would truly follow in His steps.

e) Great Friday ('Good Friday', meaning in Old English, Holy Friday) and Great Saturday

i) Great Friday

Great Friday is the most solemn day of Passion Week and of the whole Christian year. In awe and trembling we stand before the Cross on which our Saviour died for us and see the image of Him dead, lying in our midst.

The whole story of Our Lord's Passion is given at Great Friday Matins, which takes place on Thursday evening, and is called 'The Vigil of the Holy and Saving Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ' or more usually, 'The Service of the Twelve Gospels', because twelve Gospel extracts are read. The tall Crucifix, usually standing behind the memorial service table, now stands in the middle of the church with many candles lighted round it and a lectern draped in violet in front. After the Six Psalms and the Great Litany, the choir sing 'Alleluia' and the Troparion of Great Thursday. The priest and deacon come out of the Sanctuary carrying the Gospels. They are laid on the lectern and the priest begins the reading. Everybody stands with lighted candles as a symbol that Christ, even when persecuted and humiliated, is always the Light of the world.

The whole story of the Passion is read from the four Evangelists and is divided into twelve parts. It begins with Christ's farewell talk and prayer at the Last Supper, in St John's Gospel, and goes right through the four Gospels to the burial of Christ by Joseph of Arimathea. Before and after each reading the choir sings, 'Glory to Thy long suffering, O Lord'. Between the readings special verses are sung. They speak of Judas's betrayal; of the cruelty of the Jews; of Christ's infinite patience and gentleness; of the awe of all creation when the Lord of all was nailed to the Cross between two thieves. The Canon has only three odes. All tell of the Passion and foretell the glory of the Resurrection. Matins ends after the Twelfth Gospel.

This is a long service and lasts two to three hours. After each Gospel the great bell tolls, giving the number, in strokes, of the Gospel read, so that those who cannot go to church can follow the service.

There is no Liturgy on Great Friday morning: we venerate the sacrifice offered this day by Christ. It is a day of mourning and strict fasting. Instead of the Liturgy there is the service of the 'Royal Hours' - the First, Third, Sixth and Ninth. At each, besides the psalms and the prophecies from the Old Testament, an Epistle and Gospel are read about Great Friday.

The solemn vespers of Great Friday is celebrated in the afternoon at the time of Christ's death. Again all the readings remind us of the suffering Christ and His glory. After the entrance, there are Old Testament readings in which the Prophet Isaiah speaks of 'the Lamb led to the slaughter', an epistle of the Apostle Paul on the power and wisdom of the Cross; again a Gospel on Our Lord's trial before Pilate, His

Crucifixion and burial. After the Litany of Supplication the choir sings a solemn hymn, 'O Thou that art clothed in light as in a raiment...'.

All the people light candles. The holy doors are opened. On the holy table lies the Shroud or Winding Sheet - an image of the dead human body of Christ. The priest raises it on his head, the deacon walks in front with candle and censer, and they come slowly down the steps from the altar, while the choir softly sing the hymn, 'The Noble Joseph, taking Thy most pure Body down from the tree, wrapped it in fine linen, and with spices covered, laid it in a new tomb'. All kneel with head bowed low before the image of our Saviour. A bier stands in the middle of the church, with candles lit round it. On it the Winding Sheet is laid reverently and censed all round by the priest. More burial hymns are sung while the people come up to kiss it. Then the priest gives the blessing, and the last hymn is sung: 'Thou hast redeemed us from the curse of the law by Thy precious blood. Having been nailed on the Cross and pierced with the spear, Thou hast shed immortality on men, O our Saviour, glory to Thee'.

ii) Vespers and Matins of Great Saturday

Great Saturday is a reverent vigil at the tomb of the Son of God, slain for our sins. The Saturday Matins service is held on Friday evening. It is commonly called the Burial of Christ, because almost all of it is a solemn lamentation sung and read over the bier on which the Winding Sheet is lying.

After the Six Psalms and the Great Litany, the people light their candles. The holy doors are opened; the priest and deacon come out with candles and censer. The choir sing 'God the Lord has appeared unto us', and the Troparia, 'The noble Joseph', and 'When Thou didst condescend unto death, O Life Immortal, then didst Thou slay hell with the radiance of Thy Divinity; and when Thou didst raise the dead from the lowermost pit, all the heavenly powers cried: O Christ, Giver of Life, our God, glory to Thee'. Meantime, the priest and deacon cense the Winding Sheet, then stand in front of it. The choir intone the 'burial anthem' with the first verse of Psalm 118: 'Blessed are they who are undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord'. Each verse of the Psalm is followed by a verse of the 'lament', read by the priest and deacon with hymns inbetween.

It is like a long poem picturing the angels in heaven and all creatures on earth overwhelmed by the death of their Creator, and their thankfulness at being freed from death's doom by Christ. 'Thou, O Christ, that art the Life, art laid in a grave. And angel hosts awestricken glorify Thy condescension...Of Thy free will, O Saviour, Thou didst go under the earth to save dead mortals and bring them back to Thy Father's glory...Thy burial, O my Christ, all nations hymn...Make Thy servants worthy, O Virgin, to see the resurrection of Thy Son'. After this hymn, the Sunday eve resurrection hymns are sung. There follow the usual litanies. Then the Canon, where the note of joy sounds more and more clearly.

At the end of the Great Doxology the priest raises above his head the Winding Sheet, supported by four pall-bearers, the deacon walks in front, the people follow, all carrying candles. The solemn procession walks out of, and, anti-clockwise round the church, with the bells tolling and the choir singing, 'Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us'. This represents the burial of Christ. After the Winding

Sheet has been laid back on the bier, the Prokimenon is sung, and to a special melody the glorious prophecy of Ezekiel is read about the dry bones of Israel, out of which arose 'an exceeding great army' quickened to life by the breath of God. Then follows the Epistle of the Apostle Paul about Christ our Passover and the Gospel about the sealing of Christ's tomb. Matins ends as usual.

iii) The Liturgy Of Great Saturday

The Liturgy of Great Saturday is that of St. Basil the Great, and is the longest in the year. It begins on the Saturday morning with Vespers. After the 'entrance', the evening hymn 'Gladsome Light' is sung as usual. Then fifteen long Old Testament readings are made. They tell of the most striking symbolic events and prophecies of the salvation of mankind by the death of the Son of God. The first is the story of Israel's crossing the Red Sea and Moses' song of victory over Pharaoh, with its refrain, 'for He hath triumphed gloriously'. The last reading is about the three youths in the fiery furnace of Babylon, and their song of praise with its repeated refrain: 'Sing unto the Lord and exalt Him unto the ages of ages'.

The Epistle which follows speaks of how through the death of Christ we too shall rise to new life. After the Epistle, three singers stand before the bier and sing verses, like a call to the sleeping Christ: 'Arise, O Lord, and judge the earth, for Thou inheritest amongst all nations...'. While this is being sung, the violet covers are taken off the holy table, the priests change their violet vestments for white ones. The deacon carries out the Gospels and reads the first message of the resurrection from St. Matthew. Because the Vespers part of the service belongs to the next day (Sunday) the burial hymns of Saturday are mingled with the resurrection ones, so that this service already is full of the coming Easter joy.

After the Gospel the Liturgy continues as usual. Instead of the Cherubic Hymn, a special one is sung: 'Let all human flesh be silent, and in awe and trembling stand, and think of nothing earthly to itself, for behold the King of kings, the Lord of Lords, goeth forth to be slain and giveth Himself as food for the faithful. Him do precede the angelic hosts, with all their Principalities and Powers, the many-eyed Cherubim and six-winged Seraphim, covering their faces and singing the song, Alleluia'.

After the Liturgy there follows the blessing of bread, wine and dates. Originally, Orthodox used to spend the rest of the day and evening in church, watching and waiting, so food was given to strengthen them. Now the bread is blessed to remind us of this. They also spent their Vigil reading aloud the Acts of the Apostles. This custom is still kept up; the Acts lie open in front of the bier, and anyone may come in and read aloud. Towards midnight there is a short midnight service, when the canon of Great Saturday is sung. Then the priest and deacon carry the Winding Sheet into the sanctuary and lay it on the holy table. It will be there until Ascension Eve, as a symbol that Christ still appeared among His disciples for forty days after His Resurrection.

And so we wait for midnight and the beginning of a new period in the story of the Church. From this point on the book called the 'Lenten Triodion' is closed and now we open the book called the 'Pentecostarion', called the 'Blossom Triodion'.

3. Easter (Pascha) to All Saints Sunday

a) Easter Night

All the doors of the sanctuary are closed. The church is in darkness. All lamps, candles and candelabra are ready to be lit. Below the altar steps stand the bearers of the icons, crosses and banners, the Gospels, the icon of the Resurrection, for the procession. The church is thronged with people, all in their best clothes, and each holding a candle. All stand in solemn, joyful waiting for the stroke of midnight.

The holy doors open and the priests in shining vestments come out, singing, 'Thy resurrection, O Christ our Saviour, the angels sing in heaven; grant us on earth to glorify Thee with a pure heart'. The procession, followed by the people, passes out the church and moves anti-clockwise around the church still singing, stopping before the closed west door. We represent the faithful women who went to seek Christ in His tomb in the early dawn. The priest carries a cross and a triple candlestick with flowers. He raises the cross and proclaims in a loud voice: 'Glory to the Holy, Consubstantial, Life-Giving and Indivisible Trinity, always, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages'. The choir replies, 'Amen'. The priest sings the Easter hymn, 'Christ is risen from the dead', and then intones Psalm 67: 'Let God arise and let His enemies be scattered'. And the choir replies, triumphant: 'Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death and on those in the tombs bestowing life'. The priest repeats the first, second and third verses of Psalm 67, and to each one the choir replies: 'Christ is risen from the dead...'

The doors of the church are flung open, for the tomb is no longer sealed. The procession enters the church and all the lights go on. The priest raises the cross to right and left and greets the people: 'Christ is risen'. And all reply: 'He is risen indeed'. The whole of Easter Matins is one song of praise and glory to our Risen Lord. A song of joy to 'the day of resurrection, the Passover of joy, the Passover of God, for Christ our Lord hath brought us from death to life, from earth to heaven singing the song of victory'. After each ode the priest comes out of the sanctuary (all the doors are wide open), censens all round the church and gives the Easter greeting: 'Christ is risen'. This reminds us of Christ's appearances to the women and to the Apostles. At the end of Matins, after the cross has been kissed, the people greet and kiss each other three times, saying, 'Christ is risen'.

The Easter, or Paschal, Hours consist only of Easter hymns. The Liturgy is particularly solemn and joyful, because all the sanctuary doors remain open all the time, so we can see the consecration of the holy gifts. The mystery is revealed. The doors are not closed the whole of Bright Week (Easter Week) as a symbol that, by His death and Resurrection, Christ has opened the doors of His Kingdom to all believers. Nobody kneels during Bright Week and after until Pentecost, because there is no need for penitence: all sins are forgiven. At the Liturgy many Easter anthems and hymns are sung. The Gospel of the Easter Liturgy is not about the Resurrection, but is the first chapter of St John, 'In the beginning was the Word...and the Word was God'. This is to show that Christ eternally was God and has revealed Himself to the world as God by rising from the dead. The Gospel is read in several languages as a token that Christ's teaching has spread to the ends of the earth.

b) Easter Vespers and Bright Week

On Easter Sunday afternoon there is special Vespers with resurrection hymns which are sung quickly. The Gospel of St John is read, how 'the same day in the evening ...when the doors were shut', Christ appeared in the midst of His disciples.

The whole of Bright Week (Easter Week) is kept as one glorious holiday. The services are the same as on Sunday, with processions round the church after the Liturgy. It is the custom to ring the church bells during the day. People give each other red-coloured eggs: the symbol of life hidden in the tomb and quickened by the Blood of Christ. On Bright Monday and Tuesday especially small children are brought to communion.

A special large loaf called the Artos, or Thomas Bread, is blessed at Easter and distributed at the end of the week. It is the symbol of Jesus Christ, 'the Bread of Eternal Life'. It also reminds us of the custom the Apostles had to set aside a loaf at their supper in memory of the Risen Lord. The Easter hymns are sung for forty days until the Ascension.

From Easter (Pascha) to the Sunday of All Saints

From Bright Week to Ascension Day

The weeks after Easter remind us either of events connected with Easter or of special deeds of mercy of Jesus Christ.

The first Sunday after Easter is called Thomas Sunday. The Gospel tells how Thomas did not believe Christ had risen until he had seen Him himself, and how 'after eight days' Christ appeared to the disciples and rebuked Thomas for his doubt. And here Christ said words that should make us all very happy, for he said, 'Blessed are they that have not seen and yet believed', like ourselves.

On Tuesday of the week after Thomas Sunday we remember the departed. It is the custom to go to the graves of relations and friends after the liturgy and sing the Easter hymns as a symbol that in Christ all are alive.

The Second Sunday is named after the holy Myrrhbearing Women who followed and served the Lord to the end.

The Third Sunday recalls the Paralytic healed at Bethesda.

The Fourth Sunday is named after the Samaritan Woman, whom He told Who He was.

The Fifth Sunday commemorates the healing of the man born blind.

On the Wednesday of the week following (the Sixth Week) the full Easter Matins and Liturgy are celebrated for the last time because it is the eve of the Ascension and the hymn 'Christ is risen' will not be sung any more until the following Easter.

ii) Ascension Day to Pentecost

On the Thursday, forty days after Easter, we celebrate Christ's Ascension into heaven. The Ascension of Our Lord is one of the Twelve Great Feasts. Our Lord gathered His disciples and spoke to them for the last time. He bade them remain in Jerusalem till He sent His Holy Spirit upon them, then to go into the world, preach the Gospel and baptize all peoples in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. He lifted His hands to bless them and then rose above the earth and disappeared in a glorious shining cloud: His task on earth was done. The chapter in the Acts of the Apostles and the Gospel of the day tell of this. Here is the Troparion:

'Thou hast ascended in glory, O Christ our God, Thou hast given joy to the disciples by the promise of the Holy Spirit, assuring them through this blessing that Thou art the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world'.

The Sixth Sunday after Easter honours the holy fathers of the first Universal, or Oecumenical, Council held in Nicea, just outside Constantinople, the New Christian Rome, in the year 325. Clergy and laymen chosen from all the Churches in every land came together to affirm the Orthodox Faith against false teachings. They drew up the Creed, or Confession of Faith, which begins with the words, I believe in One God, the Father Almighty...'. As a result this is called the Nicene Creed and is read and sung in the Orthodox Church to this day. Every Orthodox Christian should know it by heart.

iii) Trinity Day, called Pentecost or Whitsun, and the Sunday of All Saints

On the Saturday before Trinity there are memorial services for all the departed.

Fifty days after Easter, we celebrate the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles. It was the day of the Jewish 'Pentecost' feast (Pentecost means fifty in Greek), which they held in memory of how God gave Moses the Law on Mount Sinai.

Mary the Mother of God and all the Apostles were together at prayer in an upper room. Suddenly a mighty wind arose. The house rocked and the room was filled with its rush. There appeared tongues of flame which came down on each of the Apostles. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and at once began to glorify God and to speak of Him in many tongues which they had never known before. So was Christ's promise to them fulfilled to send the gift of the Holy Spirit from God the Father. This feast lasts three days. On Sunday we glorify the Holy Trinity, and so it is called 'Trinity' or 'Trinity Day'. It is one of the Twelve Great Feasts. On Monday we honour the Holy Spirit, and it is called 'Holy Spirit Day'. And Tuesday is called the third day of the feast.

On Sunday after the Liturgy there are 'Kneeling Vespers'. Hymns to the Holy Spirit we sung. Then three long prayers are read, the priests and people all kneeling. In these prayers we confess our sins before our heavenly Father and ask forgiveness for His beloved Son's sake. We ask Christ to send His Spirit to enlighten and strengthen our souls. We pray for all our departed forefathers, relations and all people, that God may grant them rest and joy in His eternal light. There is a custom of decorating the churches and houses with green branches and flowers for Trinity. People also carry bunches of flowers in church. This is a symbol that we offer to God the blossoms of

life made new by His Holy Spirit, and that nature, like our own souls, receives new life from Him. This is the Troparion:

‘Blessed art thou, O Christ our God, Who didst show the fishermen to be most wise by sending them the Holy Spirit, and through them drawing the whole world into Thy net. O Lover of mankind, glory to Thee’.

Hymn to the Holy Spirit:

‘O heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, Who art everywhere present and fillest all things, Treasury of good things and giver of life, come and abide in us and cleanse us from all impurity and save our souls, O Good One’.

The Sunday after Trinity is the Sunday of All Saints - all those who by their love of God and their fellow-men have become holy already here on earth and left us examples of Christian lives. This day crowns the joyful celebrations of Eastertide and ends the eight weeks of the services contained in the special book of services, the Pentecostarion or the Blossom Triodion.

On the Sunday after All Saints Sunday, it has more recently become the custom in many parts of the Orthodox world to celebrate All Local Saints. Thus, in Russia, this is the Sunday of All the Saints who shone forth in the Russian Land, and in other countries similar local commemorations also now exist.

PART SIX: THE SACRAMENTS AND OTHER SERVICES

1. The First Sacraments

The Church is our mother. We are all her children. Good or bad, sad or happy, we can always come to her. She is always there, ready to love, forgive and help us. As soon as we are born she takes us to herself, leads us through life, blesses our last journey, and after our death prays for our soul. We cannot be true Orthodox or be saved without God's grace and mercy; and these we can receive in the Church through the sacraments.

The words sacrament or mystery mean something that is holy or mysterious. A sacrament is a holy act, ordained by Lord Jesus Christ, by which God gives our souls the grace of His Holy Spirit. Every sacrament has two sides: the outward form - the rites and prayers used in giving the sacrament - which we see, and the unseen, the grace which we receive. How the grace of the Holy Spirit enters our souls we cannot see or understand. God's ways are hidden from our earthly minds. We know it only by faith. It is a holy mystery. That is why in the Orthodox Church the sacraments are called holy mysteries.

There are a great many sacraments. Every action which makes holy is a sacrament. The Church Herself is a sacrament, because she makes holy those parts of the world which accept Her. However, there are seven specific sacraments: Baptism, Chrismation, Communion, Confession, Marriage, Unction and Ordination. Every Orthodox Christian receives the first four, but not always the last three.

a) Baptism

i) Introduction

Baptism is the first sacrament, because through it we can enter the Church and be called Orthodox. A person who has not been baptized cannot receive any other sacrament. Baptism is a sacrament which cleanses us from ancestral sin, the sin of Adam, and makes us Orthodox Christians. The outward sign of this is immersion (plunging) in holy water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The sin with which we come into the world dies, and we are born to a new life in Christ. He Himself told this to Nicodemus, and said that without this new birth no one could enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus Himself ordered this sacrament when He commanded John to baptize Him in the Jordan and when He told His disciples: 'Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit'.

We are usually baptized forty days after birth, as babies, but any grown-up person who wants to become a Orthodox may be baptized after being prepared. Everyone, child or grown-up, should have a godfather and godmother. When a child is baptized the godparents make the responses and promises in its name. And it is their duty to teach the child the Orthodox faith. A grown-up person makes the promises himself and the godparents are only witnesses.

ii) The Naming Of The Child

As soon as a child is born in an Orthodox family and before it is baptized, the Church takes it under Her care. Usually on the eighth day, the priest comes to the home to bless and pray for the mother and new-born baby, and to give it a name. He makes the sign of the cross over the infant and prays: 'May the light of Thy countenance be upon this Thy servant (he names the baby), and he (or she) be signed with the cross of Thine only-begotten Son in his (or her) heart'. Then the priest holds up the baby before the icon of Our Lady, makes the sign of the cross, and says: 'Rejoice, Birthgiver of God, for from Thee Christ, our God, the Sun of Righteousness, hath shone, enlightening them that are in darkness'.

The child must be named after a saint as sign that he has now joined the communion of saints and must try and follow his or her example. The saint also becomes the child's special patron. That is why among Orthodox a namesday or saint's day means more than a birthday. In olden times the child use to be brought to the church door on the eighth day to be named, in memory of the ancient Jewish law. Now this is usually done at home.

iii) The Service Of Baptism

Before a child or adult can be baptized, they must first be prepared by exorcizing the devil, (protecting the person from demonic influence and temptation), renouncing him and uniting oneself to Christ.

The child is brought to church by the godmother or godfather. The godparents with the child stand before the font facing east - from where comes the light. The child is naked (merely wrapped up) to show that it has lost its garment of innocence through sin and will now put on a new man by the light of Christ. The priest breathes three times on its face, blesses it and lays his hand on its head. This reminds us of the breath of life God breathed into the first man, and of the new life given in the mystery of baptism. The blessing in the name of Christ means that the child is separated from the unfaithful. The priest's hand laid on its head shows that it is placed under the cover of the Church. The priest prays that the babe may be joined to Christ's flock.

Then comes the exorcism of the devil, the wish to be joined to Christ, confession of faith and worship of the Holy Trinity.

The priest reads prayers in which 'in the name of Almighty God' he forbids the devil 'to approach this creature sealed by the name of Lord Jesus Christ'. He prays that God may make the child a member of His Holy Church by driving away every evil spirit. Here he breathes on its mouth, forehead and breast, saying, 'Drive from him (or her) every evil unclean spirit lurking in his (or her) heart'. After this the godparents with the child turn to the west - the place of darkness. And three times (or sometimes this is read only once) the priest asks them: 'Dost thou renounce Satan, and all his works and all his angels?' The godparents reply for the child: 'I renounce him'. Again the priest asks: 'Hast thou renounced Satan?' And the reply: 'I have renounced him'. They then turn to the east again (towards light), and the priest asks: 'Dost thou join thyself to Christ?' They reply: 'I join myself'. 'Hast thou joined Christ?' 'I have joined him'.

‘And dost thou believe in Him?’ They reply: ‘I believe in Him as King and God’. And the godfather for a boy, or the godmother for a girl, recites the Creed. After the confession of faith the priest tells the new member of Christ’s Kingdom to ‘bow to Him’. The godparents reply: ‘I bow down before the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Trinity One in essence and undivided’.

The priest puts on white or light vestments to show the joy of the Church over her new member. Candles are lit on the font and given to the godparents. The font is censed all round. The candles remind us of the spiritual sight which is received in Baptism, and the incense of the breath of the Holy Spirit. The service begins with the words, ‘Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto the ages of ages’. This is to show that through Baptism we become members of that Kingdom. Then come prayers to bless the water in the font ‘by Thy holy Spirit’. The priest makes the sign of the cross in the water three times with his hand. After this he dips a small brush in holy oil and three times makes the sign of the cross with it in the water, singing, ‘Alleluia’. Here the water is the symbol of purification or cleansing and the oil of joy. The baby, too, is anointed with ‘the oil of gladness’ by a cross on the forehead: ‘In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit’; breast: ‘for healing of soul and body’; ears: ‘for the hearing of faith’; hands: ‘Thy hands have made me’; feet: ‘that he (or she) may walk in the path of Thy commandments’.

Now comes the most solemn moment. The priest takes the child and plunges it three times in the holy water, saying: ‘The servant of God. (name) is baptized in the name of the Father, Amen; and of the Son, Amen; and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen’. As the newly baptized is brought out of the font, Psalm 31 (‘Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered’) is sung. Meanwhile the priest puts on the child a white robe in sign of purity, saying: ‘The servant of God (name) is clothed with the robe of righteousness in the name of the Father, and of Son and of Holy Spirit, Amen’. A cross is also put around the neck to remind the new Orthodox that he is a soldier of Christ. During this a hymn is sung: ‘Give unto me a robe of light...Christ our Lord, abounding in mercy’.

It should be noted that the order of Baptism for a grown-up person is the same; only he wears a long shirt, and when he enters the water the priest lays his hand on his head. Also, only a priest can celebrate the mystery of Baptism in full. But if a child is very weak and may die, anyone of the Orthodox faith may and should baptize it at once. Water should be sprinkled on its head with the words, ‘The servant of God (name) is baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen’.

Chrismation

i) Introduction

Chrismation is a sacrament which follows immediately after Baptism, as in the Church of the first centuries. In it, the newly baptized Orthodox is consecrated or dedicated to the service of God in the Church by a special gift of the grace of the Holy Spirit. For to keep pure to be a good soldier of Christ, he will need to be consecrated to the service of God and receive this special gift of grace of the gift of the Holy Spirit. The outward form of Chrismation is the sign of the cross made with myrrh

(special holy oil) on parts of the body, with the words, ‘the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit’.

The holy myrrh or chrism used for Chrismation after Baptism is not the same oil with which people are anointed at festivals or at the unction of the sick. Myrrh was already known in the Old Testament. Moses poured myrrh on the head of his brother Aaron when he was ordained high-priest of Israel. The prophet Samuel anointed David when he was made king. Priests and kings were always anointed with myrrh as a token of the grace of the Holy Spirit.

In the New Testament we read how the sinful women brought precious myrrh to anoint Jesus’ feet, and when His body was buried, Mary Magdalene and other women took some to His grave to anoint His Body. In the Christian Church anointing with myrrh always meant the consecration or dedication of a person to the service of God. It was the symbol of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Kings and emperors were anointed at their coronation to receive special grace to govern justly according to God’s law.

Myrrh, or chrism, is specially prepared and brewed out of olive oil, white wine, many scented herbs, oils and spices.

ii) The Service Of Chrismation

Chrismation begins when the priest reads a prayer in which he asks God to grant the child the seal of the Holy Spirit. He then marks with holy myrrh the sign of the cross on the child’s forehead, eyes, ears, nostrils, breast, hands and feet, saying each time, ‘The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit, Amen’. Then the priest and godparents with the babe walk three times round the font to the joyful singing: ‘All those that have been baptized in Christ, have put on Christ’. This is a symbol that the new Orthodox is united to Christ forever. The service ends with a lesson from the Epistle of the Apostle Paul about the meaning of Baptism, and the Gospel from St. Matthew, ‘Go ye and baptize all the peoples...’.

Originally, the newly baptized wore their baptismal robes for seven days. On the eighth day the robe was taken off in church and the marks of the chrism washed off. Now this is generally done at once. The priest reads a prayer for the child, then wipes its face and parts of the body with a sponge, saying: ‘Thou art baptized, thou art hallowed, thou art washed... In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...Amen’. He then cuts off crosswise a little of the child’s hair, saying: ‘The servant of God (name) is tonsured in the name of the Father, and of Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen’. This is to show that the child has become God’s servant and belongs to Him. The service ends with the blessing.

The order of Baptism for a grown-up person is the same; only he wears a long shirt, and when he enters the water the priest lays his hand on his head.

Only a priest can celebrate the mystery of Baptism in full. But if a child is very weak and may die, anyone of Christian faith may and should baptize it at once. Holy water should be sprinkled on its head with the words, ‘The servant of God (name) is baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen’.

iii) The Churching

Churching is a ceremony when a new-born infant is brought to church by its mother for the first time after baptism. It is usually done on the fortieth day after birth, in memory of how Christ was presented at the Temple of Jerusalem by His Most Holy Mother. The priest meets the Mother and child at the west door and reads prayers for them both. He then takes the baby, makes with it the sign of the cross, and says: 'The servant of God (name) is received into the Church in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen'. He carries the child forward with the words: 'He (or she) entereth into Thy house to worship towards Thy Holy Temple'. In the middle of the church the priest repeats the words of reception, and adds: 'In the middle of the church he sings praises unto Thee'.

Finally, the priest raises the baby before the holy doors of the sanctuary and again repeats the words of reception. Then if the child is a boy he carries him by the south door into the sanctuary, round the holy table and out by the north door. He holds him against the closed holy doors and hands him back to his mother with the prayer of St. Simeon: 'Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace...'. A girl is not carried into the sanctuary, but only held against the holy doors and given back to her mother with the same prayer. The ceremony ends with the blessing.

Confession and Communion

i) Introduction

Although Confession and Communion are two separate sacraments, often Confession precedes Communion. That is, although we can have confession by itself, we always go to confession before communion. However, the Church also of course gives communion to little children. Since they are not responsible for what they do, this is 'for the healing of soul and body', that they may receive the grace of the Mystery of the most holy Body and Blood of Christ and come closer to Him. For He said, 'Forbid not little children to come unto Me'. A small child needs no preparation for communion, but adults and children over about the age of seven must first confess their sins and faults to God in the presence a priest, and be forgiven.

ii) Confession

Christ gave His Apostles the power to absolve, forgive, people from their sins. This was passed on to bishops and priests. In the sacrament of Confession Orthodox who confess and repent their sins before a priest receives visibly forgiveness from him by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and invisibly from our Lord Himself. When we wish to go to Confession we should first prepare ourselves: go often to church (usually a week), fast, read holy books, and try to remember all the wrong we have done.

The priest in his stole stands beside a stand at the front of the church, on which lie a cross and the Gospels. We come in separately one after the other and bow down to the ground as before Christ Himself. The confessor may read Psalm 50 and prayers asking God to grant repentance and forgiveness. He then turns to the penitent and reminds him that 'Christ Himself invisibly stands here to receive thy confession...that thou may receive forgiveness from Our Lord Jesus Christ. Behold, His image is

before us, and I am merely a witness...The penitent confesses all his sins and faults, hiding nothing and answering all questions truthfully. When he has finished, the confessor usually gives him some advice.

The penitent bows his head and kneels. The priest covers the penitent's head with his stole, lays his hand on it and prays that God grant him true repentance. He then gives the absolution: 'Our Lord and God, by the grace and compassion of His love for mankind, forgive thee, my child (name) all thine iniquities. And I, an unworthy priest, by the power that is given me, forgive thee and absolve thee from all thy sins (here he makes the sign of the cross on the penitent's head), in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen'. The penitent rises from his knees forgiven and made clean again by the grace received through the laying-on of the priest's hand. He may now receive communion. He kisses the cross and book of Gospels and is blessed by his confessor.

iii) Communion

This is the greatest of all the sacraments, or mysteries. Under the appearance of bread and wine the faithful receive the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins and unto everlasting life. He Himself said: 'Who eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood hath eternal life'. This sacrament was ordained by Christ Himself at the Last Supper before His Passion. It can only be celebrated at the Divine Liturgy.

2. The Other Sacraments

Marriage

i) Introduction

This is a sacrament in which the bridegroom and bride give a solemn promise before the Church and a priest to love and to be true to one another. Their union is then blessed in the image of Christ's union with His Church, and they receive the grace of the Holy Spirit to found and bring up an Orthodox family.

The marriage service is in two parts: the Betrothal and the Crowning. These are usually, but not always, celebrated at the same time. A man and woman may only be joined together of their own free will and consent. Their consent and promise of loyalty are given before God and the Church, and in token of this they exchange rings. This is the Betrothal.

The Crowning is the outward form of the sacrament. Their union is crowned and blessed by prayers, that they may receive the grace of the Holy Spirit, that theirs may be a true union in the image of Christ's union with His Church.

The marriage service is full of symbols. It is celebrated in church in front of witnesses. The bride and bridegroom arrive separately. Before starting, they are blessed each in their own home by their parents or those who take their place. The icons (that of the Saviour for the bridegroom and of Our Lady for the bride) are brought with them to church and afterwards taken to the new home.

ii) The Betrothal

On their arrival in church the bride and bridegroom stand by the west door, the groom on the right and the bride on the left. A stand is placed in the middle of the church. The priest in bright vestments comes out of the holy doors with the cross and the Gospels, which he lays on the stand. He then blesses the bride and bridegroom with lighted candles in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He leads them up to the middle of the church at a little distance from the stand.

He begins the service: 'Blessed is our God, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages...'. There is the Great Litany and several prayers to grant the betrothed perfect and peaceful love, salvation, to bless them with children. The rings are brought out of the sanctuary, where they had been lying on the holy table, to be blessed. The priest takes the groom's ring, makes the sign of the cross over him with it three times, saying: 'The servant of God (name) is betrothed to the handmaid of God (name), in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen'. He puts the ring on the groom's right hand. He does the same with the bride's ring, saying: 'The handmaid of God (name) is betrothed to the servant of God (name), in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen'. They then exchange rings three times in token that each gives his own in keeping to the other for life. The betrothal ends with a prayer that the Lord might confirm (make strong) their betrothal in faith, truth and love, and make them of one mind; that He would 'grant them His heavenly blessing and send His angel to go before them all the days of their life'.

iii) The Crowning

After the Betrothal, the bride and groom, holding lighted candles, come up to the stand in the middle of the church. The priest walks in front with the censer. The choir sings verses from Psalm 127 with the refrain 'Glory to Thee, our God, glory to Thee'. Meanwhile, the priest asks each in turn in a low voice if they have 'the firm and free resolve' to marry one another and if they have not promised to marry someone else. After their reply the priest begins the celebration of the marriage. He says, 'Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages', in token that they together may become its members. A litany is said with petitions for the two being joined together. Then three long prayers are read, asking God to grant them a long and peaceful life, mutual love and help, happiness in their children, worldly goods that they may help the needy, unfading crowns of glory in heaven; to bless their parents, 'for the prayers of the parents make firm the foundation of the homes of the children'.

After these prayers the priest takes up a crown, makes with it the sign of the cross and places it on the groom's head, saying: 'The servant of God (name) is crowned to the handmaid of God, in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen'. He does the same to the bride. He then raises his hands in blessing and exclaims three times in a loud voice: 'O Lord, our God, crown them with glory and honour'. The crowns are held over the heads of the couple by young male friends, called groomsmen. The crowns are a symbol that the newly married couple receive the grace of the Holy Spirit to be the founders of a new generation and are crowned with virtue and holiness to serve all their lives to the glory of God.

After this, the Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Ephesians is read on the mystery and holiness of the Christian marriage; and the Gospel of St John on Christ's miracle at the marriage in Cana in Galilee, to show that Christ blesses marriage. After the augmented litany and the litany of supplication, the Lord's Prayer is sung. A cup of wine is brought. The priest gives this in turn to drink to the husband and wife three times - the common cup in token that they must share everything in life together. The priest then joins their right hands on his stole and leads them three times round the stand in procession. The groomsmen follow, holding the crowns above their heads. The choir sings the same verses as at an ordination, only in a different order: 'Rejoice, O Isaiah...'. 'Holy Martyrs...'. 'Glory to Thee, Christ our God...'. This triumphant procession in a circle is a symbol that a marriage union cannot be broken. The priest then takes off the crowns with special words of blessing to husband and wife, and gives them the Cross to kiss.

In some places, the crowns are made of myrtle and olive blossom and leaves and worn on the head. In others, they are of silver or gold, inlaid with small icons of Christ and His Holy Mother.

Unction

i) Introduction

This is a sacrament of the anointing of the sick with holy oil, with a prayer that they may be healed by the grace of the Holy Spirit from all ills of body and soul. Like all the sacraments, it is founded on Christ's words to His disciples after His Resurrection: '...lay hands on the sick, and they shall be healed'. The Acts of the Apostles tell us that they anointed many sick and healed them. St. James advised his flock when anyone was ill 'to call for the elders (priests) of the church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord...' (James 5, 14-15). This sacrament is given to very sick people. In principle, it has to be celebrated by seven priests for seven epistles and seven Gospel lessons were read. However, often there may only be three priests present and in some circumstances only one priest.

ii) Preparation

A small table is brought into the sick-room. On it stands a bowl of wheat with a cup of oil and wine in the middle. Seven candles are placed round it. A cross and the Gospels are also laid on the table. The grain of wheat is for resurrection and rebirth, the oil and wine of healing by the mercy of God granted us through the Blood of Christ shed for our sakes. The seven candles are a token of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

iii) The Service

The priest and the sick person also hold lighted candles. It is a service of intercession. The canon for the healing of the sick is sung with the refrain 'All merciful Lord, heal Thy suffering servant'. There is a litany and prayers for the blessing of the oil: also for the grace of the Holy Spirit to heal the anointed from every passion and ills of soul and body.

Then seven Epistles and seven Gospel lessons are read, seven litanies and seven prayers. After each, the priest anoints the patient with the mixed oil and wine on the forehead, nostrils, cheeks, lips, breasts, hand and feet, and pronounces the words of the Sacrament: 'Holy Father ... physician of souls and bodies . . . do Thou heal Thy servant (name) from the bodily and spiritual infirmity that presses upon him, and quicken him by the grace of Thy Christ...'. After this, the priest lays the open Gospels, which represents the 'strong and mighty' hand of Christ Himself, on the sick person's head. The priest reads over him the prayer of absolution or forgiveness of sins, he is given the Gospel to kiss and receives the priest's blessing.

In some churches this service is celebrated just before, or even during, Great Week. After the prayers, the blessing of the oil and wine, the Epistle and Gospel lessons, the priest anoints on the forehead all those who wished to receive the sacrament.

Ordination and Consecration

i) Introduction

This is a sacrament by which bishops are consecrated and priests and deacons are ordained, all of them receiving a special grace of the Holy Spirit. The outward form is the laying-on of the bishop's hands and the prayer of consecration. This is the only sacrament which a priest cannot perform, because a bishop alone has the right to ordain or consecrate.

This mystery was ordained to His disciples by Our Lord. After His resurrection He breathed into them His Holy Spirit and gave them the power 'to bind and to remit' sins. It is often mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, and the Apostle Paul speaks of it in his letters to Timothy. Since then ordinations have gone on unbroken in the Church. Every rightly ordained bishop, priest or deacon can trace back his ordination in an unbroken chain to the times of the Apostles.

There are three types of ordination/consecration for the deacon, the priest and the bishop. Each requires a separate laying-on of hands and receives special gifts of the Holy Spirit according to the service to which he is called. The sacrament is always celebrated during the liturgy, but at different parts of it.

A deacon cannot celebrate sacraments, but only helps at their administration. He is therefore ordained after the consecration of the Holy Gifts. A priest himself celebrates the sacraments, and he is ordained after the Great Entrance, so as to be able to take part in the consecration. A bishop who holds the highest rank and will himself have the power to lay on hands is consecrated at the beginning of the liturgy before the Epistle is read. The ceremony is almost the same for all three. It is the most solemn and impressive for a bishop.

Before the ceremony the person to be ordained is brought by a deacon to stand below the chancel steps in view of the whole congregation. The deacon then proclaims in a loud voice 'Command', and the word is repeated by other deacons inside the sanctuary. In principle, the choice of the future deacon, priest or bishop has to be approved by the people and their consent is needed for ordination. So before the ceremony the deacon asks the whole Church, as it were, to 'command' that their elect

should be ordained. The clergy and people then signify their consent with the Greek word 'Axios' (Worthy), and only then is the elect led into the sanctuary for the sacrament.

ii) The Ordination of a Deacon or a Priest

After the command has been proclaimed, the subdeacon to be ordained is led by two deacons from the church into the sanctuary and brought before the bishop, who sits at the left corner of the holy table. He bows to the ground before the bishop and receives his blessing. He is then led three times round the holy table by a deacon, as a sign that he pledges himself to God's service for ever. He kisses each corner of the holy table in veneration and the bishop's hand in token of submission.

During this, three verses are sung: 'Holy martyrs, who have fought the good fight and have received your crowns, pray ye the Lord for mercy on our souls'. 'Glory to Thee, Christ our God, the Apostles' praises, the martyrs' joy, whose preaching was the Consubstantial Trinity'. 'Rejoice, O Isaiah, the Virgin is with Child and brings forth a Son, Emmanuel, both God and Man: 'Orient' is His name; Whom magnifying, we call the Virgin blessed'. The first verse reminds the newly ordained that he must follow in the steps of the holy martyrs and serve God valiantly unto death. The second points out that he is joining God's chosen ones and pledges himself to follow their example. The third reminds him always to bear in mind our Lord's Incarnation, His life and teaching.

After the third time the candidate kneels on one knee before the holy table, to show that he will not be invested with the full priesthood; he crosses his hands on the edge of the holy table and lays his head upon them to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Here the bishop rises, covers the subdeacon's head with his pall, lays his hand upon it and reads the prayer of consecration: 'The divine grace, which ever remedies that which is infirm, and completes that which is wanting, elevates, through the laying-on of hands, the most pious subdeacon (name) to be a deacon. Let us therefore pray for him that the grace of the Holy Spirit may come upon Him'. The clergy in the sanctuary and the choir sing 'Lord, have mercy', many times. The bishop meanwhile makes the sign of the cross three times over the head of the ordained, and prays secretly that he may be granted those gifts which are needed for his office. After this the new deacon is clothed in his vestments. Each part is blessed and handed to him by the bishop with the word 'Axios'. This is repeated by the choir. The new deacon then assists at the ending of the liturgy.

A priest is ordained in almost the same way. Obviously, he must already be a deacon. He is led round the holy table by a priest. The same verses are sung. He kneels before the holy table on both knees as a sign that he takes up a higher and heavier burden of service. The laying-on of the bishop's hand and the prayer of consecration are the same; only the following words are different: 'the most pious deacon to be a priest'. In his secret prayer the bishop asks for the special gifts of priesthood. The new priest is clothed in his vestments and joins in the consecration of the holy gifts. After the consecration the bishop gives him a portion of the 'Holy Lamb' as a token 'to hold and to keep until death, and answer for at the awful second coming of Our Lord and Saviour'. This is to remind the priest to guard the holiness of the mysteries and administer them only to the worthy.

iii) The Consecration of a Bishop

Most solemn of all is the consecration of a bishop. A bishop of the Church must be unmarried, a widower or a monk. Because his duties are the heaviest and greatest he will be called upon to answer before God for all his flock. A bishop is ordained by several bishops, usually not less than three. The ceremony is at the beginning of the liturgy before the Epistle; but before he is ordained the chosen bishop must confess his faith before all the people and make solemn vows.

Before the liturgy all the bishops are seated in the middle of the church (usually a cathedral) on a raised platform, the 'cathedra'. In front of it is spread a large carpet with the design of an eagle above a city. A senior priest and archdeacon lead in the chosen bishop. He stands on the edge of the eagle carpet. The senior bishop asks him. 'How believest thou?' and the bishop-to-be recites the Creed. He is then led to the middle of the eagle's body and reads the teachings of the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation of the Son of God. He vows to keep the rules of the Apostles and Church Councils and the traditions of the Orthodox Church. He is then led to stand on the head of the eagle and promises to obey the senior bishop, to serve according to his conscience and in the fear of God. He is then blessed by the senior bishop and kisses the hands of the bishops who will ordain him.

The liturgy then begins. After the little entrance the senior priest and deacon lead him up to the holy doors, where he is received by all the bishops. He kneels on both knees before the Holy Table, crosses his hands on its edge and bows his head. All the bishops rise, lay their right hand on his head and also hold above it the open Gospels, as the hand of Our Lord Himself. The senior bishop reads the prayer of consecration with the words: '(Name) the most pious Archimandrite to be Bishop...'. The priests sing 'Lord, have mercy'. After this the new bishop is vested in full vestments and takes his place at the holy table.

3. Special Services

Services of Intercession

The Church takes part in every event in our life, so there are many special services of intercession. The latter the priest will hold in church or in our own homes. In some we thank God for His mercies; in others we ask His blessing or help: to heal the sick; to bless a new house (holy water is then sprinkled in all the rooms); for a safe journey; for a child starting school; on our saints' days. Some of the services are to Our Lord, others to the Mother of God, others to particular saints.

This kind of service of intercession always begins with the prayer to the Holy Spirit, 'O heavenly King, the Comforter, Spirit of Truth . . .', a hymn to Our Lord, or to His Holy Mother, or a saint. There is a litany of thanksgiving or special petitions. A Gospel (and sometimes an Epistle) is read, then the litany of supplication and a special prayer, when everybody usually kneels. Between these refrains are sung, for instance, 'Glory to Thee, our God, glory to Thee'; 'Sweetest Jesus, have mercy on us'; 'Most Holy Mother of God, save us'; 'Holy Father Nicholas (or other saint by

name), pray to God for us'. Long canons of praise, called akathists, to God, the Holy Virgin Mary and the saints are sometimes added to the services of intercession.

There are also many other special services of intercession: On the foundation and consecration of churches; on days of a church's patronal feast; New Year's Day; the blessing of waters; public thanksgiving; in time of war or invasion and national trouble; blessing of the fields and first-fruits; prayers for rain; memorial services for the departed, and so on.

b) Prayers for the Dying and the Departed

The Church does not forsake her children at the hour of repose. She blesses them on their last journey and prays for their departed souls. A special prayer, called the departing prayer, is read when possible at the bedside of a dying Orthodox Christian. We ask that their sins may be forgiven and their soul received in peace by our Heavenly Father.

When an Orthodox Christian reposes, his body is washed and clothed, either in his usual clothes or else in a white shroud (a reminder of the 'robe of righteousness' given him at Baptism). The body is laid out or put in a coffin, an icon or cross placed on the folded hands in token of his Orthodox faith. A white band, called a crown, with images of the Saviour and the Mother of God and the words of the Thrice-Holy Hymn, is laid around his forehead. It is an emblem of the heavenly crown which awaits the faithful. The coffin usually stands in the corner of the room beneath the icons, and candles are placed round it.

According to Tradition, as soon as an Orthodox Christian passes away, his relations or readers in turn begin to read the psalms beside the body. This vigil lasts day and night till the funeral. After every three psalms a short prayer is said for the soul of the departed. This reading is partly meant for the comfort of the mourners in the words of the psalms, and a loving, prayerful tribute to the departed. Special memorial services (panikhidas) are also sung every day. The hymn 'Give rest with the saints, O Christ, to the soul of Thy servant, where there is neither pain, nor grief, nor sighing, but life everlasting', is sung. The service ends with the prayer 'In the sleep of the blessed, grant, O Lord, eternal repose, to the soul of Thy servant (name), and give him/her eternal memory'. This does not mean eternal memory on earth among men, for that is impossible, but in the land of the living, in the Kingdom of God.

c) The Burial Service and Memorial Services

Where possible, on the third day the body of the departed Orthodox is brought to the church. Before it is borne out of the house there is a short service. Everyone holds lighted candles and the coffin is carried out to the singing of the Thrice-Holy Hymn. This shows the hope that the departed is passing into the kingdom of eternal light where spirits glorify the Holy Trinity. In church the open coffin is placed in the middle of the church facing the sanctuary, with four candlesticks round it. Sometimes, the funeral service begins with a Liturgy for the departed. It is the usual Liturgy, the name of the departed is mentioned at the Preparation and Consecration. There is a special litany and hymns, and the Epistle and Gospel speak of the resurrection.

If there is a Liturgy first, then it will be followed by the Burial Service. Again all the people stand with lighted candles. The service begins with the customary 'Blessed is God, always, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages...'. Then comes the singing of verses from Psalms 90 and 118, which speak of the joys of those who trust in the Lord. Between the verses the refrains 'Alleluia' and 'Have mercy on Thy servant, O Lord', are sung. There are also short litanies for the repose of the departed soul. Hymns follow, each one beginning with the verse 'Blessed art Thou, O Lord, teach me Thy statutes'. These hymns portray human life. God created man out of nothing in His own image. For disobeying His commandments he was condemned to return to earth. But in spite of his sins he still remains the image of God's ineffable glory, and implores God's mercy to return to his forsaken fatherland. Then more verses are sung. They are the departed's warning to the living that earthly life is short and that each of us will have to stand before God and answer for what he has made of it.

The Epistle of the Apostle Paul and the Gospel of St John are then read on Christ's glorious message of the resurrection. There is the Litany of Supplication. After this the priest reads the prayer of absolution and absolves the departed from all sins he ever committed in his earthly life. The service ends with a hymn, during which the farewell kiss is given to the departed. 'Eternal Memory' is sung and the coffin closed.

The burial takes place in a cemetery or churchyard. Cremation is not allowed in the Orthodox Church. If possible, the grave faces east. There is a short service and then the priest scatters some earth crosswise over the coffin, saying, 'The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and all they that dwell therein', and the grave is filled in. A cross is put over the grave in token of victory over death.

The burial service for babies and small children who have not yet been to confession is quite different. Such a child is guiltless of sins and the Church only prays to Christ to receive 'the blessed infant (name) into His Kingdom according to His undeceiving promise'. The whole service is one of sweet gladness over a pure angel's return to his Father's house.

When a priest reposes, his body is anointed with oil by a member of the clergy and clothed in full vestments, his face covered with the chalice veil and the Gospels laid on his breast. The service is much longer. Five Epistles and five Gospels are read. Special hymns are sung as well as the Great Doxology.

If an Orthodox passes away during Bright Week, the service again is different. It begins with the triumphant hymn 'Christ is risen from the dead...'. After the Litany for the Departed, the Easter Canon is sung: 'The day of resurrection...the Passover of gladness, the Passover of God...' and other Easter hymns. Most of the sad hymns are left out, only the hymn 'Give rest with the saints, Christ, to the soul of Thy servant' is sung. The lessons are from the Acts of the Apostles and the First Sunday Gospel of St. Matthew. There are more Easter hymns, the Litany for the Departed, the absolution and farewell. The priest gives the Easter blessing and greeting, 'Christ is risen'. The body is borne to the grave to the singing of 'Christ is risen from the dead...'.

The Church does not forget her departed children. She prays for them always at the Liturgy and on special days. Memorial services (panikhidas), besides being sung on the first three days after the repose, are also sung on the ninth and fortieth days and on

the anniversary of the death. On the third day the Church prays that our Saviour, Who rose on the third day, will raise His servant to everlasting life. On the ninth day the Church prays that he may be numbered among the nine ranks of angels and saints; on the fortieth, the last day of special prayers for the newly departed, kept chiefly in memory of Christ's Ascension, we pray that the soul of the departed may also ascend in glory and be for ever with God, according to the words of the Apostle Paul.