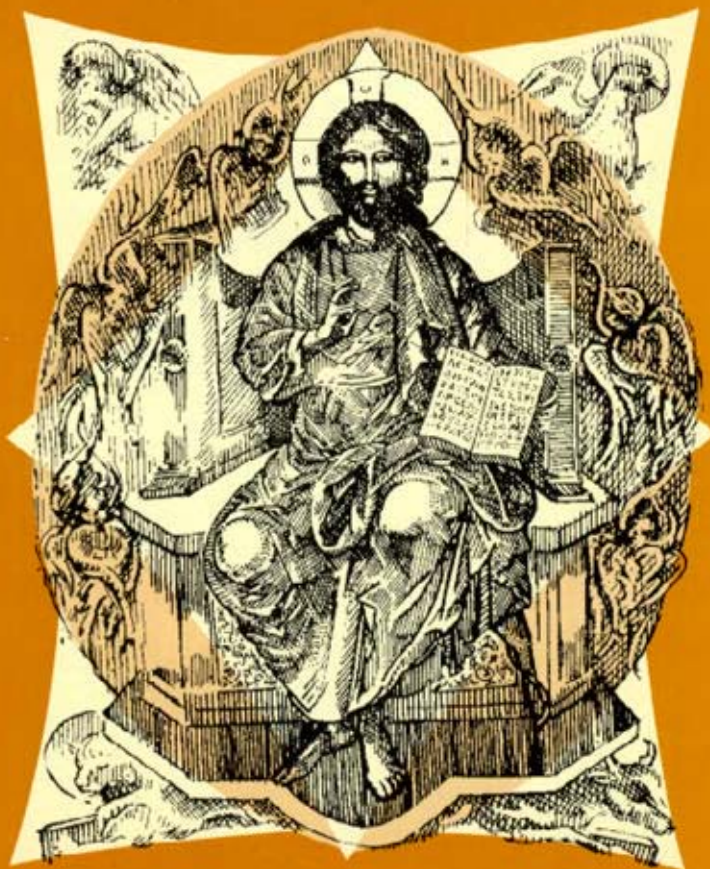


BISHOP METTAOUS.



**THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE RITES
OF THE HOLY LITURGY
IN THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH**

*The Spirituality Of The Rites
Of The Holy Liturgy
In The Coptic Orthodox Church*

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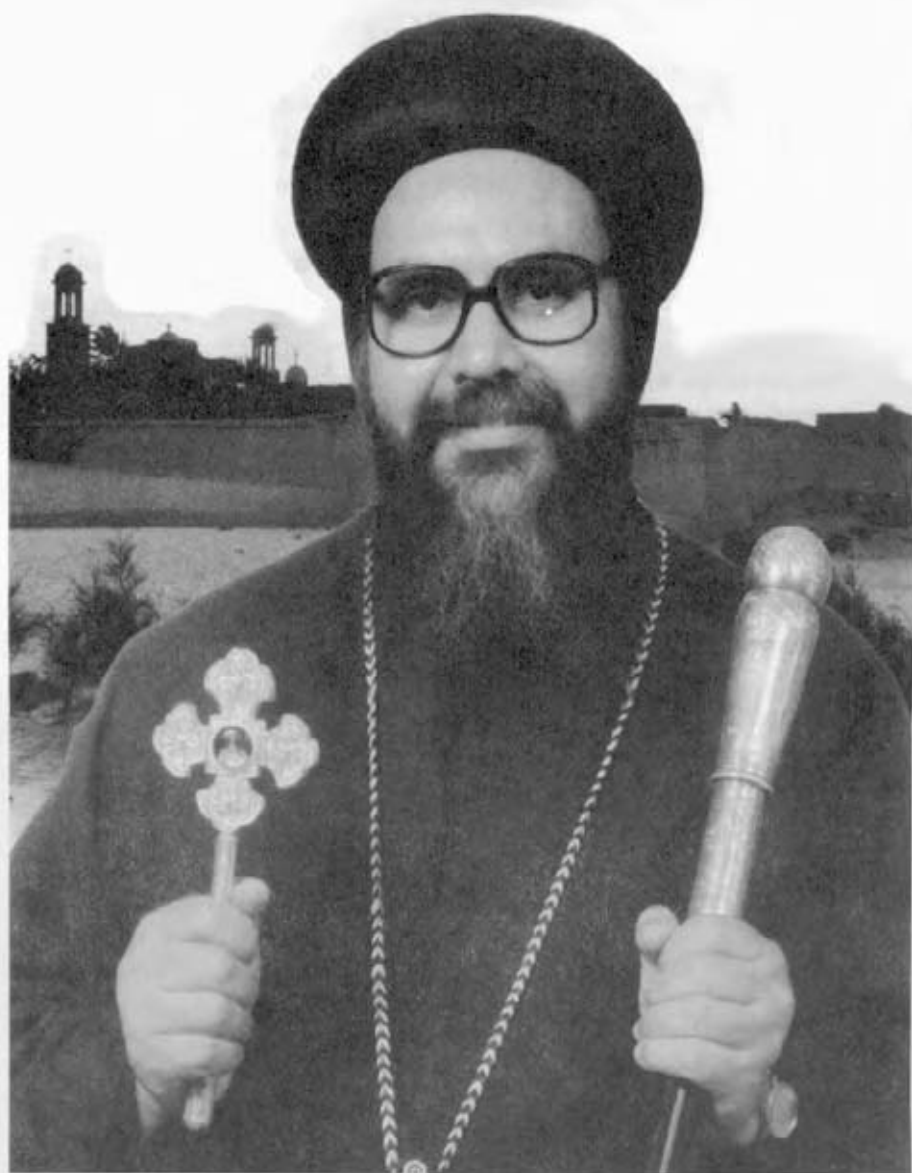
*Edited by
Amanda Hanna*



**Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ King of Kings and
Lord of lords**



*H.H. Pope Shenouda III, 117th Pope of
Alexandria and the See of St. Mark*



Bishop Mettaous.

Bishop of St. Mary Moucestry . El Sorian

Introduction

*" In the name **of** the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,
one God, Amen. "*

This book which is in your hands explains the rituals used in our Holy Coptic Liturgy, and so gives us a unique opportunity to learn, benefit and take part in our church's holiest form of worship, which is all for Emmanuel our God.

May the book be a blessing to all those who read it, giving them a deeper understanding and wisdom and admiration of our wonderful liturgical rituals which are deeply enriched with spiritual and theological meanings.

We ask this through the pleadings of our pure mother the Virgin Saint Mary, and the prayers of our honoured father His Holiness Pope Shenouda III.

**Bishop Mettaous
Bishop of St. Mary Monestry,
El Sorian.**

*In The Name Of The Father , And Of The Son And Of
The Holy Spirit, One God Amen.*

**THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE RITES OF
THE HOLY LITURGY IN THE COPTIC
ORTHODOX CHURCH**

The word 'rites' in Arabic is pronounced 'tuks' which is derived from the Greek word 'taxis', meaning 'a system'. In the church this refers to the system of the Holy Service, that is, the recitation of verbal prayers and the performing of the holy symbolical movements. Such symbols include the shape of the church, the utensils, the ranks of the priests and the garments they wear. Every motion and/or action during the worship, every action in and out of the Apostolic Orthodox Church carries with it high spiritual meaning, some of which may not be instantly apparent to everyone. Each rite carries within itself a profound spiritual and doctrinal meaning for the faithful to taste and experience during their public worship.

GOD ENDORSES THE RITES OF THE CHURCH

God has set an order for everything, especially in the worship offered to Him by man, as seen in the quotation,

*“For God is not the author of confusion but of peace”
(1Cor.14:33),*

and also,

“Let all things be done decently and in order” (1Cor.14:40).

The use of rites during worship has been a practice since long ago. We read that Noah, after the Flood, built an altar for the Lord and took from every clean animal and every clean bird and offered Burnt Offerings on it... ***“And so, the Lord smelled a soothing aroma” (Gen.8:20-21).***

We may also read about the altar in the life of Abraham, the beloved of the Lord, who built an altar for the Lord wherever he went, calling on the Name of the Lord and presenting Him with Burnt Offerings (Gen.12:7-8;13:18). When the Lord asked him to offer his son as a sacrifice, he went to the appointed place, built an altar, and placed wood on it. He then bound Isaac his son and laid him upon the wood on the altar, according to the rites of offering an animal sacrifices at the time (Gen.22:9).

There are stories about ritualistic worship and the building of altars in the life of Jacob, who, after coming back from Haran, lived in Saccoth where he built an altar, calling it

‘El Elohe Israel’(Gen.33:20).

He also built another altar in Luz, that is, Bethel (Gen.35:6). In the days of Moses, God Himself established the rites of worship. A great portion of The Book of Exodus and all of the Book of Leviticus is dedicated to the explanation of rites; God explained to Moses and Aaron all such details relating to the rites of worship. His command was very strict and whoever disobeyed it would not escape the heavenly

punishment, which was exactly what happened to the sons of Aaron - Nadab and Abihu - who disobeyed the rites, and instead offered profane fire in the censer. The Lord sent fire down from heaven to consume them and they died before the Lord (Lev.10).

There is also the story of Uzziah the king.

“When he was strong his heart was lifted up, to his destruction, for he transgressed against the Lord his God by entering the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense” (2Chr.26:16).

The priests therefore went in after him saying,

“It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the Sanctuary” (2Chr.26:18).

When Uzziah became furious and refused to get out, leprosy broke out on his forehead, *“so they thrust him out of that place ... King Uzziah remained a leper until the day of his death. He dwelt in an isolated house, because he was a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the Lord” (2Chr.26:20-21).*

In the days of David, a man called Uzza put out his hand to hold the Ark of the Covenant. No one was allowed to touch the Ark of the Covenant except the priests, who carried it on poles. The anger of the Lord was therefore aroused against Uzza and he died there before God. This incident convinced David to go back to the original rite, which the Lord Himself instituted, in carrying the Ark of the Covenant. Three months

later, when David wanted to transfer the Ark of the Covenant to the city of David, he gave orders saying,

“No one may carry the ark of God but the Levites, for the Lord has chosen them to carry the Ark of God and to minister before Him forever” (1Chr.15:2).

He then said to the chiefs of the Levites, *“You are the heads of the fathers’ houses of the Levites; sanctify yourselves, you and your brethren, that you may bring up the Ark of the Lord God of Israel to the place I have prepared for it. For because you did not do it the first time, the Lord our God broke out against us, because we did not consult Him about the proper order.*

“So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the Lord of Israel. And the children of the Levites bore the ark of God on their shoulders” (1Chr.15:12-15).

Solomon also strictly followed the rites when he moved the Ark of the Covenant from the tabernacle to the most holy place in the Sanctuary, which he had built (2Chr.6). It is written in the Bible that the Lord spoke in detail about such places of deliverance and their specifications, even more than He did about the creation in the Book of Genesis, which was only briefly mentioned. He exhibited great care in detailing the acceptable types of sacrifices, the ways of offering them, and when they were to be offered. He also dedicated Aaron and his sons as priests through whom the Leviticus priesthood descended. The rest of the tribe of Levites, many as they were, were devoted to minister to the tabernacle and the rites of worship in it.

The Lord also spoke in great detail about the Tabernacle and the Sanctuary. The Lord deliberately repeated such details to ensure that no single detail would be neglected. This indicates how highly regarded by the Lord the rites are, as they reflect the glory of worship and the sentiment of reverence for the House of God and the Holy Sacraments. Such rites refresh the spirit of the worshipper and simplify the facts surrounding religion and theology so that even the laity may appreciate them. Without such rites, worship would be dry and boring.

OUR LORD JESUS AND THE RITUALS

The Lord Jesus Christ, although He is the Law Maker and the Author, respected the rites of Moses. The Lord Jesus respected the rite of circumcision, being circumcised on the 8th day, and was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb (Luke 2:21). He also obeyed the laws of purification when His parents took Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord,

“(As it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord’), and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord ‘a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons’. (Luke 2:22-24).

The Lord Jesus respected and participated in all of the feasts and assemblies, as seen in the following quotes:

“Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem...and many believed in His Name when they saw the signs which He did” (John 2:13-

23)...“Now the Jews’ Feast of Tabernacle was at hand...but when His brothers had gone up, then He also went up to the feast, not openly, but as it were, in secret.... Now about the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught” (John 7:10-14), “And the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went from the country up to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves. Then they sought Jesus, and spoke among themselves as they stood in the temple, “What do you think - that He will not come to the feast?”, meaning, shall He do something different this year? (John 11:55-56).

Although the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders to seize Christ (John 11:57), He entered Jerusalem in a great ceremony on Palm Sunday and repeatedly went to the temple until they arrested Him. When He wanted to institute the Sacrament (the Mystery) of the Lord’s Supper, He first celebrated the rites of the Jewish Passover with His disciples, and then He instituted the Eucharist (The New Passover).

After cleansing the leper the Lord Jesus instructed him to go and show himself to the priests and offer the gift that Moses commanded as a testimony to them (Matt.8:4). In doing this He wanted to show the priests, the keepers of the law, that He didn’t come to break the law but to complement its shortcomings and to make its rituals spiritually alive. He also asked ten lepers to go and show themselves to the priests and on the way they were cleansed (Luke 17:14).

Our beloved Lord Jesus Christ was the first to establish the rituals of the Christian Church when He prepared the Upper Room of Zion. He held the bread with His hands and mixed the water and the wine. The Lord taught His disciples many things, much of which was not revealed until after His

Resurrection. These teachings were not recorded in the Holy Scriptures but were handed to the disciples by word of mouth,

“...to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).

The Holy Church is the earthly Kingdom of Heaven, and the pillar and foundation of truth.

THE APOSTLES AND THE RITES

The Apostolic Fathers established the rituals of the Church as they were handed down to them by the Lord Jesus Christ; as the Apostle Paul says,

“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you” (1Cor.11:23),“...And the rest I will set in order when I come” (1Cor.11:34).

St. Paul also instructed his disciple, Timothy, to ensure that the precious rituals and doctrine are passed down through the generations, saying,

“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2Tim.2:2).

He also instructed his disciple Titus, saying,

“For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders (priests) in every city as I commanded you...” (Titus 1:5).

He was also very particular about establishing order within the Church, as he said,

“Let all things be done decently and in order” (1Cor.14:40),“...For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints” (1Cor.14:33).

RITUALS AND THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

The beauty of the Coptic Church is in its scriptural foundation; she lives the spirit, and practices according to the Words of the Holy Scriptures. Her prayers are biblically founded and are organized according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Every word in the book of the Holy Liturgy (the Kholagy) has its origins in the Scriptures. Below are a few examples; a prayer from the Liturgy is stated first, followed by a reference from the Scriptures:

“O Great and Eternal God...”, comes from,

“You show loving kindness to thousands - the great, the Mighty God, whose name is the Lord of Hosts” (Jer.32:18), and also, “For the Lord your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, the Great God, Mighty and Awesome” (Deut.10:17).

“...Death that entered into the world through the envy of the devil...”, refers to,

“As God created man in incorruption, in His image, and through the envy of the deceiver, death entered into the world” (The Wisdom of Sirach 2:23-24).

“...You have destroyed death by the life giving manifestation of Your Only Begotten Son, our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ...”, refers to,

“According to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus” (2Tim.1:1), “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world , received up in glory” (1Tim.3:14), “...Once at the end of the ages He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself...” (Heb.9:26).

“...Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth and goodwill toward men...”, comes from,

“Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth and goodwill toward men” (Luke 2:14).

“...and make us all worthy, O our Master, to greet one another with a holy kiss...”, is taken from,

“Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you” (Rom.16:16), “All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss” (1Cor.16:16), and, “Greet one another with a holy kiss” (2Cor.13:12).

“...that we may partake of Your Immortal and Heavenly gift, without falling into condemnation...”, refers to,

“For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes. Therefore who eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, will be guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord...For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner, eats and drinks judgment to himself, not deserving the Lord’s Body” (1Cor.11:27-32).

“...In Jesus Christ our Lord...”, refers to,

“And in that day you will ask me nothing. Most assuredly I say to you whatever you ask the Father in My Name, He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My Name. Ask and you will receive that your joy may be full” (John 16:23-24).

The Holy Liturgy is a living display of the Holy Scriptures. The full edition of the Khology has been annotated to show the Scriptural reference to each and every sentence in the Liturgy.

THE COPTIC CHURCH AS A CHURCH OF PRAYER

The rituals of the Holy Liturgy are profoundly spiritual. On the evening before for the Holy Mass the beautiful hymns and praises of the Vespers Prayers are performed in preparation for the following day’s service. Psalms are prayed, and praises and doxologies are sung. Then at dawn

the Church recites the Psalms of the Midnight Prayers, with its three services, followed by the Midnight Praise which is chanted in about fifteen beautiful Coptic tunes. The Morning Prayers are then prayed at sunrise, while the sun is spreading its golden rays over the world, reminding us of the ‘Sun of Righteousness’, our Lord Jesus (Mal.4:2). During this time we recite, “When the morning hour approaches, O Christ our God, the True Light...” The morning doxologies greet Saint Mary, the angels, the martyrs and all of the saints, all of whom are felt to be present in the Church. Following this we then raise the Incense of the Prime. (The Raising of Incense is discussed in later chapters.)

From the time the priest enters the church his continuous prayers begin, some spoken aloud, but many of which are prayed in silence. In this way, the priest is kept busy in prayer at every moment, lest his mind should wonder to any earthly matters. Below are some of these prayers:

In Vespers during the Raising of Incense the priest repeats, “The holy blessing of the Vespers Incense be with us, Amen.”

In the raising of the Morning Incense he repeats, “The holy blessing of the Prime Incense be with us, Amen.”

And so too, during the raising of the Pauline Incense he repeats, “The holy blessing of Saint Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ, be with us, Amen. ”

And in the Praxis Incense (the Book of Acts) he repeats, “The holy blessing of our fathers, the Apostles, be with us, Amen.”

The congregation respond to “ EFNOTI NAI NAN” with the reply, “Have mercy upon us, O God”, **during which time the priest prays the second litany of Saint Gregory**, “Healing for the sick, and comfort to the needy...” (Saint Gregory Liturgy). Whilst praying, the priest raises the cross, which is illuminated with three candles.

The Church constantly prays for the whole world; the sick, the reposed, the orphans, the needy, the widows, the travellers, the rulers, as well as the animals, plants and vegetation, and the waters. Just as the Church advocates intercession, we intercede for the whole world to her Beloved Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ. The prayer of the Midnight Absolution is a living example of a Church which is concerned about every facet of the world, no matter how small.

THE HEAVENLY EMBASSY

The Church, being a heavenly embassy, is the icon of heaven on earth. All Church rituals and symbols are an earthly representation of the heavenly world. According to the rites of the Coptic Church, the entrance into the church should be from the west so that when we enter we proceed to the East. The reason for this is that the west symbolises darkness, the place where the sun sets, but the east is the place of light. Therefore, upon entering the church we are being transformed from the darkness of sin to the True Light which is Jesus Christ, our Lord. The curtain at the front of the church represents the barrier of our sin; this is why, as the priest pulls aside the curtain at the beginning of each prayer, he says, “Have mercy upon us, O Father the Almighty, O

Holy Trinity have mercy upon us, O Lord of Hosts be with us for we have no other supporter in our tribulations but You.”

It is interesting to note that the Temple of Jerusalem had its entrance to the East, while the worshippers faced the West; this symbolised the destiny of all prior to the incarnation and the death of Christ our Lord.

“But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves. You shall trample the wicked, For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this,’ says the LORD of hosts” (Mal.4:2).

RITUALS AND CHURCH STABILITY

It is obvious that Christian groups who want to maintain continuity and stability in the church adapt a certain order for their worship. Some splinter or extremist groups worship with no order whatsoever and, as a result, lose their direction and stability. If worship is shaped according to the moods and fashions of the congregation, the church will inevitably lose its stability. Such continuous erosion of the holistic apostolic content eventually leads to the tragic neglect of the needs of some members of the church. The apostolic system of our church is permanent and unchangeable, fulfilling the needs of all people at all times. Today we are observing that members of many Christian denomination are starved of spirituality. It is sad to see some of them focusing on non-Christian sources to supplement their deficient spiritual diet. We hope that Orthodoxy is rediscovered by these communities before matters get worse.



1 Raising of Incense

THE RITUAL OF THE RAISING OF INCENSE

The use of incense in the church is not a pagan ritual but a Biblical fact which represents the prayers and praises of the saints and angels, as seen in Revelations 8:3;

“Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. And he was given much incense, that he should offer it, with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar, which is before the throne.”

Incense is raised during Vespers and Morning Prayers before every liturgy, except those during the Great Lent which are concluded late, and hence, incense is only raised during Vespers on the Saturday night.

The Raising of Incense is an introduction and preparation for the Liturgy, consisting of a collection of prayers, praises and Thanksgiving prayers which request the Lord’s blessings upon the sacramental service. The Raising of Incense may be performed on its own, not just as an introduction to the Liturgy, but as an offer of the sacrifices of prayer and praise to God through its sweet incense. However, the Raising of Incense is mandatory prior to the Liturgy (except, of course, during Lent, as just stated above), the minimum requirement being the raising of the Prime Incense after the midnight praises. The raising of Incense can be found in the Old Testament. The Temple of Jerusalem contained a separate altar for the raising of incense called the Incense Altar which was different to the Altar of Offertory.

DETAILS OF THE RAISING OF INCENSE

The priest enters the Church and opens the curtain saying, “Have mercy upon us, O Father the Almighty, O Holy Trinity have mercy upon us, O Lord of Hosts be with us for we have no other supporter in our tribulations but You.” He then prays The Lord’s Prayer and prostrates before the altar saying, “We worship You, O Christ, with Your Gracious Father and the Holy Spirit, for You have come/risen and saved us.” He then prostrates before the other priests and the congregation saying, “Accept my prostration. Bless me and forgive me.” He exchanges a holy kiss with the other priests as a sign of love, peace and reconciliation. He also turns to the congregation and says, “Forgive me, I have sinned.”

The absolution from the other priests, and the forgiveness from the congregation is very important before starting the prayers, for our beloved Saviour said,

“And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses” (Mark 11:25).

Also the Apostle Paul says,

“Therefore I desire that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting” (1Tim.2:8).

The priest then stands reverently before the altar with his hands raised, the cross in his right hand. The deacon stands

behind the priest and begins praying the Thanksgiving Prayer.

THE THANKSGIVING PRAYER

Our church begins every prayer session with the Prayer of Thanksgiving, whether it be a liturgy, wedding, funeral, baptism, or anything else. We thank the Lord on every occasion, in every condition and for all things, in happiness and in sadness, as well as in sickness and in health. We thank Him, and believe that every circumstance is the Lord's will and occurs with His permission, as it is said in Romans (8:28),

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

The priest prays audibly up until the phrase, “...and all the powers of the devil...”, then he must pray the inaudibly part as this part contains the Name of Christ; through Whom every prayer is accepted, as He promised when He said,

“Most assuredly I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My Name He will give you” (John 16:23).

PERPETUAL PROSTRATIONS

After praying the Prayer of Thanksgiving, the priest prostrates and kisses the entrance of the sanctuary. He then enters the sanctuary with his right foot, as he is entering the

Holy of Holies. He again prostrates before the altar and kisses it. He prostrates as a humble request that God accept his prayers, pleadings and sacrifices. Leaving the sanctuary from the left side, he steps out with his right foot, his left foot still facing the altar.

THE MYSTERY OF INCENSE PRAYERS

The priest stands before the altar and the deacon brings the censer to him from the right side of the altar. The priest places five spoonfuls of incense in the censer while making the sign of the cross three times, thus consecrating the incense to the Only One Holy God (not to idols or strange gods), as it is written,

“From the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My Name shall be great among the gentiles, in every place incense shall be offered to My Name, and a pure offering” (Malachi 1:11).

These five spoonfuls of incense represent the five righteous men of the Old Testament who offered acceptable sacrifices to the Lord, and the Lord smelled their pleasing aroma. These men are:

1-ABEL, who offered the first born of his flock.

“Abel also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering” (Gen.4:4).

2-NOAH, who, after coming out of the Ark, offered from every pure animal and bird.

“Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled a soothing aroma, then the Lord said in His Heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground for man’s sake’.” (Gen.8:20-21).

3-MELCHIZEDEK, who offered bread and wine, a non-blood sacrifice, and blessed Abraham. (Gen.14:18)

4-AARON, who offered sacrifices for himself and his people,

“...and the fire came out from before the Lord, and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar,” as a sign that the Lord accepted the sacrifice (Lev.9:24).

5-ZACHARIAS, who entered the Sanctuary to offer incense, and

“...the angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar, and announced to him the birth of John” (Luke 1:8-22).

After placing the five spoonfuls of incense in the censer, the priest receives the censer from the deacon with his right hand. He places the hook of the censer on his little finger, then holds the censer from the middle of its chain, also holding the cross in his right hand.

The priest offers incense before the altar while silently reciting either the Mystery of Vespers prayer (evening), or the prayer of the Morning Incense (Matins). The priest holds the cross and the censer during the prayers and Bible readings, unless a bishop is present, in which case, he is the one who holds the cross and blesses the people with it.

THE MYSTERY OF VESPERS INCENSE

This special prayer is a deep spiritual prayer which the priest is directing to our Lord Jesus Christ, the True Sacrifice and the Lamb, Who is bearing the sins of the whole world. It consists of verses from both the Old and New Testaments, as seen below:

“O Christ our God, You are Great and Feared and True”, as mentioned in the book of Daniel (9:4),

“And I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession and said, O Lord, Great and Awesome God, Who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him.”

“...You are the Only Begotten Son...”, as mentioned in the Gospel of John (1:1),

“No one has seen God at any time, the Only Begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.”

“...The Logos (Word) of God the Father...”, as written,

“ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). The disciple

John saw Him “clothed with a robe dipped in blood and His name is called the Word of God” (Rev.19:13).

“...Your Holy Name is fragrance poured forth...”, as Solomon mentioned in the Book of Songs (1:3),

“Your Name is ointment poured forth, therefore the virgins love You.”

“...And in every place, incense is offered before You...”, as a pure offering, as written in Malachi (1:11),

“For from the rising of the sun even to its going down, My Name shall be great among the gentiles, in every place incense shall be offered to My Name and a pure offering. For My Name shall be great among the nations, says the Lord of Hosts.”

“...O Lord we ask You to accept our prayers, as incense rising before You...”, as mentioned in Psalm 140:2,

“Let my prayers be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.”

“...For You are the True evening sacrifice Who sacrificed Yourself on the honoured cross for our sins...”, as seen in Ephesians (5:2), where the Apostle advises his children, saying,

“And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us, and given Himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling aroma,” and again in Hebrews (7:27), “...who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the

people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself."

"...According to the Will of Your Good Father...", as mentioned in the Gospel of St. John (3:16),

"For God so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life,"

and in Romans (8:32),

"He Who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things."

"...He with Whom You are Blessed, and with the Holy Spirit, the Life Giver, Who is of One essence with You now and forevermore. Amen."

THE MORNING (MATIN) INCENSE PRAYER

In the prayer of the Morning Incense, the priest asks the Lord to accept the incense offered to Him as He accepted the offerings of the righteous Abel, the sacrifices of Noah and Abraham, and the incense of Aaron and Zacharias. The biblical references for each are detailed below:

"O God Who accepted the offerings of Abel the righteous...", as seen in Genesis (4:4-5),

“Abel also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.”

“...The Sacrifice of Noah...”, as seen in Genesis (8:20-21), “Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma.”

“...And Abraham...”, also mentioned in Genesis (22:2), when Abraham willingly offered his son, Isaac, as a sacrifice, just as the Lord had commanded him. When the Lord found Abraham obedient, He stopped him from sacrificing his son and told him to offer a ram that was tied by the horns to a tree. The Lord accepted the offering and bestowed great and valuable blessings on Abraham.

“...And the incense of Aaron...”, as seen in Exodus (30:1-8),

when the Lord ordered Moses, saying, “You shall make an altar to burn incense on...Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense on it. And when Aaron lights the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense on it, a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generation.”

“...And Zacharias...”, as in Luke (1:5-13),

“So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. Then an angel of the Lord

appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense...the angel said to him...'for your prayer is heard and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son'...."

"...Accept this incense from our hands, us sinners...", the priest thus asking God to accept the incense offered to Him, as He had accepted the offerings and sacrifices of the five righteous men, and also as He accepted the atoning sacrifice of Christ as a pleasing aroma, as spoken by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians (5:2) when he said,

"Walk in love as Christ also has loved us, and given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet smelling aroma."

"...For the forgiveness of our sins with the rest of your people...", which asks for the remission of his own sins and those of his congregation, as he is our intercessor before the throne of Heavenly Grace.

"...For Blessed and full of Glory is Your Holy Name, O Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forevermore, Amen."

THE BLOOD SACRIFICE - ITS ORIGIN, MEANING AND CESSATION

Biblical scholars say that when Adam and Eve fell God told them to offer a blood sacrifice of an animal without blemish. This sacrifice was to be an archetype of the blood of Christ, Who crushed the devil, for as it is written in the book of Hebrews (9:22),

***“There is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood.”
After Adam offered his sacrifice, “The Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them” (Gen.3:21),***

to protect them from their shame and nakedness, through which they would realise the need of a Saviour to shed His Blood and redeem them. In His death, the Lord was hung naked on the cross so that with His holy resurrection, He would clothe us in purity and righteousness.

From time to time, Adam offered such blood sacrifices after being banished from Paradise so that the Lord might have mercy upon him and forgive him. His obedient son, Abel, learnt these rituals from his father, and when he offered a blood sacrifice of the first born of the best of his sheep the Lord accepted his sacrifice because it was offered according to the law.

God rejected the offering of Cain, because his sacrifice was not according to the law. By not offering a blood sacrifice, he showed that he did not feel the need for atonement. God also rejected his offerings because of his evil deeds.

In the New Testament, our offerings are no longer a blood sacrifice but are from the fruits of the land and its produce. God accepts them because, through His Incarnation and death, the curse was taken away from the land. At His Birth, the angels were singing

“Glory be to God in the Highest, Peace be on earth, and good will towards man” (Luke 2:14).

During His Incarnation, He walked on the land and purified it. When He died He was buried in a

tomb engraved in the earth, and so He purified it.

“To the pure all things are pure” (Titus 1:15).

THE THREE MAJOR LITANIES

The priest then goes around the altar three times with the censer, silently praying the Three Major Litanies, namely, the **‘Litany of the Peace of the World and Church’**, the **‘Litany of the Fathers’**, and the **‘Litany of the Gatherings’**, while the congregation sings the Verse of the Cymbals. Facing him on the opposite side of the altar is the deacon who holds the cross and responds. The following is a summary of what the priest does around the altar. This is known as the Incense Circuit.

THE THREE CIRCUITS OF INCENSE AROUND THE ALTAR

After concluding the prayers of the Mystery of the Incense, the priest **stands before the altar, facing East**, and praying the introduction to the Litany of Peace, saying, “Remember O Lord the safety of Your Holy, Apostolic Church...”, while continuing to raise incense. Firstly, the priest raises incense over the altar towards the right of the throne (where the chalice is kept), then on the left side of the throne, and finally in front of the throne. He then swings the censer in a full circle before the altar, from left to right. This is done carefully so that no embers from the censer fall onto the floor. This motion of offering three times over the altar, then

in a circular motion, represents The Holy Trinity, in One Essence.

While the priest is raising incense and praying the introduction to the Litany of Peace, the deacon stands opposite him on the other side of the altar and says, "Pray for the peace of the One, Holy, Universal and Apostolic church of God." The priest, incensing in front of the altar, then proceeds to the right of the altar; while walking, he says, "That which exists from one end of the world to the other."

It is worthy of note that the priest must not offer incense unless he is facing due East or due West.

As he proceeds from the West side of the altar to the East, the priest prays, "Remember O Lord the safety of Your Church...remember our gatherings. Bless them." **Then as he faces due West**, looking at the clergymen and the congregation, he offers prayers for them saying, for example, "Remember O Lord our Patriarch.... Let Your people be thousands and thousands...." **Then the priest stands to the East** of the altar while facing West, raising incense and saying, "Remember O Lord our honourable Pope Abba (Shenouda III)...and his brother in the apostolic ministry, our father the honoured Metropolitan (or bishop) Abba...." The deacon stands in the opposite direction (West facing East), raises the cross and replies, "Pray for our Pontiff Pope Abba...Pope and Patriarch of the great city of Alexandria, and his brother in the Apostolic ministry, our father Metropolitan (or bishop) Abba...and for our Orthodox bishops." The priest then raises incense to the South saying, "Preserve them for many years to come." **He then moves to**

the West and offers incense towards the East while saying, “Remember, O Lord, our gatherings. Bless them.” The deacon stands in front of him, East of the altar, saying, “Pray for this holy church, and all our gatherings.” The priest moves to the right of the altar and says, “Grant that they may be unto us without obstacle or hindrance, that we may hold them according to Your holy and blessed will.” **Again the priest moves to the East of the altar**, and raising incense towards the West says, “Houses of prayer, houses of purity, houses of blessing, grant them unto us O Lord, and Your servants, who shall come after us forever.” The term ‘house of prayer’ also should describe our own home if it is worthy of such a holy description in that it is not defiled with unclean acts.

The deacon completes his activity around the altar in silence. Moving to the West of the altar, he raises incense, saying, “Arise O Lord God. Let all Your enemies be scattered and flee before Your face.” Moving to the East of the altar, he raises incense towards the West, facing the congregation, and says, “But let Your people be in blessing, thousands of thousands and ten thousand times doing Your will.” Moving West of the altar and raising incense toward the East, he says, “By the grace, compassion and love of Your Only Begotten Son, our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ, through Whom glory, honour, dominion and power are due unto You, with Him and the Holy Spirit the life-giver, Who is of one essence with You, now and at all times and unto the age of all ages, Amen.” The priest kisses the altar, and comes out from the sanctuary without turning his back on the altar. He steps out of the altar with his left foot, while still facing the altar.

In the following page we Summarise the circuits with a diagram.

After leaving the sanctuary, the priest raises incense before the sanctuary three times; the first time saying, “We worship You O Christ our God with Your gracious Father, and the Holy Spirit for You have come and saved us.” The second time he says, “But as for me, I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your mercy, in fear of You I will worship toward Your holy temple” (Ps.5:7). The third time, he says,

“I will praise You with my whole heart. Before the angles I will sing praises to You” (Ps.137:1-2).

He then raises incense once to the North of the sanctuary where the icon of St. Mary is displayed, and says, “We hail you with Archangel Gabriel. Hail to you highly favoured one, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women” (Luke 1:28).

Then he turns and raises incense towards the West, saying, “Hail to the hosts of angels, hail to my fathers the apostles, the martyrs and all the saints.”

He At this point the priest faces the congregation who are standing together in rows, resembling the Heavenly Jerusalem where the angels and saints dwell, then raises incense to the South of the sanctuary where the icon of John the Baptist is always placed, and says, “Hail to John, son of Zacharias, hail to the priest the son of the High Priest.”

The priest then raises incense once more towards the East, thus ending the procession in the name of the Lord, saying, “Let us worship our Saviour, the beloved of mankind,

because He had mercy on us and saved us.” He faces the East and waits until the congregation finishes chanting the Verse of the Cymbals, then starts praying the appropriate litanies. The priest, standing at the door of the sanctuary, raises incense in all four directions, signifying that God is Omnipresent and can hear our prayers.

THE LITANY OF THE DEPARTED

The Litany of the Reposed is always prayed during the raising of the Incense of Vespers.

Praying for the departed is very important and a well established teaching in the Coptic Church for numerous reasons:

- ☒ It declares that the souls of those who have passed away are still alive, unlike the animals, because God said, “I am the God of the living, not of the dead,” so we have to remember those living souls whenever we pray, striving to help them attain eternal happiness.
- ☒ It confirms the Resurrection; we ask God to raise their bodies on the Judgment Day and forgive their petty mistakes which they may not have had a chance to repent and confess before dying.
- ☒ It verifies the Day of Judgment; through our prayers for the reposed, we confess the day of reckoning, reminding some, and teaching others, to be watchful of their deeds.
- ☒ It ensures that nobody has yet received their full reward, as written in the book of Hebrews (11:39),

“And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise.”

☒ It helps us to always remember that the reposed are our brethren and we should remember them, for it is written,

“The righteous will be in everlasting remembrance” (Ps.112:6).

☒ It comforts the living in knowing that we shall receive everlasting life, and grants us patience.

☒ It fulfils our debt towards the reposed, for God ordered us, as mentioned by the Apostle James, ***“pray for one another” (James 5:16).***

St. Dionisious, a disciple of St. Paul, said, “The prayers of the righteous benefit the reposed. If the reposed’s sins were trivial there would be great benefit from what was done for him after his departure. However, if his sins were serious and heavy, the Lord has already closed the door.”

THE LITANIES OF THE SICK, THE TRAVELLERS AND THE OFFERING

When raising the Morning Incense during weekdays, the priest prays the Litanies of the Sick and of the Travellers, but on Sundays and on holy feast days, the Church anticipates that no one would be travelling, but rather, they are attending the Liturgy or celebrating the feast, bringing their offerings and oblations. Therefore the Litany of the Offerings is prayed instead of the Travellers on these days.

A beautiful section of the Litany of the Offerings is a plea to God, which says, “And those who are desiring to offer but they have nothing, give them the incorruptible instead of the corruptible, the heavenly instead of the earthly, the everlasting instead of the transient. Fill their houses and stores with good things.” The Church perpetually prays for those who wanted to offer, but were unable to do so due to lack of means.

In this litany it becomes apparent that the Church raises the standing of the offerings to the level of a sacrifice, saying, “Accept them on Your holy, heavenly altar as a fragrance of incense”, as the Apostle Paul teaches us,

“Do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Heb.13:16).

Good deeds are a sacrifice of love and kindness which one offers to others, resembling the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross Who died for our salvation,

“For God so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John3:16).

The Apostle Paul says,

“And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph.5:2).

The priest prays the Litany of Offerings at the altar, facing East, not at the door of the sanctuary where the rest of the litanies are prayed.

The Litany of Offerings is usually prayed when the Lamb is present in the church, that is, during weekdays. On Sundays and the Lordly feasts, however, the Litany of Offerings is prayed even if the Lamb is not present in the church.

On Saturday mornings, the Litany of the Reposed is said, in commemoration of our Lord Jesus Christ in the tomb on Easter Saturday.

Some Points About the Litanies

☒ The Litany of the Reposed is prayed during Vespers, that is at sunset, to remind the believers that our lives on earth shall one day come to an end.

☒ The Litany of the Sick is said in the morning because the church is like a hospital which opens its door for the sick and wounded and cures them, as St. John Chrysostom described it.

☒ The Mystery of Anointing the Sick is said in the morning when the priest, deacons, and those who are sick are all fasting.

☒ The Litany of the Travellers is prayed in the morning because, in the past, people would only travel in the morning light when it was safe to do so. David the Psalmist says,

“While the sun rises man goes out to his work and to his labor until the evening” (Ps.104:22-23).

THE PROCESSION OF INCENSE

After the priest finishes praying the litanies at the door of the sanctuary he enters the sanctuary, saying, “By the grace, compassion, and love of mankind of Your Only Begotten Son, Our Lord, God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, through Whom glory, honour....” He then puts one spoonful of incense into the censer and makes a sign of the cross, saying, “Glory and honour, honour and glory to the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit now and forevermore, Amen.” Then he offers incense over the altar three times;

- ☒ The first time he says, “We worship You O Christ our God, with Your gracious Father and the Holy Spirit, for You have come and saved us.”
- ☒ The second time he says, “But as for me, I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your mercy. In fear of You, I will worship towards Your holy temple.”
- ☒ The third time the priest says, “Before the angels I will sing praises to You. I will worship toward Your holy temple.” (Psalm 138:1-2)

THE VIRGIN’S INCENSE

The priest then turns to the North and stands before the icon of St. Mary. The tradition of the Coptic Church is to place the icon of St. Mary to the right of the temple’s veil, according to the verse,

“King’s daughters are among Your honourable women, at Your right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir” (Ps.45:9).

Raising incense before her, the priest says, “We greet you with Gabriel the angel, saying, ‘Peace be with you, O full of grace, the Lord is with you’.”

THE HEAVENLY INCENSE

Then the priest turns towards the West and, raising incense, says, “Hail to the hosts of angels and my fathers the apostles, the martyrs, and all the saints.”

While facing West the priest views the worshippers standing in their rows, appearing to be in awe and reverence, reminding him of heaven where hosts of angels, apostles and saints are standing before the Lord’s throne, praising Him endlessly. The priest then offers incense to the congregation.

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST’S INCENSE

Moving to the south of the sanctuary door, the priest then stands before the icon of John the Baptist, son of Zacharias, and says,

“Hail to John, son of Zacharias, hail to the priest the son of the High.”

The icon of John the Baptist is placed on the Southern side of the sanctuary’s door, next to the icon of our Lord Jesus Christ. We notice during the procession of Palm Sunday and

of the Holy Cross that the chapter from the Bible about John the Baptist is read to the South of the sanctuary door.

The priest once again raises incense towards the East, saying, “Let us worship our Saviour, the Good Lover of mankind, because He has had compassion upon us and has come and saved us.”

In raising the incense towards the East, the priest has completed a full circle, signifying that the start and the end of the offering is to God alone, for He is the beginning and the end, “the Alpha and the Omega” (Rev.22:13).

He then offers the incense to the Lectionary (Coptic first), then the (Arabic/English), while saying, “We worship the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to Whom is the Glory forever, Amen.”.

He takes the blessings of the Bible by touching it with his hand and then kisses it. The ‘Katameros’ (the lectionary) should be opened to the correct readings, while the priest is offering this incense.

THE OFFERING OF INCENSE TO HOLY RELICS OR A HIGH PRIEST

If there are holy relics of saints in the church, the priest is to offer them incense.

If the Pope, a Metropolitan or Bishop is present, the priest bows before them, offering incense three times;

- ☒ The first time saying, “May the Lord preserve the life of our Pope / Metropolitan / Bishop....”
- ☒ The second time saying, “Preserve him, O Lord, for many years and safe periods.”
- ☒ The third time saying, “Bring all his enemies under his feet quickly.” He then kisses the cross and the hand of the Pope, Metropolitan or Bishop and says, “Ask God to forgive us our sins.”

There is no formal written note as to what the Pope or Bishop says in response to being offered incense, however, the author has heard a Bishop respond with the same prayer as that with which a priest responds, saying, “The Lord preserve your priesthood like Melchizedek, Aaron, Zacharias and Simeon the priests of the Most High God, Amen.” The prostration and offering of incense before a high priest is not done because we worship the priest himself (as some people might think) but to offer him incense, being our spiritual leader, so that he can plead for us (intercede) and raise the incense to God on our behalf. This tradition can be seen also in public life, whereby appropriate people are chosen to present to a king or a leader the gifts or messages on behalf of others. In doing this, they show their respect and reverence to the king or leader, while, at the same time, securing acceptance of the gift, or the consideration of the petition. It is for these reasons that incense is offered to the Patriarch or the Bishop. Because he has the seniority in priesthood, the incense is offered to him which he then offers with his prayers to the Lord, praying to the Lord on behalf of the people and the clergy. The priest asks the Patriarch or Bishop to intercede for us when he says, “Pray for us to the Lord Jesus to forgive our sins.” This explanation therefore

refutes some people's objections to incensing or prostrating before the Pope or a Bishop.

PROSTRATION

The Coptic Church, in its humble and meek spirit, teaches her children three types of prostration, or metanias (bowing). These are:

1. Prostration of Worship

These are the prostrations offered to God during our individual or public worship, such as at the beginning of each of the hourly prayers when we say "Lord have mercy...." St. Isaac said about such prostrations, "Bow at the beginning of your worship, asking God from your heart, with humiliation, to give you patience and control over your thoughts during prayers." Mar John Casian said about the monks in Egypt, "I saw them in prayer. When they have finished reciting the Psalm they do not prostrate themselves in a hurry, as if it is a duty they want to get out of the way, like many of us do. On the contrary, they stand for a while to raise a short prayer, then they prostrate themselves in awe and great devotion. After that, they get to their feet in a brisk manner, standing uprightly with all their thoughts absorbed in prayer."

The Church's Canon define the number and arrangement of such prostrations by saying, "the worshipper starts his prayer either with one or three prostrations. He should kneel down after each psalm or praise, or whenever the words "kneeling down" are contained in the prayer." Believers (and in particular monks) who prostrate themselves as a daily

routine during prayer follow these regulations. The aim of prostration is to offer thanks to the Lord for His great mercies, or for His help in a certain matter. These are known as thanksgiving prostrations.

Another aim of prostrating in prayer is to implore the Lord to grant us certain virtues or to pray for other people, saying such things as,

- ☒ “Thank You my Lord Jesus Christ, for You...”, or,
- ☒ “Grant me, O Lord, the life of purity”, or,
- ☒ “Grant me, O Lord, the life of patience and tolerance”, or,
- ☒ “Grant me, O Lord, the life of complete love”, or focusing on any of the other virtues.

Also a person may devote a number of prostrations on behalf of those who have asked him to pray for them. He may be motivated to offer worships for them without their knowledge through his love for them and his awareness of their needs. One may also devote some prostrations to the Lord for the Church and its fathers, or for the safety of the world and its leaders, and so on.

On the topic of prostration in prayer, Mar Isaac said,

- ☒ “Do not think that prostrating yourself before God is a light matter. None of all the good deeds equals persevering in completing prayers with prostrations.” He also said,
- ☒ “Compel yourself to kneel down before God, for this invigorates the spirit of prayer.” Also,

☒ “Persistence in offering bows every now and then, will give the vigilant worshipper the ideal atmosphere for worshipping.” And also,

☒ “A love for continual prostration before God during prayer is an indication that the soul has died to the world and has realised the mystery of the new life.”

The Church does not allow prostration on Saturdays and Sundays or during the fifty days of Pentecost or after having Holy Communion.

2. The Prostration of Repentance

There are two types of these prostrations:

☒ Offering metanias to God, asking Him to have mercy on us, to give us the life of repentance and to forgive us our sins. These prostrations may be given as a task from our father of confession for the repentance of a certain sin, either for practice or as a corrective measure.

☒ Offered by a person to his brethren after a meeting of discussion or reconciliation. The other party should accept these metanias and offer a similar metania in return, then they should shake hands in love,

☒ reconciliation and forgiveness, as it is written in the Bible,

“Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day and seven times a day

returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him" (Luke 17:3-4).

The word “metanoia” is a Greek word which means repentance, that is, to change the mind from that which is wrong to that which is right. St. Paul says,

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2).

Prostrations offered from the heart are a powerful action in attempting to attain the forgiveness of those whom you have transgressed against. If sincere, they can wipe out all effects of insult or transgression, and refill the heart with a love greater than it felt before.

In *“The Paradise of the Fathers”* a famous spiritual book on the life and sayings of the desert fathers, there is a story about two brothers who were devout monks living in the wilderness of Sheheet. The devil became keen to drive a wedge between these two brothers. One day the younger brother lit a lamp and put it on its stand, but through Satan’s trickery, the lamp fell down and was extinguished. The older monk became very upset and hit his brother. At this, the younger brother bowed down and said, “Do not get upset my brother. Just be patient and I will light the lamp again”, repeating himself many times. When God saw how meek the younger brother was He tortured that devil until morning. The devil then went to the leader of demons, and told him what had happened. A priest of the idols who served the demons heard this story, and upon hearing it, left everything, believed, and joined the order of the monastic life. Right

from the start of his monasticism, he practiced humility. He used to say, “Humility can overcome, dissolve and suppress all the power of the enemy.

He once said: “I once heard demons say to each other, ‘Every time we are found between monks, we see them offering metanias to each other, suppressing our powers’.”

Prostrations and repentance are signs of humility, a fear of God, and the following of the commandments by the worshipper. Such virtues cannot be tolerated by the devil, as it burns him.

3. Prostrations of Honour

There are two kinds of these prostrations:

i. Metanias offered before the bodies of the martyrs and saints to honour their bodies because they endured devotion, hunger, thirst, tears and sweat on account of their great love for our Lord, Jesus Christ. Through this they became a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit. We honour them according to the promise of our Lord, Who said,

“For those who honour Me, I will honour, and those who despise Me, shall be lightly esteemed” (1Sam.2:30).

With such prostrations we also honour God, Who worked in them and led them to the shores of eternal peace. Through honouring the saints we also ask for their prayers and intercessions, as they reflect the Light of Christ. As the saints are a mirror image of the Light of Christ, this Light is then transmitted to us.

The prayers and intercessions of the saints are a formidable power and blessing, working in favour of our salvation and spiritual well being. In heaven the saints fulfil the Lord's Will by caring and supplicating for us. Here on earth, we too fulfil God's will by honouring their commemorations and glorifying their relics and icons. We also ask them to envelope us with their love and prayers of intercession. There are no barriers between heaven and earth, but instead, a strong communication between us and the saints, based on supplication and prayers.

His grace Abba Gregorious, Bishop of Higher Studies and Research, was asked, "Would your Grace shed some light on the church's teachings regarding honouring the saints' relics?", to which he answered, "The relics of the saints have engravings on them, telling their life stories; of their strife and their virtues. Didn't the Apostle Paul say,

***'I bear on my body the marks of Lord Jesus'?* (Gal.6:17)**

Every strain that was felt by St. Paul left a mark on his body. This happens to everyone. When an autopsy is performed on someone's skull, they find that his knowledge, his feelings and sensations, and his spiritual, mental and carnal experiences have all left marks on his brain. These marks are known as wrinkles. Affected also are most of the body's organs."

The struggles of life leave marks not only on the outside of the body, but also on every cell inside the body. This is why the same body that slept will rise in resurrection; whatever one sows he will reap. Each body therefore differs from every other body. In resurrection, the molecules of one body will not be mixed with those of other bodies, despite

decomposition. In other words, there will be no mix up between bodies because each individual body will have the marks of his own life, and that will distinguish it from all the others. For this reason we honour the relics of the saints. We realise and we believe that those relics were the dwellings of the saints, and on every part of these relics are the marks of their lives. Every bone of St. Athanasious, for example, bears the qualities of St. Athanasious. Every molecule of his organs or his bones summarise his whole life.

ii. Metanias offered to the fathers of the Church, the Patriarch or bishops, are the second type of Prostrations of Honour in which we honour them as a sign of our love and obedience as they are ambassadors for Christ and successors of the Apostles in the holy Church. We also prostrate in worship to the Holy Spirit which dwells in them, through which they consecrate altars and ordain priests and deacons.

The Holy Bible is full of evidence that Prostrations of Honor to the clergy are proper. Here are just four examples taken from many.

- ☒ Firstly, Joshua bowed to the commander of the Lord's army (Joshua 5:14).
- ☒ Secondly, the man who came to inform David about the death of both Saul and Jonathan bowed before him (2 Sam 1:2).
- ☒ Thirdly, the third captain of fifty men fell on his knees before Elijah (2 Kings 1:13).
- ☒ Finally, King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face before Daniel (Dan.2:46).

In the New Testament a rich young man, when he saw Jesus, thought he was one of the good Jewish teachers and ran and knelt before Him, asking Him,

“O Good teacher, what should I do to inherit the eternal life?” (Mark 10:17).

His kneeling to Christ was therefore not to worship Him, as he did not know of His Divinity, but rather for honoring as he was used to doing with his Jewish teachers. There was also a woman who, upon approaching Christ,

“...came and fell at His feet and...kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter” (Mark 7:25,26).

Once again a prostration of honour and not of worship. The father of the epileptic boy bowed to Jesus to honor Him, as the man knew nothing about His Divinity,

“and when they came to the crowd, a man came up to Him and kneeling before Him said, “Lord, have mercy on my son” (Matt.17:14-15).

Honouring the fathers of the Church is a holy obligation. St. Paul the Apostle teaches us this, saying,

“Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who Labor in the word and teaching” (1Tim.5:17).

As for the kneeling of Cornelius (the centurion in the Roman army) before Peter (Acts 10:26), it seemed that the pagan Roman officer bowed in worship as he had been accustomed to do before the Roman emperors, who considered

themselves divine. Furthermore, Cornelius heard about St. Peter from a holy Angel in a divine vision. The Angel said nothing to Cornelius concerning his salvation; he left that to St. Peter, saying,

“Simon Peter will tell you what to do.”

Cornelius over-reacted and exaggerated in his honor for St. Peter, who stopped him before he went too far. The Apostles Paul and Barnabas did a similar thing in Lystra when the priest of Zeus brought oxen and wreaths to their gates and wanted to offer sacrifices with the people, saying,

“The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men”
(Acts 14:13).

History also tells us that Abba Antonious the Great, father of all monks, used to honour the clergymen. Apostolic St. Athanasious, wrote in his famous book, ‘The Life of Abba Antonious’, “...moreover, he was docile and meek with a humble spirit. Although he had reached very high standards himself, he still strictly observed the Church Canon and tended to honour all clergymen more than himself. He never shunned away from bowing before Bishops of priests.”.

In the biography of Apostolic Patriarch Athanasious, the twentieth Pope of Alexandria, we read, “When Abba Macidonious, Bishop of Phyla Island in Nuba, slept in the Lord, the people chose priest Marcus, one of his disciples to take his place. A deputation of the people accompanied priest Marcus, the Bishop Designate, to Alexandria to see Pope Athansious regarding the consecration. When they arrived in Alexandria and asked for the Pope, he was nowhere to be found in the Patriarchate or in the church as

he was known to have loved seclusion and calmness. Someone told the delegation that the Pope had been hiding in a small monastery west of Alexandria and he volunteered to take them there. As the delegation approached the monastery, a deacon came out to meet them and they told him of the delegation's mission. The deacon went back inside the monastery and told the Pope. The delegation went inside and fell down on their knees to the ground at the sight of the Pope. The Holy Spirit had already revealed to the Pope the reason for the delegation's mission and of the selection of Marcus as successor to Abba Macdonious before they had even arrived."

In the Sinaxarium (20th Toot) is the story of St. Theobesty, who, although her husband had died while she was still in the prime of her life, she pledged to wear the robe of monks. She went to see Abba Maccari, Bishop of Nicea (in the province of Menoufia, Egypt) and knelt down before him. After receiving his blessings she asked him to pray over her and dress her in the robe of monks. These examples show us that Prostrations of Honor before the Patriarchs and the Bishops is an old and established tradition in the holy church.

THE OFFERING OF INCENSE TO A HEGOMEN

This procedure occurs during the raising of the Morning or Vespers Incense, and also in the Liturgy. After the priest offers the incense to the attending Patriarch or Bishop he incenses to the priests who are present. The priest who performs the Incense Round opens the palms of his hands, the censer still hanging from the little finger of his right hand. He then says to the hegomen, "I ask you, my father the

hegomen, to remember me in your prayers, so that our Lord Jesus may forgive me my numerous sins.” The hegomen places his right palm on the open left palm of the serving priest and then turns his hand over with the back of his hand touching the priest’s palm. Moving his hand, he then does the same thing on the priest’s right palm. He performs the whole procedure twice through, after which the two of them hold hands and prostrate before each other, kissing each other’s hand. At this time, the hegomen responds to the priest’s request by saying, “May the Lord preserve your priesthood like Melchizedek, Aaron, Zacharias and Simeon, the priests of the Most High God, Amen.”

The above procedure takes place when the priest who is incensing is the associate priest and not the serving priest (the one offering the sacrifice). If the incensing priest is also the serving priest, the hegomen says, “May the Lord accept your sacrifice like Melchizedek, Aaron, Zacharias and Simeon, the priests of the Most High God, Amen”, the word sacrifice being substituted for the word priesthood.

THE OFFERING OF INCENSE TO A PRIEST

The procedure is the same as that stated above, whereby the priest who is to perform the Incense Circuit opens the palms of his hands, the other priest responding in the same way as in the case of a hegomen (as seen above), his response being guided by whether or not the priest is offering the sacrifice.

Some Points on Offering Incense to the Clergy

☒ The aim of offering incense to clergymen, in general, is to involve them all in the offering of incense and in raising their prayers and supplications to the Lord. This intention can be seen in the incensing priest's request of his associate which asks the associate to pray for him, while they offer incense to the Lord together, coupled with a supplication for the Lord's assistance. This is known as the 'Fellowship of Incense'. Such 'fellowship' can be seen in the Bible when the Apostle Paul said,

“They gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship” (Gal 2:9),

☒ referring to the Apostles who gave them fellowship as they were fellows in the ministry.

☒ Incense is offered three times before a bishop, twice before a hegomen, and once before a priest. The priestly kiss that is exchanged between a priest and a hegomen is called 'The Oath of the Community', that is, the community of 'incense'.

☒ The tradition of offering incense to the clergy is still followed in some other orthodox Churches.

☒ The detail given in the Liturgy to describe the offering of incense to the clergy is evidence of its importance as being a proper rite of the church.

☒ It is stated here that the offering of incense to a Bishop is the same as offering it to a priest, except for the difference in the number of hands offered (3 to the bishop, 2 to the hegomen and 1 to the presveter).

THE INCENSE CIRCUIT OUTSIDE THE ALTAR

After incensing before the clergymen, the Incense Tour around the Church begins. Most churches nowadays have four rows of pews, with three aisles between them; to the North, south, and central. When the community of Incense finishes, the priest walks to the North of the sanctuary door to the iconostasis and offers incense before the icons of the angels, the apostles and saints. Here he prays such prayers as:

- ☒ “Hail to Archangel Gabriel”, while standing before Archangel Gabriel’s icon,
- ☒ “Hail to the martyr, St. George”, before the icon of St. George,
- ☒ “Hail to the martyr, Saint Mina”, before the icon of Saint Mina, or
- ☒ “Hail to the Saint Abba Antonious”, before the icon of Abba Antonious.

He continues as such until he reaches the door of the northern sanctuary where he bows and raises incense saying,

- ☒ “Hail to the sanctuary of God the Father.”

He then continues offering incense before the icons on the North side of the iconostasis.

After offering incense before the icons to the North of the sanctuary the priest proceeds Westward among the congregation, offering incense and blessing them, saying,

☒ During Vespers Incense: “The blessing of the Vespers incense be with us, Amen.”

☒ During Morning Incense: “The blessing of the Morning incense be with us, Amen.”

He then walks to the North-West corner of the Church behind all the seats at the back and then walks South until he reaches the centre walkway. He walks down the centre walkway towards the East until he reaches the middle sanctuary door, then he turns South to the iconostasis and offers incense to the icons there. He continues incensing before the icons on the South side of the iconostasis until he reaches the Southern sanctuary door where he bows and offers incense to the icons.

Moving from the Southern door the priest then he proceeds Westward down the Southern-most aisle of the Church, offering incense to the congregation and blessing them while repeating the phrase, “The Holy blessing of Vespers Incense/Matin Incense be with us, Amen.”.

The congregation respond with silent words of repentance, such as, “Lord Jesus Christ forgive me my sins of which I am aware, and those of which I am unaware”, or maybe, “O God, forgive me for I am a sinner”, or they may pray the Repentance Psalm (Ps.51), which begins, “Have mercy upon us O God...” The priest continues down the Southern walkway in a Westerly direction, until he reaches the back of the Church where he then turns North and travels behind the pews to the centre aisle. Again, he walks down the centre toward the East, while offering incense and blessing the congregation as before.

Some Points About the Incense Circuit

In ancient churches the words, “Hail to the sanctuary of God the Father”, was written on the front of the sanctuary door. The Church insists on calling it the sanctuary of “God the Father” for three reasons:

- ☒ The Liturgy that is celebrated in the sanctuary is for God the Father.
- ☒ The sacrifice of the Liturgy is the Body and Blood of God the Son.
- ☒ God, also being The Holy Spirit, sanctifies the mysteries and turns them into the True Body and Blood of Christ.

The priest offers incense to the icons of the martyrs and saints, believing that they are with us in spirit and praying with the priest. The martyrs and saints accept the incense and support us with their prayers and supplications exactly as though they were living; as they are now living in the unseen victorious Church while we are living in the struggling Church on earth.

Incense is only offered before icons that have been consecrated by the holy Myrrour oil. There is a special ritual for consecrating the icons which is performed by a bishop. On the issue of offering incense to the Icons of our Lord, God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, there are two opinions; one is that we should say, “Holy God”, both for the regular offering and on a special occasion, and the other is that we should say, “Hail to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ”, for the crucifixion icon, “Hail to the Resurrection of

our Lord Jesus Christ”, for the resurrection icon, “Hail to the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ”, for the ascension icon, and so on.

THE FIVE INSPIRING CONTEMPLATORY VERSES

Before he reaches the place of the Passover (Holy Week) Prayers, the priest recites the first verse of the Five Contemplatory Verses, saying, “Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever. He, being one Hypostasis, we worship and glorify Him.” This prayer glorifies the Lord Jesus, Who was crucified for us and saved us through His Honoured Blood, being taken from the Book of Hebrews (13:8), where St. Paul says, “ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever”.

When the priest reaches the place where the crucifixion icon is usually placed on Good Friday, he stops and completes the other four verses. Incensing towards the East, he says the second verse, “This is He Who raised Himself as an acceptable sacrifice on the cross for our salvation”, referring to Christ, Who sacrificed Himself so that no one who believed in His Name might perish, but would live forever. The Righteous died for us to save us from the yoke of sin, and to transfer us to the glorious freedom that belongs to God’s children, and to the Kingdom of Heaven. The Apostle Paul says, “As Christ also has loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph.5:2). Jesus Christ is the Perfect Priest and, at the same time, is also the Perfect Sacrifice.

The priest then raises incense towards the North saying the third verse, “So His Good Father smelled it on Golgotha in the afternoon.” This refers to God the Father smelling the sweet aroma when He saw the Son on the cross; through His Crucifixion, the Son gave the Godly righteous His right. He Who is without sin, became a sacrifice of sin, so we become righteous through Him. The Father accepted the sacrifice of Golgotha for the sins of the whole world as “a fragrant offering” (Eph.5:2), the fragrance of satisfaction.

The priest then raises incense towards the West while facing the main Western door of the church (a symbol for the door of Paradise) and says the fourth verse, “He opened to us the gates of Paradise and returned Adam to his rightful place.” He then he raises incense toward the South while saying the fifth verse, “Because of His cross and Holy Resurrection, He returned man once more to Paradise”. All five of these verses are a glorification for Christ, Who was crucified for our sake, and gave us salvation. All mention the crucifixion, which is why they are said in the crucifixion icon place of Good Friday.

The priest then continues walking Eastward down the centre aisle, all the time offering incense to the congregation and blessing them, until he reaches the sanctuary door. Standing at the altar, he puts one spoonful of incense into the censer, saying, “Glory and honour, honour and glory to the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

With the penitent prayers and collective repentance that is offered by the congregation during the incense tour, the priest goes back to the altar and prays The Mystery of Confession.

THE MYSTERY OF CONFESSION

This mystery is also called The Mystery of the Return, as the priest says it after he returns from the Incense Tour. Here he raises incense over the altar while saying the Mystery of the Congregation's Confession, saying,

“O God, as You accepted the repentance of the thief on Your right while on the cross, accept the confession of Your people. Forgive all their sins for the sake of Your Holy Name which is called upon us, and according to Your mercy and not on account of our sins.” In this prayer the priest asks God to accept the confessions and repentance of his people, just as He accepted the confession and repentance of the thief at Golgotha. He also asks the Lord that He may prepare the congregation to partake of His Mysterious Dinner. He then goes once around the altar, raising incense, before departing via the sanctuary's main door. Standing before the sanctuary door the priest again raises incense in the four directions (as he has done previously) then offers incense to the Holy Bible and the senior clergymen.

Having done this, the priest then hangs the censer in its place. It is preferable to follow the authentic Coptic tradition of hanging the censer by its chain in the centre of the Sanctuary's entrance, as was done in the ancient Coptic churches. This ascending incense gives comfort to the spirit and soul of the congregation through its sweet fragrance, as it represents the prayers that are rising to the Throne of Grace which the Angel offers to the Divine Glory, as in the quote,

“ And another Angel came and stood at the Altar with a golden censer; and he was given much incense to mingle with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar before the Throne. And the smoke of the incense rose with the prayers of the saints from the hand of the Angel before God” (Rev. 8:3-4).

The priest worships the Lord before the altar, then stands to its right side until the end of the Doxologies and the Creed.

FURTHER REMARKS ON THE INCENSE CIRCUIT

A lovely old tradition which is still occasionally followed today sees the priest place his hand on each individual's head while he is incensing among the congregation.

The reason for doing this is threefold. Firstly, it is to give them blessings; secondly, to recognise the attending congregation and understand their spiritual standing during the mass; and thirdly, to receive a brief confession from those who might have trespassed after their last confession. Today it is left up to each individual to pray the following short prayer while the priest is touring with the incense, saying, “Lord Jesus Christ, forgive me my sins of which I am aware, and those of which I am unaware”.

THE PRAYER OF ‘EPHNOTI NAI NAN’ - ‘LORD HAVE MERCY UPON US’

After the Doxology and the Creed, the priest holds the cross with three lit candles to signify that He Who was crucified is the Light of the world, sacrificing Himself to give light to those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death. The priest stands in reverence in front of the Sanctuary. He spreads both his arms, holding the cross with the three lit candles in his right hand, while the left hand is being opened in supplication and humility.

While facing due East, and without signing Without Making The Sign of the Cross, he chants, “Lord have mercy, establish Your mercy upon us.” Still facing East, he then makes the sign of the cross, and says, “Have compassion upon us.” He turns to face the North and, while signing the cross, says, “Hear us.” Then he turns towards the West, gives the blessings to the congregation, and says, “Bless us.” The congregation bow their heads to receive the blessings. The priest then turns to the South and says, “Protect us,” while making the sign of the cross. He then turns to the East once more, and with the sign of the cross, he says, “Support us.” Still facing East, he completes the Litany without signing, saying, “Take Your wrath away from us, tend to us with Your salvation and forgive us our sins.”

Some Points on the Prayer Of ‘Ephnoti Nai Nan’

- ▣ During Vespers Incense the priest chants this Litany in the ‘long tune’, but in the Morning Incense he uses the ‘short tune’ because the service is too long.

☒ When the priest chants the Litany in the ‘long tune’, the congregation responds by singing “Lord have mercy” three times, also using the ‘long tune’. During the congregation’s response the priest remains facing East with his hands raised, being absorbed in a warm prayer of pleas for mercy. Some Liturgy Books state that during this time the priest prays inaudibly the second litany in the Gregorian Liturgy, which begins, “Healing for the sick, comfort for the needy”.

THE LITANY OF THE GOSPEL

At the end of the congregation’s response, the priest makes a sign of the cross over the congregation with the cross and the lit candles, and says, “Let us pray”, followed by, “Peace be with you all.”

He then blows out the candles and gives them to the deacon, crosses the box of incense, and puts another spoonful of incense into the censer while saying the Litany of the Gospel.

Standing before the sanctuary, he then offers incense to the Bible while saying, “We worship before the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, through the prayers of David the Psalmist and Prophet. O Lord grant us the forgiveness of our sins.” Entering the sanctuary with the censer, the priest then goes around the altar performing the Round of the Gospel while saying, “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace.” Then the Gospel is read in Coptic and in Arabic or English.

THE FIVE MINOR LITANIES

Having put one spoonful of incense in the censer, the priest stands before the door of the sanctuary and prays the Five Minor Litanies concerning Safety, the Church Fathers, the Holy Places, the Weather and Vegetation, and the Congregations.

THE ABSOLUTIONS

The priest then takes the cross from the deacon and recites the three absolutions; two of them are prayed in silence while facing the East, and the third is said audibly while facing the congregation (West). While the priest is saying the third absolution, the congregation bow their heads, asking for absolution and forgiveness. These three absolutions are the same prayers that our spiritual father prays on us after confession.

The First Absolution:

This prayer is called a Prayer of Submission to the Son, as stated below with its Biblical references: “

O Lord, Who has given authority unto us to tread upon serpents and scorpions and upon all the power of the enemy...”, as Christ gave to His disciples when He told them,

“Behold I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you” (Luke10:19). “

...Crush its heads beneath our feet speedily...”, as the Apostle prayed on behalf of the Romans (16:20) when he said,

“And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.” “

May You destroy all his evil thoughts that are against us...”, as such evil thoughts, vicious fights and deceptive sights are planted in our minds by the devil in an attempt to occupy our thoughts. The priest prays to the Lord that He disperse these away from himself, and from us all, saying, “...For You are our King....”

The Second Absolution:

This is also a Prayer of Submission to the Son: “

For You O Lord who descended from the heavens...”, as the Lord of Glory said about Himself,

"For I have come down from heaven not to do My will but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 6:38). “

..You became man...”, as the Apostle stated,

“But He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant and coming in the likeness of men, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (Phil.2:7-8). “

To save mankind...”, as the Bible says,

“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners, of whom I am chief” (1Tim.1:15). “

You are He who sits upon the Cherubim and the Seraphim, beholding those who are lowly...”, as mentioned in First Chronicles(13:6), which says,

“To bring up from the ark of God the Lord Who dwells between the Cherubim”,

and also, Isaiah the Prophet (6:1-2) says,

“I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood Seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew”. “

Now also our Master, we lift up the eyes of our hearts to You, Who forgives sins and saves our souls from corruption...”, as stated in the Book of Psalms (102:3-5) which says,

“Hear my prayer, O Lord...for my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burnt like a hearth. My heart is stricken and withered like grass, so that I forget to eat my bread. Because of the sound of my groaning my bones cling to my skin.” “

We worship Your unutterable compassion, and ask You to give us Your peace, as You have given all things unto us...”, which repeats Isaiah’s prayer,

“Lord, You will establish peace for us, for You have also done all our works in us” (Is.26:12). “

Acquire us unto Yourself, God and Saviour, for we know none other than You, for Your Holy Name we do utter...”

The church is the bride of Christ which He acquired with His blood, and so the elders of the church are advised to, “take heed to yourselves and to all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own Blood” (Acts 20:28). Paul the Apostle says,

“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him Who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light” (1Pet.2:9)

. If the Lord acquires us with His Blood, we are His own, we love Him, and are faithful to Him, as we say in the Litany of Safety, “We do not know anyone other than You, we say Your Holy Name.”“

So fill us, O Lord, with Your fear, for our only desire is for You. Rejoice that we abide in Your goodness, and those who revere You, exalt them in their ways of life and adorn them with virtues. And may we all be worthy of Your Heavenly Kingdom, through the goodwill of our Gracious Father, with Whom You are blessed together with the Holy Spirit....”

Through this absolution the priest is therefore asking the Lord to grant us His peace which we have lost because of our sins, for sin destroys peace, as seen in the quote,

“There is no peace, says the Lord, for the wicked” (Isaiah 48:22).

The priest also prays that we are filled with God’s fear, for the fear of God is very important in one’s spiritual life. It may be noted that when the priest asks for peace, he says, “Give us Your peace”, but when he asks for fear, he says, “Fill us with Your fear.”

St. Antonious, father of all monks, said, “The crown of wisdom is the fear of God. Just as light disperses darkness and illuminates a dark house, so does the fear of God when it enters a man’s heart. It drives ignorance away and brings every virtue and wisdom.” The priest is also praying to direct us towards a desire for God. Our taste for spirituality changes because of sin, just as good food tastes different in a sick person’s mouth. As a result of sin, our yearning to God becomes tepid. The priest therefore asks the Lord to give us back our longing for Him, as in the saying, “Draw me after you, let us make haste” (Song of Songs 1:4), lest we be drawn to sin and die.

The Third Absolution:

The priest prays this absolution while facing the West and bowing his head:“

O Lord Jesus Christ the Only Begotten Son...”, as the Lord Jesus said about Himself, “He is the Only Begotten Son in the Bosom of the Father” (John 1:18).“

...And the Word of God, the Logos...”, as St. John saw Him,

“clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His Name is called the Word of God” (Revelation 19:14).“

...Who rid us from the bondage of sin through His death on the cross. You breathed into the face of Your holy and honoured disciples and saintly Apostles saying, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you will remit, they are remitted to them, and those which you will retain, they shall be retained’ ...”, as mentioned in John (20:21-23), which says,

“Then Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you’. And when He said this, He breathed on them , and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’” “

Now also, O our Master, through Your holy Apostles, as You gave grace to those who laboured in the priesthood in Your holy church to forgive sins upon the earth, and to bind and to loose every bond of iniquity, we also ask and entreat Your goodness, O lover of mankind, to remember Your servants...(Here the priest makes the sign of the cross on the congregation twice, saying,)...my fathers and brethren...(then on himself, saying,)...and my weakness. Those who bow their heads before Your Holy glory, grant unto us Your mercy and loose every bond of our sins. If we have committed any sin against You, whether knowingly or unknowingly or through anguish of heart, O Master Who knows the weakness of men, grant us the forgiveness of our sins, You great and merciful God.”

The priest makes a sign of the cross on Himself, on the deacons, and then on the congregation saying, “Bless us,

purify us, absolve us and absolve all Your people. Fill us with Your fear and help us to live according to Your Holy good will, for You are our God to Whom be glory, honor and dominion, now and forevermore, Amen.”

In this absolution we gain forgiveness for the sins for which we have actually repented. We should note that this absolution covers all sins; those which we know about, and those we do not, whether a sin by word of mouth, or by deed.

As each person here is bowing in reverence they should pray silently a secret prayer, such as, “I ask You Lord to forgive my sins, because You are not pleased with the death of a sinner, but to return and live. Forgive my sins, O Lord, and whiten my clothes in the Blood of Your Beloved Son, Who became a sacrifice for my sins. Let me be a partner to those who repented, grant me tears to weep for my iniquities, grant me grace to abide in my repentance, and never go back to sin.” They should also silently pray Psalm 50, which begins, “Be merciful to me O Lord according to the multitude of Your tender mercies...”, ending with The Lord’s Prayer. At the end of the absolution, the congregation proceeds towards the priest to kiss the cross, the Bible, and the priest’s hand.

THE BLESSING

Some priests leave the blessing out because it is too long. The priest says the blessing while facing the West. The following is a brief blessing, but the name of the church’s patron saint, or the saint whose feast is being celebrated,

should be mentioned; “May God have compassion upon us, bless us, make His face to shine upon us, and have mercy upon us. Lord save Your people, bless and uplift the Christians everywhere, through the supplications and prayers of the Lady of us all, the holy Theotokos St. Mary, and the holy Archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, and all the heavenly hosts, and our fathers the Apostles, the martyrs, the saints and the crossbearers, and the blessed saint and angel of this day. May their holy blessings, their grace, their favour, their love, and their support be with us all forever, Amen.”

The priest then says, “Christ is our God”, and the congregation responds with, “Amen, let it be so.” Facing the East, the priest continues, “O King of Peace, grant us Your peace and forgive us our sins, for unto You is power, glory.... Amen.” He also asks the angel of peace to accompany each member of the congregation as they leave the church, until they arrive at their homes. Then together with the congregation, the priest prays The Lord’s Prayer.

THE DISMISSAL

During the raising of the Vespers Incense, or if the Holy Liturgy is to be held late after raising the Morning Incense, the priest dismisses the congregation saying, “Go in peace, the Lord be with you all, Amen”, and the congregation respond, saying, “And also with you.” Under normal circumstances, however, the holy liturgy is celebrated immediately after the raising of the Morning Incense, and therefore the Dismissal not said. In this case, the deacons proceed into the sanctuary to put on their white garments of service.



2 The Offertory

THE RITUAL OF THE OFFERTORY

WEARING THE VESTMENTS

While putting on the service garments the priest should go over his thoughts and find himself pure and reconciled with everyone, remembering the Apostle's words, "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift.

Agree with your adversary quickly while you are on the way with him" (Matt.5:23-25).

His body and clothes should be clean and ready for service. He should make sure that the Lamb (the Holy Bread) is prepared, and also that the flask is full of good wine. He begins by doing the sign of the cross on his service garments, and on the deacons' garments, before wearing them. While this is taking place Psalms (29) 30 The Orthodox Translation of the Psalm Gives the Psalms slightly different numbers. and (92) 93 are read. The significance of each Psalm is seen below:

Psalms 30

I will extol You O Lord for You have lifted me up and have not let my foes rejoice over me..."

The priest then thanks God for choosing him for this honourable service because no one can claim this rank or this ministry for himself, but must be chosen by the Lord, as was Aaron, the brother of Moses. He thanks God for adopting him like a son and giving him the priestly office, thus becoming the Lord's possession. The Lord has assigned the priest to reside in His house like an obedient son in his father's home, making him a shepherd for His holy flock and a minister to His Holy Sacraments. The priest puts on the tunic which covers and shrouds his body as if it hugs him symbolising the Divine embrace which accepts and encloses the repentant who have returned to the Lord through heartfelt penitence.

Lord Jesus is the Good Shepherd,

“Like a shepherd He will gather the lambs in His arms, He will carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those that are with young” (Isaiah 40:11).

In His love, “He goes after the one which is lost until He finds it. And when He has found it, He lays it on His shoulders, rejoicing and brings it home” (Luke 15:4-6). Jesus also took the children in His arms, laid His hand upon them and blessed them (Mark 10:16).

There is a curvature in the Eastern Wall of the Sanctuary, known as The Eastern of the Sanctuary, which symbolises the Lord's embracing bosom, His compassion and His care. The lit lamp that is always hanging there represents the Lord's watchful eye which beholds and guards the whole world, especially those who call His Name and throw themselves into His bosom;

“For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show His might on behalf of those whose heart is blameless toward Him” (2Chron.16:9).“

Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning...” (Psalm 30:5).

Since the priest is going to serve the sacraments and partake of the Holy Communion he should be prepared, that is, repentant. Therefore, on the night before a Holy Mass he should offer true repentance to God, weep, and ask forgiveness of his sins so that in the morning when he wears the white garments his heart is as white as his clothes, being full of joy and happiness. The evening and night time represent a life of darkness and sin when a person becomes weary in heart and mind but the life of purity and repentance is clear and white like the daylight when a person feels happy and joyful in heart and mind.“

You have turned my weeping into joy. You have torn down my sack cloth and clothed me with gladness, so that my soul praises You and my heart laments no more...” (Ps.30:11),

As the priest has offered true repentance and a humble heart to the Lord, He has turned his weeping, his tears and his sadness into gladness and great joy. The Lord has removed the sackcloth of sadness and dressed him in the magnificent priestly robes, to serve the Him in honour and glory. He raised him from the dust and humbleness of penitence, and sat him down with the elders of His people. He appointed him as shepherd to His holy flock and as minister to His Divine and Immortal Mysteries. The priest’s soul praises the

Lord and his heart laments no more. Every day he gets strength through the Holy Communion to fight and overcome sin. “

O Lord, my God, I confess to You forever” (Ps.30:12).

For all the blessings the Lord has bestowed upon him the priest gives thanks to the Lord and acknowledges His favors for the rest of his life. “My soul blesses the Lord and remembers all His benefactions. He forgives all her sins, cures her ailments, He redeems her life from the pit, covers her with mercy and compassion, He fills her days with goodness and her youth is renewed like the eagle’s” (Ps.103:1-5).

Psalm 93

The Lord reigns, He is clothed with majesty, the Lord is clothed, and girded Himself with strength...” (Psalm 93).

As the priest puts on his liturgical garments for the service of the altar of God he confesses that the Lord is His King, his authority coming from God Who is perfect in power and greatness. He serves the Lord as a soldier serves his king - dressed in full uniform. When the priest puts on the priestly white robes he confesses that the Lord is clothed with majesty and has girded Himself with strength; He is the King Who reigns over the whole earth, the priest being like one of the serving angels who stood by the door of the tomb “in white clothes” (John 20:12). He puts on the white garments to serve and partake of the Sacraments so that he may gain power in his struggles as stated in the promise,

“He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments” (Rev.3:5).

The priests and deacons clothed in their beautiful white garments resemble the revelation of the heavenly multitude as seen by St. John, who said,

“After these things I looked and behold, a great multitude which no one could number of all nations, peoples and tongues standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes with palm branches in their hands and crying out with a loud voice saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb” (Rev.7:9-10).“

The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voices, the floods lift up their waves” (Ps.93:3).

“He who believes in Me, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38).

The word ‘river’ refers to the Spirit of God and His work in the human soul, as the quote refers to the Holy Spirit which the believers were about to receive. It also refers to the children of God, in whom and through whom the Holy Spirit works vigorously.

The priest addresses God saying, “O Lord, we are Your children, anointed with Your Holy Spirit; we ask for Your help, we cry amidst the troubles and hardships facing us in this world. We seek refuge in You O Lord ‘escaping the corruption that is in the world through lust’ (2 Peter 1:4), we resort to You, O Lord, in Your heavenly house, exactly as

Noah and his family found refuge in the ark and were saved from the destroying deluge.”

The tunic which is worn during the service becomes a spiritual weapon as it protects and contains the wearer. The priest continues, saying, “O Lord, give us comfort to our troubled souls, which are trembling with fear from the adversaries who want to swallow us alive, when their anger kindles against us, the floods may sweep us away and the torrent may go over us. We seek refuge in You O Lord, crying with the Psalmist, ‘Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mine where the floods overflow me. I am weary with my crying, my throat is dry, my eyes fail while I wait for my God, those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head’.” (Ps.69:1-4). “Rescue me and deliver me out of great waters, from the hands of foreigners” (Ps.144:7).

When we find refuge in the Lord we feel He is very close to us, we feel His care, according to His Divine promise; “Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him, I will set him on high because he has known My name. He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him. I will be with him in trouble,

I will deliver him and honour him and show him My salvation” (Ps.91:14-16).

In experiencing the truth of these promises, we shall sing together with the bride in the Song of Songs, saying,

“His left hand is under my head, and His right hand embraces me” (Songs 2:6),

and with the Psalmist, who said,

“He drew me out of many waters, He delivered me from my strong enmity, from those who hated me, for they were too strong for me. They confronted me in the day of my calamity but the Lord was my support” (Ps.18:16-19),

and with the Prophet Isaiah, who said,

“When the enemy comes like a flood, the Spirit of God will lift up a standard against him” (Is.59:19).

When the children of God achieve victory they rejoice, as the Psalm, which states,

“all rivers will applaud and mountains will rejoice in the Lord” (Ps.98:8).

If the waves of the sea are high and fearful do not be afraid, because,

“...The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, than the mighty waves of the sea. Your testimonies are very sure...” (Ps.93:4-5).

The Lord is more powerful than all of our enemies. He can easily give us victory and set us free. In His strength there is marvellous comfort and care. He gave us His Holy Body and Honoured Blood in a mysterious and incomprehensible way; becoming spiritual food and drink which will allow us to live forever if we partake of them with merit, repentance and humility. From them we draw the strength that enables us to face the torrent that tries to sweep us away and we can stand

up to the fury of the sea; we can win victory over the world through Jesus Christ, Who is within us.

The Lord's testimonies are true; His words are clarified like gold and silver which are purified seven times. Therefore, we firmly believe that what we eat is His Holy Body and what we drink is His Honoured Blood, as He Himself said,

“This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me...This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My Blood” (Luke 22:19-21).“

...Holiness befits Your house, O Lord, forevermore” (Ps.93:5).

The church is the house of God; it is where the sacraments are officiated and where we partake of the Holy Body and Blood of our Lord. For this reason the church is to be revered and respected, as David says,

“For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand of my own choosing, I would rather be a door keeper in the house of my God, than dwell in the tents of wickedness” (Ps.84:10), “Oh worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness” (Ps.96:9).

The priests and deacons who are celebrating the Holy Mass in their white vestments resemble the angels who praise and chant before the throne of God, the church thus becoming the Heavenly Jerusalem on earth. They praise God, sanctify the church through their prayers, and partake of the Holy Communion.

CLOTHING THE ALTAR/THE PRAYER OF PREPARATION

The priest wipes any dust that may be on the altar, then unwraps the utensils that are used for the Holy Communion. At this time, these utensils are enclosed in a special cloth, and tied with three knots. As the priest unties each knot, he does the sign of the cross on it, and then begins the Prayer of Preparation which is stated below with adjoining references:“

O Lord who knows the hearts of all...”. David the Psalmist says,

“For He knows the secrets of the heart” (Ps.44:2)..

“The Lord looks from Heaven, He sees all the sons of men. From the place of His habitation, He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth. He fashions their hearts individually, He considers all their works” (Ps.33:13-15).“

..The Holy dwelling in His Saints...”. God who is all Holy cannot bear seeing evil and cannot abide in evil doers. For this reason the Lord only dwells with those who are righteous.“

...He who is without sin is mighty to forgive our sins...”, as Jesus told the paralytic,

“Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven.” When the scribes murmured accusing Him of blasphemy,

He assured them, saying,

“But that you may know that the Son of Man has power to forgive sins” (Matt.9:2-6).“

...You Lord know my extreme unworthiness, unpreparedness and my undeservedness for this holy service, which is for You, I have no merit to draw near and open my mouth before Your Holy Glory...”. Truly this is an awesome and blessed service bestowed upon the weak, sinful human, that he should stand before the Holy Altar of God, interceding for his people, and to carry the Holy and Precious Body and Blood of the Lord, seeing that which the angels desire to see.“

But according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, forgive me for I am a sinner...”. Here the priest resembles the tax collector who could not raise his eyes up to heaven, but kept beating his chest saying,

“God be merciful to me, a sinner” (Luke 18:13).“

...And grant unto me that I may find grace and mercy at this hour and send me strength from above...”.

The priest begins wiping the utensils and a large covering is placed over the altar. This covering is placed beneath the throne so that the paten does not fall accidentally during the service or when the priest kneels.

On top of this large covering he puts another cover, (usually of a red or blue colour), which serves the purpose of showing up any tiny particles of the precious Body which may have fallen during the Fraction or while the Holy Sacrament was being given out. The priest then places on

top of the paten a dome symbolising the star that appeared over the manger at the birth of our Saviour.

Over the dome, the priest places two small veils. The first veil is used to cover the paten after the Offertory Litany, and the second is used to wipe the chosen lamb. It is the second veil that is used to wrap the Lamb during the procession around the altar, and is later placed on top of the 'Prosfarine' to symbolise the seal on the Lord's tomb. The priest carefully wipes the chalice and places it inside the throne. The throne is also covered with a special veil that has an opening at the top. He then places the spoon (Masteer) upside-down on the right side of the chalice, the spoon's scooping head should be pointing to the East. He then covers the chalice and the spoon with another veil. All of this is done during the Preparation Prayer, which continues..."

...That I may begin and be made fit and may finish Your holy service according to the good pleasure of Your will, for a sweet aroma of incense...". This phrase echoes the reverent verses that are said during Raising of the Incense, which states, "He Who gave Himself up an acceptable sacrifice on the cross, for the salvation of mankind. His Good Father smelt the aroma at evening on the Golgotha." and as St. Paul said, "

As Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us a fragrant offering and a sacrifice of God for a sweet smelling aroma" (Eph.5:2)."

...O our Lord be with us, take part with us in this service, bless us...". Here he asks for the Lord's help and blessings so that he might complete the service and partake of the Holy Communion without condemnation."

...For You are the forgiveness of our sins, the light of our souls, and our strength and confidence in our lives...". God is everything in our lives; our lives are centred around God, for He is the One Who gives us strength."

For unto You we ascribe praise, glory...."

PREPARING THE ALTAR

(1) Preparing the altar symbolises the Upper Room in Zion,

"A large Upper Room furnished and prepared" (Mark 14:15),

to which our Saviour sent a couple of His disciples to prepare for the celebration of the Passover. In this same manner, the heart of every Christian approaching the Holy Sacraments should be pure and raised above all lowly, bodily and earthly matters. It should be a tolerant, forgiving and loving heart that has been prepared and cleaned of every sin and displeasing thought and is adorned with repentance and confession from a good spiritual life. Such a blessed heart is a sanctuary to the Lord Jesus Who finds comfort in His Saints. In such a heart the Lord can celebrate the Passover with His disciples.

(2) The altar coverings should remain until the end of the Holy Communion as taking the coverings away before the end of the Liturgy would be inappropriate; it would be like removing the ornaments before a visiting king left his palace.

PRAYER AFTER PREPARATION

The priest says the following prayer after he finishes preparing the altar: “

You ,O Lord, have taught us this great mystery of salvation. You have called us who are lowly and unworthy servants to be servants of Your holy altar. O You, our Lord, make us worthy to finish this service so that without falling into condemnation before Your Great Glory, we may offer up unto You a sacrifice of praise, glory and great beauty in Your sanctuary. O God, Who gives grace and sends forth salvation and works all in all...”. According to St. Paul,

“There are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the spirit is given to each one for the profit of all” (1Cor.12:6-7).“

...Grant that our sacrifices, O Lord, may be accepted before You for my sins and for the ignorance of Your people...”.

In the Old Testament it states that the priest offers up sacrifices first for his own sins and then for the people’s (Hebrews 7:27). The high priest in the Old Testament entered the most holy place once a year to

“offer with blood for himself and the ignorance of his people” (Heb.9:7).

Through this the church teaches the priest the spirit of penitence and humility, making him take all grave matters

and serious sins upon himself yet attribute mere errors and ignorance to the people.

This teaching is in accordance with the spirit of the Bible, which states,

“And that servant who knew his master’s will and did not prepare himself or o according to his will shall be beaten with many blows. But he who did not know yet committed things worthy of stripes shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, of him much be required, and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:47-48).

In Leviticus we read,

“If it is the anointed priest who sins, thus bringing guilt on the people then let him offer for the sin which he has committed a young bull without blemish to the Lord for a sin offering” (Lev.4:3)...“If anyone of the common people sins unwillingly in doing any one of the things which the Lord has commanded not to be done, he shall bring for his offering a goat, a female without blemish for his sin which he has committed” (Lev.4:27-28).

So the common people offer a female goat for their sins while the priest offers a bull suggesting that common people’s sin is therefore lighter than the priest’s because their comprehension of the commandments and their requirements is much simpler than that of the priest. It is a matter of measuring the knowledge and appreciation of the work of Jesus, as well as the sensitivity of the conscience and the profundity of self condemnation. “

...For behold it is pure according to the gift of Your Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ, our Lord..." The priest then kisses the altar in awe and reverence.

PRAYING THE PSALMS

The Psalms are read before offering the lamb as they are prophecies about the incarnation of the Lord Jesus for the salvation of the world. For this purpose, the priest must ensure that the basket containing the offertory bread and the decanter of wine is ready before praying the Psalms. Otherwise the Psalms shall be repeated again if the bread and wine were not present.

On Saturdays and Sundays and during non-fasting periods the church prays the Third and Sixth Hour prayers before beginning the mass. During periods of fasting, the church also reads the Ninth Hour, and during Holy Lent and Jonah's Fast the Eleventh Hour is also prayed. (In the monasteries, they also pray the Prayer of the Veil.)

If any of the major or minor Lordly feasts or any of the Feasts of the Cross fall on a Wednesday, a Friday or during any of the fasts it is treated as though it is a Sunday, having the morning Liturgy and the reading of the Third and Sixth Hours only. In this case there is no abstinence and the tunes that are sung are happy tunes or Palm Sunday tunes, especially on the two Feasts of the Cross.

Some Remarks on Fasting During Feasts:

If the Feast of Nativity falls on the 28th Kiahk and on a Tuesday or Thursday then the following day which is the 29th Kiahk is not fasted even though it is a Wednesday or a Friday. This is because the actual date for the Nativity is the 29th Kiahk. However, if the feast falls on its actual date, the 29th Kiahk, and this is a Tuesday or a Thursday then the following day is fasted.

THE METHOD OF PRAYING THE HOURS

If the priest is praying only the Third and Sixth Hour Psalms he starts by reading the Third Hour Psalms then follows with the Sixth Hour. He then reads the Gospel of the Third Hour and its parts, followed by “Holy God...”, The Lord’s Prayer, and, “Peace to you...” Then he prays the Gospel of the Sixth Hour and its parts, followed by, “We glorify you Mother of Light...”, The Creed, then “Keryalison” is said during the choosing of the Lamb.

During fasting periods when the Ninth Hour is also prayed the church prays the Third Hour prayers completely separate, consisting of the Psalms, the Gospel, the Parts, “Keryalison” repeated forty-one times, “Holy Holy”, The Lord’s Prayer and the Third Hour Absolution. The Sixth and Ninth Hour prayers are then prayed following the same structure as that of the Third and Sixth Hour prayers during a non-fasting period.

On the feasts of the Nativity, Epiphany and Resurrection we offer the lamb without first praying the Psalms as the holy Liturgy is celebrated at night.

The serving priest should read the following Psalms each hour;

+ In the Third Hour he should read, “May the Lord answer you...”, “I will exalt You...”, “My heart is overflowing...”, and, “Oh clap your hands all you people...”.

+ In the Sixth Hour he should read, “Save me O God by Your name...”, “Lord You have been favourable to Your land...”, and, “The Lord reigns....”

+ In the Ninth Hour he should read, “Oh sing to the Lord a new song...”, “The Lord said to my Lord...”, and, “I believed, therefore I spoke...”.

When beginning to pray the Psalms of the Third Hour the priest and the congregation prostrate while the priest says, “Lord have mercy, Amen. Alleluia. Glory be to the Father, the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and forevermore, Amen. The prayer of the Third Hour of this blessed day is offered to Christ our King and our God beseeching Him to forgive our sins. From the Psalms of our teacher David the Prophet and King, may his blessings be with us all, Amen.”

When praying the afternoon prayers from the Agbia or those during Vespers we should not prostrate but rather bow our heads reverently and do the sign of the cross. Prostrations are always associated with abstinence from food. For this reason, during Passion Week the Morning Litanies are

accompanied with prostrations while the Evening Litanies are associated with bowing or kneeling.

On Saturdays, Sundays, Pentecost and Feast days the hourly prayers that are said before the liturgy are prayed without prostration.

The deacon then distributes the Psalms, after which the priest says the introduction to the Gospel, saying, “Glory be to You O Lord. A chapter from the Holy Gospel according to our teacher St. (Matthew, Mark, Luke or John) the Evangelist, may his blessings be with us all, Amen.”

One of the deacons prostrates before the sanctuary and kisses the cross and the priest’s hand and then reads the Gospel. The priest says, “Let the sayings of God be completed in peace. Glory be to God forever and ever, Amen. We worship You O Father, with Your Gracious Son and the Holy Spirit, for You have come<\$FOn regular days of the year and during fasting periods it is said “...have come...”<R>From Nativity Paramoun until the end of the Circumcision Feast it is said “...were born...”<R>For the Epiphany Paramoun (10th Tuba - 12th Tuba) it is said “...were baptized...”<R>On the two Feasts of the Cross (17th Toot - 10th Baramhat) and during Passion Week and funerals, it is said “...were crucified...”<R>During all the days of the Pentecost, from Easter Eve till the end of the 50 days, also on Sundays from the Apostles fasting until the 4th Sunday of Hatour, and on the commemoration of the Annunciation Feast, Christmas and the Resurrection, which is the 29th of each Coptic month (except Toubra and Amsheer, as they symbolize the law and prophets of the Old Testament, falling before the Easter) it is said “...have

risen...” After all of these five sentences, the priest says “...and saved us, have mercy upon us.” and saved us.”

The phrase, “Let the sayings of God be completed in peace”, means that the word of God which has just been read from the Holy Bible should be fulfilled in our lives in a practical way; we should believe in them and live each word from day to day, as St. James said,

“Be doers of the word and not hearers only deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks in the perfect law of liberty and continues in it and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the word, this one will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:22-25).

The Lord Jesus blesses those who hear and act according to the word not those who merely know the word, as He says,

“If you know these things, happy are you if you do them” (John 13:17).

The priest then reads the three parts of the Third Hour which follow the Gospel; “O Lord, do not take Your Holy Spirit...”, “O Lord Who sent Your Holy Spirit...”, and, “O Mother of God...”. Then the priest says, “We ask You Lord to hear us and have mercy upon us and forgive us our sins, Amen.” Then together with the congregation, “Keryalison” is repeated forty-one times, followed by “Holy, Holy, Holy...”, The Lord’s Prayer and the Third Hour Absolution prayer.

Some Remarks On the Hourly Psalm

☒ The serving priest should lead the Psalms even if a higher ranking priest is present. If a bishop is present, he should do the sign of the cross on the service vestments of the priests and deacons. He should also choose the Lamb and then gives it to the serving priest.

☒ The serving priest should read the first three parts of the Third Hour prayer then distribute the rest; he should distribute firstly to the other priests who are participating in the service, then to other priests present in the church and whatever is left is to be given to the deacons to read.

☒ “Keryalison” is repeated forty one times because the Lord was whipped thirty nine times (2Cor.11:24), was struck with the crown of thorns on His head (Matt.27:30), and was pierced in His side with a spear (John 19:34). During this powerful and precious contemplative prayer we ought to remember the sufferings of the Lord which He tolerated for our salvation, remembering the scourges, the thorns, and how His precious blood was shed for the purification of the whole world.

☒ Following the Gospel we say, “We worship You O Christ, with Your Gracious Father and the Holy Spirit, for You have come and saved us. Have mercy upon us.”

THE WASHING OF HANDS

The priest washes his hands three times. On the first washing he says,

“Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean, wash me and I shall be whiter than snow” (Ps.50:7).

On the second washing he says,

“Make me to hear joy and gladness that the bones which You have broken may rejoice” (Ps.50:7).

On the final washing he says,

I shall wash my hands in innocence so I will go about Your altar, O Lord, that I may proclaim the voice of thanksgiving, Alleluia”(Ps.25:6-7).

Please Note

☒ The priest does not enter the Sanctuary with dirty hands that need to be washed or cleaned, but rather, these ritual washings are a symbol of the purification of the heart through repentance. The first and second verses are taken from Psalm 51 (the Psalm of Repentance). In these verses the priest beseeches the Lord to purify him from every sin and every evil so that his heart becomes pure and whiter than snow and he becomes worthy to stand before God and to offer the bloodless sacrifice. In the third verse, he pleads again with the Lord that He purifies him, both inside

and outside, so that he may be able to go to the altar and recite the prayers and praises of the Holy Liturgy, and that the Lord may hear his prayers, without any hindrance. St. Kyrillos, the Bishop of Jerusalem, said, “Washing hands with water is not because of defiled bodies, for if our bodies were defiled, we should have not entered the church at all. This washing is an indication that we should be pure of every sin. Hands are for work, and with washing them, we think of purity and staying away from any wrong-doing.”

☒ It is a fact that sin is a barrier between God and us that can hold back our prayers from Him;

***“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear”
(Ps.66:18)...***

***“When you spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you, even though you make many prayers, I will not listen, your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean, remove the evil from your doings”
(Isaiah 1:15-20).***

☒ The Apostle Paul advises us, saying,

***“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water”
(Hebrews 10:22).***

THE SELECTION OF THE LAMB

The priest then dries his hands on a clean white linen towel then takes a veil from the paten and puts it inside his sleeve on his left arm or on his head.

He then holds the cross with his right hand and stands by the sanctuary door facing the West as the Lamb and the wine are presented to him. The holy bread which is to become the lamb should be presented by the highest ranking person present as an honour to the lamb.

The priest puts the decanter of wine on the nearest bread loaf and does the sign of the cross on himself saying, "In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, One God, Amen." He then does the sign of the cross on the bread and wine three times saying, "Blessed be the Father, God almighty, Amen. Blessed be His Only Begotten Son Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen. Blessed be the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, Amen." He then does the sign of the cross on the bread with the decanter of wine saying, "Glory and honour, honour and glory to the Holy Trinity, the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forevermore Amen."

Next the priest examines the bread to choose the most suitable one for offering. Then he, the associate priest, and the deacon who is to hold the decanter, smell the wine to make sure that it is pure and not vinegary and is NOT distilled wine.

He then hands the decanter to the deacon. When choosing the most suitable bread which is to become the Lamb, he

places his right hand on top of his left, placing his hands over the tray in the shape of a cross, as Jacob did when he blessed the sons of Joseph (Genesis 48:8). While doing this the priest says, “May the Lord choose a lamb without blemish.”

He holds each bread in his hands and examines them carefully to choose the best. If the one in his right hand is the best, he puts the one in his left hand back in the basket. Then he takes another one in his left hand and compares it with the one in his right. If the one in his left is best, he takes it in his right hand and holds the other bread in his left hand.

He must ensure that the best bread is always on top, putting the other bread back in the tray and picking another one to compare with the one in his right hand. He compares all of the bread in the basket until he finds the best one, being the best in appearance, with a perfect Spadikon, the right number of pierced holes. Nothing should be sticking to it and it should not have cracks; it should be without blemish, just like the Passover lamb (Gen.12:5).

The priest then touches each of the other breads in the basket with the back of the chosen bread, which is still in his right hand, and places them back in the basket. He then wipes the chosen bread carefully with the small veil, taking care not to turn it upside down. Holding the chosen bread in his left hand so that the three pierced holes are on the right side of the bread, he then dips his right thumb into the wine decanter which the deacon is holding and makes the sign of the cross, once on the face of the chosen bread in his left hand while saying, “Sacrifice of Glory”, and then on the rest of the bread in the basket, saying, “Sacrifice of blessing...Sacrifice of Abraham ... Sacrifice of Isaac ... Sacrifice of Jacob.” He again signs over the chosen bread, and says, “Sacrifice of

Melchizedek.” Then the priest bows, asking for absolution from those around him, before entering the sanctuary.

Further Remarks on the Selection Of The Lamb

☒ Touching the remaining breads with the chosen bread symbolises that all the sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed to the Sacrifice of the Cross, and that the Sacrifice of the Cross was in turn the aim and the objective of all the Old Testament sacrifices.

☒ Holding the chosen sacrifice in his right hand, keeping it on top while touching the other breads, and making sure it is never upside down emphasises the superior honour and glory that the sacrifice of the New Testament had over those of the Old Testament.

☒ The final sign of the cross is done over the chosen bread with the intention of revealing that the sacrifice of the New Testament resembles, to a great extent, the sacrifice of Melchizedek which was a sacrifice of bread and wine and not a sacrifice of blood.

☒ The sign of the cross is done firstly and lastly on the chosen bread as it will be transformed into the real Body of the Son of God, Who said about Himself,

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last” (Rev.22:13).

☒ The bread is round in shape and around its circumference is imprinted in Greek ‘Holy God, Holy Almighty, Holy Immortal’. It is as round as the sun to symbolise the True Lamb, the Sun of Righteousness, Jesus Christ, having no beginning or end as Christ is

without beginning or end; the Alpha and the Omega, the Eternal Son of God.

☒ The imprint on the bread has twelve small squares, a square for each of the twelve disciples, and within each square is a cross. Encircled by these twelve small squares is a large square with a large cross inside of it. This middle part is called the ‘Spadikon’, a Greek word meaning ‘The Lord’; the large centre square symbolising Jesus Christ, Glory be to Him. Around the Spadikon are five holes which have been pierced into the bread, representing the sufferings of our Lord: three nail wounds, the crown of thorns, and the piercing of His side. These holes should be placed so that three holes are on the right side of the Spadikon and two holes are on the left. Whenever the priest holds the Bread the three holes should be on the right side.

☒ The number of holy breads in the basket from which the priest chooses the Lamb should always be an odd number (for example 3, 5, 7). The spiritual significance of this is that the number three signifies the Holy Trinity and choosing one of them reminds us that the Eternal Word was Incarnated to forgive the sins of the world. It also declares that the three Hypostasis - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit - are all sharing in the salvation process. The number five signifies the five sacrifices of the Old Testament :

The Burnt offering The Sin offering The Inequity Offering
The Peace offering The bread offering

☒ These sacrifices were performed using one of five pure living creatures; sheep, cows, goats, pigeons or

turtledoves (Lev.10:14). The number seven represents the five types of sacrifice, as stated above, plus the two birds that were sacrificed to purify the leper (Lev.14:4). All of these sacrifices were archetypes of the sacrifice of the cross and therefore also of the sacrifice of the Holy Liturgy.

☒ Since our Master, Jesus Christ carried our sins within His Body on the cross as He offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin, so the bread offered in the Holy Liturgy should be made with yeast to symbolise these sins that Christ bore. The Coptic Orthodox Church, led by the Holy Spirit, makes its holy bread with yeast, which should then be baked so that the yeast perishes just as sin perished in the Resurrected Body of Christ. The yeast is still present in the bread but is dead because of the fire. As the fire spoiled the effect of the yeast, so Christ had ended the effect of sin through offering His Body as a sacrifice; “God...by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh on account of sin, He condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom.8:3).

BAPTIZING THE LAMB

After putting the veil on the altar the priest then carries the Lamb and wets his right index finger and makes the sign of the cross on the bread from the top of the bread to the bottom, then around the bread from the left side to the right. This action symbolises the baptism of Christ by St. John in the River Jordan. While doing this, the priest prays “

Let our sacrifice be accepted before You Lord for the forgiveness of my sins, and the ignorance of Your people.

The priest pours himself and kneels over the selected Lamb.”, asking the Lord to accept this sacrifice as a sacrifice for his own sins in particular, and also for the ignorance of the congregation. He places all the burdens of his congregation, the Church and the whole world on this Lamb which carries the sins of the whole world.

Then he prays silently a deep prayer called the Prayer of Commemoration.

THE PRAYER OF COMMEMORATION

He places upon the Lamb that is about to be slain for us, all the hardships, tribulations and diseases of His people. He pleads for forgiveness for the sinners, the raising of the fallen, steadiness for the righteous, healing for the sick, relief for the troubled, a safe return for the travelers and reposal for those who have slept. With these remembrances he mentions people by name, which have often been written on a piece of paper and placed on the Altar in front of him.

He then prays for all Christians in general and for his relatives in particular, saying, “Remember O Lord, Your servants, the Orthodox Christians, everyone in his name, remember, O Lord, my father, my mother, my brothers and my relatives in the flesh. My spiritual fathers, guard the living with Your angel of Safety, and repose those who have slept.” After giving priority to everyone else by praying for them first, he then mentions himself last, saying, “Remember, O Lord, my weakness, I, the poor, and forgive my many sins.”

Some Points on the Prayer of Remembrance:

☒ The priest mentions himself last as an act of self denial, as if he says with the Apostle Paul,

“Last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared also to me. For I am the least of the Apostles, unfit to be called an apostle” (1Cor.15:8-9).

☒ The priest prays these remembrances and pleadings for his people, for if he succeeds in accomplishing his mission with the Lord as an advocate and intercessor, he can heal the sick, solve the problems and eliminates the hardships of the people, and can then rejoice with his congregation like a father does with his children, saying with the Apostle,

“Even if I am to be poured as a libation upon the sacrificed offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me” (Phil.2:17-18).

He then briefly says the three Major Litanies;

☒ “Remember, O Lord, the peace of Your One, Holy, Universal and Apostolic Church....”

☒ “Remember, O Lord, our Pontiff Pope Abba Shenouda III, and his brother in the apostolic ministry Abba Ignatious Zakka”

☒ “Remember O Lord our gatherings, bless them....”

THE PROCESSION OF THE LAMB

The priest wraps the Lamb in the same veil he used during its selection. He puts the cross on top of it and, bending a bit (as Christ bent while holding the Cross going to Golgotha), he holds the lamb in reverence against his head while standing at the door of the sanctuary saying, “Glory and honour, honour and glory....”

Some Points on the Procession of the Lamb:

☒ The priest prays the prayer “Glory and honour...” while standing at the door of the sanctuary for three reasons. Firstly, everyone can hear the whole prayer instead of missing parts of it, which can sometimes happen if the priest is moving around the altar. Secondly, it then gives the priest more time when he does move around the Altar to pray the important inaudible prayer of “Remember O Lord all those who have asked us to remember them in our prayers, may the Lord remember them in His Heavenly Kingdom”, in which he mentions all those whom he mentioned before, and maybe those who he forgot to mention. And thirdly, it gives the deacon a chance to respond, as he proceeds around the Altar saying, “Pray for these sacred and worthy oblations, and for our sacrifices, and for those who offered them.”

☒ When the priest carries the Lamb with both hands and holds it against his head, he re-enacts what Simeon the Elder did when he carried the child Jesus and proceeded around the altar of God. Just as Simeon blessed the salvation of the Lord which He prepared

before all people, so the priest also goes around the Altar glorifying God, Who sent His Son for our salvation.

☒ The procession of the Lamb goes around the Altar only once, to symbolise the Saviour being taken to the temple by his parents to fulfil the requirements of the law. It also represents that Christ would offer Himself only once as a sacrifice for the whole world.

At the end of the round the priest stands at the left hand side of the Altar, unwraps the oblation and lays it on his left palm. He moves the wine decanter near it and prays loudly while signing the cross three times over the bread and wine. He then puts the bread in the paten under the star with its three holes to the right, completing the three signings, saying, “Glory and Honour...”

Next the priest uncovers the chalice and makes sure that it is clean by wiping it with the veil in his right hand.

He takes the decanter from the deacon and after the response is said by the congregation he says, “Pray.” He signs the congregation with the wine while saying, “Peace be to you all” and follows with the Thanksgiving prayer.

He pours the wine in the chalice. Then the deacon pours some water in the decanter which is carried by the priest (around 1/4 or 1/3 full, but not exceeding 1/3 and not less than 1/10). The priest then shakes the decanter and pours it into the chalice. He gives the deacon the decanter upside-down in order that it dry properly as it must fast in preparation for the next liturgy, completing these tasks while praying the Thanksgiving prayer. The priest then holds the

cross to do the necessary signings for the Thanksgiving Prayer and the Offertory.

Remarks:

☒ It is preferable when pouring the wine and water in the chalice, to pour it in the sign of the cross to remind us that the cross became our strength and pride.

☒ Mixing the wine with water reminds the believers of the blood and water that gushed out when Christ our Redeemer was pierced in His side. As they offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving the believers should remember that their Christ is alive in His Divinity although He died in the flesh and gave up His humanly Spirit to the hands of His Father. The proof that He is alive in His Divinity, even after He bowed His Head, came when they pierced His side with a spear and blood and water ran out of His side (John 19:34). It is medically impossible for a dead person to bleed liquid blood. It is a known fact that when someone dies his blood clots. To ascertain the death of a person a physician sticks a pin in his body. If there is no flow of blood then the person is dead. Even if they stab the heart of a dead man with a dagger only few drops of yellowish fluid (known as plasma) come out of the wound. When they pierced Christ in the side after His death blood and water, still distinguishable from each other, gushed out of His side. This is a proof that although Jesus died in His Humanity, His Divinity never departed His Body, protecting it from decay or corruption. This is to say that Christ died with His Humanity but was alive through His divinity.

THE LITANY OF OFFERINGS

After the Thanksgiving Prayer the priest prays the Litany of Offerings inaudibly while holding the Cross. Below is a summary of the prayer with some Biblical references:“

Master and Lord Jesus Christ, the Logos of the Eternal Father, You are of one essence with Him and the Holy Spirit. You are the Living Bread which came down from heaven...”. Jesus said about Himself,

“I am the Living Bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever” (John 6:51).“

...For You offered Yourself as an unblemished Lamb, as a sacrifice for the life of the world...”. Isaiah the Prophet wrote about Him saying,

“He was oppressed and He was afflicted yet He opened not His mouth. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before its shearer in silence” (Is.53:7).

John the Baptist, when he saw Christ coming to him, said,

“Behold! The lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29).

The Lamb of the Passover that was without blemish was a symbol of Jesus Christ, Who was slain on the Cross for the sins of the whole world.“

...We ask and entreat Your goodness, O lover of mankind...”, and pointing to the bread on the paten says, **“Shine Your face upon this bread...”**, then points to the wine in the chalice saying, **“And upon this cup** which we have set upon (pointing to the altar he says,) this priestly table which is Yours.” He then makes the sign of the Cross three times over the bread and wine.

At the first signing of the cross he says, **“Bless them.”** At the second signing of the cross he says, **“Sanctify them”**, and at the third signing of the cross he says, **“Purify them and transform them.”**

He points to the bread with both hands praying, **“May this bread indeed become Your Holy Body.”** Then pointing to the chalice he says, **“And the mixture in this cup may become indeed Your Honoured Blood and may they become for all of us partaking,** the healing and salvation for our souls, bodies and spirits.”

THE GREATNESS OF THE HOLY SACRAMENTS

How great is the Holy Communion! It is not only given for the forgiveness of sins, but also for the healing of our bodily and psychological diseases when received with a repentant and contrite heart.

The opposite will result, however if the Holy Communion is taken in an unworthy manner, for St. Paul the Apostle says,

“For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself not discerning the Lord’s

body. For this reason many are sick and weak among you and many sleep” (1Cor.11:29-30).

The priest then continues, saying, “For You are our God and glory is due unto You...”. The priest then covers the paten and the chalice. Covering the paten and the chalice symbolises the shrouding of our Lord Jesus Christ after His death on the cross.

The priest takes hold of the top two corners of the ‘Prosfarine’ (large altar veil) and the deacon on the opposite side of the altar takes hold of the bottom two corners of the veil and together they cover the Holy Mysteries. The ‘Prosfarine’ represents the stone which was rolled against the entrance of the tomb. Having covered the Holy Mysteries the priest places a small triangular shaped veil on the top of the ‘Prosfarine’. This small veil represents the seal on the tomb’s door.

The priest and the deacon who faces him, both in their white clothes, symbolise the two angels that Mary Magdalene saw in the tomb where the body of Jesus was laid, one standing at His head and one at His foot (John 20:11).

THE ABSOLUTION FOR THE SON

During this time, before coming out of the altar, the priest silently prays the Absolution for the Son saying, “O Master and Lord Jesus Christ the Only Begotten Son” This is the third absolution that is said at the end of the Vespers or Morning Incense. He then kisses the altar, kneels before it, stands up and kisses it again. On the right of the altar he

offers a metania to the priests and to the altar deacons. They do the same, and together they exchange a holy kiss with each other before leaving the Sanctuary in preparation for the absolution.

THE ABSOLUTION OF MINISTERS

The serving priest gives the cross to the most senior priest present. The senior priest faces East standing behind the other priests and deacons who are kneeling on the floor in front of the sanctuary's door. With five signings of the cross the senior priest says the Absolution of Servants, as seen below: “

May your servants, the ministers of this day...”. First he signs to the East, crossing the priests serving with him. If a hegomen (protopriest) is present, he would say, “...the hegomen...”, and if a priest is attending he would say “...the priest...”. He then crosses the deacons saying, “...and the deacons...”. If only one deacon is present he says, “ ... and the deacon...”. He then turns to the left and does the third sign of the cross towards the rest of the servants saying, “...and the clergy...”. He turns to the West and crosses the congregation saying, “...and all the congregation...”. Finally he turns towards the East and crosses himself saying, “...and my weak self...”.

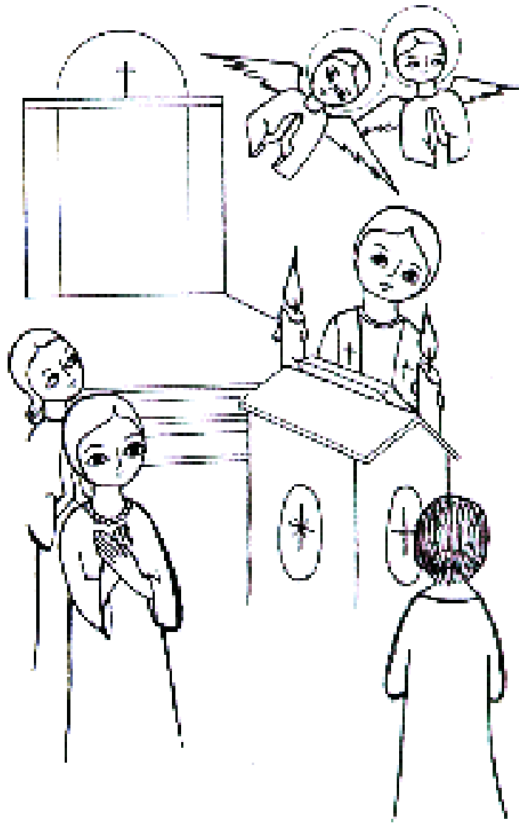
The Absolution continues with the saying, “...Be absolved from the mouth of the Holy Trinity, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and from the mouth of the one, holy, universal and Apostolic church...”.

Then they all rise and the priests exchange prostrations. The exchange of prostrations has a profound significance in that the serving priest shows humility and respect by bowing before the senior priest and asking that he may be absolved, and the senior priest pays back his respects at the end of the absolution by bowing before the serving priest and also requesting to be absolved, asking that he may remember him in his prayers.

Notes On The Absolution Of Ministers:

☒ If there are priests who are not participating in the service but are present in the church the eldest should say the absolution of ministers. If all of the priests are serving then the eldest should say the absolution. If only one priest is serving then he is the one to say the absolution.

☒ The priest includes the congregation in the Ministers Absolution as they are considered to be serving and partaking in the Holy Liturgy with the deacons and priest, and are not considered mere spectators. The congregation have their own role with responses and hymns throughout the whole Liturgy. It is the participation of the whole - the congregation, the priests and the deacons - that gives strength as the whole church becomes one heart and soul worshipping and praying in spirit and in truth.



3 Liturgy of the Word

LITURGY OF THE WORD

THE CIRCUIT OF THE PAULINE INCENSE

After the Absolution the serving priest enters the Sanctuary, takes the box of incense and bows before his brethren asking them to bless the box with him. In love and humility they bow in return saying, “You Bless.” Then he puts five spoonfuls of incense into the censer.

A Point On The Round Of The Pauline Incense

☒ If the Patriarch, a Metropolitan or a Bishop is present he alone should bless the box of incense since he is the Archpriest. On the second signing of the cross he places the incense in the hands the other priests and they put it in the censer. He then completes the rest of the signings.

☒ The incense is placed in the censer which is carried by the deacon who stands towards the right of the altar. The priest then does the sign of the cross on the congregation saying, “Let us pray”, then after the response of the deacon he says, “Stand up for prayer.” The priest then says, “Peace be with you all”, signifying the introduction to the Pauline Readings. The priest then takes the censer from the deacon and says the first Mystery of the Pauline Incense.

THE FIRST MYSTERY OF THE PAULINE INCENSE

The church has prepared five readings for each Liturgy; the Pauline Epistle, the Catholic Epistle, the Acts (Praxis), the Sinaxarium, and the Gospel. These readings provide an opportunity for Biblical contemplation and teaching. These readings are in addition to the readings said during the raising of Vespers and Morning Incense. During periods of fasting and feasts prophecies are also read. The priest also prays some silent prayers that the Lord may enlighten His congregation and grant them the grace to apply the words that they hear to their own spiritual lives. He then prays the First Mystery of the Pauline Incense, saying:“

O God, the great...”, of whom Moses said to his people,

“For the Lord Your God is God of gods and Lord of lords the great God Mighty and Awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe” (Deut.10:17),

and Jeremiah the Prophet said,

“And the Great the Mighty God whose Name is the Lord of Hosts.”

...The Eternal God who is without beginning and without end, who is great in His counsel and mighty in His works...”, as Jeremiah the Prophet said,

“You are great in counsel and mighty in works” (Jer.32:19).

As the Lord is Mighty in works, He is also Mighty in words, He made His servant Moses to be,

“mighty in words and deeds” (Acts 7:22).“

...He Who is present everywhere, with everyone, be with us also, Our Master, in this hour. Stand amidst all of us. Purify our hearts, sanctify our souls and cleanse us from all sins which we have done willingly and unwillingly...”.

Here the priest confesses that the Lord is a blessed God Who is Almighty and omnipresent. He then asks the Lord in humility to be in the midst of His people so that His people will be blessed and the Church will prevail against her enemies, as it is written in the Psalms,

“God is in the midst of her and shall not be moved. God shall help her just at the break of dawn...The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge” (Ps.46:5).

The priest then asks the Lord to purify both himself and His people so that they all may be worthy to partake of the Holy Communion.“

...Grant us to offer before Your uttering sacrifices, offerings of blessings and a spiritual incense, entering within the veil in the Holy Place of your Holies...”.

“Where the forerunner has entered for us even Jesus having become high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb.6:20).

The priest then proceeds around the altar three times while praying the Three Major Litanies of Peace, the Fathers, and

the Congregation. He then comes out of the sanctuary with his left foot first without putting his back to the altar. The Round of the Pauline Incense is similar to that of the Vespers and Morning Incense (explained previously in The Raising of Incense), the only difference being that the priest in the Pauline Round says, “The blessings of Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ be with us all, Amen”, instead of, “The blessings of the Vespers/Morning Incense be with us all, Amen.”

Some Notes On The First Mystery Of The Pauline Incense:

☒ It is preferable for the serving priest to do all of the Pauline Round, but if the Pope, a Metropolitan or a Bishop is serving, he performs the round inside the sanctuary then gives the censer to the serving priest to continue around the church. The ‘Diskolia’, which is the book of Apostolic Teachings, says that, “The Bishop carries the incense around the altar three times, then gives the censer to the priest who proceeds around the church with the incense.” In doing this the Bishop inside the Sanctuary symbolises our beloved Lord Jesus Christ in heaven, and passing the censer to the priest who then proceeds around the church with the incense signifies the Lord commissioning His Angels and His saints to care for and serve mankind; the angels being serving spirits who are sent to serve the believers on earth. It also refers to Moses asking Aaron to incense among the congregation so that God’s wrath might be removed from the people.

☒ In the Pauline Round Of Incense the priest proceeds around the whole church in remembrance of St. Paul who exerted himself exceedingly in his travels to preach

the message of the Lord, which he did more than any other Apostle. About this the Apostle says,

“But by the Grace of God I am what I am and His grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them” (1Cor.15:10).

☒ When he had to count his toils to convince the Corinthians of the legitimacy of his Apostleship he said,

“Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one. I am talking like a madman with far greater labors far more imprisonments, with countless beatings. I have been adrift at sea on frequent journeys...” (2Cor.11:23-28).

☒ In his Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul says,

“From Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum, I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ” (Romans 15:19). Illyricum is a city West of Greece. St. Paul is famous for his four preaching journeys on both sea and land in which he endured hardship and tribulation.

☒ In the Pauline Round the priest offers incense from the left side of the church and proceeding to the right indicating that through the faith preached by St. Paul we were taken from darkness to God’s great light.

☒ If the Pope, a Metropolitan or a Bishop is serving and needs to consecrate the church’s altar, utensils of the altar such as the censor, paten and chalice, or consecrate the icons of the church, he does so during the readings of the Pauline Epistles.

☒ If the serving priest wants to give the censer to his fellow priest, they exchange a kiss like the one exchanged during the Incense of Fellowship (but without saying anything) and then the censer is passed. The same procedure is followed when the censer is given back to the serving priest.

THE INCENCE OF THE PRAXIS

THE PRAXIS CIRCUIT

There is no round of incense during the readings of the Catholicon, during which time the priest remains in the Sanctuary according to the Lord's command to His Disciples that they should not depart Jerusalem before the coming of the Holy Spirit. After the round of the Pauline and the Arabic (English) reading the priest starts the prayers and mysteries of the Praxis Round.

THE SECOND MYSTERY OF THE PAULINE INCENSE

This Mystery comes after the Pauline readings and not during its reading as it was in the ancient Liturgy Books. (The ancient books are now kept in the Library (of the Syrian Monastery).“

The priest prays the following prayer which is given with Biblical references below:“

...O God of knowledge, and giver of wisdom, who brings to light the hidden things of darkness...", just as Job said,

"He uncovers deep things out of darkness and brings the shadow of death to light" (Job 12:22),

and Daniel says,

"He reveals deep and secret things, He knows what is in the darkness and light dwells with Him" (Dan.2:22),

"And gives the word to them that preach the gospel with great power" (Ps 67:11)"

...Who, of Your Goodness, has called upon Paul to be a chosen vessel, who was for some time a persecutor...", for it is written that he was

"still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the way whether men or women he might bring them bound to Jerusalem" (Acts 9:1-2)

The Apostle says about himself,

"I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it" (Gal.1:13).

"...But he found favour with You, O Lord, that he should become Your chosen apostle and preacher of the Gospel, O Christ Our Lord...", and the Lord was pleased with him and called Paul to His service, who said,

“But when I pleased God who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace to reveal His Son to me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles” (Gal.1:15-16). “

With that you were pleased that he would be called Apostle and preacher to the Gospel of Your Kingdom, O Christ our Lord”, being called a servant of Jesus Christ, as he said,

“Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ called to be an Apostle separated to the gospel of God” (Rom.1:1).

It is written in the Book of Acts,

“As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then having fasted and prayed and laid hands on them they sent them away” (Acts 13:23). “

...Also now we ask You, O lover of mankind, to graciously grant us and all your people, pure minds and wisdom so that we may learn and understand how profitable Your Holy teachings, which are being read to us are...”.

While the congregation listens to the Pauline epistle, the priest goes inside the sanctuary and prays deeply, pleading with God to bestow upon His people a mind that is not preoccupied with the world and its anxieties, for these preoccupations are like thorns which poison the Word of God. He also entreats the Lord to give them, as well as himself, a pure understanding, a clear mind, knowledge and wisdom, and to reveal to them the deep spiritual meanings that are behind the words being read.

...And as Paul imitated You, O Prince of Peace, so help us to be like him in deed and faith...”.

St. Paul imitated the Lord Jesus as much as his human nature could bear. In imitating his humility St. Paul said,

“I know how to be abased” (Phil.4:12).

He claimed to be the least of all the apostles, unworthy of the term ‘apostle’. St. Paul travelled to many countries to preach the word of God, enduring many trials and was tortured many times because of his love for the Lord Jesus Christ

“Who is weak and I am not? Who is made to stumble and I do not burn with indignation?” (2Cor.11:29).

He also followed the Lord in sufferings, as seen in these accounts, which state,

“They stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city supposing him to be dead” (Acts 14:19)...

“I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God, which was given to me for you to fulfil the word of God” (Col.1:24-25)

The priest pleads with the Lord, on behalf of the people and himself, to be like the Apostle Paul in his deeds and faith, heeding the words of St. Paul when he said,

“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1Cor.11:1)...“

Nevertheless, I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that day” (2Tim.1:12).“

...That we may glorify Your Holy Name O Lord, and have pride in Your cross at all times...”.

St. Paul the Apostle used to glorify the Lord at all times, and attributed all glory to Him, considering himself weak, as mere dust. He was always proud of the cross and its victory saying,

“But God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world” (Gal.6:14).“

...And unto You we give glory...”

MYSTERY OF THE CATHOLIC EPISTLES

The priest says the Mystery of the catholic Epistle inaudibly saying, “

O Lord God who has revealed unto us through Your Holy Apostles the mystery of the glory of Your son Jesus Christ...”. St. Paul asked the Ephesians to pray for him, asking,

“That utterance may be given to me that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel” (Eph.6:19).

The word ‘catholic’ is a Greek word which means ‘universal’. The seven epistles following St. Paul’s epistles are called the catholic Epistles, commencing with the Epistle of St. James. They were called the ‘universal’ epistles because they were written to all the nations and not to a particular person or a certain group of people, as were the Pauline Epistles. The Gospel of Christ, as taught by the Apostles, is the doctrine of heaven. If we follow it, it will lead us to a happy eternal life. “

...And has given unto them according to the power of the infinite gift of Your Grace, that they should proclaim among all nations the glad news of the unsearchable riches of Your mercy...”.

The Lord chose His disciples so that they may preach to the nations about the riches of the Kingdom of Heaven, and of the salvation of Christ, through His death on the Cross and His Glorious Resurrection. St. Paul says,

“To me who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all people see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ” (Eph.3:8-9).“

...We ask You Our Lord make us worthy to have a share and an inheritance with them. Graciously grant us to always walk in their footsteps and to imitate their struggle and to have

fellowship with them, in the sweat they had for godliness sake...”. Here the priest asks for himself and for his people that the Lord makes them worthy to inherit the eternal life with Christ, together with the saintly Apostles.

The Lord had written their names in His Heavenly Kingdom and prepared a place for them to be with Him, keeping His promise that,

“If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me and where I am there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honour” (John 12:26).

Before gaining such an inheritance with the Apostles we must follow in their footsteps, contemplate on their lives and imitate their faith, deeds, struggles, and sacrifices, which were all done in the Name of Jesus Christ. The apostles were martyred and shed their blood for His Name, enduring much persecution and torture in the course of preaching Christ.“

...Watch over Your holy Church, O Lord, which You founded through them...”.

The church is the group of believers,

“Having been built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord” (Eph.2:20-21).

The Apostle Paul who is one of the founders of the Church speaks to the believers saying,

“For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building...For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1Cor.3:9-11). “

...And bless the lambs of Your flock...”. The believers are the flock of the Good Shepherd, our beloved Lord Jesus Christ, who sacrificed Himself for His sheep,

“So we, Your people and sheep of Your pasture, will give You thanks forever, we will show forth Your praise to all generations” (Ps.79:13).“

...And may this vine which You have planted, grow and be fruitful...”. The Church is the vine and the Lord Jesus Christ is the vinedresser Who cares for the vine so that it may grow and increase in its fruitfulness, as seen in the Psalm,

“Return, we beseech You, O God of hosts, look down from heaven and see and visit this vine and the vineyard which Your right hand has planted” (Ps.80:14-15)“

...Through Jesus Christ our Lord....”

THE MYSTERY OF THE PRAXIS

The priest prays the Litany of Oblation, not the Litany of Travellers which is prayed in the morning. If he has already said the Litany of Oblation then he does not repeat it. After the Mystery of the catholic Epistle the priest prays the Mystery of the Praxis. Having put one spoonful of incense in the censor, he says:“

O God who accepted the sacrifice of Abraham and prepared for him a lamb in place of Isaac...”. Isaac, despite the fact that he was a strong youth, did not resist his father or flee when Abraham was offering him as a sacrifice on the altar to the Lord; for this reason the Lord accepted this sacrifice. The sacrifice of Isaac is the archetype of the sacrifice of our beloved Lord Jesus Christ who was sacrificed for the forgiveness of our sins.“

...Likewise, O Lord, accept this sacrifice of incense and send down upon us in return Your abundantly rich mercy and purify us from all corruption of sin and make us worthy to serve in holiness and righteousness before Your goodness all the days of our life...”

If we raise before the Lord pure and undefiled hands, a sanctified heart and eyes full of innocence and yet illumination, the Lord will accept our offering as a sweet aroma of incense. The church here repeats what Zachariah the priest said,

“We serve Him in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life” (Luke 1:75).

Notice that the priest calls the incense ‘a burnt offering’, meaning a sacrifice, just like the sacrifice of fasting, the sacrifice of prayer, the sacrifice of raising hands during worship, and the sacrifice of praise. As mentioned previously, in the Old Testament temple there was a special altar named the Altar of Incense, where the sacrifice of incense was offered. At the right hand side of the Altar of Incense the angel appeared to Zachariah and announced the birth of his son John.

The priest proceeds around the altar three times while praying the Three Minor Litanies then comes out of the sanctuary and offers incense as mentioned in the Round of the Pauline. He then offers the Gospel Incense before exchanging a holy kiss with his fellow fathers and asking them to pray for him.

He then proceeds to offer incense to the icons on the Southern side of the sanctuary's door, then proceeds towards the Northern side of the sanctuary. He walks among the congregation down the centre aisle saying, "Let your people through blessing be thousands upon thousands...", and he blesses the congregation while saying, "The blessings of my masters, the Apostles Peter and Paul...". He does not proceed as far as the Western end of the church but returns to the door of the sanctuary while saying the Mystery of the Confession of the congregation.

Some Remarks Concerning The Round Of The Praxis:

☒ In coming out of the sanctuary to offer incense in the whole church the priest symbolises the Apostles when they left Jerusalem to preach Christianity throughout the whole world. The priest does not go around the whole church as in the round of the Pauline, which signifies the fact that the Apostles limited their preaching to Judea and the cities of Judah, whereas St. Paul preached Christianity to the whole world, and therefore encountered more tribulations during his travels than his fellow apostles did.

☒ The priest offers the incense from right to left to indicate that the Apostles returned from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem after the Ascension of the Lord.

Another reason being that, as the priest started the Round of the Pauline from left to right, he starts the Round of the Praxis from right to left, indicating that both are equal.

☒ After finishing the Round of the Praxis the priest does not enter the sanctuary. This is for two reasons. One is due to that fact that the Apostles did not return to Jerusalem but were martyred in the country where they last preached; and the other is that by the end of the three rounds after reading the Praxis the priest has completed seven rounds, these being the three rounds after the First Mystery of the Pauline, one round after the Mystery of the Congregation's Confession and the three rounds after the Praxis. These rounds are a representation of the children of Israel and the Ark of Covenant who circled Jericho seven times before the walls tumbled down. As the priest proceeds around the altar offering incense and raising prayers and pleadings to the Lord the walls of evil and sin tumble down.

THE SINAXARIUM

After the Praxis the priest reads from the Sinaxarium which is the book containing the daily commemoration of saints. 'Sinaxarium' is a Greek word meaning, 'The News'; the chronicles of the fathers, prophets, patriarchs, bishops, saints and martyrs. It narrates their lives and spiritual struggles and how the Lord put an end to their toils by rewarding them with the crown of glory and eternal life in the Heavenly Kingdom; a place where Christ wipes away every tear from their eyes. The objective of reading the Sinaxarium is to savour the personal account of such champions and to learn

the history of the church. It also tells of the sufferings that men and women have endured for the church; the types of pain and hardships endured for the sake of keeping the faith. The striving, the fasting and asceticism of the saints was all with the aim of venerating the Kingdom of Heaven, about which the Lord said, “The Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force” (Matt.11:12). The church urges the people to follow in the footsteps of the saints, as it says in the Bible,

“Consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith” (Heb.13:7).

The Church celebrates the martyrdom of the martyrs, and the departure day of the saints (not their birthdays) as it is the end of their lives which holds significance. In Solomon’s words,

“Better is the end of a thing than its beginning” (Ecc.7:8).

The Church calls the departure day of the martyrs and saints a Feast Day because it is on their day of departure from this world that they are joined to the Heavenly Bridegroom, the Bridegroom Who they loved even to their death. On this glorious day all the saints and angels will be present witnessing the event, and there will be great joy! In the Psalms David says,

“Death of the righteous is dear in the eyes of the Lord” (Ps.116:10),

and in the book of Proverbs Solomon writes,

“The memory of the righteous is a blessing” (Prov.10:7).

Hence, the Church being rich and full of glorious saints, continuously lives in festivities, such as the major and minor Lordly feasts, the feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the commemoration days of angels, and feast days of the saints and martyrs.

It is customary that the priest himself reads the Sinaxarium, to give the message an educational and spiritual strength. After reading the story of the saint of the day, the priest may refer to his or her life story in the sermon, offering a contemplation so that the congregation may benefit and learn from the saint's example.

The priest may also use the Sinaxarium as a means of proving the authenticity of the Holy Bible and the promises of the Lord which are fulfilled in the lives of His faithful saints who accepted the Bible in truth. They applied the teachings of the Bible to their lives, becoming themselves a living Bible.

CONSECRATION OF THE PATRIARCH AND BISHOPS

The author of the Book of Acts wrote about the deeds of only two apostles, namely Peter and Paul. The author did not conclude the Book of Acts with "Amen" like the other books of the New Testament, but left it without ending, the reason being that the service and ministry of the Church which began with the Apostles has no ending but is a continuous ministry for as long as the church exists on earth.

These apostles were to be succeeded by such apostolic successors as the patriarchs, the bishops, the martyrs and the saints. In fact, all those who strive within the church and shape its history will be annexed to the Book of Acts. This history is recorded in the Sinaxarium and that is why the Sinaxarium is read straight after the Praxis.

The Church, in her wisdom, has designated the period after reading the Praxis and the Sinaxarium to consecrate the Patriarch and Bishops as they continue the works and acts of the Apostles. These apostolic successors present a new chapter in the history of the church and an extension of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

The Sinaxarium is read all year round, but as a tradition it is not read during Eastertide so as not to mix the joys of the Resurrection with the grievances of the martyrs' sufferings. The festivities of the Resurrection are also superior to the feasts of martyrs and saints and subsequently ought to be foremost in the hearts and minds of the believers. The procession of the icon of the Holy Resurrection, sung in its festive tunes, replaces the readings of the Sinaxarium during this time. In the days between the Ascension and the Pentecost there is no procession and therefore the Sinaxarium is read, except for the Sunday when the Praxis tour is done with the icon of the Resurrection.

THE PROCESSION OF THE RESURRECTION ICON

After reading the Praxis they chant the hymn, "Come all you Heavenly Hosts", while the icon of the Resurrection is prepared. A deacon carries the icon together with two

candles. The deacons who hold the crosses, banners and candles go before the icon together with the chanting deacons.

The priests enter the Sanctuary carrying censers, crosses and candles, and after the hymn they go around the altar three times, then they circle three times around the church, and finally one more time around the altar, making a total of seven rounds, while chanting hymns of the Resurrection, such as “Christ has Risen”. As previously stated, the seven rounds represent the seven times the Israelites marched around the city of Jericho with trumpets, while the priests carried the Ark of the Covenant,

“So the people shouted when the priests blew the trumpets...The people shouted with a great shout that the wall fell down flat. Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him and they took the city” (Josh.6:20).

Through the seven rounds of the icon of the Resurrection the stronghold of sin will collapse and the believers will be victorious, rejoicing with the Lord Who has risen from the dead.

After the procession the deacon who is holding the icon of the Resurrection stands facing the West and the priests proceed in order of rank to offer incense to the icon; each priest offering three spoonfuls of incense. With the first spoonful he says, “We worship you O Christ Our God and Your life-giving Resurrection, for You have risen and saved us from our sins.” With the second spoonful he says, “O my Lord Jesus Christ Who rose from the dead, crush Satan under our feet speedily.” And with the third spoonful he

says, “Hail to the Resurrection of Christ, Who rose from the dead and saved us from our sins.”

After offering the incense each priest kisses the icon and gives the censer to the next priest. The icon is then placed in the Eastern side of the sanctuary with two lit candles surrounding it. If a feast of St. Mary, a martyr, saint or angel falls during Eastertide, the icon of that saint (or angel) should accompany the icon of the Resurrection during the procession but incense is offered only to the icon of the Resurrection. On the Ascension Feast, the procession is done with the icon of the Ascension, but on the Sunday between the Ascension feast and the Pentecost the icon of the Resurrection is used in the procession. In the feast of Pentecost, the procession is done with the icon of Resurrection, because the Lord’s Resurrection is the cornerstone of our Christian belief.

The procession is done during the raising of Morning Incense and after chanting “Lord have mercy”. In their ministry, the Apostles’ most important work was to testify about the Resurrection of the Lord. When they wanted to choose an apostle to replace Judas Iscariot, Peter stood amidst the disciples and said,

“Therefore of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of those must become a witness with us of His Resurrection” (Acts 1:21-32).

When St. Paul went to Athens he preached to the philosophers there about Jesus and his Resurrection (Acts

17:18). He stressed this doctrine very strongly in his teachings, saying to the Corinthians,

“And if Christ is not risen your faith is futile, you are still in your sins” (1Cor.15:17-19)...“But now Christ has risen from the dead and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1Cor.15:17-20).

THE CHURCH’S ADORATION AND DEEP RESPECT FOR THE GOSPEL

The Church highly honours and respects the Gospel as it is the sayings and deeds of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Incarnated God. This is why there are many prefaces and notices before reading the Gospel.

During the reading of the Gospel the priest prays a deep prayer called the Mystery of the Gospel, praying that that the Word of God may work in the hearts of the listeners. After reading the Gospel a sermon is given. It is usually based on the Gospel of the day as it is the focus of the day’s readings.

All the readings before the Gospel - the Pauline Epistle, the catholic Epistle, the Praxis, the Sinaxarium and the Psalms - are related to the Gospel and based upon it’s reading. The following are quotes from the Gospel readings in the Liturgy which indicate its great importance within the church, followed by their respective Biblical references.

THE LITANY OF THE GOSPEL

After saying the Trisagion, the priest puts one spoonful of incense in the censer, and stands by the door of the sanctuary praying the Litany of the Gospel, saying,

“O Master and Lord Jesus Christ Our God...” The priest addresses the Lord Jesus saying, “O Master...who said to His saintly and honoured disciples and pure apostles,

‘Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see the things which you see and have not seen them and to hear the things which you hear and have not heard them. But blessed are your eyes for they see and your ears for they hear.’ (Matt.13:16-17).

This quote states that certain facts of the Gospel were revealed to a few of the righteous men of the Old Testament who earnestly desired to see and behold the Word of God but could not. They died with their faith, believing in the coming of the Redeemer, as it says,

“These all died in faith not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off they were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Heb.11:13).

They wished to see the Messiah, the Great Saviour, and to hear the words of grace coming out of His Divine Mouth.

Our beloved Lord Jesus once said to the Jews,

“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day and He saw it and was glad” (John 8:56).

Jacob said,

“I have waited for Your salvation O Lord” (Gen.49:18).

Job, through the eyes of faith, saw the Lord Jesus coming, as he said,

“For I know that my Redeemer lives and He shall stand at last on the earth” (Job 19:25).

Isaiah the Prophet saw Him being born of a Virgin in a miraculous divine way when he said,

“Behold the Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son and shall call His Name Emmanuel” (Is.7:14).

Isaiah also prophesied about the pains which our Lord tolerated in silence for our sake when he said,

“Surely He has born our grief and carried our sorrows yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement for our peace was upon Him and by His stripes we are healed. And we, like sheep, have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before his shearers is silent, so He opened not his mouth. Because He poured out his soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors

and He love the sin of many and made it intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:4-12).

Zachariah saw Him entering Jerusalem as a Great King. He prophesied hundreds of years before the actual time of the coming of Christ saying,

“Rejoice greatly O Daughter of Zion! Shout O Daughter of Jerusalem! Behold Your King is coming to you. He is Just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey. A colt the foal of a donkey” (Zachariah 9:9).

David saw Him coming to the world as a Redeemer and Saviour, saying,

“Surely the salvation is near to those who fear him that glory may dwell in our land” (Ps 85:9).

He also saw Jesus’ sufferings on the cross more than a thousand years before, and described it as though it was an eye-witness account in Psalm 22.

All of these men, and many others, saw Christ through their faith, longing to see Him personally and listen to His words, yet could not. The saintly Apostles saw Jesus and lived with Him. They heard the words of grace and the mysteries of the Gospel direct from His mouth, being therefore justified in their elation through such blessings.

We, the children of the New Testament have a big share in these blessings as we see Christ every day on the Altar slain for the sake of our sins. We partake of His Holy Body and Blood for the forgiveness of our sins and the healing of our souls, bodies and spirits.

In the Holy Gospel we could hear His Words, see His miracles and discover His divine Love through His Incarnation. The eyes and ears of the least trusting believer who sees and hears these things and enjoys the mysteries of the New Testament are still greater in blessings than the eyes and ears of the most distinguished prophets and righteous men of the Old Testament.

“Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women, there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist, but he who is least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he” (Matt.11:11).

The eyes and ears of the most feeble believer who experiences the Grace of Christ and the might of the Bible’s promises listens to the Lord’s Words and relishes life with Him. Such believers are therefore considerably more blessed and joyous than those of the greatest scientists who are separated from God.

True happiness relies on understanding the mysteries of the Bible and benefiting from its promises.

The eyes that today can see the Lord face a mystery like the mystery of the mirror (1Cor.13:12), and the ears that hear His words, believe them, and try to utilize them in their lives shall attain the full blessings when they see Him face to face and hear His joyous voice, as He says,

“Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt.25:34).

Those privileges which the Lord has given to us should incite us to give thanks, urge us to apply ourselves and invite us to contemplate the means of Grace, which we enjoy, and the revelations of the New Testament. We should realize that the benefits given to us ought be in accordance with the privileges we receive, otherwise they become our debts;

“To whom much has been committed, of whom they will ask the more” (Luke 12:48).

That is why the priest continues the litany saying, **“May we be worthy to hear and to act according to Your Holy Gospels through the prayers of your saints”**, as he asks for the assistance and grace of God to help us to listen to the words of the Gospel and act upon them so that every believer might become a fifth Gospel.

“You are our epistle written in our hearts known and read by all men, you are manifestly an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart” (2Cor.3:2-3).

The pleadings and prayers of the saints help and support us in our struggle to please the Lord and keep His commandments till the last breath, as the saints themselves did, and so we may gain a share with the saints.

While reading the Litany of the Gospel, a deacon stands behind the priest holding the “Gospel Container”, which is the four Gospels in a book covered with silver or velvet. He puts the cross on it and raises them in honour to the top of his head.

At the end of the first part of the litany the deacon responds saying, “Pray for the Holy Gospel”, asking that the Holy Gospel be spread throughout the world and that all should listen and act according to it in the aim of winning eternal life.

The congregation responds by saying, “Lord have mercy.” Then the priest continues, “Remember also, O Our Master...”. At the end of the litany he offers incense to God before the sanctuary saying, “And to You we send up the glory, honour...”. Remaining there, he then offers incense to the Gospel saying, “Bow to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ through the prayers of the chanter David the Prophet. O Lord grant us the forgiveness of our sins.” Then the Psalm is read in Coptic.

Some Points on the Litany of the Gospel:

- ☒ The priest asks David the prophet to intercede for us as we read one of his Psalms.
- ☒ Psalms are prophecies about Lord Christ, Glory be to Him, which is why the Reading of the Psalm is before the Gospel. The Psalms are an annunciation of the perfect light, ‘The light of the Gospel’.

The priest and the deacon enter the sanctuary and the priest puts a handful of incense in the censer while saying, “Glory and honour... .” He then holds the “Gospel Container” with the cross on it while the deacon faces him, holding onto them also.

Together they go around the altar, the deacon walking backwards, while the priest says,

“Lord now You are letting Your servant depart in peace according to Your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all people. A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of Your people Israel” (Luke 2:29-32).

During this procession the priest offers incense to the “Gospel Container”.

Further Remarks:

☒ Going around the altar holding the Gospels and the cross represents the spreading of Christianity to the whole creation and announcing that our salvation was completed through the Cross.

☒ The prayer of Simon the elder has two meanings:

i.) This prayer ends at approximately the same time as the Psalm ends, then the Gospel of the New Testament is read. This is exactly what Simon did when he saw Christ the Saviour of the whole world and asked to depart from this world (representing the Old Testament).

ii. Nobody can ask for departure from this world except he who is ready, and here the priest and the Church announce their readiness to listen to the Gospel and to accept the Kingdom of God, as St. Paul says.

“And having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace” (Eph.6:15).

At the end of the procession the priest puts the “Gospel Container” on his head in honour and stands to the left side of the sanctuary facing West. The deacon raises the Cross on his head and stands by the right side of the sanctuary’s door also facing the West, and when the response of the Psalm finishes he says, “Stand up in the fear of God and let us listen to the Holy Gospel”, drawing the congregation’s attention and asking them stand up in awe and piety to listen to the Holy Gospel, the Word of God and the Constitution of Heaven.

Then the priest, facing the East, comes out from the sanctuary without putting his back to the altar, stepping with his left foot while saying, “Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord. A chapter from the Holy Gospel according to St. (Matthew, Mark, Luke or John).” The verse “Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord” was said to Christ when He entered Jerusalem in a great procession, and later when He was in Jerusalem, when...“He was teaching daily in the temple” (Luke 19:47).

Today we are experiencing the same situation whereby Jesus has come to teach us through His life-giving words in the Gospel. We believe that the Lord Jesus stands by all His Words and promises for those who whole-heartedly believe He fulfils these promises. He said through Jeremiah,

“I am ready to perform my word” (Jer.1:12).

The other priests kiss the Gospel, then the serving priest kisses it. The deacon reads the Arabic/English Gospel saying, “Stand up in the fear of God and listen to the Holy Gospel, a chapter from the Holy Gospel according to St. (Matthew,

Mark, Luke or John) the Evangelist may his blessings be with us all.”

The priest hands the censer to the deacon, as he starts the Coptic reading of the Gospel, starting with, “Our Lord, God, Saviour and King of us all Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God to Whom is Glory forever...”.

During the reading of the Gospel, two deacons holding lit candles stand on both sides of the lectern; this symbolises that the Gospel enlightens our path in life, the Gospel being the life and words of the Lord Christ who said,

“I am the Light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life” (John 8:12).

An abundance of light also represents joy and happiness and the Gospel is the Lord’s joyous tidings.

After reading the Gospel, the priest bows and kisses it in honour and reverence while saying, “Glory be to our God forever...Amen”, as St. Paul says,

“Now to our God and Father be Glory for ever and ever Amen” (Ph.4:20).

The priest then kneels down to God before the Sanctuary then stands back up. The archdeacon, or a senior deacon who can read properly, begins the Arabic/English reading.

The Priest takes the censer and, while standing in awe before the Gospel, he incenses and prays the Mystery of the Gospel. He implores the Lord to make him and His people worthy to hear the Holy Bible, which many prophets and righteous

people desired to see but they could not, and to hear but they could not hear it. He also pleads that they become not just listeners, deluding themselves, but hearers and doers of its commandments and admonitions for the sake of their salvation.

During this time the congregation stand up in awe and devotion listening to the Holy Bible, the word of life. They learn this devotion and respect for the Holy Gospel from their priest whom they see standing before the Bible in reverence and adoration while he offers incense and prays the Mystery of the Gospel with dedication.

THE MYSTERY OF THE GOSPEL

The priest prays silently, “O You, Who are long suffering, abundant in mercy and truth...”, as the chanter says,

“But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion and gracious Long suffering and abundant in mercy and truth” (Ps.86:15). “

Receive our prayers and supplications, accept our petitions, repentance and confession upon Your Holy Undeiled Altar in heaven. May we be worthy to hear Your Holy Gospel and may we keep your precepts and commandments and bring forth fruit, therein, a hundred fold, sixty fold and thirty fold...”.

Here he asks the Lord to purify his heart, and the hearts of his people, and remove from them the thistles and thorns of the false concerns and attacks of devil which strangle the

Word. He also pleads with the Lord to make us repent and live the words of the Gospel and to bring forth fruits “...In Christ Jesus Our Lord...”.

The priest asks for all these blessings in Jesus Christ’s Name as Jesus taught us in saying,

“Most assuredly I say to you whatever you ask the Father in My Name, He will give you...Ask and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:23-24).

The Apostle also teaches us saying,

“Therefore, by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His Name” (Heb.13:15)...

“having boldness to enter the Holy place by the Blood of Jesus” (Heb.10:19)...

“Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who came to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them” (Heb.7:25).

It is very important to always ask in the Name of Jesus Christ; He intercedes for us so that our prayers can enter the Holies and meet acceptance with God. The church has realised this important point and has therefore added to the Lord’s Prayer the words, **“Through Jesus Christ our Lord”**, to assure that all prayers, glorifications and supplications be raised to God in the Name of Christ, through His endless merits. No prayer or litany in the Church is without the Name of Jesus, whether at its beginning or end. The Thanksgiving Prayer, the prayer with which all

churches commence praying, begins, “Let us give thanks to the beneficent and merciful God, the Father of our Lord, God and Saviour....” It ends like most Church’s litanies with the comforting conclusion, “...through the Grace, mercy and love of mankind of Your Only Begotten Son, our Lord, God and Saviour, Jesus Christ ...”.

It is regrettable that some priests ignore this conclusion, being satisfied with what is prayed loudly, not knowing the vital importance of that conclusion. It is the stamp and the seal that gives validity to the prayer and makes it acceptable in Heaven. It includes two important factors which are essential for the acceptance of the prayer: one being that we ask ‘through grace and compassion’, for without the Lord’s Grace which flows with compassion for us the weak prayers of our defiled lips would never be accepted; the other being the Name of Christ, Who admonished us to always ask in His Name and His merits in order to receive all that we ask for.

In one of Jesus’ homilies He stressed the importance of this requirement by stating the phrase, “In my Name”, six times (John 14:13-14, 15:16-24, 26). It is more than just a requirement, it is a promise and an inspiration, as the commandments of the Lord Jesus have the Divine power for fulfilment. If:

“A letter which is written in the king’s signet ring no one can revoke” (Est.8:8),

then how much more irrevocable is the prayer that is raised in the Name of Christ through the Holy Spirit, Who intercedes on our behalf with words unutterable.

It is also stated in the Psalm,

“I will lift up my hands in Your Name, my soul shall be satisfied with marrow and fatness” (Ps 63:4-5).

The Wise Man says,

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous run to it and are safe” (Prov.18:10).

The Apostle says,

“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12).

Therefore, praying in the Name of Christ is a request that Jesus has acquired with His Blood. There is no admission to the Holiest of the Most High except through Him, nor is there acceptance for prayers raised to God in any name other than the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Having boldness to enter the Holiest by the Blood of Jesus” (Heb.10:19).

An old manuscript states that if a Bishop was present, he would be the one to say, “Through the Grace, compassion and...” which indicates its importance. This is the custome in the Byzantian Tradition.

Then the priest completes the Mystery of the Gospel with the following prayers:

- ☒ “Remember, O Lord, the sick of Your people, look at them with mercy and compassions. Heal them.
- ☒ Remember, O Lord, our fathers and brethren who are travelling, bring them back home in safety and soundness.”
- ☒ Remember, O Lord, the wind of the sky and the crops of the land, bless them.
- ☒ Remember, O Lord, the plants, and the vegetation of the land, bless them.
- ☒ Remember, O Lord, the safety of the people and the livestock.
- ☒ Remember, O Lord, the safety of this Holy place of Yours, all places and monasteries of our Orthodox fathers.
- ☒ Remember, O Lord, the head of our state, Your servant, preserve him in safety, equity and power.
- ☒ Remember, O Lord, the captives, save them all.
- ☒ Remember, O Lord, our fathers and brothers who slept in the Orthodox faith, repose all their souls.
- ☒ Remember, O Lord, those who have offered those oblations, and those on whose behalf they are offered, and those who are presenting them, grant them all a heavenly reward.
- ☒ Remember, O Lord, those distressed in hardships and tribulations, save them from every adversity.
- ☒ Remember, O Lord, the catechumen of your people, have mercy upon them, confirm them in Your faith and cast out of their hearts all traces of idolatry.
- ☒ Your law, Your fear, Your commandments, Your rights and Your Holy doctrines, establish in their hearts, and grant them to realise the strength of the

words they have been taught. In the due time they may be worthy of rebirth, which is for the forgiveness of their sins, as You prepare them a temple of Your Holy Spirit. Through the Grace, Compassion”

If there is an associate priest, he prays the Litany of the Gospel then moves around the Altar and stands by the door of the Sanctuary, as previously stated.

After the deacon finishes stating, “Stand up in the fear of God...”, the serving priest, who has to read the Gospel in Coptic, says, “Blessed is He who comes in the Name of God.” The associate priest walks out of the Sanctuary backwards, and he too prays silently, saying, “Blessed is He ...”, then, “Our Lord, God, Saviour and king of us all Jesus Christ ...”. The serving priest then says (aloud) the introduction to the Gospel and then reads the Gospel in Coptic.

During the reading, the attending priests kiss the “Gospel Container”, which the associate priest holds. He stands facing the Gospel and offering incense to it while silently praying the mystery of the Bible, standing in awe and reverence.

After the Coptic reading of the Gospel a senior deacon reads it in Arabic/English. Then the congregation sits quietly while one of the priests gives the sermon, which is usually based, firstly, on the Liturgy’s Gospel, and secondly, on the other readings which are thematically similar.

During the sermon much care must be taken as to the interpretation of all verses of the Liturgy’s Gospel and the spiritual, religious and ritual connotations therein. It should

clarify the object and the message the Church wishes to give to her children, through all the readings of the day of which the Gospel is the most important. The sermon also may refer to the saints of the day, as read in the Sinaxarium, saving the preacher from using unrelated or remote stories. The priest also should not concentrate on just one verse of the Bible, using it as the only frame of reference for the sermon, (like the Protestants do). The sermon should contain many references, linking one verse to another, and explaining the main purpose of the day's readings. This was the most important objective the church had in mind when arranging the readings throughout the year.

Some Points on the Reading of the Gospel:

☒ In the old Coptic churches there used to be an elevated platform for reading the Gospel and giving the sermon to make it easier for the people to see and hear the reader. Reading the Gospel from an elevated position suggested the respect and great reverence that is given to the Word of God. It also indicated that the Gospel contains heavenly mysteries and honourable, superior teachings. Christ advised His disciples, saying,

*“What you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops”
(Matt.10:27)*

*Isaiah the Prophet says, “O Zion, you who bring good tidings, get up into the high mountain. O Jerusalem, you who bring good tidings, lift up your voice with strength”
(Is. 40:9).*

The Holy Bible also speaks about Ezra, who wanted to read to the people from the law of Moses after they had returned from captivity,

“So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose,...And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people (meaning that he was standing on an elevated platform), And when he opened it, all the people stood up” (Neh.8:4-5).

On the same platform the Levite priests stood to explain the laws to the people,

“And the Levites helped the people to understand the law, and the people stood in their place, so they read distinctly from the book, in the law of God, and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading” (Neh.8:7).

☒ The Mystery of the Gospel is only said when reading the Gospel of the Liturgy. The priest reads the Gospel of the Morning and Vespers Incense without the mystery, but he still incenses to the Gospel.

☒ We notice in Coptic Churches that the Coptic lectern is placed in the Northern side (left hand side) and faces East, while the Arabic lectern is in the Southern side (right hand side) and faces West. The reason why the Coptic lectern faces East is that the priest, when reading the Coptic Gospel, is praying a part of the Liturgy, and prayers are always directed towards the East.

☒ In the past when the people spoke the Coptic language fluently there was no need for a second

lectern, nor for a second reading of the Gospel in Arabic. During this time there was only one lectern facing West towards the people. After the Coptic language became more obscure the Church had to put another lectern in the Southern side facing West towards the people, being used for the Arabic interpretation of the Coptic readings so that the people could understand and benefit from it.

THE LECTREN OF THE DAYS

☒ The readings of the week days, the Epistles and Gospel, are based on the Sinaxarium of the day. The readings regarding the commemoration of the prophets are different from those of the Apostles and those of the saints. To avoid repetition, some days readings are substituted from, the readings of other days; the first are known as ‘referred days’, the latter as ‘special days’. Some examples of these are:

☒ In the Prophets’ Commemorations of the 8th Toot we read the commemoration of Moses.

☒ In the Commemoration of the Twelve Apostles, the readings are those of 5th Abib which is Martyrdom day of Saints Peter and Paul.

☒ In the Commemoration of the Seventy Disciples, the readings are those of 1st Tuba which is the Martyrization day of St. Steven, the Archdeacon.

☒ In the Commemoration day of the universal Church’s Martyrs, the readings are those of 25th Hatour, the Martyrdom day of St. Marcorious, the Two Sworded.

☒ In the Commemoration day of the Coptic Martyrs, the readings are those of 15th Hatour, the Martyrdom day of Mar Mina, the marvels performer.

☒ In the Commemoration days of the Patriarchs of Alexandria, the readings are those of 29th Hatour, the Martyrdom day of Abba Peter, the seal of martyrs.

☒ In the Commemorations of Monks, the readings are those of the departure day of Abba Antonious, the father of all monks, and so on.

SUNDAYS LECTREN

The Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, thought that all Sunday readings throughout the year should revolve around one topic which is ‘The work of the Holy Trinity in the Church’; meaning, His Holy influence in arranging her affairs and redeeming, saving, guiding and supporting her. In examining the Sunday readings it becomes apparent that the readings of each of the four Sundays in every Coptic month revolve around one issue and one aspect of the gracious favours of the Holy Trinity to the Church.

Further Points:

☒ If a major or minor Lordly feast falls on a Sunday, the passages of the feast are read and not those of the Sunday. This applies to the two Feasts of the Cross and the Coptic New Year’s day.

☒ In Ebn El Assal’s book, “Main Acts in the Church’s Culture”, the following point is made, stating that, ‘If someone arrives at the church late, that is, after the

reading of the Gospel and deprives himself from listening to it, he should refrain from having Communion.’ This indicates the importance that the Church puts on the Bible, making a great effort to encourage her children to hear it, as well as the sermon that is based upon it, listening in awe and reverence, in order to nourish their souls and comfort their spirits.

☒ The word of God can be consumed in two senses. In one sense it can be devoured intellectually; the word (the Bible) being comprehended, absorbed and becoming part of the mind. In the second sense, the Word, that is Jesus Christ, is actually eaten and swallowed as the Eucharist, becoming united with us. Professor Origanos says, “We say that we drink Jesus’ Blood, not only through the mysterious ritual, but also through His Words which carry life in them.”

“The words that I speak to you are spirit and they are life” (John 6:63).

☒ St. Peter said to Lord Christ,

“Lord, to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (John 6:68-69).

As a matter of fact, the Church ask her children, specially those who intend to partake in the Holy Communion, to attend the Liturgy from the time of the raising of the incense, being in attendance during the introductory prayers and the absolution. If this is not possible then they should at least be there when the Ministers’ Absolution is prayed to get the benefit from it. If they cannot attend the Ministers’

Absolution, at least they have to be present at the Gospel's reading. Hearing the Bible, the Word of life, and listening to the sermon is the minimum requirement for those who want to have Communion. One should attend the Mass right from the beginning to gain the blessings and the benefits of the Holy Communion, as he then will be receiving it after long prayers, and extended spiritual preparation.

The book called 'The Lord's Table' emphasises the importance of attending the mass in saying, "The communal thanksgiving prayer in the first church, was also Eucharistic." St. Severus, Ibn El Moqaffa, says, "He who does not attend the readings and the sanctification of the oblations, shall receive the same punishment as Judas Iscariot, as they partakes in the Holy Communion with an impure soul. The readings and the Liturgy are performed before the communion to sanctify the soul and the body of him who partakes of the mysteries, thus he becomes worthy of the Holy Communion."

The book entitled 'Paradise of the Fathers' tells a true story which confirms what St. Severus says, showing how the readings are effective in purifying the soul and leading it to repentance. As the story goes...It happened that St. Paul the simple, St. Anthony's disciple, went to the monastery to visit the brethren as his custom was. As they were entering the church, he was watching them to examine each one's attitude. He saw them rejoicing and saw their happy Angels following them. But one of them had his face blackened and hateful demons were dragging him, while his Angel followed at a distance with a frowning face. When the Saint saw that, he wept, hit his chest many times and went out of the church. The brethren went after him and asked why he was crying, they asked him to go back and attend the Liturgy, but he

declined and sat at the church's door weeping bitterly. When they came out of church after the Mass he, again, watched them to examine their condition. He saw the brother, who had entered the church in a sorrowful condition, coming out with a shining face and a radiant body. His Angel was very happy as he followed him, while the demons kept at a distance with saddened faces. St. Paul clapped his hands merrily and in great joy blessed the Lord, the Father of Goodness, and shouted, "Come, and see the works of our Good Lord who wishes the salvation of all the people. Come and look at His love to mankind, which is unspoken of. Let us prostrate ourselves and say, 'You alone, O Lord, can wipe away every sin.'" All of the other brothers gathered around him and he told them what he had seen. They asked the brother how the Lord changed his condition, and he confessed before all of them saying, "For a long time I have been living in extreme defilement, and when I saw the father crying bitterly, my heart started to develop some feeling, so I listened carefully to the readings and I heard Isaiah saying,

'Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean, put away the evil of your doing from before my eyes. Cease to do evil. Learn to do good, seek justice, reprove the oppressor, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord, through your sin are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow' (Is.1:16-17)

. When I, the sinner, heard those words my heart pounded and I said to the Lord, 'You are the compassionate God who came to save the sinners. You, who said, there shall be rejoicing in heaven, before God's Angels, when one sinner repents. Now, O Lord, what you have promised through Your prophets, fulfil in me, the sinner, and accept me again to You. From now on, I shall do nothing of the evils I have

done before, I shall serve You in purity until my last breath'. On this pledge I left the church". On hearing that all the brothers shouted in one great voice, "How magnificent Your works are, O Lord, they all are done prudently."

From that time onward, that brother lived in purity and pleased the Lord with his devout life. Lord Jesus Christ said to His disciples,

"You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to You. Abide in Me and I in you" (John 15:3-4).

Hearing the word of God cleans the mind from the evil thoughts and intentions. It defines the straight and Divine path which we ought to follow.

☒ When the Gospel is read, we should listen carefully, in fear, awe and in contemplation because it is the word of life. We listen like Virgin Mary used to do when she witnessed the events of the marvellous and Divine Nativity and heard the words of the Angels and the shepherds, the words of Elder Simeon, Hennah the Prophet, and what Joseph the devout told her regarding the visions about her Divine Child. The Holy Book says about her, "But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19).

We should also do as Mary, Lazarus' sister did when Jesus went to their house, listening to Him in full attention and deep contemplation in order that she comprehend what He said to her. In the Bible, "And she, Martha, had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word" (Luke 10:39). That was why the Lord blessed her, saying,

“Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:42).

The book of the Apostles’ Teachings (the Diskolia) says, “When the Gospel, Liturgy’s Gospel is read, all the priests, deacons and congregation shall stand up quietly and in complete silence as it is written, ‘Be silent and listen, O Israel’, and also, ‘You stand up and listen’.”

What has been said about the Gospel of the Liturgy also applies to all Gospel readings in the Church, whether it is Vespers or the morning or hourly prayers. In order to maintain quiet inside the church and to avoid distraction while the Gospel is being read, everyone who arrives at the church during this time should wait quietly at the door and listens carefully until the reading is finished. He can then walk, kneel down in front of the Sanctuary, kiss the priest’s hand and settle quietly in his place.

In the book called ‘Trinity’s Mystery in Priesthood’ we read, “If someone steps inside the church’s door while the Gospel is being read, he shall stop there and not move till the reading is finished.”

THE MYSTERY OF THE VEIL

When Moses read the law to the people of Israel, they bowed their heads in order to avoid seeing the light that shone from his face, as he used to unveil his face when he read the law. After the sermon, while chanting the Gospel’s response, the serving priest stands in front of the Sanctuary

before the veil. He bows his head towards the East and, in submission and humility, prays the Mystery of the Veil. This prayer deep, strong and important prayer is outlined below with some Biblical references:“

O Lord, Who, for His unspoken love to mankind, sent His Only Begotten Son into the world to bring back the lost sheep...”, as spoken by the Apostle, who said, “In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His Only Begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation of our sins” (1John 4:9-10). Christ is the Good Shepherd, Who came to seek and deliver those who were lost. He left the glories of heaven and descended to the world in search of the lost sheep - the children of Adam who have strayed in the world. Our beloved Lord Jesus forsook the praises of the angels and all the heavenly hosts in order to descend to earth for the salvation of His Hands’ creation. He said to Himself, “What have I here (in heaven) that my people are taken away for nothing?” (Is.52:9). He descended from the heights and sought the lost sheep until He found them, redeemed them and returned them back to the Father’s bosom, as in the saying,

“For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (1 Pet 2:25).“

...We pray O Lord that You not reject us as we draw near to Your awesome sacrifice, for we do not rely on our own righteousness, but on Your mercy by which You gave life to our race...”. Here the priest asks the Lord to make him worthy of touching the Holy Sacraments without falling in

condemnation and without committing the sin of daring to approach the Holies with no merit; a sin which subjects the person to the Divine wrath, and hence, retribution where man can be cast out and thrown into darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing the teeth. Because man is never sinless, no matter how hard he may try to purify himself, the Apostle says,

“For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this” (1Cor.4:4)...

“Even if one was righteous, his righteousness would not save him” (Ezk.33:12)...“

But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are like filthy rags” (Is.64:6).

The Lord commands us not to depend on our piety saying,

“When you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do’.” (Luke 17:10).

Hence, the priest relies on the great mercies of God and approaches the sacraments in fear and awe, saying with the Prophet Daniel,

“O my God, incline Your ear and hear. O Lord, hear, O Lord, forgive, O Lord, listen and act” (Dan.9:18-19).“

We ask and entreat Your Goodness, O Lover of mankind, that this Mystery which You have instituted for our salvation, does not become condemnation to myself or to Your people, but given for the remission of our sins”.

Our beloved Lord Jesus has given us His Holy Body and Honoured Blood in the Eucharist, so that we may be cleansed of our sins, if we partake of them in repentance and readiness. In the Confession part of the Liturgy, the priest says, "...Given for the salvation, remission of sins, and for an eternal life to those who partake of them". In order to be prepared to partake of the Holy Sacraments, we must continually live a life of repentance and confession.

As the Apostle Paul teaches us, those same sacraments which are given for the salvation, remission of sins and for eternal life, can become condemnation, weakness, illness and even death to those who risk approaching them without repentance. He says,

"Therefore whoever eats this Bread or drinks of this Cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that Bread and drink of that Cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner, eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's Body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord" (1Cor.11:27-32).

The priest must carefully consider those who approach the Holy Communion, especially those personally unknown to him. He must ask such questions as, "Do you have a confession father?", or, "When was your last confession?", "Are you spiritually prepared for the Holy Communion?" If someone receives the Sacraments without repentance and readiness, he will fall in condemnation and the priest would

be responsible as he gave him the Body and Blood of the Lord without considering his spiritual state.

Abba Gregorios has an interesting view about this matter. He likens the priest to a bank cashier (teller), who becomes fully responsible before the bank if he cashes a cheque without properly identifying the cheque bearer. For this reason, the church admonishes new priests during ordination to be extra careful when giving the Sacraments.

The Command which the bishop reads on the ordination day says, “It is your duty, above all other church commands, and before all other Apostolic instructions, to apply the utmost care for the distribution of the Lord’s life-giving sacraments. You shall administer this diligently and fervently. Rest assured that the Seraphim and Cherubim are standing around the Altar, with fear and awe. Be always aware of the high esteem of Him, Who is slain in your hands. He is Christ, Emmanuel, Who gave Himself up for you. Be always aware that you fraction His Incarnated organs, and that you carry on your hands Him, Whom Simeon the Elder carried with honor and majesty. And that this chalice is His Blood, shed for our sins with which He saved all captives from Hades. The Blood which flowed from the true vine, His blessed side, after He had given up His soul on the cross. O what a Mystery! This is the Holy Body and the Honoured Blood with which the creation has been saved, this is the Lamb of God Who carries the sins of the world and brought man to the light of the truth. So, be always on the alert, O son, pay the utmost attention and guard these jewels like the Cherubim guarded the Tree of Life. Be always vigilant regarding those sacraments so as to be saved from grave matters. Do not give them except to people who are living rightly, with good fame and pure souls. Beware of

negligence to avoid any harm coming to you, for the whole world does not deserve even the smallest molecule of them. Let your distribution be in good order, quietness, silence and extreme carefulness. Examine the holy utensils closely, and let those with sharp eyesight check them, twice and three times for any particles sticking to them. If you do all this, your service will be acceptable, your intercession honourable, your prayer beneficial and the Lord's Grace to you will be abundant."

In the ritual procession that is performed for the new priests in the church on the fortieth day of their ordination, they are given the following advice, which states, "Give all the care to distributing the Divine Mysteries. Do not give them unless you assert the merit of those who seek them. For if you take this matter lightly, and in negligence give them to unworthy persons, your judgment will be enormous, as the punishment to negligent priests is so severe." Besides urging priests to give the utmost care when distributing the Holy Sacraments, the church also advises the people about the absolute necessity for preparedness, repentance, confession and internal and external cleanliness before the Communion. It is our view that priests, preachers and ministers should not stop advising, guiding and cautioning the people through their sermons about this vital matter.

The church also performs the 'Washing of Feet' before Maundy Thursday's Mass, emulating the Saviour Who washed His disciples' feet before giving them the Mystery of Thanksgiving. The Church's aim here is to teach the people the absolute necessity of washing their souls with repentance, before approaching the Sacred Table. The reason why Jesus washed their feet was to tell them that he who has been cleansed by Baptism, needs only to wash his feet, the only

organs that get dirty through contact with the ground. This is a clear indication that after being wholly cleansed through submersion in the baptismal font, one does not need to go into it again before approaching the Holy Communion. All he needs is repentance, as the priests washes him with its rites, and he is cleansed from the sins which he has confessed. But he who receives the Holy Communion without repentance, shall face what Judas Iscariot faced; after he took the bread from the Saviour, Satan entered him. By drying the disciples feet after He washed them, the Lord proclaimed the need to be extremely cautious regarding sin every time we approach and receive His life-giving Mysteries.

In his book 'The Confession Sacrifice', St. Severus, Bishop of Ashmonians and a great saint of the Church, explains the relationship of the mysteries of repentance and confession with the Holy Communion, and the necessity of preparedness before Communion. Under the heading 'Beware not to have Communion without Confession' he writes, "Confession is essential and necessary. Don't you know what the Lord means when He says about the unrepentant sinner, 'From now he shall be condemned'. Also read the Apostle's words, 'For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner, eats and drinks judgment to himself' (1Cor.11:29). Because he has not judged himself first on the hands of the priest, he shall get the Lord's judgment, which He has brought upon himself, by receiving the Holy Body and the Honoured Blood of the Lord unprepared.

Eating the Holy Body without merit is like Adam eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, for the Lord created the tree so that Adam might eat of it when the Lord allowed him to; so that he might live. But when he ate of it without the Lord's permission it brought about his death and destruction.

It is the same with the Holy Body which the Lord gave as an eternal life to him who eats of it according to His command; but if anyone eats of it in an unworthy manner, it will result in his death. For the Apostle says, “Whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, will be guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord” (1Cor.11:27). This means he will be guilty of shedding this honourable Blood, exactly like those who shed it on the Cross. This sin of daring to eat the Body of the Lord without confession is greater than adultery, murder and idolatry; it is the greatest of all sins, as the Apostle says, “He will be guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord”. No doubt, the offence against the Body and Blood of the Lord is greater than the offence of adultery, murder or idolatry.

We also read the Apostle’s words, “Anyone who has rejected Moses’ Law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of Grace. For we know Him who said,

‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, say the Lord.’
(Heb.10:28-30).

The Lord gave us these Holy Sacraments to give us the strength to reject sin and hasten to live repentant lives. He who claims that the Lord forgives his sins through the Holy Communion without confession is blaspheming by putting the Lord in the situation of approving of sin and accepting disobedience. For such a person, sin becomes easy because, to them, eternal life is effortlessly achievable. That is why God says that the Holy Sacraments are “forgiveness and

eternal life” to those who receive them with merit, and “condemnation and eternal death” if received unworthily. St. Macarius, in one of his sermons, said, “Purify your hearts from every defilement, in order to be worthy to receive the Sacred Body and Blood of Christ, so that He may abide in you and you in Him, and you will be protected from all adversities.” Accordingly, he who takes this matter lightly, either receiving the Sacraments without merit or not receiving them at all, will be overcome by the forces of darkness, and thus banish himself by his own will from life. Let us approach Holy Communion in awe and fear, and in true faith, so that the Lord may cast the fear of the enemy away from us, through the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom is the Glory forever, Amen. “

Honour and Glory be to Your Holy Name, O Father and Son and Holy Spirit, now and forever, Amen.”

If all things related to receiving Holy Communion went according to the rites, and everyone believed that what is in the paten and chalice are the Body broken and Blood shed for the life of the whole world, and if the deacons and congregation were prepared and having confessed their sins, and if the priests were pure on the inside and outside and distributing the Sacraments in awe, fear and caution, and if the people approached the Holy Communion in reverence and devotion, it would indeed be a moment from Heaven.

“To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna to eat” (Rev.2:17), and

“To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life” (Rev.2:7).

Truly, whoever witnesses those awesome moments will

“fall down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you” (1Cor.14:25).

He will give glory to the Lord with the twenty four heavenly priests saying,

“You are worthy, O Lord, to receive Glory and Honor and Power, for You created all things and by Your will they exist and were created” (Rev.4:11).



4 The Three Great Litanies

THE THREE GREAT LITANIES

The priest prostrates before the Sanctuary, and then before other priests and finally to the congregation. He asks the priests for absolution and exchanges a holy kiss with them, requesting their prayers. Then he asks the congregation for forgiveness, in accordance with the Saviour's command,

“Therefore, if you bring your gift to the Altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the Altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matt.5:23-24).

The priest then proceeds towards the altar, kisses it and then, with a submissive heart, begins praying the Major Litanies of ‘Safety’, ‘the Church Fathers’ and ‘Our Gatherings’. He offers incense, as detailed in the Liturgy Book, and at the end of each litany he says, “Through the Grace and Compassion...”. He lifts the front of the Eprospharine to offer incense to the covered Mysteries, in remembrance of the time when the three Mary's came to Christ's tomb at the dawn of Sunday, as seen in the quote,

“Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they and certain other women came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared” (Luke 24:1).

THE CREED

In the days of old, the catechumen would attend up until the end of the third litany, and leave the church at the reading of the Creed. This was because their faith was weak and they lacked knowledge of the Christian faith. For this reason the deacon calls out before the Creed, “Attend to God with wisdom, Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy. Truly we believe in one God...”. The deacon calls upon the people to maintain reverence while saying the Creed. The Creed must be said audibly and in harmony and unity.

A Point on the Creed:

☒ In the rites of the liturgy reciting the Creed is of great importance as there are two essential conditions that have to be met before offering the bloodless oblations and receiving the Holy Communion; these are:

i. Faith, without which we cannot please God, for he who comes to God must believe that He is the goal, and will reward those who diligently seek Him (Heb.11:6).

“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb.11:1).

We declare this strong faith in our Lord by reciting the Christian Creed. We declare it from our hearts so that it may be acceptable and pleasing to the Lord.

ii. Love. We show our love for each other before God when we exchange holy kisses with one another during the Reconciliation Prayer, “Exchange a holy kiss with one another....”

And so, by reciting the Creed we declare our orthodox faith in the one God with three Hypostases. We announce our hope and anticipation in the Resurrection from the dead when Christ will come again to judge the world. We also hope for the eternal life of the world to come with all the happiness and joy for those who are righteous, and declare misery and sorrow for the unrighteous.

By exchanging holy kisses we show love towards each other and subsequently to God, according to the blessed Apostle’s words,

“If someone says ‘I love God’ and hates his brother, he is a liar, for he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him that he who loves God must love his brother also” (1John 4:20-21).

Hence, by saying the Creed and exchanging holy kisses we have obtained the three great Christian virtues;

‘Faith, Hope and Love’ (1Cor.13:13),

and the Lord will accept our prayers and offerings. As we lead a life of repentance we will approach the Holy Sacraments with a pure heart.

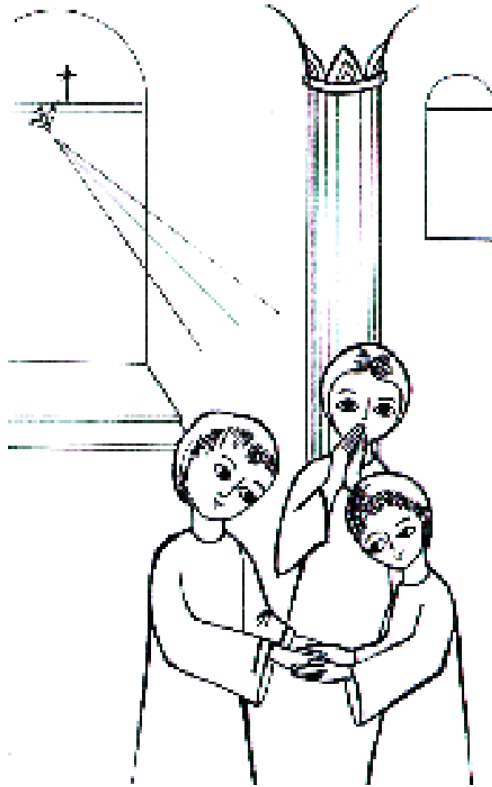
WASHING THE HANDS

While the Creed is being read the priest washes his hands three times, as he did before choosing the Lamb. He stands by the Sanctuary's door, facing West, and shakes his hands before the people. This action cautions and warns people to be prepared before receiving the Holy Communion. He repudiates the guilt of him who dares to receive Communion undeservedly, as if he is reminding them of St. Paul's fearful words, "Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup in an unworthy manner, will be guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner, eats and drinks judgment to himself not discerning the Lord's Body" (1Cor.11:27-30).

By shaking his hands the priest is signifying, "I am innocent of the blood of whoever undeservedly partakes of the Holy Sacraments, without letting me know", after which he dries them on a white clean towel.

A Point on the Washing of the Hands:

☒ The priest washes his hands before the Prayer of Reconciliation in preparation to touching and fragmenting the Holy Body with his undefiled hands, just as the Savior purified His disciples before the Lord's Supper by washing their feet and drying them.



5 Prayer Of Reconciliation

PRAYER OF RECONCILIATION

The first part of the Reconciliation Prayer is a contemplation on the Lord's creation of the uncorrupted man who then fell into sin through the envy of Satan, resulting in the death of man. God saved us by the life-giving manifestation of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ when He reconciled us with the Father through His shedding of blood on the cross.

“God was, in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed us to the word of reconciliation” (2Cor.5:19).

This is why the Liturgy for the believers begins with the Prayer of Reconciliation, as it symbolises the reconciliation between us as sinners and God. This reconciliation is important before approaching the Holy Sacraments.

Further Discussion on the Prayer Of Reconciliation

☒ The Reconciliation Prayer is not prayed on Maundy Thursday as an indication that the true reconciliation will not be accomplished until the crucifixion of Christ on Friday.

☒ In the second part of the Reconciliation, the priest prays to God to fill the hearts of the people and himself with His heavenly peace. This wonderful and precious peace which Christ has given us is to be enjoyed by all believers until it is perfected in heaven. When He gave His peace to the disciples, and to the church after them, He said,

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

☒ Every day, at the end of the Doxology, we pray that we may be worthy of that Heavenly Peace, saying, “O Christ, the Word of the Father, the Only God, grant us Your peace which is full of joy. As when You gave it to your holy Apostles, so also say unto us what You said to them, ‘My peace I give to you...My peace which I have taken from My Father, I now leave with you until the end of the ages’.” The peace which Christ gives us and which the world cannot give is the peace that comes from the cross, from the forgiveness of sins and from the Reconciliation with God. He is our peace (Eph.2:14).

☒ The Reconciliation Prayer in all of the three Liturgies prayed in the Coptic Church emphasise this peace. In the liturgy of St. Basil, the priest prays, “With Your Goodness, O God, fill our hearts with Your peace.” In St. Gregory’s liturgy he prays, “You have become our mediator with the Father, and have brought down the dividing wall of hostility, and reconciled the earthly with the Heavenly making the two of them one.” In St. Cyril’s liturgy he prays, “Make us worthy of the heavenly peace which befits Your Divinity, and make us worthy to exchange a holy kiss with one another.” As the priest entreats the Lord in the Reconciliation Prayer to fill his heart and the hearts of His people with the Heavenly peace, he also prays that He may cleanse them from defilement, evil doings, quarrels and feuds so that they may be able to

exchange a holy kiss each other in love, and thus become worthy of partaking of the Divine and Life-giving Mysteries.

☒ On Maundy Thursday, the Reconciliation is not prayed and exchanging the holy kiss is not done, to remind us of Judas Iscariot's fraudulent kiss. Here the church urges her children not to emulate his dishonesty, treachery and love of money,

“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1Tim.6:10).

☒ In some old Liturgy's Books the Reconciliation is called the Prayer of Exchanging Holy Kisses because at the end of the Reconciliation Prayer the deacon calls out, “Exchange a holy kiss with one another.” Men exchange kisses with other men, and women with other women; they are kisses of reconciliation, peace and love. “God has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation” (2Cor.5:18-19), meaning that Christ has reconciled us with the Father through shedding His precious blood on the cross. He has become our mediator with the Father and has broken down the dividing wall (Gregorian Reconciliation). Likewise, we ought to be reconciled with each other, and forgive each other with the kiss of reconciliation, peace and love according to the Apostle's advice, “Bearing with one another, and

forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another, even as Christ forgave you, you also must do.

But above all these things put on love which is the bond of perfection” (2Cor.3:13-14).

☒ Since peace is the fruit of love, reconciliation and forgiveness, the Apostle added,

“And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body and be thankful” (Col.3:15).

While praying the second part of the Reconciliation Prayer the priest holds up the triangular veil which is on top of the Eprospharine, which symbolises the seal on the Saviour’s sepulchre. The lifting up of this cloth symbolises the breaking of the seals on the tomb’s door. When lifting this veil, the priest holds its corners and raises it before his face in the same triangular shape, as it had been when on the top of the Eprospharine, and it remains in this triangular shape until the end of the Reconciliation Prayer when the priest places it on the left side of the Altar, ready to take it in his left hand after lifting the Prospharine.

When the deacon says “Prospharine, “Prospharine!”, (meaning “Come forth!”), at the end of the Reconciliation, the priest, with the help of the deacon, raises the Prospharine while creating a vibration. Raising the Eprospharine signifies the rolling away of the stone from the sepulchre’s entrance, and also to the return of the Saviour’s soul to His Body at His rising from the dead. The vibration symbolises the quake

that happened when the angel rolled the stone away from the tomb's entrance. However, the Saviour had risen in absolute quietness and left the sepulchre while the stone was still blocking its entrance with the seals still intact and the armed soldiers still guarding the tomb. Jesus coming out of the tomb while it was left intact is symbolic of how He was born of Virgin Mary while her virginity was still untouched, and also of when He entered the Upper Room where His disciples were while the doors remained locked.

Throughout the Reconciliation Prayer and until the end of the Fraction, the priest bows his head before the Altar. At the end of each sentence he kneels down folding his arms on his chest. When alternating service between praying priests, the priest standing before the altar must not leave it before the other priest takes his position before the altar. It is forbidden to leave the altar unattended by a priest for even a moment while the Sacred Sacrifice is present.

After the praying of the Reconciliation and before the lifting of the Prospahrine is when the ordination of readers, subdeacons, deacons, archdeacons, priests, and protopriests takes place in the presence of the Pope or a bishop. It is done during this time to represent that reconciliation has lifted the barrier that was placed before the Holy of Holies in the Old Testament, (now the Sanctuary), from which all were forbidden to enter except to the high priest who was allowed to enter only once a year (Lev.16:34). These days anyone with a priestly rank, whether high or small, can enter it once he has been ordained, as we are now in the days of grace and intimacy with God. Another reason for the ordination to take place at this particular moment, is so that the newly ordained priests and deacons can participate in the mass from the beginning.

At the end of the Reconciliation Prayer, the deacon calls out, “Exchange a holy kiss with one another”, and the people do so with an action of their hands, showing love and forgiveness. The whole Church becomes one heart and one thought, and are prepared to attend to the Holy Liturgy which begins with the priest saying, “The love of God the Father and the grace of His Only Begotten Son Jesus Christ, and the gift and fellowship of the Holy Spirit, to be with you all”, meaning that if we have love for one another, then the love of God will abide within us also.



6 The Heavenly Hymn

THE HEAVENLY HYMN

The priest, with the help of the deacon facing him, lifts up the Prospharine and the deacon folds and places it behind the throne of the chalice until the end of the Mass. The priest then holds the small triangular veil that he placed on the left side of the altar in his left hand and the small veil that is placed on the paten he takes in his right hand in order to bless the people with the sign of the cross saying,

“The Lord be with you all”, which is taken from St. Paul the Apostle in (2Thes.3:16).

The congregation responds, saying, “And also with your spirit.” Here the priest and the congregation mutually pray for each other, heeding the words of St. Paul who said,

“You also helping in prayer for us” (2Cor.1:11).

This is a great way to carry out the Apostle’s advice which states,

“Pray for one another that you may be healed” (James 5:16).

The priest prays for the people and blesses them, and the people pray for the priest, requesting that the Lord bless his fatherly and compassionate spirit. Truly this is a blessed and joyful action, it will soften the Lord’s heart towards us.

The priest then does the sign of the cross towards the servants on the East while he says,

“Lift up your hearts.” The priest and all the people must actually lift up their hearts and forget the earthly concerns and the worldly worries. About this topic the Apostle says,

“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of the Father. Set your minds in things above, not on things on earth” (Col.3:1-2).

And the Lord also says,

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt.6:21).

Since our true treasure, the Lord Jesus Christ, is in heaven, then to heaven we must lift our hearts, minds and senses.

The Congregation responds, saying, “They are with the Lord.” Before responding, we must ensure that our hearts are truly uplifted. We must put our minds and hearts in the words and the meaning of the response because if we utter it and our hearts are not uplifted and our minds are not focused on praying then we are lying to the priest and at the same time being dishonest to God. And what a grave sin it is to lie to God who searches the heart and examines the mind. It is better to be silent and not to utter this response if we think that our minds are not centred on praying. Let us first learn and practice how to pray in spirit and truth, then we can truly say that our hearts ‘are with the Lord’. Let us remember the Psalm which says,

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight O Lord, my strength and my redeemer” (Ps.19:14).

Let us fear the Lord’s reproof, and heed the words,

“These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honour Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me” (Matt.15:8).

We should ask the Lord at the beginning of every Liturgy to give us this Grace and let our hearts be with Him and be focused on Him, alone, throughout the Mass.

The Priest then crosses himself saying, “Let us give thanks to the Lord.” He kisses the Cross and then puts it on the altar. Let us give thanks to the Lord who made us worthy to enter His House, and to stand in His Presence, and participate in serving Him and lifting our hearts towards the Throne of Grace. The priest here emulates the Twenty Four Heavenly priests about whom the Revelation says,

“And the Twenty four Priests who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshipped God, saying ‘We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the One Who is and Who was and Who is to come, because You have taken Your Great Power and reigned’.” (Rev.11:16-17).

The people respond with, “It is Right and Worthy.” This response is a confirmation of the thanksgiving offered by the priest to God, Who is worthy of every thanks and every praise, for He is full of goodness and His mercy remains forever. The response also carries out the priest’s instruction of, “Let us give thanks to the Lord.” The priest then raises

his covered hands signifying the Seraphim who stands before God with his eyes and feet covered by his wings because of the imperceptible and unspoken majestic glory of God (Is.6:2).

Then the priest prays the following three passages: “Right and Worthy...”, “Before Whom stand...”, and “Around You stand...”.

HOLY (AGIOS)

The priest places the small veil which is in his right hand on the left side of the altar, and with his right hand he lifts the veil which is placed over the chalice and replaces it with the one in his left hand. With his left hand he then picks up the veil which he put on the left side of the altar. He holds the cross within the small veil held in his right hand and does the sign of the cross three times saying, “Holy (Agios).” The first sign of the cross he does on himself, the second sign of the cross is on those who are serving with him, and the third sign of the cross is on the congregation.

The word ‘Holy’ alone is a most powerful and deep prayer, for it is the greatest defence against Satan who is the enemy of holiness. It carries all implications with which we wish to honour God; He is Holy for He is merciful, loving, almighty, most high and without sin, and so on. We should note that the word ‘Holy’ refers only to God. For those who are righteous we use the word ‘saintly’ because their piety comes from the Lord, Who is the origin and the source of every holiness; He is

“The King of Saints” (Rev.15:3), and

“The Most Holy” (Dan.9:24).

As we praise the Lord with the word ‘Holy’ we join the Cherubim and Seraphim as they cry to one another saying, “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His Glory” (Is.6:3). The angels’ praise centres around the word ‘Holy’ as it glorifies God, Who is the source of every holiness. As we join the heavenlies in glorifying God we must be saintly like Him Who is Holy, for

“Without holiness, no one will see the Lord” (Heb.12:14).

In this sense, it is the minimum requirement for being in the presence of the Lord, to see Him and enjoy Him. Without holiness we do not deserve to partake of the Liturgy’s Holy Sacrifice; as the Liturgy gathers together the assembly of the devout, and the Holies are for the holy.

Some Remarks on the Start of the Liturgy:

- ☒ Uncovering the paten by lifting the small veil from it saying, “The Lord be with you”, while the Chalice remains covered represents Christ’s appearance to Mary Magdaline while His identity was concealed to her.
- ☒ Uncovering the chalice when saying, “Agios”, indicates that He revealed Himself afterwards to Mary Magdaline and she then recognised Him.
- ☒ Covering the chalice again after it was uncovered symbolises Jesus showing Himself to the two disciples

who were on their way to Emmaus, then disappearing from them.

☒ When the priest first does the sign of the cross with the veil that was on the paten saying, “The Lord be with you all”, and then when he does the second sign of the cross with the veil that was on the chalice saying, “Agius”, indicates the equality between the Body and the Blood, and the need to get the blessings of them both. These actions also honour both the Body and Blood.

☒ The veils, or wrapping cloths, represent the shrouds that wrapped the Saviour’s Body at His burial. The direction of the shifting of the veils is performed in the same order in which the Lord Jesus unwrapped Himself and took them off His body during His Glorified Resurrection. The veils are also placed on the altar in a similar order to the way the shrouds were placed in the tomb when found by Peter and John as they entered the sepulchre (John 20:4-7). This proves that the Saviour’s body was not stolen from the tomb as the Jews alleged, as a robber, in his rush and confusion while committing his crime, would leave everything in disarray, and not in the perfectly organised manner in which Christ left the shroud.

☒ The action of the priest moving the veils around on the altar represents the movement of the Cherubims’ wings.

☒ Taking the veil from the top of the Chalice Throne and replacing it with another represents that this Mystery has been instituted for the rise and the fall of many. (Luke 2:34). It also means that we have been exalted to take the place of the fallen angels.

After this, the priest says the following passages:

“Holy, Holy, Holy, Truly You are Holy O Lord Our God...”, followed by,

“He was incarnated and became Man and taught us the way of Salvation...”.

While saying, “He was incarnated and became Man” the priest adds a spoonful of incense to the censer so that the fragrance of the incense, as it is diffused, reminds us of the incarnation of the Lord Jesus in the womb of Virgin Mary, who is the Golden Censer. The burning embers symbolise the fire of Divinity. At the end of the passage the priest says, “He descended into Hades through the cross.” The priest then bows in reverence, placing his hands on his chest in the shape of the cross, then kisses the altar.

He then says, “He rose from the dead on the third day.” At the end of this passage when the priest says, “He will appear to judge the world in equity and reward each one according to his deeds”, he beats his chest three times in awe and remorse for his sins, recalling the horrifying day of reckoning when the people will gather and the angels will open the books which reveal the deeds and examine the minds of all; the righteous proceeding to eternal life, while the wicked to shame and everlasting contempt. (Dan.12:2)

Further Remark With Respect to Maundy Thursday and the Saturday of Light

☒ In the Liturgies of Maundy Thursday and Easter Saturday (Saturday of Light), some favour the opinion of

saying the passage from St. Gregory's Liturgy, which says, "You came to the slaughter...", to the passage, "He rose from the dead...", for at that particular time Christ had not yet risen.



7 The Consecration

THE CONSECRATION

INCENSING THE HANDS

The priest points to the bread and the wine with his hands which are covered with the veils, and says, “He instituted this great mystery of godliness for us...”. He puts the veils on both sides of the Throne then incenses his hands over the censer in preparation to touch, consecrate, fragment and distribute the Holy Sacraments. He then moves his hands away from the censer and says, “...Since He was determined to surrender Himself to death for the life of the world.”

Some Points on the Incensing of the Hands:

☒ Some priests transfer a handful of incense smoke and put it on the bread, others transfer it to both the bread and the chalice. Some do this action only once, and others three times. They transfer the incense smoke on the Sacrament as a symbol of the spices which Joseph of Arithmea and Nicodemus put on the Saviour’s body at His burial, but the old liturgy books limited its explanation by saying, “Incensing the hands is done in preparation for touching what is before him and holding it within his hands.”

THE INVOCATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

When this is done the priest takes the oblation with his right hand and places it in his left hand, then takes the veil which was in the paten, kisses it and puts it on the altar saying, “...He took the bread upon His pure, spotless, undefiled, blessed and life-giving Hands...”. It is desirable at this moment, that every priest compares the pure, spotless, undefiled and life giving Hands of the Lord with his own sinful hands. If he does this he will be filled with contrition, humility and shame towards the great mercies of the Lord, Who has chosen him to officiate and consecrate the sacraments, just as the Lord also consecrated the sacraments before him.

Remarks on Lighting the candles:

☒ From the moment the priest handles the bread the deacons around the altar hold lit candles to illuminate the area around the bread and the chalice. The candles are lit until the priest says the phrase, “He tasted and gave it ...”. The lighting of candles signifies the awesome moment of transformation when the deacon calls out, “Attend to the Lord in awe and reverence” after which the priest invokes the Holy Spirit to transform the bread into the Body of Christ and the wine into His Blood.

☒ The priest puts his right index finger on the bread which sits on his left palm and, looking up, he says, “He looked up towards heaven, to You, O God, His Father and Master of all...”, then, doing the sign of the cross on the bread three times he says,

He Gave Thanks, He Blessed It, He Sanctified It

“Took bread, gave thanks and broke it” (Luke 22:19).

“Took bread, blessed it and broke it” (Mark 14:22).

☒ He sanctified it because, with His power and words of sanctification, He consecrated the bread, thus transforming it into His Holy Body. After each sentence and signing of the cross, the congregation together with the deacons respond saying “Amen.”

☒ The Priest then breaks the bread into three parts, from the top to the bottom, **without separation**. He places one-third of it on his right hand and the two-thirds of it on his left, saying, “He broke it...”.

☒ He opens the bread slightly and breathes the Holy Spirit onto it, then continues saying, “...and gave it to His holy disciples and pure Apostles saying...”, as he breaks the top and the lower part of the bread, still without separating them.

☒ The broken parts are the parts above and below the Spadikon; breaking it this way the bread is divided into four sections making the shape of the Cross. During this time the priest continues saying, “Take, eat of it you all, for this is My Body...”.

The priest then puts the bread in the paten and clears his hands from any particles of the bread that might be on his fingers.

He then puts his hand on the rim of the chalice and says, “Likewise, after supper He took the chalice, mixed it with wine and water, He gave thanks,

He Gave Thanks, He Blessed It, He Sanctified It

The deacons and congregation respond with “Amen” after each sentence and signing, as they did with the Bread. He then touches the rim of the chalice and says, “He tasted it...”. The priest then breathes over the chalice as he did with the bread and continues, saying, “...and gave it to His holy disciples and pure Apostles saying...”. The priest lifts the chalice slightly and moves it in the sign of the cross; he first tilts it Westward, then Eastward, to the North (left), then to the South (right), whilst saying, “Take, drink of it you all, for this is my Blood...”.

Further Remarks on the Invocation of the Holy Spirit:

☒ Moving the chalice from West to East symbolises that we, who were once alienated from God and living in darkness, (the west symbolising alienation from God), have been transformed to the light and to the grace of God through the Bloodshed and death of Christ on the cross,

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the Blood of Christ” (Eph.2:13).

☒ Moving it from the left to the right signifies that we were once rejected and separated from God but through the precious blood of Christ shed on the cross we have been moved to the right hand of the Father to

be with our beloved Saviour and Good Shepherd Jesus Christ.

☒ Moving the chalice in the shape of the Cross indicates that Christ shed his Blood on the Cross for the Salvation of all mankind;

“And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world” (1John 2:2).

ANAMNESIS

The priest points to the Bread and the Chalice saying, “For every time you eat of this Bread and drink of this Cup you preach My death, confess My Resurrection and remember Me till I come.” These are the very same words that Jesus said when instituting the Eucharist (Matt.26:26-28), and Apostle Paul also said,

“For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes” (1Cor.11:26).

Therefore, every time we perform the Mystery of Thanksgiving and partake of the Holy Sacrifice we preach the Lord’s Death in our own inner Jerusalem, inviting our souls to die with Christ so that we may also rise with Him;

“For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him” (Rom.6:5-8).

We die to the world and to the lusts of the world, as in the quote, “Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom.6:11).

Further Points on the Anamnesis:

☒ Here remembrance means the living memory rather than just remembering. The word ‘Anamnesis’ is a Greek word, meaning ‘recalling’ and ‘re-enacting’.

☒ We ‘remember’ Christ, Who died for us and Rose from the dead, not merely as an historical event, but as an existing, true sacrifice. In other words, it is an effective memory because what we offer on the altar is the same sacrifice that was offered up for us on the cross.

☒ This type of remembrance can be likened to the manna which Moses put in a golden container and kept in the Ark of the Covenant inside the Holy of Holies in remembrance of the Manna the Israelites ate in the desert of Sinai. Remembrance can also consist of something that the mind can conceive but the senses cannot perceive.

☒ God exists everywhere, but we still say that the devout will always remember Him, as the Psalmist says; “His remembrance is to the age of ages.” It is therefore absolutely correct to say that this Mystery is in remembrance of Christ’s Death, because He is present in It in a mysterious, invisible and imperceptible manner.

The priest then says, **“As we too commemorate His Holy passion, His Resurrection from the dead...”**

When we commemorate His Holy passion our emotions ascend to Him Who was sent as a lamb to the slaughter. We contemplate on Him who endured the iniquity of the wicked, was scourged, had his face slapped and did not turn his face away from those who spat on Him (from the Liturgy of St. Gregory). We contemplate on Him Who

“Gives His cheek to the one who strikes Him and be full of reproach” (Lam.3:30),

“He has filled me with bitterness. He has made me drink wormwood” (Lam 3:15).

When we remember His life-giving sufferings on the Cross, we remember also His descent into Hades to redeem Adam and all his children who died in the hope of the Redeemer. Today, in partaking of the Holy Communion, the Slain One descends from the Altar into our hearts, into our bodies and into our souls, to set us free, and to save us from the captivity of the world and Satan.

At the end of the sentence, the priest kneels down before the altar in piety and respect to pray the Mystery of Invocation. The deacon calls out to the people, **“Attend to the Lord in awe and reverence.”**

Some Remarks on the Invocation:

☒ At the end of the Litany of Invocation the priest says, “We offer You these oblation from what is Yours, on every occasion, in every condition, and for all things.”

On every Condition, For every Condition, And at all Conditions

☒ Now the priest comes to the crucial moment of intercession. This very moment manifests his office as a priest and an intercessor on behalf of the whole of creation, as he offers the oblations and the bloodless sacrifice on behalf of everything and everyone in the world.

☒ While the priest is kneeling down before the altar to pray the Invocation of the Holy Spirit, the deacon then says, “Attend to the Lord in awe and reverence.” He then also kneels down beside the altar but keeps an eye on the Oblation, lest any fly or insect comes near It, for he too is responsible for the Sacrifice as he is the servant with the priest.

☒ When the deacon alerts the congregation to kneel before the Lord in awe and reverence he has to set an example of that fear and reverence.

☒ His kneeling down beside the altar must show the utmost piety and respect for this precious moment, which is the most awesome moment of the whole mass, the moment when the Holy Spirit comes down on the Bread and the Wine to transform them into the Body and Blood of Christ.

Some Remarks on the Deacon’s Service:

☒ When the Apostle speaks about the requirement of deacons, he says,

“Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given too much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be proved, then let them serve as deacons being found blameless” (1.Tim.3:8-10).

☒ The rank of deacon is not insignificant in the church of God, for the Apostle says,

“For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus” (1Tim.3:13).

A deacon once asked St. Barsonophios (in the 16th Century),

“Tell me father, since you have instructed me to serve the Holy Altar, what thing should occupy my mind while I am serving, especially if I am holding the honourable Chalice, and should I have a special robe for serving the Altar?”

St. Barsonophios answered, saying, “My son, these are spiritual matters, the deacon must be like a Cherubim, all eyes and all mind, thinking of what is above and observing what is high. With fear and awe he praises God, because he holds the Blood of the Eternal King. He is like the Cherubim, shouting with praise and fanning over the awesome Mysteries just like those in Heaven fan with their wings. And remember that those wings indicate the ascension of the mind away from the heavy earthlies to the heavenlies.

He chants within his innerself the praise of triumph to the majestic glory of our Lord, and in awe says, ‘Holy, Holy,

Holy, Lord of Hosts, heaven and earth are full of Your Holy Glory!’ Satan will then flee in terror at these words, for he becomes frightened from the soul which is captivated with love and praise toward God. His evil forces also run away in humiliation, leaving that soul liberated from their bondages. After that the soul sees the true Light and enjoys the fascination of the Glory of the Eternal God. Here the soul hears the Prophet David calling out in a great voice, ‘See and taste, how sweet is the Lord Christ’. Then the soul becomes pure and rejoices with the Holy Blood which abides in her, and protects her from every pain and grief. In this, you should ponder when you attend to the Holy Sacraments and in your responsibility with the sacred censer, the service vestments and organising the altar and its vessels.

When you accompany the priest while taking the Holy Sacraments to a sick person, again you have to think about those same matters, and let it be known to you that you are a cherub committed to deaconship. Attain a spiritual robe, with which you please God.”

The deacon asked again,

“Father, you told me that a deacon must be like a Cherubim, but I am a sinner, what can I do so that being a deacon is not for my condemnation?”

St. Barsonophios answered,

“Always remember the fact that you are a sinner and ponder upon the ways a deacon should act.

Remember death always, and how to please God. Judge yourself and let your heart be filled with awe and repentance;

do not judge others, confess your sins and repent. The Lord said through His prophet, 'Confess the pretence of your heart and I shall forgive it to you'.

The Lord then will commend you, for he who humbly resists his selfish self in every regard will be saved, and he who does not satisfy his desires nor wrongs others, but rather reproaches himself for everything, will find mercy from the Lord.

Do not let your past sins break your heart and do not refrain from serving the altar and let this be in fear, in supplication and in contemplation. Take the remedy from your spiritual father and obey whatever he orders you, do not impose yourself on serving the liturgies without his permission. Ban yourself from whatever he forbids you. The outcome of priesthood is immensely great."

Upon hearing the deacon call out, "Attend to the Lord in awe and reverence", the congregation kneel in awe and respect. This is a formidable moment when the Holy Spirit comes down on the mysteries to consecrate and transform them. The whole church kneels down and says, "We praise You, we bless You, we serve You O Lord, and we worship You." These are fearful moments when every one in the church should be worshipping in awe, awaiting the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Mysteries to sanctify and transform them into the works and gifts of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2).

THE WORDS OF THE INVOCATION

The priest kneels down with his hands on the altar and silently prays the Litany of the Invocation of the Holy Spirit with an air of contrition, saying,

“We, the sinners and unworthy servants, ask You, O Lord our God as we kneel down before You, through the pleasure of Your Goodness, that Your Holy Spirit may come down upon us (pointing to himself), and on these oblations (pointing to the bread and the wine), to sanctify them, transform them and manifest them holy to Your saints.”

The deacon then says, “Let us attend. Amen”, calling for absolute silence and utter stillness during the moments of the descent of the Holy Spirit..

The priest rises and quickly does the sign of the cross three times and says in a loud voice,

“And this Bread, He makes into His Holy Body.” He then kneels again and in reverence praying silently, “Our Lord, God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, this Holy Body given for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life to those who receive it.” This phrase explains the previously spoken phrase, “And This Bread He makes into His Holy Body”, in telling us that the Body of our Lord, God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, is given for the forgiveness of sins, and an eternal life to those who partake of it.

The priest then says aloud, “And this Chalice too, He makes into His Honoured Blood of the New Testament.”

The priest kneels down again and prays silently, “Our God, Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, this Holy Blood given for the forgiveness of sins”, this sentence also explaining the nature of the sacrament like the previous statement. Then he says out loud, “An eternal life to those who partake of it.” The congregation rises and responds saying, “Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy.”

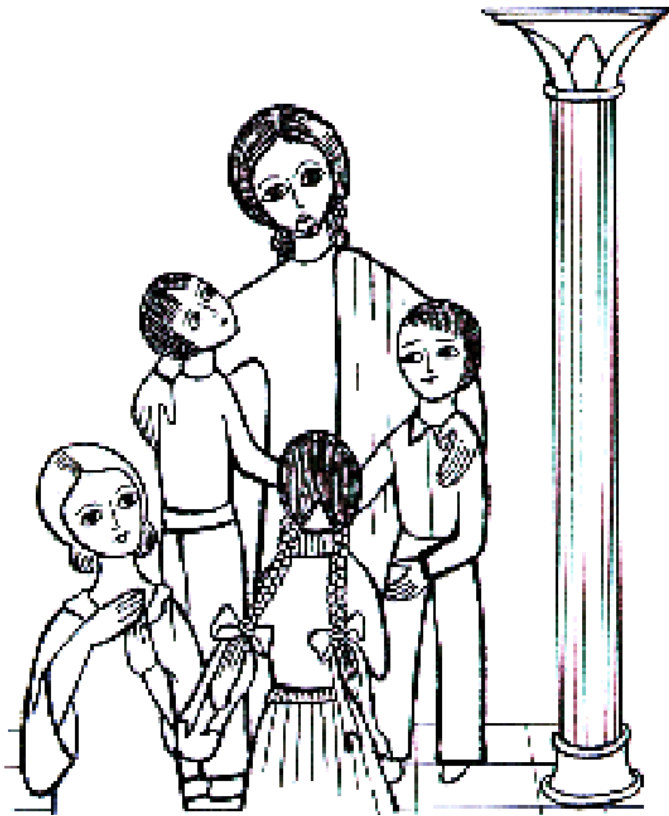
The bread has now become the Body of Christ and the wine has become the Blood of Christ, and remains so for the rest of the Liturgy.

Some Remarks on the Litany of the Invocation of the Holy Spirit

The Liturgy book states that the priest does the sign of the cross three times quickly on the bread and likewise on the Chalice. The reason for the swiftness is that, as he utters the words “He makes it into His Holy Body”, it immediately becomes the Body of the Lord which He took from Virgin Mary, and which He gave to His pure disciples; the Body which received the life-giving sufferings and was shrouded and buried; the Body which rose from the dead, in which He ascended to heaven, and in which He will come again to judge the living and the dead. Similarly, as he says, “His Honoured Blood of the New Testament” the wine transforms into the Lord’s Blood which was shed on the cross for the salvation of Adam and his offspring.

After the transformation the **blessings can come only from the Sacraments, therefore the priest can no longer do the**

sign of the Cross on the Sacraments. Swiftmess is therefore necessary as the action of doing the sign of the Cross on the sacraments must be completed before the priest finishes the sentences, “He makes it into His Holy Body... and His honoured Blood of the New Testament.” In other words, the signings of the cross must be confined to the words “...this bread...”, in the first instance, and, “...this chalice too...”, in the second instance. The priest may need to say the words slowly in order that the signs are completed before the transformation takes place.



8 Litanies And Commemorations

THE SEVEN MINOR LITANIES

After the Prayers of Consecration are completed the priest picks up the two veils which he left on the altar when he began doing the signs of the Cross, and, taking one in each hand, he prays, **“Make us all worthy, O Our Master, to partake of Your Holies for the purification of our souls, bodies and spirits, that we become one body and one spirit, and may share the inheritance with all the saints who have pleased You ever since the beginning.”**

He pleads for himself and the believers who intend to approach the Holy Sacraments, that the Lord prepares them for the partaking of His holy, pure and heavenly Mysteries for the salvation and sanctification to their souls, bodies and spirits in order to become one with Him, and abide in Him, and share an inheritance with all the saints who perfected the faith. Then he prays the Seven Minor Litanies:

☒ The Litany of Safety: which asks for the safety of the universal and the Apostolic Church, and for its protection from the schemes of Satan and his forces.

☒ The Litany of the Fathers: which asks the Lord to grant the Pope and all the Orthodox Bishops strength, grace and wisdom in their service, and that they maintain the right faith which has been delivered by the saints.

☒ The Litany of the Ministers: in which we pray for the priests who assist the bishops in rightfully disclosing the word of truth, and in shepherding, attending to and caring for the people and the salvation of their souls.

☒ The Litany of Mercy: which asks that the Lord may have mercy upon him and upon all the people, according to His great mercies and abundant compassion,

“For with the Lord there is mercy and with Him is abundant redemption” (Ps.130:7).

☒ The Litany of Places: in which we pray for the safety and security of the cities and monasteries where our church is located, and for all the places, cities and monasteries in the whole world, because, if the place where the church dwells is in peace, then the children of the church will find their own peace, as in the saying, “And seek the peace of the city for in its peace you will have peace” (Jer.29:7), “That we may lead a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and reverence” (1Tim.2:2). The Psalmist prays for his city saying,

“Peace be within your walls, prosperity within your places. For the sake of my brethren and companions, I will say ‘Peace be within you.’ Because of the House of the Lord our God , I will seek your good.” (Ps.122:7-9).

☒ In saying, “...And for those who are dwelling in it, in God’s faith...”, the priest refers to the believers who dwell in the places and monasteries, referring particularly to the monks who live in the wilderness because of their strong faith in God and His care. If it was not for these monks’ great faith and love for Jesus Christ they would have not been able to survive such desolate wilderness and endure life in remote monasteries, mountains, and caves, and in places no one knows about. Although impoverished, distressed and humiliated with asceticism and strife, in their vigilance and

solitude, all this they endure with joy because of their great love for our Lord. (If the priest wants to say the part “Your people and Your church...” , it should be said after the Litany of Places).

☒ The Litany of the Waters, Sowing and Harvesting: which refer to the season of the Nile’s flooding when the flood waters cover the cultivated lands and deposit abundant silt to enhance its fertility, which occurs from the 12th of Baouna to the 9th of Baba. Prayer for the plants, from the 10th of Baba to the 10th Tuba, is the season for sowing the main crops in Egypt after the flood waters subside. Prayer for the winds, from the 11th of Tuba to the 11th of Baouna, is the period of moderate winds which is suitable for the growth, fruiting and ripening of crops, “That both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together” (John 4:36). After each one of these litanies the priest says, “Bring them up to their measure according to Your Grace ...”.

☒ The Litany of Oblations: which refers to offerings in general, including whatever the believers bring to church to the needs of the church and its people; from flour for the bread, to grape juice for filling the chalice; candles, curtains, books, the Altar’s utensils. When praying this litany, the priest points to the Sacraments as they are the crown and symbol of all what the believers offer.

COMMEMORATION OF THE SAINTS

The communion of saints represent the ‘cloud of witnesses’ which surrounds the believers and to which the Apostle Paul referred to in saying, “Therefore we also, since we are

surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnare us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin” (Heb.12:1-4).

As we mention the names in the “Communion of the Saints” we remember their life stories and recall their virtues and love towards our beloved Lord. They sacrificed themselves for the Lord, and had no regard for the comfort of their bodies, “And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity of return” (Heb.11:15), but they endured everything for their great love to Christ the King.

Each of them offered himself as an oblation, in one form or another, to God.

It was as though the heart of the Virgin Mary had been pierced with a sword when she shared the sacrifice of her Son on the Cross.

☒ John, the forerunner, was beheaded because he preached the coming of Christ and told the people to repent.

☒ St. Mark served and preached the name of Christ to the people until he was dragged along the streets of Alexandria and was martyred.

☒ St. Severus, St. Discoros and St. Athanasios all defended the faith even to death.

☒ St. Peter, the Seal of Martyrs, was slain for his people, like He who had been slain for the world.

☒ St. John Chrysostom was slain for his impartiality.

☒ The three hundred and eighteen fathers assembled at Nicea, the one hundred and fifty fathers assembled at Constantinople, and the two hundred fathers assembled at Ephesus were all a testimony to the Lord in defending the Apostolic Faith.

☒ Abba Anthony and Abba Paula left the world and followed Jesus, enduring many spiritual hardships until the end. They were dead to this world, living in the mountains and the wilderness because of their great love for Jesus Christ. Abba Macarius tolerated iniquity and humiliation until death, like Jesus who endured disgrace.

☒ The powerful Abba Moses the Black offered true repentance and wrestled with sin until death. We give thanks to God,

“Having provided something for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us” (Heb.11:40).

“And a white robe was given to each of them, and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their

brethren, who would be killed as they had been, was completed” (Rev.6:11).

THE DIPTYCH

If the priest so wishes, he says the diptych from St. Cyril’s Liturgy, which is said in an emotive, mournful tune. If the priest does not pray this part he prays silently, after the Commemoration, the following passage, saying,

“Remember, O Lord, all those who passed over to You; all the clergy and all the laity, repose their souls in the bosoms of our saintly father Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Paradise of joy, in the place from which grief, sorrow and sighing have fled, in the light of your Saints.” He then adds a spoonful of incense to the censer and mentions the names of those whose souls are reposed, saying, **“Those, O Lord, who have passed over to You in the Paradise of Delight...”** This is the St. Basil diptych which is prayed even if the St. Cyril diptych was prayed.

Some Points on the Diptych:

- ☒ In Maundy Thursday’s Liturgy neither the Commemoration nor the Diptych are prayed as the church is totally preoccupied in contemplating the Lord’s sufferings and death.
- ☒ The above mentioned diptych, however, is not sung using the Mourning Tune on Sundays, feast days or Eastertide.
- ☒ Some priests prefer to pray the passage that begins with, “Remember O Lord...”, from the Liturgy of St.

Gregory, with its wonderful tune during the Lordly Feasts and Eastertide, instead of “Those O Lord...”.

After St. Basil’s Diptych the priest says, “Guide us into Your Kingdom ...”, and ending with, “Peace be with you all.”

All of this he **says without doing the sign of the Cross** on the congregation because, as mentioned previously, after the Holy Spirit has descended upon the Sacraments and as we are in the presence of Christ, **so it is not permitted to do the sign of the Cross on the people or to look Westward, facing his back to the Sacrifice.**



9 Fraction and Communion

FRACTION AND COMMUNION

The phrase, “Also let us give thanks to the Almighty God ...”, begins the introduction to the Fraction. If there is more than one priest attending, the serving priest should recite the Fraction.

When it is finished the priest puts the two veils down on the altar and does not take them into his hands again.

He takes the pure Body with his right hand and places it on the palm of his left hand. He puts his right index finger on the Body on the right side of the Spadikon where the Body is broken and says, **“The Holy Body.”** **The congregation then kneels and says, “We worship Your Holy Body.”**

He then lifts his index finger from the Body and dips the tip of his finger in the Honoured Blood. He lifts his index finger slightly and makes the sign of the cross once inside the chalice saying, **“And the Honoured Blood.”** **The congregation respond with, “And Your Honoured Blood.”**

The priest gently shakes his index finger inside the chalice to free it from the Blood, taking the utmost care to ensure it does not drip after he takes his finger out of the chalice. He brings the Body, which is on his left hand, closer to the Chalice and puts his index finger with the Blood on it on the Spadikon.

Then he lowers his hands over the paten and does the sign of the cross on the Pure Body with the Honoured Blood.

With his index finger on the Spadikon, he moves his finger upwards and then over the back of the Body, proceeding towards the bottom and then up the front of the Body until reaching the Spadikon. He then moves his index around the Body from left to right until he comes back to the Spadikon, thus forming a sign of the cross.

While doing this he says, “Those belonging to His Christ, the Almighty, Our God.”

The congregation respond saying, “Lord have mercy.”

The priest then says to the people, “Peace be with you all”, to which the people reply, “And also with your spirit.”

Some Remarks on the Introduction to the Fraction:

☒ The three sentences, “...the Holy Body...”, “...the Honoured Blood...”, and, “...belonging to His Christ the almighty our God...”, are a continuation of the introduction to the Fraction. The whole passage states, “We ask Him to make us worthy to share and offer His Divine and Immortal Mysteries, which are the Holy Body and The Honoured Blood belonging to His Christ, the Almighty, our God.”

☒ Performing the sign of the Cross on the Body with the Blood represents Christ’s Body covered with His Blood which spilled from the nails in His body, the crown of thorns on His Head, and from where He was pierced with a sword.

☒ During this time the people cry, “Lord Have Mercy”, because this moment portrays the Crucifixion of Christ and the shedding of His Pure Blood which He

endured because of His mercy and love for those in the world, and for the salvation of our souls.

☒ The priest offers peace to the congregation at this moment; the moment when the world was in great turmoil; the sun was darkened and the earth shook, the rocks cracked and all the people were horrified.

☒ When the priest begins to handle the Sacraments the deacons light candles to illuminate the area around the Holy Body and Honoured Blood, keeping them lit until the end of the Fraction.

☒ There are two reasons for keeping the candles lit during this time. One is to honour the Holy Sacraments, the other being that the burning candle sheds light upon others so that they may believe in Him, as Jesus, whose Incarnated Body is being fractionated by the priest, gave Himself up so that whoever believes in Him will not perish but will have eternal life.

☒ The droplets of wax that fall from the burning candle remind us of the sweat that dripped from the Saviour's Body like drops of blood as He prayed in Gethsemane, "And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly.

And His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44).

☒ They also remind us of the tears which He shed during intense prayer,

"Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to

Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear” (Heb.5:7).

☒ They also remind us of the drops of blood covering His Pure Body when He was hanging on the Cross for our salvation.

A lit candle represent to us the salvation which the Lord Jesus made on the Cross for those who slept in hope. From the Cross His soul descended to Hades to give light to those who were living in darkness and in the shadow of death and to bring them back to Paradise where there is light and joy.

“The Lord is my light and my Salvation (Ps.27:1).

THE FRACTION

The Fraction is a prayer of thanksgiving to God for His inexpressible gift, as He gave us His Holy Body and Honoured Blood as an eternal life to those who worthily partake of them. It is also a supplication that He may give purity to our hearts, souls and bodies so that we dare, in the intimacy of His Divine love, partake of them.

The prayers of Fraction are numerous. Some Fractions are prayed all year round and some are for Major or Minor Lordly feasts, the Virgin’s feasts, the angels or saints’ feasts, for periods of fasting, and so on. The fractionation of the Holy Body signifies the sufferings which were inflicted upon our Lord Jesus Christ.

THE TWO METHODS OF DIVIDING THE HOLY BODY

The Direct & Brief Fraction:

This procedure is not commonly used, where the priest divides the Body without separating it from the jewels.

The Body is divided but is still intact. The priest divides the portion at his right (about one third) to four pieces corresponding to the four Crosses on the right. This he does without completely separating them.

The priest then divides the left portion (about one third), into four parts around the four crosses on it. (again without separation)

He then separates the Spadikon completely, lifting it out, he kisses it, then puts it back in its place.

Then he puts the Holy Body in the paten and cleans his hands, especially the finger he used in dividing it, to remove any particles of the jewel that may have adhered to it.

The Comprehensive Fraction:

This method is more commonly used. The priest divided the right portion (about one third) without separation. He lifts it and places perpendicular to the remainder (in the shape of a Cross)

He then takes a jewel from the top part of the portion that contains the Spadikon and puts it in the Eastern part of the paten, which is known as the Head. He then takes another gem from the lower part of the portion containing the Spadikon and puts it in the Western side of the paten. This is known as the limbs. He takes a piece from the right side of the right portion (which is placed on top of the two thirds) and puts it in the paten towards the right. He puts the rest of that portion in the paten to the left. Having done this, he has formed the shape of the cross. He then detaches the two remaining portions, proceeding from the top to the bottom.

He then takes the contre portion that contains the Spadikon and places it in the centre of the paten. He then starts dividing the portion which is still in his hand, which is the left side of the oblation. He divides it into four parts, without separation, so that each part contains one of the four Crosses.

The priest then removes the pieces he had previously placed on the left side of the paten (which is most of the right third of the oblation), and puts the left third that is in his hand in its place.

The portion which he has taken from the paten he then divides into three parts without separation, each part containing a Cross.

When he finishes he puts it in the right side of the paten beside the piece that was placed to the right at the beginning of the Fraction. This way the right third is divided into four parts like the left third. He then takes the centre third, which he has previously placed in the middle of the paten, and detaches the Spadikon (from below the crust with the soft

part in it so that it does not crumble during the following movements).

The rest of the centre portion remains joined together. The priest puts the Spadikon back in its place in the middle of the centre part, taking great care not to let it crumble, then he puts it in the middle of the paten as it was before.

The priest then gathers all the divided jewels and puts them back in their place; the oblation now looking intact with all divisions in place as if the fraction never happened.

Here the skill of the priest is evident, as the Liturgy Book states, “If the priest is keen and well organised, he fractions the oblation, yet it is still whole and holds in his hands, divided but intact, which is good.” Having done this, the priest then rubs his hands over the paten so that the smallest particle does not adhere to them.

Remarks on the Fraction:

The great majority of priests do not remember the Fraction prayers by heart so they must read from the liturgy book during the fraction.

It is desirable that when the priest finishes each sentence that he then starts dividing the Body, as in this case both his eyes and his mind will be focussed on the Body, rather than the book. When he stops chanting the congregation responds with “Lord have mercy”, that is an opportune time to look intently and concentrated in dividing the Body, otherwise he may start spilling portions of the Holy Body outside the Paten

PRAYERS OF ABSOLUTION AND SUBMISSION

The priest prays silently,

“Yes, we ask You, Holy Father, the Good Who loves goodness, to lead us not into temptation...”, as Christ taught us in the Lord’s Prayer, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (Matt.6:13). “...We pray that sin will not dominate us...”, quoting the Psalmist’s words,

“And let not iniquity have dominion over me” (Ps.119:133),

“...But deliver us from sinful deeds; its thoughts, its actions and its feelings...”. Here the priest pleads the Lord to save him and the congregation from sinful deeds and wicked thoughts and actions, and to protect their senses from every evil. “...Abolish Satan, dismiss him, rebuke also his deeds planted in us...”, **the priest says, pleading to the Lord to abolish Satan’s snares and influence that we can fall under, such as killing, adultery, stealing and other sins. “...Sever all means and medium which cause us to commit sin...”.**

How important and fascinating this plea is. It is essential that everyone, with the help of God, tries to sever every medium which leads him to commit sin. The youth, for example, should stay away from such places that may cause him to sin, as well as avoid materials which may prove to be a stumbling block, such as cheap songs, pornographic books and

magazines. By doing this, he will sever all links which may result in immoral behaviour,

“...And delivers us, through Your holy power, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

..’. We should diligently strive against sin, its causes and its incitement, so that the Lord’s holy powers and delivering grace will save and protect us from stumbling.

The priest entreats all this in the Name of Christ, for,

“Whatever you ask the Father in My Name, He will give you” (John 16:22).

The deacon then says, **“Bow your heads before the Lord.”**

This is a call for a collective repentance before approaching the Holy Sacraments. The people bow their heads before the Lord in a moment of penitence and confession so as to be worthy to receive the absolution from the priest’s mouth.

What is required here is just bowing the head in accordance with the deacon’s call and not kneeling to the ground like many people do. Full kneeling to the ground befits worshipping and honouring the Lord, while bowing the head suits confessing sins in contrition and humility, like the tax collector who,

“Stood afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beats his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner’.” (Luke 18:13).

Also, like the Prophet Ezra who prays,

“O God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heaven” (Ez.6:9).

Likewise, the Prophet Daniel says,

“We have sinned and committed iniquity. O Lord, to us belongs shame of face because we have sinned against You. To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him” (Dan.9:5,8).

Prophet Jeremiah also says,

“We lie down in our shame and our reproach covers us, for we have sinned against the Lord our God.” (Jer.3:25).

And the Psalmist says,

“My dishonour is continually before me, and the shame of my face has covered me” (Ps.44:15).

Everyone (including the clergy) bows their head and says, **“Before You, O Lord.”**

As the priest prays the absolution everyone should raise his penitence to God saying, “O Lord, absolve, remit, and forgive me my sins which I have committed willingly or unwillingly ...”, or he may pray another prayer of repentance.

PRAYER OF SUBMISSION TO THE FATHER

The grace of the Only Begotten Son, Our Lord, God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, has now been accomplished. We have professed His redeeming sufferings, preached His death and proclaimed His Resurrection”.

Throughout the Liturgy, the reality of remembering the sufferings, the death and the Resurrection of the Lord, becomes evident in the priest’s prayers and the people’s responses.

“The Mystery is Accomplished”, this happened through the transformation of the bread and the wine into the life giving Body and the honoured Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. “

We thank You O Lord, the Almighty God...”The priest now prays in the same manner as the Twenty Four spiritual elders who, in their eternal praise, prostrate before the throne of God, saying,

“We give You thanks, O Lord, God Almighty, the One Who is and Who was and Who is to come, because You have taken Your great power and reigned” (Rev.11:16-17).
“

...For Your Mercy upon us is so great, as You have prepared for us what the angels crave to behold..."

This is as previously declared by the deacon earlier in the Mass, **“In entreaty, in thankfulness, in quietness and in**

silence raise your eyes towards the east, to see the altar where the Body and Blood of Emmanuel are placed. Angels and archangels attend, together with the six winged Seraphim and the full eyed Cherubim, who cover their faces because of the splendour of His unseen and unspoken of Glory. ”“

...We ask and entreat Your Goodness, O lover of mankind, that you purify us all, as we are united with You through the partaking of Your Holy Sacraments...”

The Church's main objective by praying collectively in the Liturgy and concluding with the believers partaking of the one Body of Christ is to unite all people in Jesus Christ. The Church is one Body and the Liturgy is a collective prayer, collective penitence and collective cleansing (through the absolutions prayed over the congregation, that is, the Absolutions of Vespers and the Mornings Incense, as well as the Absolution of the Ministers, and the Absolution prayed after the fraction).

The Mystery of Communion is a Mystery of communal sharing of the One Body and One Blood. The essential aim of the works of the Body and Blood, is to unite the congregation to become one body and one soul, in accordance with our Good Saviour who said,

“Holy Father, keep through Your Name those whom You have given me, that they may be one, as we are...that they all may be one, as Your Father is in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in us” (John 17:12-21).

Likewise, as the Apostle Paul says to the Galatians,

“For you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal.3:28).

Unity with Christ is not a unity of nature or substance but a unity of will and desire. Such unity cannot be achieved all at once but is obtained through consistently partaking of the Holy Sacraments in a worthy manner, which will unite him with God. This fellowship with God develops gradually, resulting in complete unity.

☒ The first stage of this fellowship is to have a covenant with God, as He said,

“Take it and drink from it, all of you, for this is My Blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matt.26:28).

☒ The second stage of this growing relationship is to abide in the Glorified Christ. Our beloved Saviour says,

“He who eats My Body and drinks My Blood abides in Me and I in him” (John 6:56).

☒ It is at the third stage in which full unity with the beloved can be achieved. At this stage, the believer totally abandons his will and desires as he feels overwhelmed with God’s will and desire and is burning with the love of God. He believes in Him totally, relies on Him totally, and submits to Him totally in order to live a life of joy and happiness in the Lord.“

“...So that we become filled with Your Holy Spirit, steadfast in Your true faith , and yearning to Your true

love, and articulating Your Holy Glory at all times, through Jesus Christ our Lord...”.

Receiving the Holy Sacraments with worthiness fills us with the Holy Spirit and gives us spiritual power which preserves us steadfastly in the true faith without any inclinations toward blasphemous thoughts and ideas. Having known the Lord personally through the Holy Communion and experiencing the strength with which we are victorious in the fight against the body, the world and the devil, we could not be allured into the trivialities of the heretics which allege that these Mysteries are figurative, not real and non-effective.

As we experience the power in the Holy Sacraments we become filled with the longing to approach them more frequently in order to be united with God. This is true also of the angels; the more they praise the Lord, the more they yearn and burn with desire and enthusiasm to abound the praise and prolong their being in the presence of God.

As we accumulate those personal experiences, we voice the glory of the Lord at all times. “Saviour and see how sweet is the Lord.” We join those who preach the glory of God, of whom the Psalmist says,

“They shall speak of the glory of Your Kingdom and talk of Your power, To make known to the sons of men His mighty acts and the glorious majesty of His kingdom” (Ps.145:11).

While the people are bowing their heads, confessing their sins and offering collective penitence, the deacon calls out,

“Attend to God in reverence”

so that the people prepare themselves to receive the absolution from the priest.

The priest then says, “Peace be with you all.”

Before saying the absolution for the remission of sins, the priest gives the congregation peace as a pledge and introduction to the joy they are about to receive.

The congregation then responds with, “And also with your spirit.”

THE ABSOLUTION TO THE FATHER

The Priest then prays the Absolution to the Father, which states, “O Master, God Almighty, Healer of our souls, bodies and spirits, You are He Who said to the Apostle Peter, through the mouth of Your Only Begotten Son, our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ,

”You are Peter, and upon this rock (meaning the rock of your solid faith, through which you professed, saying, “You are Christ, the Son of the Living God”, I build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven...” (Matt.16:18-19).

We notice that, as the Lord gave Peter the power to ‘bind and loose’ as a reward for his zeal, He also gave it to all the disciples by saying,

“Assuredly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in Heaven” (Matt.18:18).

Thus, Peter had no privilege over the rest of the disciples. They were all brethren and partners in the Apostleship and were equal in power to bind or loose. “

...Now, O Lord, let your servants, my fathers, my brothers and my weak self, be absolved by my mouth through Your Holy Spirit, O Good Lover of mankind...”.

The Priest is only human, a weak sinner who asks absolution for himself and for others. Although the absolution comes from his mouth as an officiator and servant of the Lord’s Mysteries, this absolution originates from the Holy Spirit which dwells in him, and which he received from the Bishop who breathed in his mouth during his ordination as a priest. During the ordination of a priest, after the Bishop takes the Honoured Blood, before drinking water, he asks the new priest to repeat the following sentence three times; “I open my mouth to draw for myself a spirit.” After each sentence the priest opens his mouth and the Bishop blows into it the breath of the Holy Spirit. This is the same breath which the priest blows over the Mysteries when consecrating them, over the Chrism when anointing the sick, over the water when praying on it, in the sick person’s face when praying for him, and in the face of the baptised person at his baptism.

“...O Lord, who takes away the sins of the world readily, accept your servants’ penitence, a light of knowledge and a remission of sins...”.

The Lord willingly accepts their repentance before they approach the sacraments so that they are worthy to partake of the Holy Communion without condemnation.“

...For You are a compassionate and merciful God, who is long-suffering, just, and abundant in loving kindness and mercy...”, just as the Psalmist says,

“For You Lord are good and ready to forgive and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You” (Ps.86:5). “

...If we have trespassed against You, either by the word of mouth or by action, forgive us our sins, O good Lord and lover of mankind. O Lord, absolve us and absolve all Your people from every iniquity, every curse, every denunciation, every unfaithful oath and every encounter with the heretics and idolaters. Bestow upon us, O Lord, the intellect, the strength and the rationality to effectively flee from every vile that is of the adversary, grant us to please You at all times. Inscribe our names with all the hosts of Your Saints in the Kingdom of Heaven, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, to Whom is due all glory...”.

The priest mentions the names of those whom he wishes to remember; those who are living, and the reposed before praying for himself, just as he did when he baptized the Lamb.“

...Also, my Lord, remember my weak self and forgive me my many sins, for where sin increased, grace abounded all the more...”,

As the Apostle Paul says,

“Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 5:20-21).

Grace is essential to give us immunity against the many evils happening around us. It also supports the repentant people and strengthens them in their trial against iniquity so that they may never go back to their old sins.“

...Because of my own sins and the defilement of my heart, do not deprive Your people of the Grace of Your Holy Spirit...”

. The church does not believe there is any difference between a saintly priest and a wicked one when it comes to the fulfilment of the Holy Sacraments and the invocation of the Holy Spirit to transubstantiate them. Repentance, righteousness and virtues benefit the priest personally, working toward the salvation of his soul. They also avail his children through good example, guidance and good care.

The priest then prays the Litanies of Safety and of the Fathers, silently praying, “Remember, O Lord, the peace of Your One, Holy, Universal and Apostolic Church. Remember, O Lord, our Patriarch, the honourable Pope Abba....and his brother in the Apostolic Ministry, Bishop...”.

He then audibly prays the Litany of the Gatherings while uncovering the Chalice, saying, “Remember, O Lord, our gatherings, bless them” (without doing the sign of the Cross).

The deacon raises the cross while responding,

“You redeemed us by Your Spirit. Let us listen in the fear of God.”

The deacon hears the priest’s repentance, “Remember O Lord, my weaknesses and forgive me my many sins...”, and sees his contrition, his humility as he pours himself over the sacrificed Lamb of God, who carries the sins of the whole world. Hearing and seeing this, the deacon testifies immediately to his penitence and reassures him saying,

“Redeemed indeed...”.

Each repentant bowing during this prayer of repentance benefits from this penitence as he is preparing himself to accept the absolution.

This response of the deacon reminds us of what Prophet Nathan said to King David after David had confessed his sin;

“The Lord has put away your sin, you shall not die” (2Samuel 12:13).

The people then implore the Lord for His tender mercies in order to accept their repentance and make them worthy of partaking of the Holies, saying, “Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy.”

THE SIGNINGS BEFORE CONFESSION

The priest holds the Spadikon in his right hand, and while bowing his head, he makes the sign of the Cross over the chalice with the Spadikon saying, “The Holies are for the holy.”

Then he slightly dips the Spadikon in the Blood and raises it again without letting any drops fall off it.

When bringing the Spadikon back to the paten he opens his left palm underneath it in case any Jewel might fall from it or in case the Blood drips. The priest then signs the Body with the Spadikon that has been dipped in the Lord’s Blood and applies it to the wounds he made in the Body during the fraction by putting the Spadikon on each wound all round the Body while it lies in the paten. He does this while praying,

“Blessed be the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Hallowed is the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

Some Points on the Signings

☒ When the priest says, “The Holies are for the holy”, he is warning and cautioning those who intend to approach the Sacraments that the Holies, which are the Life Giving Body and the Honored Blood, are for the holy people only, that is, the repentant who regret their sins and who have confessed them before the priest

and who are honest in keeping and obeying the commandments. As the Apostle says,

***“Only let your conduct be worthy of the Gospel of Christ”
(Phil.1:27).***

☒ One of the church’s rules says, “After all the prayers have been prayed, the priest shall say, through the mouth of the archdeacon, ”He who is pure, let him approach the Holy Sacraments, but he who is impure, let him not go near it lest he becomes burnt with the fire of Divinity. And he who has wronged his brother, or has unclean thoughts or, has been drunk with wine, let him not approach.”

☒ Dipping the Body in the Blood teaches us that this Body is for the Blood, and this Blood is for this Body. Likewise, signing the Body with the Spadikon absorbed in Blood indicates the unity of the Body and the Blood with the Divinity, which has not parted from His humanity even for a single instant or a twinkle of an eye. Dipping the jewel in the Blood then removing it refers to the Baptism of Christ; this baptism also commemorating the Lord’s death and Resurrection.

☒ After signing the Body with the Spadikon absorbed in Blood, the priest goes around the Body touching all the wounds he made on the Body during the fraction, in what is called ‘the dyeing of the wounds’, as if he is trying to soothe the wounds the Lord endured because of our sins. However, the priest and the congregation should realise that nothing dresses the wounds of the Lord and heals them except if we return to Him in repentance and submit our lives to Him, working hard to please Him and obeying His commandments. This

reminds us of the church's interpretation of the Lord's words on the cross, when He said, "I thirst." He did not thirst for water as much as He thirsted for the salvation of our souls and our return to Him.

The congregation responds with, **"One is the Holy Father, One is the Holy Son, One is the Holy Spirit. Amen."** To the priest's cautioning,

"The Holies are for the holy", the people respond, "Far from it. We are no saints, but rather unworthy sinners. Only God is Holy with His three Hypostasis." We can say that the true holiness and true worthiness of partaking of the feared Mysteries of Emmanuel, Our Lord, is to rid ourselves of the burden of sin and its bitterness, confessing it and striving not to return to it, then approaching the Holy Communion in reverence, with tears of repentance.

When the priest perceives the submissiveness and humility of the people in daring to approach the Holiness of the Lord and His awesome mysteries he gives them peace and reassurance saying, "Peace be with you all", and so the congregation responds with, "And also with you."

For the second time, the priest anoints the wounds of the Body with the Spadikon saying, "The Holy Body, and the True Honoured Blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of our God, Amen." And the congregation in true faith responds with, "Amen." For the third time, the priest anoints the wounds of the Body with the Spadikon saying, "Holy and Honoured are the True Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of our Lord, Amen", and again the congregation responds with, "Amen."

The priest then turns the Spadikon upside down, holds it between his fingers, raises it to the Chalice making the sign of the Cross over the Blood with it, then puts it upside down in the Blood and says, “Truly this is the Body and Blood of Emmanuel our God, Amen.” The congregation says, “Amen, we believe”, confirming and affirming the priest’s saying and confession.

Further Remarks

☒ Signing the Body three times with the Blood-soaked Spadikon before raising it and placing its back in the Chalice, refers to the three days that Jesus remained in the tomb before His Resurrection on the third day.

☒ Turning the Spadikon and placing it upside down in the Chalice to be immersed in the Blood symbolise the act of crucifying Christ, the Lamb of God, who carries the sin of the whole world, when they laid Him on His back to nail Him on the cross. As they began to place the nails in His hands and feet, the blood gushed out and covered His Pure Body, His perpetrators acting like a butcher when he slays a sheep, turning it on its back and slitting its throat.

THE CONFESSION

Having done this, the priest then raises the paten carefully and recites the confession, saying,

“Amen, Amen, Amen, I believe, I believe, I believe and profess unto my last breath, that this is the Life-giving Body

which Your Only Begotten Son, our Lord, God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, took of our Lady and Queen of us all, the Mother of God, the pure St. Mary...”,

This is in accordance with what the Holy Bible teaches us regarding His incarnation and His birth of the Virgin Mary. The Apostle Paul says,

“When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman.” (Gal.4:4).“

...He made it One with His Divinity without mingling nor interchanging nor alteration. And declared the proper confession before Pontius Pilate...”,

This also being in accordance with what the Holy Bible tells us in the narration of the trial of the Lord of Glory before Pontius Pilate, the governor of Jerusalem at that time. The Apostle Paul says,

“...Jesus Christ who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate” (1Tim.6:13).“

...And gave it up willingly on the Holy Cross on our behalf. I believe that His Divinity never departed His Humanity, not even a single instant or a twinkle of an eye. Given for the salvation, remission of sins and an eternal life to those who partake of them...”,

for Jesus, Himself, said,

“Whoever eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood has eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day. For My Flesh

is food indeed and My Blood is drink indeed” (John 6:54-55).“

...I believe, I believe, I believe that this is true. Amen.”$\\$It is worth noticing here how our Orthodox Church passes on the correct faith to the priest on his ordination. The Patriarch (or the Metropolitan or Bishop) places the centre part of the Body in his hands and the new priest places his hands on it while repeating the confession after the Patriarch, sentence by sentence, in a loud voice. The priest remains honest to this correct faith all his life.

The priest then puts the paten back on the Altar and covers the chalice with a veil. He then kneels down before the altar and silently prays, until the deacon finishes the confession, saying, **“Every honour, every glory and every worship are due at all times to the Holy Trinity, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forevermore...”**,

And secondly, **“Absolve and forgive us our sins which we have committed our Father...”**,

And finally, **“Make us all worthy, O Lord, to partake of Your Holy Body and Honoured Blood for the purification of our souls, bodies and spirits and for the forgiveness of our sins that we become one body and one spirit with You. Glory be to You...”**.

These prayers are to give glory to God Who, in His modesty, consented to give us His Body to eat and His Blood to drink. The priest does this with humility, contrition and declaration of unworthiness, then he beseeches absolution and forgiveness before partaking of the awesome Mysteries.

At the end of the priest's confession the deacon takes the Cross in his right hand, a lit candle in his left hand, and a veil between the two of them. He holds this before his eyes while saying the deacon's profession,

“Amen, Amen, Amen. I believe, I believe, I believe that this is true, Amen. Pray for us and for all the Christians who wished us to remember them in the house of the Lord. The peace and love of Jesus Christ (is) with you all. Sing a Psalm, Alleluia. Pray for the merit of partaking of these Holy, Pure and Heavenly Mysteries. Lord have mercy.”

Further Remarks

☒ In his profession, the deacon affirms and confirms, on behalf of the people, all that was mentioned in the priest's profession. He then asks the people to pray for those approaching the Holy Sacraments, that they may partake of them worthily, with a repentant heart, lest they be condemned, for every person approaching the holy sacraments should examine himself, as the Apostle said. The words, “Pray for the merit of partaking of these Holy, Pure and Heavenly Mysteries”, emphasize the importance of examining oneself before approaching the Mysteries; is he really ready to receive these Holy Sacraments? Is he complying with these words?

☒ As we hear the deacon's call, “Pray for the merit of partaking of these Holy, Pure and Heavenly Mysteries”, we ought to lift our hearts to the Lord and beseech His blessings and His mercies on all those

partaking, so that their communion fulfils the Lord's promise, which stated, "He who eats My Body and drinks My Blood, abides in Me and I in him" (John 6:56). We should also pray that those who approach the Sacraments may be worthy and not be condemned.

☒ The reason why the deacon holds the cross in his right hand, a lit candle in his left and a veil between them, is because as a deacon cannot gaze at the splendour of the Lord's glory so he covers his eyes like the Seraphim who covers his face with two of his wings from the brilliance of His Majestic Glory. As for the priest, he does not hide his face because he has been merited, through the sacrament of priesthood, to fraction and hold in his hands the Body of Christ.

☒ A devout person once said that he used to see his guardian angel walking before him. After he had been nominated and ordained as a priest he saw the angel walking behind him, and so he asked him, "Why have you changed?", to which the angel replied, "Through your ordination as a priest you have attained eminence which merits you to fraction and to hold the fearful Mysteries of Emmanuel, Our Lord, which we, as angels, covet to behold." In his amazement, the devout priest gave glory to God.

☒ The cross and the candle refer to Christ Who endured the sufferings of the cross and sacrificed Himself to give eternal life to the world like a candle which burns itself to give light to the people. Likewise, Christ had fractionated His Body and shed His Blood on the cross to give light to those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to bring them out into the brightness of His Kingdom.

After the deacon's profession, the congregation responds with, "Glory be to You O Lord, Glory be to You." We give glory to God who bestowed His Holy Sacraments for the healing of the soul, body and spirit, for the forgiveness of sins and for abiding in Him.

DISTRIBUTION OF THE HOLY SACRAMENTS

THE HONOURED BODY

The priest rises from kneeling before the Altar and receives absolution from his brothers the priests, by bowing and saying, "I have sinned, absolve me." He also receives forgiveness from the deacons and from the congregation by saying while bowing, "

I have sinned, forgive me." Then he starts giving out the Holy Communion. He begins with the Holy Body, so that he communes himself with the front jewel of the Body (known as the Head). He does this in his capacity as the serving priest, and the head of the gathering. If an associate priest is present, the serving priest takes the Masteer (spoon) from the top of the throne of the Chalice and puts the back jewel of the Body (known as the limbs) in it. The associate priest approaches, bows before the Altar and the Mysteries which are on it, kisses the Altar then takes the Masteer with his hand which is covered with a veil. He brings his mouth close to the paten and communes the jewel which is in the Masteer.

He then communes the altar deacons in the order of their ranks, from the right third of the Body, after fractionating its four portions into small parts according to the number of those who are partaking. When giving the Holy Body the priest takes a small gem from the Body between the fingers of his right hand and puts the palm of his left hand beneath it until the jewel is put carefully in the partaker's mouth. During this he says, "The Body of Emmanuel, Our God, this is true. Amen." The partaker then replies, "Amen." After he receives the gem in his mouth, the partaker covers his mouth with a small cloth while he is chewing. This is because he has attained a precious jewel and so is keen to hide and conceal it. It is also to avoid accidentally dropping any part of it while chewing.

The priest places the dome in the paten and covers it with a large veil, making sure the edges do not get inside the paten, and that no particle of the jewel sticks to it when it is covered. The priest carries the paten with great care, and from the left hand side he turns to the West and blesses the congregation in the partakers area, while saying, "The Holies are for the holy. Blessed is Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God and Holy is the Holy Spirit. Amen." The people bow and cry out, "Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord."

The priest then puts the paten back on the Altar. The priest carries the paten again, and from the right hand side he turns West, blesses the people and says, "Holy Body and True Honourable Blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of Our God. Amen." The congregation cries out while bowing, saying "Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord."

From the right side of the altar, the priest, carrying the paten in his hands, goes to the men seeking the Holy Communion in the Northern part of the Sanctuary. The deacon precedes

him, walking backwards with a lit candle in his hand, crying out, “Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord.” If another priest is attending, he takes the Chalice to give the Blood to the partakers who have already received the Body. If necessary, a deacon with the rank ‘Diacon’, which is a full deacon, is allowed to hold the Chalice and give the Blood to the partakers, but if no one is available to give the Blood, the priest leaves the Chalice in the Throne on the altar until he finishes giving the last tiny gem of the Body left in the paten, then he gives the Blood. When the priest is not attending to the altar while giving out the Body, he charges a deacon to stand before the altar holding a lit candle.

After the priest finishes giving the Sacraments to the men he goes to the women’s area. Having given the sacraments to the ladies, he goes back to the altar and gives whatever remains of the gems to himself, to associate priests and to the deacons in order of their ranks.

When he finishes partaking of the Body he puts the paten on the left side of the altar, removes the veil that had been underneath it, and shakes it carefully inside the paten, then he picks up the small molecules of the gems which had adhered to the paten. He asks the associate priest or the deacon to join him in looking closely inside the paten for any molecules he may have missed. If the deacon sees anything, he points at it with his finger without touching the paten and the priest picks it up and eats it. The two of them look carefully until they are both sure that the paten is absolutely free of gems. The deacon then says, “Hail to the Cross.” The priest makes the sign of the cross inside the paten with his finger and says, “Hail to the cross of Jesus Christ.”

Precision in the distribution of the sacraments and in consuming all minute gems that remain in the paten is a very important matter which the church greatly stresses to the new priest. During an ordination the Bishop advises the new priest, saying, “Let your distribution be in array, in order, in quietness and calmness, and in caution and carefulness. Look closely at the sacred utensils and ask one with sharp sight to look twice and thrice until you are sure.”

Further Remarks on the Distribution

☒ It is of great importance that every partaker should approach the Sacraments in preparedness, repentance and confession, so that he does not take condemnation to himself (1Cor.11:27). He has to clear his conscience beforehand by avoiding errors, having confessed his sins, having been reconciled with everybody and, moreover, abstaining from eating and drinking for required period of time; nine hours for adults, six hours for children and three hours for sucklings. For the late Liturgies, like those of the Great Lent, the abstinence starts at midnight. The nine hours abstinence signifies the Lord’s nine hours of sufferings on the day of crucifixion, from the beginning of the trial at 9 a.m. until His burial at 6 p.m.

☒ St. Macarius the Great once said, “Do not be ashamed to regularly confess your sins to attain healing from them so that you deserve to partake of the Lord’s Body and Blood and He may abide in you and you in Him.” For if the Lord has warned against eating the Old Testament’s animal offerings saying, “But the person who eats the flesh of the sacrifice of the peace offering that belongs to the Lord, while he is unclean,

that person shall be cut off from his people” (Lev.7:20), how much more is it essential to cleanse the soul, recover its defilement, confess and repent before partaking of the Divine Bloodless Offering.

☒ Revelations (11:1) states, “Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod, and the angel stood saying, ‘Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there.’” Protopriest Abdel Messieh Theophilis Nekhaili says in his interpretation of this chapter, “The rod that was given to John indicates that the ministers of Christ are given the authority to measure and test the believers. The ministers absolve him who deserves absolution and binds him who deserves to be bound, so if the priest bans someone from approaching the Holy Communion, this person should not be enraged or furious, instead he shall listen to the advice and accept the directive.”

☒ The priest covers the paten because it is not befitting that those who are not partaking should behold the Sacraments.

☒ The congregation bow during this time to emulate to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary’s who bowed before the Lord when He showed Himself to them after the Resurrection; “Jesus met them and said ‘Rejoice’ and they came and held Him by the feet and worshipped Him” (Matt.28:9). It also signifies the disciples who worshipped Him, as they saw Him ascending to Heaven (Luke 24:52). The bowing and lowering of the heads of the congregation symbolises the Seraphim who covered their faces with their wings when they saw the Lord sitting on His throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filling the temple (Isaiah 6:2).

☒ The congregation's cry, "Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord", indicates that what is in the priest's hands is the same Body which Christ took of the Virgin Mary and the same Body with which He entered Jerusalem where the crowds welcomed Him with the same outcry, saying, "Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest" (Matt.21:9). It also signifies that Christ, who was incarnated for our salvation, rose from the dead and ascended in great glory to the Heavens, and will come again in His Glory to judge the living and the dead. At all times, we look forward to His coming when His servants will rejoice and exclaim.

DISTRIBUTING THE HONORED BLOOD

After giving out the Holy Body and consuming all the remaining jewels in the paten, as mentioned before, the priest starts giving out the Honoured Blood. He uncovers the Chalice, takes the veil that has been placed on top of it, and places it in his left hand, taking the Master from the top of the Throne and putting it inside the chalice.

He then raises the Chalice from the throne with his right hand, taking the utmost care while doing so. The deacon helps by holding the doors of the Throne open. When the Chalice comes out of the Throne everyone bows in glorification to the Honoured Blood which has been shed for our salvation.

When the Chalice has been taken out of the Throne the priest holds it in his left hand which is covered with the veil. He

then communes the Spadikon which is immersed in the Blood, after draining it from the precious Blood inside the Chalice. He then partakes of the Blood.

If there is an associate priest he gives him the Chalice and the Masteer inside it. The associate priest partakes of the Blood, once or three times (his hand must be covered with the veil when holding the Masteer).

After this, the priest gives the Blood to the deacons with the Masteer, once or three times while saying, **“The Blood of Emmanuel our Lord. This is true. Amen.”** The partaker responds with, “Amen.”

Then he gives the Holy Blood to the congregation; first the men, then the women. He then returns to the altar and drinks what is left from the Blood straight from the chalice without using the Masteer. In doing this he has to apply great care so that none of the Blood rolls over the handle of the Masteer (which is inside the Chalice) when he tilts the Chalice to drink from it. If too much Blood remains after giving it to the congregation the priest should take care not to drink it quickly, but gradually, lest he chokes and the Blood splashes out of his mouth.

Remarks on the holy Communion

☒ When the partaker brings his mouth close to the chalice he should imagine that he is approaching the stab wound in the side of the Divine from which blood and water flowed on the cross. He should offer thanks to God for His inexpressible gift.

☒ +The Church gives the two substances of the Thanksgiving Mystery separately, first the Body then the Blood, for two reasons:

The Lord Christ Himself gave it to His disciples in the same way when He instituted the Mystery of the Eucharist, “Jesus took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat, this is My Body’.” (Matt.26:27-28).

The Church wants us to never forget Christ’s Blood which gushed out of His Divine Side on the cross and was shed on the ground for our Salvation. The Church collects it in a Chalice, separate from the Body, because the Blood which flowed from His side streamed, and still streams, for our salvation. In its flow it saves all those who come to the Father through it because it is alive and it intercedes on our behalf with its redemption and saving merits.

“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

☒ The serving priest receives the Holy Communion before all partakers, even if there is an older or higher rank priest among them, (e.g. if a priest is serving and there is a protopriest among the communicants), as the serving priest is the Sacraments’ minister. In accordance with what our Glorified Saviour did during the Last Supper, He first consecrated His Body, He broke it and ate first, then gave His disciples. Likewise, He sanctified the cup, tasted it first, then gave it to His disciples.

☒ No one shares the Spadikon with the serving priest, who alone eats it whole without division or fraction, because the word Spadikon means the ‘Lordly Part’ and it is impossible to divide or faction Master Christ.

☒ The whole Sacraments must be communed. Nothing is to remain for later or the next day. The command of the Old Testament’s law regarding the Passover lamb says,

***“You shall let none of it remain until morning”
(Ex.12:10)***

☒ This does not apply to the part of the Sacraments which the priest keeps in the Gem’s box to take immediately after the Mass to a sick person. In this case, the priest, without drinking water after the Holy Communion, goes to the sick person when the Mass is over to give him the Holy Sacrament. He then washes the Gem’s box thoroughly and gives some of the water to the sick person to drink, before drinking the rest of it himself.

☒ When the Lord ascended to heaven the disciples looked steadfastly towards heaven, even after He was out of their sight, for a cloud received Him. They remained staring towards the heavens until two men in white clothes (angels) stood by them and said,

***“Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven?
This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven,
will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into
heaven” (Acts 1:4-12).***

☒ We should do likewise after the Holy Communion and the going of the Lord's Honoured Body and Blood out of our sights. We should have our hearts drawn to heaven, looking forward to His second coming, to take us with Him on the cloud.

☒ Every partaker should pray a thanksgiving prayer after he has received the Sacraments to offer thanks to God for the grace he has attained, and to plead that his partaking of the Pure Body and Honoured Blood be a blessing, a strength and purity to secure a favourable acceptance before the feared Throne on the day of Judgment, and not be for retribution or condemnation. In this regard, one of the fathers said, "After we receive this Holy Sacrament, we should not be hasty to leave the church and we should not speak with other people. Instead, we should stay for a few moments, on our own and in silence, after the Liturgy, offering a thanksgiving prayer to God, and to appreciate the everlasting value which these moments bring to us, as we become able to worship our Lord, and sense the presence of the Divine Guest inside us, and pour our hearts into His Divine heart. Thus we become a new person, a person who has undergone an alteration, then we can leave the church and mix with the people. The people will realise that an unutterable mystery has been fulfilled within us. It is the mystery of love which will be manifested through our increasing love to others." In the prayer book of the Hours, (the Agbia), there are prayers to be said before and after partaking of the Holy Communion.

WASHING THE UTENSILS

After giving out the Honoured Blood, the priest starts washing the utensils.

He washes the Masteeer (spoon) inside the Chalice and drinks the water. Then the deacon pours more water in the cup. The serving priest gives it to the associate priest who drinks it. Again, the priest thoroughly washes the inside of the Chalice with his hand, and pours the water in the paten. He then washes the outside of the Chalice, especially the spots which he touched with his hands, this washing is done above the paten.

Next, he washes the Masteeer, the whole of it, then the whole of the dome (or star) which sits upon the paten, paying particular care to the ends which touch the paten.

He pours the washing water of the Chalice, Masteeer and star in the paten, washes the paten thoroughly with his hand, then drinks the water. The deacon pours water in the paten which is in the hands of the priest, which the deacons then drink to resolve the Holy Communion.

The priest washes his hands up to the wrist and his lips, then with that water he washes the paten and drinks the water. If the associate priest has held the Chalice and has given the Blood to the people, he also washes his hands in the paten and drinks the water. A deacon then dries the utensils with a clean towel used specifically for drying the altar utensils. He then binds them together with the veils and the Prosparine, making sure the wrapping is not too tight otherwise the utensils might be bent. When tying the utensils, the deacon

makes five knots: two knots in the preliminary (lower) tie, and three knots on the upper one. This done so that when the priest unwraps the bundle to dress the altar before the Mass, he unties the top three knots with the familiar three signings of the cross, and the lower two with the continuation of the signings, saying, “Honour and Glory, Glory and Honour...”

THANKSGIVING PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

After he has finished washing the utensils, the priest bows his head before the Lord and prays the following Thanksgiving Prayer:“

Our mouth is full of exaltation, and our tongue with praise, because of our partaking of Your Immortal Sacraments, O Lord...”. This is similar to what David the Psalmist says, “When the Lord brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nation, the Lord has done great things for them.

The Lord has done great things for us, whereof we are glad” (Ps.126:1-3)

. Here the Lord has brought back the captivity of inner Zion, our souls, and freed us from the captivity of Satan, who had trapped us within his will. The Lord has brought us back to Himself, through repentance, and bestowed upon us the greatness of His favours by giving us His Holy Body and Blood. Through deservedly partaking of them we shall have eternal life and steadfastness in Christ, this is why we rejoice

and our tongues become filled with praise and gratefulness to our God, Who is full of loving kindness.“

...For what an eye has never seen, nor an ear has ever heard, and what has never been perceptible to a human heart, You have prepared, O Lord, to those who love Your Holy Name...”, as the Apostle Paul says,

“...Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, not have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him” (1Cor.2:9). Regarding the Holy Sacraments,

one of the Fraction Prayers says, “

Granting those who depend on Him, with all their hearts, the things that the angels covet to see.” “

...You have revealed it to the young children of Your Holy church. Yes Lord, because this is the pleasure which was before You, for You are full of mercy...”, just as Jesus, the Lord of Glory, said to give thanks to the Father,

“I thank You Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight” (Matt.11:25-26).

It is also like the Apostle Paul’s saying,

“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But God has revealed them to us

through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God” (1Cor.2:9-10).

The babes referred to here are the simple and meek believers, who straightforwardly and without confusion believe in the Mysteries of the church, their effectiveness on their souls, and the Lord’s love, kindness and compassion on them. Though they are not worthy of them, they rejoice and offer thanks. They hear the Chanter saying,

“What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits towards me? I will take up the cup of salvation and call upon the Name of the Lord. (Pray). I will pay my vows to the Lord now in the presence of all His people” (Ps.115:12-14).“

We send up to You Glory and Honour, O Father and Son and Holy Spirit, now and forevermore...”

DISMISSING THE ANGEL OF THE SACRIFICE

After the Thanksgiving Prayer, the deacon pours some water in the priest’s hand who breathes on it three times while saying the three signings of the cross. If other priests are present they, too, blow on the water and repeat the second signing.

The priest stands before the altar and dismisses the angel of the Sacrifice by sprinkling some of the water on the altar and sprinkling the rest upwards saying, “O angel of this offering who ascends to the highest with this praise, remember us before the Lord that He may forgive us our sins.”

It is not befitting that any priest or deacon takes off the vestments of the service before the angel of the sacrifice is dismissed or before the congregation have been dismissed.

DISMISSING THE CONGREGATION

After sprinkling the water and dismissing the Sacrifice's angel the priest starts to dismiss the congregation. First he places his hand, wet with water, on the Throne of the Chalice, then on his own beard, then on other priests' beards. He then places his hand on each deacon's head as a blessing before dismissing them. Dismissing the congregation can be done in two ways:

- ☒ If only few people are in attendance, the priest places his hand on each person's head.
- ☒ If there are many people he dismisses them by sprinkling water on them in an organised manner to avoid any noise. During the sprinkling of water the people should not leave their places. This is the most recent way of dismissing the congregation and it seems that this had to take place because of the growing number of worshippers and the difficulty of giving them the dismissal in the previous way.
- ☒ Some priests find it necessary to sprinkle the dismissal water after the Blessing Prayer, and give the dismissal, "Leave in Peace", to avoid the disturbance during the Prayer of Blessing.

Further Remarks on the Dismissal:

☒ The priest dismisses his brothers, the priests, by placing his hand on their beards and not on their heads. The Liturgy Book says that he wipes their faces with his hand because placing the hand on the head indicates giving a blessing and blessings are only given by the senior to the junior, like the Apostle Paul says,

“Now beyond all contradiction, the lesser is blessed by the better” (Heb.7:7).

☒ As all the priests are brothers and none is less than the other the priest does not give them the dismissal by placing his hand on their heads but by wiping their beards with his hand. Moreover, the beard is a sign of their pledge and devotion to God, so it is a sacred and respected thing.

☒ The priest has to make sure that the sprinkled dismissal water has reached each and every single person in the church. The Coptic person is under the conviction that even if he attends from the beginning of the Liturgy, partakes of the Holy Communion and attains many blessings but has not received his share of the dismissal water with which he wipes his face, or has missed out on the Eulogia, he considers the benediction to be incomplete and leaves the church unsatisfied and not filled with happiness.

☒ Dismissal by placing the hand on every person's head was the original way of dismissal carried out in our church. It has many meanings and benefits. It means that the priest attends to the congregation and

knows who has come to church and who has not, hence he should ask about them. After the Liturgy, he can then go to visit his people as if they are his own children, or as endeared sheep of the holy flock, which deserve the care and attention of the shepherd.

☒ If the Patriarch or one of the Bishops is present, but not serving during the Liturgy, the serving priest does not sprinkle the water but instead puts the water that has been poured in his hands into the Patriarch's or the Bishop's hands. The Patriarch breathes on the water and sprinkles it upwards to dismiss the angel saying, "O angel of this offering...". He then prays the dismissal of the clergy and the congregation and says the Blessing.

THE CODE OF BENEDICTION

At the conclusion of all the collective prayers, the congregation chants "Amen Alleluia, Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit." In the presence of the Patriarch or a Bishop they add, "May you be bestowed the blessing of Moses." After that, the priest stands by the door of the Sanctuary facing West and says the usual benediction, which is the same as what is said at the end of raising the incense.

After the Lord's Prayer, the priest gives the dismissal saying, "And now, the love of God the Father, and the grace of the Only Begotten Son, our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ, and the fellowship and the gift of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Go in peace. The peace of the Lord be with you." The people respond with, "And also with you."

THE PSALM OF JOY

The priest kisses the Altar and goes around it once while saying Psalm 46, which says, “O clap your hands, all you peoples...”. The following provides a contemplation of this splendid Psalm:“

O clap your hands all you peoples, Shout to God with the voice of triumph...”, as clapping the hands and shouting the voice of triumph are signs of joy and happiness, and what joy and happiness are greater than partaking of the Holy Body and Blood of Christ, so that He may abide in us, and so we receive the promise of eternal life. It is written that when the disciples received the last blessing from the Lord at His Ascension,

“They worshipped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing the Lord” (Luke 24:52-53).

Likewise, after receiving the last benediction of the Liturgy which is partaking of the Life-giving Sacraments, and after the Sacraments go out of our sight which symbolises the Ascension of the Lord into heaven, we see the priest going around the altar and, kissing its corners reciting the Psalm of Joy, joining the disciples who were continually in the temple praising and blessing the Lord.

Attending the Liturgy and partaking of the Divine Mysteries is the same as attending the ‘Bridal Supper of the Lamb’. The onlooker blesses those invited to the super saying,

“Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” (Rev.9:19).

In the Book of Revelations, the marriage supper of the Lamb is full of joy and jubilation,

“Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints” (Rev.19:7-8).

The wife of the Lamb is the Church, Christ’s Bride, the believers’ souls which should be prepared and equipped with repentance and self-examination, they should be adorned with virtues ,and beautified with holiness and purity of heart, so as to be worthy of going to the banquet of the Lamb’s marriage, and of receiving the awesome mysteries.

Christ’s Sacrifice, of which we partake with repentance, with a contrite spirit, having confessed our sins, is our joy and jubilation as we are saved from sin and death. This sacrifice is like the fattened calf which the compassionate father killed when his lost son came back to him. After he embraced his son, he ordered his servants, saying,

“Bring the fattened calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry, for this my son was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry” (Luke 15:20-24).

In their gladness they used instruments of joy and dancing, that is why the church chants Psalm 150 during the

distribution and community of the Holy Sacraments. This is the Psalm of praise; praise with the sound of trumpet, praise with the lyre and flute, and praise with loud sounding cymbals.

Then we chant, “Blessed are You”, which is said in joyous occasions. We also sing suitable hymns and praises to make all those who are present feel that they really are attending the banquet of the Lamb’s marriage.“

...For the Lord is the Most High and is feared, Great King of the whole earth, subdued the peoples to us and the nations under our feet...”. The Lord is the most High and is feared and He rules the whole world, yet He has humbled Himself and given us His Holy Body and Honoured Blood. The church calls the Mystery of Communion ‘The Fearful Mysteries of Emmanuel, Our Lord.’ We must not take these Mysteries lightly and exploit the kindness of God; His modesty, His love and His patience with us. Instead, we must approach these Mysteries with fear, with awe, with reverence and with thanksgiving to God for this inexpressible gift. We must approach them with repentance, with preparedness and with contrition, lest we be burned with the fire of Divinity, and take dreadful condemnation to ourselves in that great day.

By partaking of the Divine Mysteries we attain strength and fortification with which we overcome our enemies, both the hidden and the manifest. We can overpower demons who fight us with desires and temptations and we can triumph over our corrupt nature, our evil inclinations and desires. We can be victorious over those who wish to harm or persecute us with our tolerance, patience, love, serving and sacrifice, in the same manner as the martyrs used to do with those who

persecuted and tortured them. They succeeded in converting them from aggressive swordsmen to saints and martyrs.

By partaking of the Holy Communion, we unite ourselves with Jesus, thus we receive strength from Him and we know that His strength is made perfect through weakness. When we receive the Divine Mysteries and carry Christ inside us, we can overcome the world, “Because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” (1John 4:4), “And they overcame him by the Blood of the Lamb” (Rev.12:11).“

...He has chosen us for inheritance. The excellence of Jacob whom He loved...”. What is greater than the Lord choosing us to partake of the Divine and Life-giving Mysteries? He has chosen us to attain the pledge of the Kingdom and to experience life in unity with Christ. Life here is like a riddle, or like looking into a mirror, and shall continue to be so until we meet Him face to face and dwell in His house forevermore. The Lord who loved Jacob for his spiritual adornments, such as his tolerance in temptations, his persistence in prayers, wrestling with God, not repaying evil with evil, his humility, dependence and submission to God. So, He also loves those fruits of the Spirit in us. He wants them to grow and multiply until they reach the perfect spiritual excellence, until they reached the perfect fullness of the stature of Christ, whose radiant glamour excels all that of the humans, and upon whose lips grace has been poured. He loved righteousness and hated iniquity, and for that the Lord God has anointed him with the oil of gladness and made His Throne forever and the people fall under Him.“

...The Lord ascended with a shout, God ascended with the sound of a trumpet...”. As mentioned before, the Holy Sacraments disappear in the partakers mouths. The Body and

Blood which were on the altar disappear after the Communion, symbolising the ascension of our Lord Christ into heaven in front of His disciples, and His departure from their sight when He was taken up in the cloud. “

And they worshipped and returned to Jerusalem with joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God” (Luke 24:52-53). The Lord’s Ascension was coupled with the disciples’ joy on earth, and also with jubilation and welcoming praise from all the heavenly hosts. Psalm 24 tells us about the heavenlies’ reception to their Creator at His Ascension to heaven, and about opening the gates widely to let in the Triumphant Lion from the tribe of Judah who went out, overcame, and returned victorious. The Psalm says, “Lift up your heads, O you gates, and be lifted up you everlasting doors! And the King of Glory shall come in, Who is the King of Glory? The Lord, Strong and Mighty. The Lord Mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates, and lift them up, you everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is the King of Glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of Glory” (Ps.24:7-10). The Psalm does not say “open your doors”, but, “lift up your doors”, so that heaven can welcome her Lord and her God as He ascends from earth after accomplishing the redemption and freeing His people from captivity.

Psalm 18:1 says, when the Lord descended to earth, “He bowed the heavens also, and came down.” After He had fulfilled His mission and ascended to heaven, He went up with the jubilation of victory for He is the Strong and the Mighty in battle. In the battle of the Cross, He bound Satan, broke his thorn and abolished his authority over humans, because in the Cross,

“Having disarmed principalities and powers. He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it [the cross]” (Col.2:15).

How great would it be if we do not just open our mouths to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord, but also open our hearts by lifting away our sins and lusts. Then, He can come into us as a dwelling. He can reign over us and make us His home, finding comfort inside of us. He can find a place in our hearts to rest His weary Head, which has been moistened with the night’s dew, because of His waiting and knocking at the doors of our hearts, and their long rejection to the Blessed and Majestic Person.“

Sing praise to our God. Sing praise to our King, sing praise because the Lord is King over all the earth. Sing praise with understanding for the Lord has reigned over all nations.” How wonderful is this Psalm which is full of joy, jubilation and praises, for the splendour of the Lord’s Ascension to heaven. The Psalm repeats the words, “sing praise”, five times in two verses. We should feel the great, unutterable and honourable joy when we partake of the Divine Sacraments, submitting our lives to the Lord, depending upon Him in all situations, yielding every thought to the obedience to Christ so that He may reign over all people, over our thoughts, senses, times, talents and lead us at all times in the procession of His triumph.

The church does the correct thing in chanting the joyous hymns during the distribution of the Sacraments, as the people of the church stand in awe during such blessed moments, meditating on the sacrifice of the cross and the slain Lamb for the sins of the world. They listen and participate in the hymns of the distribution. This has been the

church's custom since the Apostolic era and this is evident in the Apostolic instructions, "Let all believers sing praise until all the oblation has been communed." Taking an example from what happened when Jesus set the Lord's Supper in the upper room in Zion, the Holy Bible says,

"And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives" (Matt.26:30).

It is not right to give a sermon during the distribution, for the songs of praise and jubilation will be silenced and the people will be distracted from the Sacrifice and the significance of the Communion. They will sit during moments when sitting is strictly forbidden; at the time of distributing Jesus' Broken Body and Shed Blood for our sins. During such a sermon, the speaker would be giving his back to the Sacrifice and teaching in the presence of the Greatest Teacher of all. Those who give the sermon at the time of the distribution violate the original rite that had been prevailing in the days of the Apostles, according to the teaching of the Holy Bible,

"And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers" (Acts 2:42).

From this verse, we can see that the original arrangements of the ceremony of the Thanksgiving Mystery was firstly, teaching (nowadays this corresponds with the readings of the Pauline, the Catholic Epistles, the Acts, the Sinaxarium and the Gospel, and then the sermon), and then the fellowship in partaking of the Lord's Body and Blood, and the accompanying prayers and praises. Let us hope that the church realises this mistake and avoids it so that the people can feel the sacredness of the time of Communion and

participate in praising the Lamb who had been slain for the life of the world.

St. Severus, son of Mokafaa, says, “He who approaches the Sacraments must stand up in fear and in reverence, until Christ has ascended from the altar. This ascension happens after the whole Body has been communed and the oblation has been lifted out of the church. It is when the people see that He has ascended that they plead with Him to maintain for them the Grace of the Holy Spirit, which He sent upon His disciples after His Ascension.”

It is important to note that he who attends the Liturgy and leaves the church before the end of the distribution and giving the dismissal receives the same share as Judas Iscariot. Likewise, he who does not attend the reading of the Gospel and the consecration of the offerings and then approaches the Sacraments, gets the same punishment. He is partaking of the Holy Communion with an unclean soul. The reading of the Holy Books and praying the Liturgy were set to be read before Communion to sanctify the partaker’s soul and body; then he becomes worthy of the offerings. “The Lord sits on His Throne...” As the Lord sits on the Throne, on the right hand of the Greatness, as He ascended to heaven, He also sits on the throne of our hearts when we unite with Him in faith during the Holy Communion. Thus our hearts become thrones, our bodies become a heaven, and our thoughts and all our lives become spiritual and heavenly.“

...The leaders of the people gathered together. The people of the God of Abraham for the shield of the earth belong to God. He is greatly exalted. Alleluia.” When we approach the Holy Sacraments, let us gather ourselves and meditate on

“The God of Abraham”, for the Lord Jesus Himself said, “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 7:58). It was He whom Abraham saw from afar. He saw the day of redemption and the sacrifice of the cross with an eye of faith hundreds of years before their occurrence. He saw the day of the Lord and the day of redemption, when God ordered him to slay his son Isaac on Mount Moria. When Abraham obeyed, arranged everything, and was about to slay his only son, the Lord stopped him. Abraham raised his eyes and saw a ram behind him tied in the bush by its horns, he took the ram and offered it with great happiness for the redemption which the Lord made. This redemption was a sign of the greatest redemption the Lord would make on the cross in the fullness of time, not for one person, nor for a number of people, but a redemption for the whole world so that no one who believes in Him would perish, but gain eternal life.

Let our senses be gathered at the time of receiving the Sacraments to ponder the Lord’s great mercies on us sinners, for we did not love Him, but He loved us first. He loved us in kindness and gave Himself up for our sake. Here, Abraham is remembered because it was him to whom the Lord gave the promise of the coming of Christ from his offspring when He said,

“And in your seed all families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen.28:14).

The shields of the earth are the strong people who are strong through His strength and those who depend on Him and are exalted on earth. They are renowned for their holiness and their strong life with God. People see their good deeds and give glory to their Father Who art in heaven. For God

“Gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength.... Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Is.40: 29-31).

Because the Lord is their strength and their refuge, “He is the shield to all who trust in Him” (Ps.18:30).

THE WASHING OF HANDS

After reciting Psalm 46 and kissing the corners of the altar, the priest washes his hands after giving the dismissal in preparation for giving the congregation the Eulogia.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF EULOGIA; MORSEL OF BLESSING

Eulogia is a Greek word which means ‘blessing’. In our church, the word Eulogia is given to the ‘morsel of blessing’ which is distributed to the worshippers at the end of the Liturgy. The Eulogia comes from the bread which remains after choosing the Lamb. This bread was a potential offering and could have become the Divine Body. For this reason they have much honour and the priests and congregation share them. It has been the custom in Coptic churches that the priest distributes the Eulogia first to the believers in front of the Sanctuary. He starts with his brothers, the priests, who shake hands with him and break a morsel of the Eulogia. If the Patriarch or a Bishop is present he distributes the

Eulogia. The priests go first to break a piece from the bread in his hand, then the people follow. The Patriarch, the Bishop or the priest gives each of them a morsel of the blessing which each person kisses, eats and then goes home. In doing this, every believer will come out of the church thankful to the Lord, comforted and asking for the continuation of this grace for him and for all believers.

Some Points on the Eulogia:

☒ The priest breaks the Eulogia over the Lamb's plate which the deacon holds for him so that fragments of the bread don't fall on the floor. At the end of the distribution, the priest or the deacon collects the fragments which have fallen in the plate and eats them.

The Eulogia must be kissed before eating it because it is a morsel of blessing and has attended the Liturgy, and we know that everything becomes sacred with the word of God and with prayers.

☒ If the morsel is too big and one cannot take it in one mouthful, he then breaks it with his hands and not with his teeth, making sure he does not drop any fraction on the ground.

☒ In the non-fasting days, the Eulogia must be eaten before leaving the church.

☒ In fasting days when the Mass is finished earlier than the time of breaking the fasting, the Eulogia can be kept until eating time and be taken before the meal.

The priest then takes off the vestments of service and puts on his black clothes before leaving the Sanctuary, as he does

with his left foot, while facing East. He then draws the curtain of the Sanctuary saying, “Draw Your shield over us, and let the door of Your church be opened in our faces, throughout the ages and till the end of all times.” He kisses the curtain and goes in peace.

A Final Remark:

☒ We should not prostrate or bow after partaking of the Divine Sacraments because we are in a joyous situation, carrying the Lord Jesus inside ourselves. The church’s rules prohibit kneeling to the ground after receiving the Divine Sacraments.

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, one God, Amen."

This book which is in your hands explains the rituals used in our Holy Coptic Liturgy, and so gives us a unique opportunity to learn, benefit and

take part in our church's holiest form of worship, which is all for Emmanuel our God.

May the book be a blessing to all those who read it, giving them a deeper understanding and wisdom and admiration of our wonderful liturgical rituals which are deeply enriched with spiritual and theological meanings.

We ask this through the pleadings of our pure mother the Virgin Saint Mary, and the prayers of our honoured father His Holiness Pope Shenouda III

Bishop Mettaous

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