

## **EXPLANATION OF THE MARONITE DIVINE LITURGY AND ITS TRADITIONS**

The Ritual of the Holy Mass according to the Antiochene Maronite Catholic Church that is today celebrated, has its origins in the ancient rites of the Universal Apostolic Church established centuries ago by Jesus Christ and by his Apostles. Since establishment of the Church by Christ, many diverse forms of Christian worship have developed. In the same period, the rites and customs observed by the Maronites have progressed and flowered into the form which can be seen on God's Altar today.

Consequently, through periodic reforms in the liturgy since the days of early Christianity, the Church has attempted to give its faithful a deeper comprehension of and appreciation for the spiritual meaning of the Mass, and in addition, has tried to give a better understanding of the spiritual benefits to be derived by those who partake in the Holy Sacrifice.

The most recent reform in the Maronite liturgy came about as a result of Vatican II. On December 4, 1963, the Vatican Ecumenical Council issued a decree entitled "The Liturgy." In accordance with the terms of the decree and the wishes of the Maronite Clergy, 1) The Vatican Ecumenical Council. 2) The Maronite Bishops. 3) Other Members of the Maronite belief, clergy and laity alike. 4) The Maronite Patriarch in Lebanon who was empowered (by the terms of the regulations issued November 21, 1965, pertaining specifically to the Eastern Church and being part of the Ecumenical Decrees of Vatican II) to reform the liturgy of the Maronite Church, His Eminence Cardinal Patriarch Peter Paul Meouchi in a patriarchal decree, dated April 13, 1973, ordered the priests of the Maronite Church to amend the Mass and to use the new Ordo Missae, as new form of prayer and devotion for a trial of one year from the date of the decree.

Shortly after the Decree was issued, hostilities broke out in Lebanon, and His Beatitude and Eminence Cardinal Patriarch Antonius Peter Khoreiche prolonged the experimental year for a further indefinite period. Moreover, to free the clergy of the Maronite Church for more important work of ministering to those who had suffered as a result of the upheavals in Lebanon, His beatitude ordered a postponement of decision - making meetings respecting church procedures until some future date when the country was once more at peace.

In 1992, His Eminence Cardinal and Patriarch Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir, has ordered the new edition of the Maronite Mass, ad experimentum for five years.

The most important elements written into the Maronite Mass by the Patriarch at the time of the decree made April 13, 1973 and in July 1992 are as follows:

In his observance of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, a priest should always face the Congregation at those times when he directly addresses the Community or when he gives a blessing or benediction, and he should turn to the altar when he addresses or pray to the Lord.

The text of the Mass should be in the vernacular particularly at those times when the priest speaks to the congregation. However, the words of Consecration, the Epiclesis (the invocation of the Holy Spirit), as well as certain hymns and blessings should be spoken in the

original Aramaic, the language used by Christ, to remind the faithful of their Maronite heritage and traditions.

The faithful will bow their heads in accordance with an ancient Maronite custom rather than genuflect in the Roman Catholic fashion.

The first part of the Mass, the "preparation of the faithful," shall consist of prayers, hymns, and readings which will varied according the seasons of the Church and feast days honored by our Holy Mother Church.

On certain special feast days during the year, such as Ash Monday, Palm Sunday, Commemoration of the Finding of the Cross, etc., and for weddings, funerals, and baptisms, a special liturgy appropriate to the occasion will replace the usual prayers prescribed for the preparation of the faithful.

### **PARTS OF THE MARONITE MASS**

Before members of the faithful can receive a Sacrament, the Church prepares them through prayers, hymns and readings from Holy Scriptures. This is particularly true of the faithful attending the Mass. Consequently, the Mass is divided into three distinct parts :

- I. The preparation of the faithful and the offering,
- II. The consecration of the bread and wine (the offering),
- III. Holy Communion, a sharing in the Sacrifice of the Mass.

### **I-The First Part: The Preparation**

These part is subdivided into three components :

- a. Preparation of the Offerings,
- b. Preparation of the Celebrant (the Priest),
- c. Preparation of the Faithful.

#### ***a) The Preparation of the Offerings***

The Holy Mass is a renewal the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross, yet it does not involve the shedding of blood. The Mass is, at one and the same time, a sacrifice made on behalf of all Humanity. The sacrifice of Abel is recorded in the Old Testament, and an emulation of the sacrifice requires that only one's most prized possession should be offered to God.

At one time, Christians coming to Church to attend Mass brought with them their choicest bread and wine so that the priest could choose the most superior quality from among the gifts for the actual sacrifice. From this custom came the word "BOURSHANA" (the host) which in the original Aramaic (Syriac) language means " the choicest of the offerings "(Gifts)." The

remaining bread, wine and other offerings were left for personal support of the priest, the poor, and the needy.

After barter was made obsolete and money became the medium of trade and exchange, the bringing of gifts to church ceased, and the custom was replaced by Mass stipends and collections.

Since the instigation of recent experimental forms of the mass in the Maronite Church, there has been a return to age-old custom of preparing the offering prior to the preparation of the faithful. Where more than one altar exists in a church, there is usually a smaller one to the right of the main altar known as the "preparation's table," and this used for the preparation of the offerings.

### ***b) Preparation of the Priest***

The preparation of the Priest commences with his confession before the altar where he prays for forgiveness and for support with prayers to celebrate the Holy Mass honorably and humbly.

The Priest asks the participants also to pray for him in order that he may be enabled to celebrate the mass in faith, in truth and in devotion as Christ desires him to do, and as the Holy Mother Church prescribed.

### ***c) Preparation of the Faithful***

The preparation of the faithful consists also of three components:

1. The opening prayers and the blessing of the incense.
2. The prayer to the Virgin Mary, Mother of God and our Mother, or a hymn or psalm, or one of St. Ephrem's Hymns (Ephremiate); varying according to the Proper of the Mass, this is followed by the singing of the Trisagion (Qadishat) 3- Readings and Instructions

After the faithful have been prepared by confession, hymns, and prayers imploring our blessed Mother and the Saints for help, readings from Holy Scripture, the basis of our Christian religion, help our faith to increase.

We learn from the Scriptures how to follow in the footsteps of our Lord, how to live a good Christian life, how to increase our faith, our hope and our love for God, our neighbors, and all members of the Christian Community.

After a reading from the Epistles of St Paul, or from other Apostles, followed by a reading of the Gospel, the priest explains in his sermon or homely the meaning of our Christian beliefs and how to apply ourselves daily to the living of a good Christian life.

Subsequently a recitation of the Creed takes place, during which we renew our Christian vows and our faith in the Holy Universal, Apostolic and one undivided Church.

## **II - The Second Part : The consecration**

### ***a) The Anaphora***

The word "anaphora" comes from the Greek and means the repetition of words and deeds. According to Maronite interpretation, the word has a dual meaning, the first pertains to a repetition of Christ's words and deeds as they were uttered and performed by Him on the First Holy Thursday at which time He commanded that the holy Sacrifice be repeated. He said: "do this in commemoration of Me until I return."

By his use of these words, Christ intended that Christians should celebrate the Mass until His return to this world.

The second meaning of "anaphora" is the Maronite tradition pertains to the repetition of words in the same language and idiom that Christ Himself spoke when he lived on earth, and is taken to refer to the words of Consecration and the institution of Holy Communion.

The Antiochene Maronite Catholic Church is one of the richest if not the richest in the number of anaphora contained in its Liturgy. There are at least seventy two Maronite Amphorae. In the present reformed Maronite mass, the "Anaphora of the twelve Apostles " is the one used. The Maronite Synod chose this particular one and hope to reform the other seventy-one Anaphora so that there will be a wider choice of Anaphora available for use by Maronite priests celebrating Mass.

### ***b) Transfer of the Offering to the Main Altar and the Kiss of Peace***

Where there is more than one Altar in the Church, the Offerings are carried to the main Altar in a solemn procession, and strictly speaking, the Mass now truly begins.

Immediately following is the ceremony of peace where the faithful carry out the instruction of Christ;

" if you are bringing a gift to the altar and you remember that your brother has something against you, then leave your offering and go and make peace with your brother, and then return to offer your gift." Matthew 5,23.

At this point, the priest touches the altar to gather blessings from it, with his hand folded as in prayer, the priest symbolically holds the blessings which he holds between his folded hands to a member of the congregation as he repeats words of the priest. The members of the congregation repeat the actions and words of the altar boy or server. In this manner the ceremony of peace is conducted throughout the congregation.

The Eucharistic ceremony which follows consists of three parts:

- 1) A thanksgiving to God the Father.
- 2) A remembrance of God the Son.
- 3) an invocation of the Holy Spirit.

#### **1- Thanksgiving to God the father.**

In the thanksgiving, we thank God for sending His one and only Son to save mankind from the bondage of sin and for granting us the privilege of being children of god, thereby entitling us rightly to call God "Our Father. "

## **2- Remembrance of God the Son (Anamnesis)**

This essential part of the Mass commemorates the words and deeds of Jesus Christ, and permits us to fulfill what Our Lord commanded us to do, that is, to consecrate bread and wine into the Body and the Blood of Christ. This is known as the Canon of the Mass. The canon is a repetition of the words and deeds of Jesus Christ who, in order to save mankind, died on the Cross and rose again from the dead.

## **3- Invocation of The Holy Spirit (Epiclesis).**

Here, the priest genuflects on both knees, followed by a general genuflection by the congregation. The priest calls upon the Holy Spirit to sanctify the Sacrifice of all the faithful and particularly of those present. The priest concludes the invocation with a prayer for help for his people, for the deceased, for the needs of the Church and for the entire world.

## **III - The Third Part: The Communion**

a) The Communion commences with the breaking of the consecrated Host by the priest and mixing it with the consecrated Blood of Christ. The Chalice is raised before the faithful in order that they may renew their faith and reconfirm their belief in the presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ under the appearance of Bread and Wine.

b) The priest then request the congregation to pray the " Our Father " as Christ taught us to pray it.

c) Upon completion of the Lord's prayer, the priest invites the members of the congregation to receive Holy Communion by saying:

"Sancta sanctis" which means that whoever considers himself to be worthy may come forward in faith and in love to share in the Body and Blood of Christ.

d) The priest concludes the Mass with the prayers of thanksgiving, words of blessings, the making of announcements pertaining to baptisms and other events relating to the parish. Each member of the congregation now leaves the Church taking with him or her a renewed strength and consolation and encouragement to live as Christ did and with the hope of fulfilling the words of the Apostle St. Paul: " Every Christian must be another Christ in the society and environment in which he lives and works."

## **The Liturgy – Part One • The Anaphora – Part Two**

A Commentary on the Holy Mysteries

The Holy Mystery of Offering (Qorbono)

By Chorbishop Seely Beggiani

The center and focus of all the Holy Mysteries is participation in the Eucharist. Baptism and Chrismation initiate us into the community of believers, but it is the Eucharist which is the source and cause of community. While Baptism "grafts" us as members into the Body of

Christ, the Eucharist nourishes us with the Body of Christ. We have become adopted children of God the Father, and therefore brothers and sisters of Christ, it is the Eucharist which enables us to grow in the likeness of Christ. Thus the Eucharist is the Holy Mystery which completes the process of Christian initiation.

The Eucharist, like the other Mysteries, is a communal celebration. Salvation is not an individualistic matter. We are saved through and with others. The community of Christ is mutually supportive of its members. At each celebration of the Eucharist, the joys and sorrows, successes and failures, sufferings and triumphs of our brothers and sisters in Christ are experienced in togetherness. The strong come to assist the weak; the rich seek to help the poor; the joyful strive to comfort the sorrowing. All are impelled by the Word of the Gospel, and all of our sacrifices are united with the sacrifice of the Eucharist. Therefore, attending Sunday Liturgy is not merely a question of obligation, but is the very life and heart of the Christian community.

## **Influences on the Maronite Liturgy**

The Maronite Church in its liturgy is fortunate in being the heir of at least two rich traditions, those of Edessa and Antioch. The Church of Edessa traces its origins to the preaching of the liturgical contributors included St. Ephrem and James of Saroug. The first Christian converts to the Church of Edessa included the earliest Jewish-Christians. Therefore, its liturgy is strongly influenced by the world-view of the Bible. As one of the oldest established churches, it developed its prayer forms before being influenced by Greek thought. Our Maronite liturgy today still has many hymns and prayers from St. Ephrem and James of Saroug. The Anaphora of the Apostles (also known as III Peter and by the Syriac word Sharrar), which the Maronite Church shares in common with the Church of Edessa, is the oldest Anaphora in the Catholic Church, and is still found in adapted form as the Anaphora of the Signing of the Chalice on Good Friday.

The Church of Antioch was the ancient See of Peter and developed its liturgy with influences from the Church of Jerusalem. The Maronite Anaphora of the Twelve Apostles represents the oldest tradition of the Church of Antioch. St. John Chrysostom took this Anaphora with him to Constantinople and became the basis of the Byzantine liturgy. As heir to the Patriarchate of Antioch, the Maronite Church represents the Antiochene liturgy in its fullness. Thus, the Maronite Church, in its prayer life, preserves the way of worship of the Apostles and their earliest disciples.

## **Qorbono (Quddas)**

It is fitting that the Maronite name for the divine liturgy is Qorbono in Syriac and Quddas in Arabic. The Syriac term refers to the idea of "offering" and focuses on the sacrificial acts of Christ offering himself, and on our own willingness to render our lives as an oblation. The Arabic term refers to the idea of "making holy" and refers to the fact that in the liturgy the gifts, and by analogy the participants, are divinized by the action of the Holy Spirit.



## **Preparation of the Gifts**

The Preparation of the Gifts reminds us that the liturgy is an act of offering by the whole community. It is the people that bring their time, treasures, and talents to the Eucharistic celebration. The bread and wine selected from among the gifts are chosen to become the Body and Blood of Christ. Similarly, our gifts and dedication to be of service to Christ are consecrated through the action of the divine liturgy.

## **Lighting of the Church**

Light is taken for granted by most people in the twentieth century. Our modern science has demystified the sun, the cycle of the seasons and the solar year. The invention of electricity has given ordinary human creatures power over light and darkness. Earlier generations were in awe of the sun and light. When day came to a close and pitch darkness covered the earth, they prayed that the sun would rise again and that warmth and life would again deliver them from the seemingly endless cold and a dying earth. Our ancestors had a deep awareness of their total dependence on light.

However, modern science can also make us aware of the absolute necessity of light in our lives. Photosynthesis is critical to any life at all on earth. If humans were deprived absolutely of light for even a short time, they would go mad and ultimately die. It is no accident that according to Albert Einstein the speed of light is the absolute for our universe.

Our faith tradition teaches us that primordial light was the first creation of God and thus the very stuff of the universe. God is portrayed as the "Father of Lights" and Christ is the Light of the world. The Bible often teaches us that we ultimately choose to live our lives either according to the Way of Light or the Way of Darkness; and that light leads to life while darkness leads to death. The true nature of Christ was revealed as uncreated light at the transfiguration, and it was the light of Christ at his death that destroyed the darkness of Sheol (the region of the dead). Our immortal destiny is presented as the eighth day of creation where the sun will never set, where we are called to view the shining face of Christ.

It is for all these reasons that the lighting of the Church in preparation for the divine liturgy has such a great significance. In participating in this act we are proclaiming our readiness to be children of the light and to allow our deeds to be judged in the open light of day. The lighting of the candles announces the presence of Christ, the light of the world, whom we welcome among us. In the fully lighted church which represents the universe in miniature, we give thanks for the light and warmth of God's creation.

## **Rite of Preparation**

While the Divine Liturgy consists of two parts, the service of the Word and the service of the Eucharist, each part can be further subdivided. The service of the Word begins with a period of preparation, purification and catechizing as a fitting introduction to the reading of Scripture.

## **Opening Hymn and Prayer**

The opening hymn is usually a psalm of praise or a hymn commemorating the feast. While being an act of worship, this recitation helps lift our minds and hearts to the contemplation of

holy things. Dionysius the Areopagite, a writer of the sixth century, claims that the baptized laity are "an order of contemplation", and considers the mysteries as external signs leading us into mystical power.

The celebrant and servers enter the Sanctuary further symbolizing the presence of Christ in the midst of His community. The celebrant proclaims his unworthiness and asks for prayers that he might obtain forgiveness.

The first prayer of the Liturgy is intended to announce the feast being celebrated or to cite the theme of the day.

## **The Celebrant's Greeting and the Hymn of the Angels**

The celebrant greets the church community with a salutation of peace, to which the congregation responds with the angelic hymn of peace. We are reminded that the life of Christ begins with the angel's announcement of peace, and that Christ's appearances after His resurrection always opened with a greeting of peace. Isaiah has prophesied a prince of peace. The angels at the birth of Christ proclaimed a new world order of peace between the heavens and the earth. Christ announces the giving of a peace that is not of this world. The Resurrected Christ offers both peace and the forgiveness of sins. The commitment to peace is reaffirmed later in the liturgy when the gesture of peace is offered to each member of the worshipping community.

It is fitting that the Liturgy begins with the angelic hymn, for in our faith we believe that whenever the Divine Liturgy is celebrated on earth, the boundaries between heaven and earth are removed and earthy worshipers join in the eternal Heavenly Liturgy chanted by the angels. During these moments of earthly adoration, we have the opportunity of being mystically transported to the threshold of Heaven. Being in a holy place and about to participate in holy things, we are aware of our finitude and sinfulness. In this service of the Holy Mysteries, we are about to hear the Sacred Word of God and our bodies and souls await the reception of the Body and Blood of Christ. Therefore, it is necessary to prepare and purify ourselves. Part of our preparation consists in being catechized regarding God's plan of salvation and about the event in the Liturgical Year that we are celebrating. We also seek the words to express sorrow for our sins and to solicit God's mercy. And, at this point near the beginning of the Divine Service, we take the occasion to petition God for our needs.

## **The Prayer of Forgiveness (Hoosoyo)**

It is to all these aspects that the "Prayer of Forgiveness" or Hoosoyo seeks to respond. The term Hoosoyo in Syriac has the meaning of atonement or pardon and can also refer to God's mercy seat. Syriac Christians applied the term to Christ Himself.

The Hoosoyo begins with a preamble or proemion which is addressed to God in the person of Christ. The purpose of the proemion is to offer worship by uttering the glorious names of God. In fact, this prayer is reminiscent of the prayer known as the "eighteen benedictions" offered by the Jews in their synagogues service. Such a practice of proclaiming the beautiful names of God as an act of adoration is found in many religions. What is particular to the Maronite tradition is that all names and titles that Scripture applies to God are directed to Christ. For



example, in the proemion of the Sunday of the Announcement to the Virgin Mary, we pray: "may we be worthy to praise and confess the God of earth and sky, the Creator, the Sustainer, the Life-Giver. In His love and foreknowledge He decided to return to the heirs of Adam and pitch His tent in their midst. . . ." In the proemion of the Sunday of the Visitation to Elizabeth, we proclaim: "may we be worthy to praise, confess and glorify the Lord of all eternity, who hid himself in the womb of the Virgin; the Ancient of Days, who was concealed in the Virgin's temple...."

Echoing the Council of Nicea that affirmed that the Word of God is of one being with the Father, our Maronite tradition therefore, prays that the Word of God incarnate in Christ is "the Creator, Sustainer, Life-Giver, and Ancient of Days," titles that we often attribute to God the Father. Perhaps, we have here an example of an ancient Christian principle that the "law of faith becomes the law of prayer". We also have examples in church history where the reverse is also true: "the law of prayer becomes the law of faith."

The body of the Hoosoyo or Sedro is divided into two sections. The first section is a prayer of praise of the works of God and His plan of salvation, or an exposition of the meaning of the feast being celebrated. This section often serves a catechetical function. Often in our Maronite tradition the Liturgy was the great teacher of people. It was their theological handbook. By meditating on the whole range of prayers in the Liturgy, the laity were educated in the faith. In fact, our prime source of Maronite theology today remains the prayers of the Holy Mysteries and the Divine Office. For example, a concise presentation of the Maronite understanding of God's revelation is found in the Hoosoyo of the Sunday of the Announcement to Zechariah. It teaches: "O Lord of heaven and earth, in times past you spoke to your chosen ones through messengers and angels. Adam heard you walking through the garden, and Your voice led Abraham to a strange and new land. Moses saw You in a cloud and in a pillar of fire. Your mysterious words appeared on the wall, traced by an unknown hand. Through these means you have prepared a straight and level path for the final revealer of Your mystery. You have spoken, yet You have no mouth. You have no feet, yet you led. You have never known sin, but You are infinite in Your mercy toward sinners."

The last section of the Hoosoyo consists of a series of litany of petitions. In fact, the term Sedro in Syriac means: rank, series, order or phalanx. Since God has accorded to his people graces in the past, we implore Him to continue His generosity. An example of this litany of petitions is found in the Hoosoyo of the Wednesday Memorial of the Virgin Mary. It prays: "O Lord, through the prayers of Your Mother, keep away from the earth and its people the scourge of wrath; eliminate dangers and disturbances; remove war, captivity, hunger and plague from us. Have compassion on us, we are weak, comfort us, we are sick; assist us, we are in need; deliver us, we are oppressed; grant rest to the faithful departed and enable us to reach a happy death. ... "

During the praying of the Hoosoyo, incense is burned. The celebrant or deacon incenses the people and the interior of the church so that all may be purified in preparation for the reading of the Word of God. The burning of incense is a powerful symbol. Incense represents something precious and sweet smelling that is burnt and therefore consumed. It therefore, represents sacrifice, the act of surrender for the sake of a higher purpose. Thus, Christ, the martyrs and all who lay down their life for another are living incense. The burning of incense

at the Hoosoyo sets the tone for our Liturgy. It symbolizes the sacrifice of Christ that liberates us from our sins. In participating in the burning of incense, we seek first of all purification and forgiveness. We also pledge that our lives will be consumed in good works so that we may also become an offering pleasing to God.

The congregation responds to the Hoosoyo by chanting a hymn or psalm (Qolo) appropriate to the theme of the feast being celebrated. The celebrant then summarizes the Hoosoyo by chanting a concluding prayer of incense (Etro).

## **Service of the Word**

### ***The Thrice Holy Hymn (Trisagion)***

With the congregation purified and in a prayerful state, it is time to welcome the coming of the Word of God. The ancient hymn which praises God as strong and immortal is chanted three times. While other traditions have referred this hymn to the Trinity, the Maronite tradition here again affirms all attributes of God to the Word made flesh in Christ. In its origin this hymn celebrated the procession of the Scriptures in preparation of their being read to the congregation. The prayer that follows the Trisagion petitions God to sanctify and purify the minds and hearts that are about to hear the reading of the Holy Scriptures.

### ***The Reading of the Holy Scriptures***

The Christian community of faith is founded on the hearing of the Word of God. It was the preaching of Christ that formed the first disciples. It was through the preaching of the apostles that the Christian church came into being and ultimately spread throughout the world. The Holy Scriptures are the continuation of the preaching forming and sustaining new Christian disciples through the ages. The Scriptures are truly the "Living Word of God" among us. During the Liturgical year the whole Bible is read in the service of the Holy Mysteries and in the Divine Office. We have the opportunity to be instructed by our Divine Master and to meditate on His Words of Life.

The congregation introduces and responds to the reading of the Scriptures with psalmic verses (Mazmooro) and by chanting Alleluia.

The celebrant, as the ordained leader of the community, preaches a homily to exhort us, to help us in our understanding of what we have heard and to apply the words of the Gospel to our lives, and to make prophetic judgement on the world and its values.

The faithful conclude the service of the Word offering praise and thanksgiving to Jesus Christ for His Living Word to us.

In ancient times, it was at this point that those who were not ready to celebrate the Service of the Eucharist left the place of worship. These included catechumens and public sinners who had not yet received forgiveness. This practice reminds us of the level of worthiness we should strive for in seeking to participate in the Eucharistic celebration.

## **The Pre-Anaphora**

### ***The Creed***

Before beginning the Eucharistic prayer, the assembled community makes a profession of faith. Faith is made up of many elements. At its most fundamental level, faith is a personal encounter with God and our definitive response of mind and heart to God in love. It creates a personal relationship between the believer and God. In faith we choose to view God, the world and ourselves through the eyes of Christ. We choose to make His will, His priorities, and His values our values. In order to come to an understanding of our commitment of faith, to define who we are as a community, and to articulate our faith to ourselves and others, it becomes necessary to express our inner faith externally in a series of beliefs and doctrines.

In the early church, when there were many adult converts, candidates for baptism were called upon to profess their faith publicly. Concise formulas of faith or creeds were developed for this purpose. At the first Ecumenical Council of Nicea in 325, a creed was written to express the major beliefs of the church at that time. In the sixth century, this Nicene Creed was incorporated into the Divine Liturgy.

In reciting the Nicene Creed we affirm that we are a part of the Christian tradition, that we are prepared to integrate that tradition into our lives and actions. We also affirm that the Eucharist in which we are about to participate is a sign of our unity with the faith of the apostles and with our fellow believers.

Since the Creed was inserted in the Divine Liturgy at a late date, its exact place in the pre-anaphora is unclear. The Roman Church places it at the beginning, while the Eastern Churches place it after the offering of the gifts. The Maronite Church has tended to follow the Roman practice.

### ***The Procession of the Gifts***

The bread and wine are carried in procession to signify that they are the offering of the whole community. They symbolize our readiness to offer all the gifts we have received from God- our wealth, our intelligence, our skills, our talents, our treasure, our life itself- for His service. The collection taken at the Divine Service represents a further giving on our part for the work of the church as it seeks to establish God's kingdom.

The procession of the gifts also reminds us that in biblical days, it was the "first fruits" that were offered to God. In other words, we recognize that all we have comes from God and He has a right to our best accomplishments. We also recognize that the bread and wine carried in procession are soon to contain the very reality of Christ Himself.

## **Acceptance of the Offerings**

Representing the Church, the celebrant accepts the gifts of the faithful. Since our offerings signify our desire to reach out to God, and we pray that God will reach out to us in acceptance, they must be sincere and represent our inner intentions. Spiritual writers remind us that in the Bible beginning with the story of Cain and Abel, God has embraced those who come to Him in honesty of intention, and has rejected the offerings of those who are

insincere. The prophets constantly caution us that true worship is not a matter of externals, but begins with purity of heart.

The celebrant's prayer of offering also reminds us that our generosity is always exceeded by God's generosity. It concludes by praying: "... in exchange for their perishable gifts, grant them the gift of life and entrance into your kingdom."

## **Commemorations**

At every Divine Service, it is the whole church, the mystical Body of Christ that is at worship. In this prayer we recall that our existence as a redeemed community is due to God's plan of salvation achieved in Jesus Christ. Assembled with us is the whole communion of saints from Adam to the present time, and the Blessed Virgin Mary is especially remembered. As we recall those who have gone before us, we petition God to remember our dead and to remember us, the living, those present at this Divine Service and those who were unable to attend.

## **Incensation**

With the gifts placed at the altar, the celebrant incenses the gifts, the altar and the faithful again as a symbol of purification. We pray that our gifts and especially we, ourselves be rendered worthy to participate in this sacrifice.

## **Prayers and Exchange of Peace**

The work of redemption was to bring about peace. When our human race sinned, division and alienation entered into the world. We alienated ourselves from the love of God, from each other and from the world around us. In a sense we become aliens to our true selves. We live in an atmosphere of discord which ultimately leads to destruction. Christ came to bring peace to the world. The prayer of peace in our ancient Anaphora of III Peter Sharrar says it beautifully:

The luminous peace that the angels of heaven transmitted to men on earth with glorious canticles of thanksgiving and by which the faithful church is enriched and the eyes of conscience of her children have been illumined- the peace which was sent to the Holy Virgin, the Mother of God, Mary, by the mediation of the Angel Gabriel who said to her: 'Peace be with you, the Lord is with you, from you shall be born the Savior of the children of Adam' -- the peace which reconciles the higher and lower beings and that the angels came to proclaim on earth saying: glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and good hope to men-- the peace laden with life that our Lord gave to his disciples in the Holy Cenacle of Zion in saying to them: 'I leave you peace, I give you my peace, the peace of the Father who sent me, I leave among you:' may the peace which was with and among them, O Lord, be with and among us, all the days of our lives; in your compassion, pardon and erase all the offenses that we have committed voluntarily and involuntarily, consciously and unconsciously, regarding each other, for You alone are just. May your mercies, Lord of concord and peace, be with all of us.

Having been baptized into Christ we must be messengers of peace and restore harmony with God, each other, and in the world. Our Lord also taught us that before we offer our gifts we must make peace with our brothers and sisters. Therefore, at this point in the Divine Service we are called to express our peace and love to all those gathered with us in the assembly. In the gestures of peace the celebrant first touches the altar to symbolize that the source of all peace is Christ Himself.

The second prayer is called the prayer of imposition of hands and the presumption is that at this point there used to be an imposition of hands by the celebrant on the community. This gesture probably signified that the celebrant was petitioning the Holy Spirit to bless the congregation in their desire for purity and peace.

The third prayer is referred to as the prayer of the veil and may point to a time in the past when a veil surrounded the altar in some Syriac churches. During the Service of the Word the veil would have been closed since the liturgical action would be occurring at the place where the Sacred Scriptures would be read. At this point in the Divine Service the veil was opened to enable the congregation to share in the action occurring at the altar. Syriac writers see in the opening of the veil an image of the opening of the heavens, since our divine liturgy on earth is an earthly reflection of the eternal divine liturgy taking place in heaven.

Another interpretation of the prayer of the veil sees it referring to the removal of the chalice veil which had been carried in procession over the gifts as a protection for them.

reprinted with permission

The Liturgy – Part One • The Anaphora – Part Two

Eparchy of Saint Maron

109 Remsen Street

Brooklyn NY 11201