

The Eucharist: The Focus of it All

Lord, help us remember that when we are at your holy altar and there remember that we have a problem with someone near and dear, we need to reflect seriously before taking another step. Indeed you ask us to leave the altar and leave the church and go and be reconciled with whomever we have hurt or has hurt us. Lord, help us remember the seriousness of your command to "love one another" so that our worship of you is not cold and meaningless but filled with love! Amen.

(based on Matthew 5:23-24)



What's A Catechumen?

The first major part of the Liturgy, the Synaxis, is all about getting ready, about learning, about receiving God through his Word, through the Gospel.

What are we getting ready for?

To receive Jesus himself, through the Eucharist.

How have we prepared?

The priest has vested and confessed before the congregation; he has carried the cross and censer through the church and congregation; the deacon has led us in prayers for the Church and for ourselves; we have heard the Holy Word of God through the Scripture readings; we recited the Creed to affirm the basic beliefs we all hold to.

So far, we're just warming up. In fact, turn to page 23 of your Liturgy books and notice the very first thing the

deacon says when we have officially started the second major part of the liturgy, the Eucharist.

Write it here:

Now, what does this *mean*? Seems like the deacon is dismissing people of

little faith.....okay, that's a no-brainer, why would someone who doesn't believe want to participate anyway?

the penitents.....okay, this refers to people who are staying away from the liturgy during an imposed period of penance

the unclean.....perhaps once those who were ritually unclean (and there were such categories) or, more recently, those considered spiritually unclean and

the catechumens..... read on!



Who's Who

Who were or are the *catechumens*?

Well, in the early Church, a catechumen (pronounced *cát-uh-cue-mun*, a form of the Greek verb "to instruct") was a

person who was undergoing training and

instruction preparatory to receiving baptism. They

could come to church but were dismissed before

the ultimate act of faith – taking communion-

because they weren't baptized yet. Those were the

days when being in church was an earned privilege.

Amazing how times have changed! And, by the

way, no one is really asked to leave today. This is

just a remnant from an earlier time, one that is felt

to reflect an important if not practicable truth.

The King of Glory

We are now at the moment in the Divine Liturgy when the deacon brings the gifts that have been stored in a side niche to the priest. These gifts are the bread and wine.



In early centuries, people in the parish would bring grain and flour and loaves of bread or grapes or wine from their own fields. But now, in a far less agricultural society, our gift of money goes to purchase these items. But always remember that these “gifts” are from you, the people! And that you are offering them up to God through the prayers and actions of the priest to become the spiritual food of the Eucharist. As the deacon goes to the niche and solemnly bears the chalice around the altar to the priest, we usually kneel before this awesome beginning – the first step to the transformation of this humble food and drink to the Body and Blood of the Lord.



As the priest censes the chalice and then takes it from the deacon, exalting it before the people and then placing it on the altar, he is reciting a dialogue with the deacon straight out of the Psalms. Psalm 24 to be exact.

Psalm 24 is one the oldest Psalms in the book, and almost certainly written by King David. (While the entire book is attributed to him, some were most probably the work of musicians writing in his style.) It was probably written to accompany a triumphant procession into the Temple. Or it might have been a song David wrote as he danced and sang when he brought the Ark of the Covenant into the ancient-gated city of Jerusalem (Samuel 6:12-15, 17).



Dictionary Definitions

The Hill of the Lord: Refers to Mount Zion upon which King Solomon built the Temple.

Read the Psalm and summarize the verses:

Psalm 24

Verses 1 and 2 tell us :

Verses 3 and 4:

Verses 5 and 6:

Verses 7 and 8:

Verses 9 and 10:

Why do you think that this Psalm is quoted as the priest receives the chalice of bread and wine from the deacon?

The Holiest “Kiss” Ողջոյն

If the greatest gift offered us at Liturgy is Jesus Christ himself, then the next best has to be the promise of unity and love in the Kiss of Peace. As we turn to embrace our pew neighbors, the words of *Krisdos Eee Mech Mer Բրիստոս ի մէջ մեր* announce that all of our separate souls have become one Church. Incredibly enough, that is what we are empowered to be at Liturgy. We assemble not for our private moment with God – that we can have





The Armenian Angle

The Armenian Church is the only church to retain the distinctive formalized greeting that has each worshipper greet his or her neighbor with a bow over the right and then left shoulder, hand over heart. The greeting is always — no matter the season:

Krisdos ee mech mer haydnetzav Քրիստոս ի մէջ մեր յայտնէցաւ: (Christ was revealed among us) to which the reply is: *Orhnyal eh haydnootyoonun Krisdosi* Օրհնէալ է յայտնութիւնն Քրիստոսի: (Blessed is the revelation of Christ).

at any other time, any other place - but to become what we became at baptism, a member of the Body of Christ, the Church.

And since God is love (I John 4:8), there is a lot of kissing that goes on during Liturgy: we kiss the cross, we kiss the Gospel, and we kiss one another, admittedly a bobbing of heads over one another's shoulders, but ... nevertheless. Kissing has its contractual side. The kiss of respect - for the cross, for the Bible, for a revered person - promises faithfulness, allegiance, and mutual love.

But the promise can also be false, like Judas' kiss. St. Ambrose wrote, "A kiss conveys the force of love, and where there is no love, no faith, no affection, what sweetness can there be in kisses?" And so with the gift comes a challenge. In that ritualized greeting, are we taking seriously the invitation to meet our Lord halfway: "As I have loved you so you must love one another. By this will all people know you are my disciples." (John 13:34-35) ?



Up Close and Personal

What are you usually thinking during the Kiss of Peace? What might you try to think about?

? What Do I Do...

When I go to the priest to receive communion?

Approach the chalice, cross yourself, open your mouth for the priest to place a piece of communion safely inside, then cross yourself again. Although we never want to have our backs to the altar, it's neither safe nor necessary to back away from the chalice. Slowly turn and join the other communicants who have gathered at one side of the chancel.

QUICK QUIZ

Match the words with their meanings:

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Catechumen | a. "The King of Glory" |
| 2. Gifts of the people | b. Teaching part of the Liturgy |
| 3. The Synaxis | c. Preparing to be baptized |
| 4. The Eucharist | d. Liturgical gesture of love |
| 5. Psalm 24 | e. Holy Communion |
| 6. The Kiss of Peace | f. Bread and wine |

The Least You Need to Know

- ✓ The Eucharist is the ultimate purpose of the Divine Liturgy; historically, at this part of the Liturgy, those not baptized were asked to leave.
- ✓ The congregation symbolically gives the gifts to the priest in the presentation of bread and wine by the deacon.
- ✓ The Kiss of Peace cements the love relationship among the faithful as well as between the faithful and God.

