

## THE LITURGIES OF LENT: THE LITURGY OF ST BASIL

The Divine Liturgy we normally celebrate on Sundays and weekdays is credited to St John Chrysostom (ca. 347-407). On the Sundays of Lent, however, we celebrate another Divine Liturgy, which is traditionally identified with St Basil the Great (330-379). What's different about the Liturgy of St Basil and why do we use it during the Great Fast?

For folks in the pews, the responses of the Liturgy of St Basil are identical to those of the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom except for the Hymn to the Theotokos. In place of "It is truly proper" we sing the beautiful hymn "In you, O woman full of grace, all creation rejoices." The faithful may also sing the familiar responses of the Anaphora --- "It is proper and just" through "Holy, Holy, Holy" and the "Amen" of the consecration---to different chant melodies. Originally (and still in Slavonic) the musical setting of these responses was much longer and more complicated, because they were meant to cover the extra time needed for the priest to pray the much long Anaphora prayers which are characteristic of the St Basil Liturgy. Now that the Anaphora prayers are taken aloud (a return to the ancient practice which various Eastern Catholic and Orthodox Churches are slowly considering) the faithful can hear for themselves the real different -- and the real beauty -- of the Liturgy of St Basil.

The longer priestly prayers of St Basil's Liturgy bring together two main themes: a theology of sacrifice and a theology of salvation. Both of these come together in Jesus' offering of His own life as the perfect sin offering on the Cross. Every Divine Liturgy continues to make the benefits of that unique sacrifice available for the faithful as we grow into a full realization in our own lives of what Christ has done for us.

The prayer after the Great Entrance traces the history of sacrifice through the Bible: the offerings of Abel (Genesis 4,4), Noah (Genesis 8,20), Abraham (Genesis 22,13), Moses and Aaron and the priest-prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 10,8). Each of these Old Testament figures also points in some particular way to Jesus Christ. The

prayer goes on to recall that the apostles received the commandment to offer the sacrifice of the Liturgy from Christ Himself (Luke 22,19; 1 Corinthians 11,25).

The prayer before "Holy, Holy, Holy" reminds us that our earthly liturgy offers us the privilege of participating on earth in the perfect worship offered constantly by the angels in heaven. This prayer delves into the mystery of the Trinity, celebrating each person in turn in carefully crafted language that simultaneously insists on the unity among the Three. The prayer that follows summarizes God's whole plan of salvation from Adam and Eve until the end of the world. St Basil's inspiration seems to come especially from the Epistles of St Paul. He describes the original dignity with which God created man and the consequences that flowed from the Adam and Eve's sin: "sin entered the world and, through sin, death" (Romans 5,12).

The prayer's summary of what Christ has done for us is a jewel of theology: "Living in this world, he gave us precepts for salvation, turned us away from the deceit of idol, and brought us to know you, true God and Father. He purchased us for himself as a chosen people, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation (1 Peter 2,9), cleansing us with water and sanctifying us with the Holy Spirit (Romans 15,16). He surrendered himself as a ransom to Death (Ephesians 5,25), by which we were held captive, sold into slavery under sin (Romans 7,14). Descending by the cross into Hades, in order to fulfill all things in himself, he freed us from death's despair, and rose on the third day, preparing the way for the resurrection of all flesh from the dead."

The Liturgy of St Basil is celebrated on the five Sundays of the Great Fast, on Holy Thursday and Holy Saturday, on the vigils of Christmas and Theophany, and on St Basil's own feastday, January 1.

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## THE LITURGIES OF LENT: THE LITURGY OF THE PRESANCTIFIED GIFTS

The celebration of the Divine Liturgy is always joyful. It is a participation in the death, resurrection and glorification of Jesus Christ and a foretaste of the Kingdom of Heaven. Because the Divine Liturgy is always a feast, it came to be seen as incompatible with the spirit of Lent as it is observed in the Byzantine tradition. Therefore, the Divine Liturgy is served only on Saturday and Sunday during Lent; the weekdays are “a-liturgical” and the daily services of Vespers and Matins mark the liturgical day. The daily selections from the Triodion, along with daily readings from Genesis, Isaiah, Psalms and Proverbs, provide rich spiritual nourishment of their own. At the same time, the saints who shaped our liturgical life realized that the faithful could not be deprived of the Eucharist. They thought back to the Exodus when, for 40 years, God provided manna every evening and morning to nourish His people on their journey. Lent is likewise a little Exodus toward the Promised Land of Pascha, an escape from exile in sin and a return to our homeland of intimacy with God our Father. The Liturgy of the Presanctified was already in common use in Constantinople by the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. The Church Council convened in 692 makes it the only Liturgy that can be celebrated on a weekday in Lent. The celebration of the Presanctified Liturgy was lost in many Byzantine Catholic Churches in the centuries after our reunion with Rome (1598/1646) and replaced by much simpler Latin services with a very different emphasis such as Stations of the Cross. The Second Vatican Council and later documents by Pope John Paul II called us to return to our authentic Byzantine customs. The bishops of the Ruthenian Byzantine Catholic Metropolia of Pittsburgh therefore mandate that the Presanctified be celebrated in every parish at least once a week during the Great Fast.

The responses to the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts are sung in a distinctive Lenten tone.

There is no anaphora (Eucharistic prayer) or consecration in the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts. An extra “Lamb” (the Eucharistic particle representing Christ) and particles for the communion of the faithful are consecrated on the previous Sunday and reserved for

this Liturgy. Hence, they will be somewhat drier and harder. The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is essentially Vespers, the evening prayer of the Church, with additional ceremonies related to the preparation and distribution of the Eucharist. The additional Psalms 120-134 which are chanted at this Liturgy were originally connected with the annual Jewish pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Booths. The Lenten Church is likewise on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, in order to participate in the mysteries of Christ’s death and resurrection which were accomplished there.

Psalm 141-- “Let my prayer ascend to you like incense and the lifting up of my hands like an evening sacrifice” refers to the incense offered every evening in the Jerusalem Temple as a sacrifice for the people’s sins. We likewise struggle against our own sinful tendencies during Lent and offer God our prayers, penance and charity as sacrifices.

There are two Old Testament readings. In Genesis we hear the story of humanity’s creation and fall, and follow the creation of Israel out of the family of Abraham. The men and women of Genesis model a variety of virtues for us but also demonstrate how mankind drifted further and further from God. The practical advice of Proverbs, spoken in the voice of the wise King Solomon, teaches us how to discipline ourselves to live uprightly in a very fallen world. Daily selections from these two Old Testament books can be found on the Church calendar. They make excellent Lenten reading.

In place of the Cherubic Hymn we sing another hymn that reminds us that the Liturgy allows us to do for a time what the angels do for all eternity: “Now the powers of heaven are serving with us, for behold the King of Glory enters. They escort the mystical sacrifice already accomplished. Let us draw near with faith and love that we may become partaker of life everlasting.” Because the Great Entrance is made with the Eucharist (rather than with still-unconsecrated bread and wine as in the Divine Liturgy), the faithful kneel for the Entrance at the Presanctified.

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