

# Worship Services of the Orthodox Church

## The Daily Cycle

The Daily Cycle of divine services is the recurring pattern of prayer and worship that punctuates each liturgical day in the life of the Orthodox Church. Monasteries generally serve the entire cycle of services. Some cathedrals do, as well. Most parishes do not.

The Divine Liturgy is not itself a part of the Daily Cycle but is inserted into the cycle, usually after Orthros or the Sixth Hour. In some cases it is combined with Vespers. The service of Typika is related to the Divine Liturgy and is often celebrated on days the Divine Liturgy is not appointed.

### Services

The services of the Daily Cycle are usually contained in a bound collection called the Book of Hours, also known as the Horologion (Greek) or Chasoslov (Slavonic).

The Daily Cycle follows this pattern:

- \* Vespers (sunset)
- \* Compline (after-dinner) - also known as Apodeipnon
- \* Midnight Office (12:00am) - also known as Mesonyktikon
- \* Orthros (sunrise) - also known as Matins
- \* First Hour (6:00am)
- \* Third Hour (9:00am)
- \* Sixth Hour (12:00pm)
- \* Ninth Hour (3:00pm)

### Aggregations

Although each service of the Daily Cycle has a particular time traditionally associated with it, in current practice the services are more commonly served together in one of three aggregations.

\* The Evening Aggregate usually consists of Ninth Hour, Vespers, and Compline. It commences shortly before sunset.

\* The Dawn Aggregate usually consists of Midnight Office, Orthros, and First Hour. It usually begins shortly before sunrise.

\* The Midday Aggregate consists of Third Hour and Sixth Hour. The Divine Liturgy or Typika may be included in the Midday Aggregate.

On days when Great Compline is appointed (e.g., weekdays in Great Lent), it constitutes the entirety of the Evening Aggregate. Vespers is shifted to the Midday Aggregate.

### All-Night Vigil

On the eves of First Class Feasts, Second Class Feasts, and certain Third Class Feasts, a special aggregate, known as the All-Night Vigil, may be served. In such case, the other aggregations may be altered slightly (e.g., including Little Vespers in the Evening Aggregate). Although there is some variance in practice, the All-Night Vigil generally includes at least Great Vespers, Orthros, and First Hour.

## Vespers

The office of Vespers is the evening prayer given prior to the celebration of the next day, such as the feast day of a Saint, an event in the life of Christ or the Theotokos, or the Resurrection of Christ, which is celebrated on every Sunday of the year. Since in Orthodox tradition the day begins at sundown, Vespers is actually the first service of the day.

The general structure of the Orthodox service of Vespers is as follows (psalm numbers are according to Septuagint):

- \* Vespers opens with the Trisagion and then the Proemial Psalm 103 (Bless the Lord, O my soul; O Lord my God, Thou hast been magnified exceedingly).
- \* Litany
- \* A collection of psalms, called a kathisma is read. On Saturdays, the first kathismata is read (Psalms 1-8).
- \* Psalm 140 (Lord I have cried unto Thee), 141, 129, and 116 are chanted in the tone of the week. Starting with the last two verses of Psalm 141, verses about the feast day (or Christ's resurrection on a Saturday evening) are chanted alternately with the verses.
- \* The hymn "O Joyous Light" is sung.
- \* The Prokeimena are chanted.
- \* On occasional feast days, there are one or more readings from the Old Testament.
- \* The prayer "Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this evening without sin" is read.
- \* Litany of Fervent Supplication
- \* On major feast days, a Liti will be served at this point. The clergy and the cantors will process to the back of the church in front of an icon of the feast or saint being commemorated. After the cantors chant hymns pertaining to the feast, the deacon or priest will read a long litany while the cantors chant "Lord, Have Mercy." The priest ends with a long prayer invoking the intercessions of the saints and the Theotokos. After the petitions, the priest will bless five loaves of bread in the center of the church, which are distributed to the faithful after the service. Liti ends after the hymn "O Theotokos and Virgin" is chanted. Then the service continues as normal.
- \* The Aposticha are chanted. These are verses that teach about the feast day (or on a Saturday evening, Christ's resurrection).
- \* The Nunc dimittis, the canticle of St Simeon ("Now lettest thou Thy servant depart in peace") is read. (from the Gospel of Luke II:29-).
- \* The Apolytikia (Troparia) are chanted, which commemorate the feast of the following day.
- \* The closing prayers are read.

## Orthros

Orthros, also called Matins, is the longest and most complex of the daily cycle services. Unless it is celebrated as a vigil in the evening, orthros (Greek for "early dawn" or "daybreak") is celebrated in the morning. While some sections of Orthros follow the eight-tone cycle, others follow the eleven-part cycle of the Resurrectional Gospels.

- \* Sunday Orthros opens with the priest's exclamation Blessed is our God ..., Heavenly King ..., and the Trisagion Prayers. (Note: Heavenly King ... is omitted between Pascha and Pentecost.)
- \* The chanter or reader reads the Royal Troparia (Lord, save your people and bless your inheritance ...).
- \* The deacon offers a brief litany.
- \* The six psalms (3, 37, 62, 87, 102, and 142 - Septuagint numbering) are read.
- \* The deacon intones the Litany of Peace.
- \* Theos kyrios and the apolytikion are chanted.
- \* The small synapte is offered by the deacon.

- \* The kathismata are chanted.
- \* The reader chants the evlogetaria (Blessed are you, O Lord, teach me your statutes).
- \* The small synapte is offered again by the deacon.
- \* The Hypakoe is read by the chanter to prepare for the message of the Gospel reading.
- \* The Anavathmoi (hymns of ascent) are chanted.
- \* The Prokeimenon are chanted.
- \* The order of the Gospel is followed: the deacon intones Let us pray to the Lord ..., the priest responds with a prayer, and the chanter sings three times, Let everything that breathes praise the Lord. One of eleven Gospels is read; these Gospels each address a different part of the Resurrection narrative, because it is Sunday, the feast of the Resurrection. Having beheld the Resurrection of Christ ... is read by the chanter.
- \* The 50th Psalm is chanted.
- \* Glory..., both..., and a hymn are chanted.
- \* The deacon prays, O God, save your people and bless your inheritance ...
- \* The canons are chanted: first and third odes; small synapte; mid-ode kathisma; kontakion, oikos, synaxarion (commemorating the saints of the day); and katavasies (odes 1-8).
- \* The chanter sings the Magnificat while the deacon censens the church.
- \* The ninth ode of the katavasiai is chanted.
- \* The deacon again prays the small synapte.
- \* The chanter sings Holy is the Lord our God three times.
- \* The Exapostilaria (hymns related to the day's Gospel, or the day's feast) are chanted.
- \* The Lauds or Ainoi are chanted, slowly (Let everything that breathes praise the Lord.), followed by the doxastika.
- \* The Great Doxology is chanted. (Many consider the doxology to be the first part of the Divine Liturgy, as this often follows the Sunday Orthros.)

There are seven types of Orthros:

### Basic Forms

- \* Sunday Orthros: the longest of the regular orthros services. If this service is celebrated in its entirety it can last up to three hours. It contains three canons, apart from any additional festal canons which may be added. As a result, in most practical situations, abbreviations are made. Often, this Orthros is part of a vigil.
- \* Daily Orthros: there is no Gospel.
- \* Feast-day Orthros with Gospel.

### Special Forms

- \* Lenten Orthros: penitential material added (hymns and prayers).

Orthros services related to the Paschal feast:

- \* Great and Holy Friday Orthros: there are twelve Gospel lessons; Antiphons are used (originating in a different office). The troparion sung at the 15th antiphon: Today is hung upon the cross... (Simeron krematai).
- \* Great and Holy Saturday Orthros. This contains some elements of the old cathedral office: procession with epitaphios, reading of three pericopes (OT, epistle, Gospel) at the end.
- \* Paschal Orthros. This is celebrated from Pascha Sunday until Thomas Sunday. The six psalms and the praises are not part of this service.

## The Divine Liturgy

The Divine Liturgy is the central worship service of the Church. Its purpose is to celebrate the Sacrament of the Eucharist, or Holy Communion. There are four liturgies in use by the Orthodox Church: the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, which is celebrated on most ordinary Sundays, the Liturgy of St. Basil, which is celebrated during Great Lent and on other special occasions, the Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts, which is celebrated on Wednesdays and Fridays during Great Lent, and the Liturgy of St. James which is celebrated on October 23.

The Divine Liturgy contains two parts: the Liturgy of the Catechumens, sometimes called the Liturgy of the Word, at which the Scriptures are proclaimed and expounded, and the Liturgy of the Faithful, sometimes called the Liturgy of the Eucharist, in which the gifts of bread and wine are offered and consecrated. The Church teaches that the gifts truly become the body and blood of Jesus Christ, but it has never dogmatized a particular formula for describing this transformation. The Prothesis (or proskomedia), the service of preparing the holy gifts, can be considered a third part which precedes the beginning of the Liturgy proper.

During the prothesis, the priest cuts out a square called the Lamb from the main loaf of bread (prosphora). This will be consecrated during the Liturgy of the Faithful to become the holy Body of Christ. He also removes small particles and places them on the diskos (or paten) in commemoration of the Theotokos, various saints, and the living and departed faithful. The remainder of the bread is blessed and distributed to parishioners and visitors after the service; this bread is called antidoron. The priest also blesses wine and water, which are poured into the chalice. Warm water will be added after the epiclesis. The gifts are censed several times. The conclusion of the prothesis leads directly into the beginning of the Divine Liturgy.

### Rites of Entrance

The Liturgy of the Catechumens begins with the exclamation from the priest, "Blessed is the kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages." The assembled faithful respond, "Amen." The deacon (or priest, if no deacon) continues with the Great Litany, so called because it is longer than most litanies and its petitions touch on the needs of the world: peace and salvation, the Church, her bishops, her faithful, captives and their health and salvation, deliverance from anger and need. It is concluded, as with most litanies, by the remembrance of the faithful the witness of the Theotokos and the saints. The faithful are charged to commend one's life to Christ. A closing prayer is exclaimed by the priest.

There follow three antiphons, which vary by day and jurisdiction. Generally, an antiphon consists of Psalm verses interspersed with a refrain, or troparion. The first two antiphons are followed by a short litany and the Prayer of Justinian, "Only Begotten Son." The third antiphon is followed by the Little Entrance, at which is sung, "Come, let us bow down and worship Christ! O Son of God, save us who sing to you: Alleluia." "Son of God" is normally followed by an insertion depending on the feast, such as "risen from the dead" or "wondrous in your saints." The troparion of the third antiphon is also prescribed for the celebration of the day, and since it served as the dismissal hymn for the Vespers of the previous evening, it is often referred to as the apolytikion. On multiple feasts, other troparia are added. Normally the troparion of the local church's patron is chanted, followed by a kontakion, which is a sort of chanted sermon on the feast or the season.

Having fully entered the church liturgically together around the Word, the gathered body chants the Thrice-Holy Hymn to the Trinity: "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal: have mercy on us." On Pascha, Pentecost, the Nativity of Christ, Theophany, and the Saturday of Lazarus, the hymn "As Many of You as Have Been Baptized" is substituted. On feasts of the Holy Cross, the substitution is "Before Your Cross."

## Rites of Proclamation

The proclamation of Scripture is announced with the prokeimenon, a psalm or canticle refrain sung in responsorial fashion. Then, a reader proclaims the apostolic reading from an epistle or from the Acts of the Apostles. This reading is usually chanted, but a spoken reading may be allowed out of economy for local situations. A triple alleluia is sung, also with verses as at the prokeimenon. This alleluia announces the Gospel reading. Following the alleluia, there is a short exchange between the priest and the people, after which he or a deacon chants the Gospel. Following the Gospel, the priest will often give a homily, a short or medium-length excursus on the Scripture, the season, or the present festival or commemoration, roughly equivalent to the Protestant sermon. The homily may also be given after the Communion or even after the dismissal.

Traditionally, the service continues with the Litany of Fervent Supplication, which is marked by an insistent triple repetition of “Lord, have mercy.” The Liturgy of the Catechumens is concluded by a litany praying for the continued growth of the catechumens in faith, leading up to the day of their baptism.

## The Great Entrance

The Liturgy of the Faithful begins as the assembly starts chanting the Cherubic Hymn. The celebrants go to the prothesis or table of preparation. The priest presents the diskos to the deacon and takes the chalice himself. The deacon leads the priest through the north door of the icon screen. The clergy bring the gifts in procession to the holy doors, the central doors of the icon screen, while the deacon calls the faithful to attention, asking that the Lord will remember all people in his kingdom. As the holy gifts are carried solemnly through the holy doors, the assembled faithful conclude the Cherubic Hymn. (Note: if a deacon is not present, the priest makes this entrance with the diskos and chalice alone.)

After the priest blesses the faithful the deacon exclaims, “The doors! The doors!” This famous exclamation once marked the point in the service at which the doors to the temple were locked, only faithful Christians remaining. Over the centuries, visitors have been allowed to stay, though the solemnity of what follows is still recalled with this phrase. Then, the Church professes its common faith by reciting the Creed. The liturgical name for this creed is the Symbol of Faith, indicating its importance to early Christians in determining the Orthodoxy of persons claiming to be of the Church.

## The Eucharistic Prayer

Following the Creed, the priest begins the anaphora, the great eucharistic prayer over the gifts, so called because of the initial phrase: “Let us lift up our hearts.”

After remembering the history of our fall and redemption and the institution of the eucharistic meal, the priest invokes the Holy Spirit, asking that he be sent down on the gifts. It is sometimes noted that this invocation, the epiclesis, is the moment of transformation of the gifts of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, but there is not total agreement among Orthodox scholars whether the transformation can actually be pinpointed to a single moment in the service. It is certainly true that the prayers of the service treat the gifts as consecrated and transformed after this point.

Having invoked the Holy Spirit and consecrated the gifts, the priest commemorates the saints, beginning with the Theotokos. At this point, the assembled faithful chant the ancient hymn in honor of the Virgin, the megalynarion. The text of this hymn changes on the celebration of certain feasts.

The priest prays that the bishop, in whose name he is celebrating the Liturgy, will be kept in the Orthodox Faith and preserved in health and years. The Lord’s Prayer is given by the entire congregation.

## The Communion and Dismissal

After consecrating the gifts, commemorating the saints and praying for the local bishop, the priest lifts up the consecrated gifts, exclaiming, “The holy things are for the holy!” to which the faithful respond, “One is holy, one is Lord, Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.” They immediately chant the Communion hymn, the text of which may change for the feast of the day, while the priest invokes more prayers, after which he invites the congregation to draw near and receive the sacrament.

The faithful communicate in Orthodox tradition by receiving in both kinds (bread intincted in the wine) from a spoon, a tradition which dates to the fourth century. Having received the body and blood of the Savior, they take a small piece of bread, antidoron, which is a part of the same loaf from which the Lamb was taken. Antidoron is not consecrated to be the Eucharist, but it is blessed and so it is treated with reverence. In Russian tradition, a small cup of wine is also offered.

After a dismissal common to the services of the Church, the faithful come forward to venerate the cross and leave the church. Renewed by the eucharistic meal, they are sent forth as witnesses to Christ in the world.

When a bishop or other hierarch of the Church is celebrating the liturgy, the service is lengthened by special commemorations at different places throughout.

## **Paraklesis**

A paraklesis (pl., parakleses) is a service of supplication specifically for the living (as opposed to a Memorial Service, which is a supplication for the departed). This service is most often addressed to the Theotokos, but may be used to seek the intercessions of any saint. The distinguishing feature of a paraklesis is the inclusion of a supplicatory canon to the saint whose intercessions are being sought. A paraklesis can be served as a stand-alone service or, in a slightly abbreviated form, in conjunction with vespers. It is appropriate to be served at any time of need.

During the Dormition Fast (August 1-14), a paraklesis is appointed to be served each evening, except on Saturday evenings and the eves of the feasts of Transfiguration (August 5) and Dormition (August 14.) The parakleses of the Dormition Fast use, on alternate days, the Small Supplicatory Canon to the Most Holy Theotokos (composed by Theosterictus the Monk in the 9th Century) and the Great Supplicatory Canon to the Most Holy Theotokos (composed by Emperor Theodore I Ducas Lascaris in the 13th century). The cycle of the Dormition parakleses is determined by two rules of thumb: (a) the cycle begins with the Small Supplicatory Canon whenever August 1 falls on a Monday through Friday; and (b) on Sunday evenings, the Great Supplicatory Canon is always appointed.

Outside the Dormition Fast, a paraklesis directed to the Theotokos is always chanted with the Small Supplicatory Canon. The texts of various supplicatory canons can be found in many popular prayer books, service books, and horologia.

## **Other Services**

The Orthodox Church has Sacramental services for Confession, Healing (Unction), Baptism, Chrismation, Ordinations, and Marriage. Also, there are services for churchings, funerals, memorials, consecrations, blessings (such as the artoklasia), and for other special occasions such as the Akathist Service (Salutations to the Virgin Mary or Cheretismi), celebrated on the five Fridays before the Annunciation (March 25).

## Classification of Feasts

In the Orthodox Church, liturgical celebrations are ranked according to a hierarchy of several classifications. Each class has its own characteristics and is expressed in the divine services and disciplines in a particular way.

Pascha is in a class of its own, ranking above all other commemorations. Holy Week before Pascha has a rich series of special services. The other twelve Great Feasts are divided between First Class Feasts (feasts of our Lord) and Second Class Feasts (feasts of the Theotokos). The lesser classes—Third Class Feasts, Fourth Class Feasts, and Fifth Class Feasts—commemorate the lives of the saints, holy events, and holy objects. Between the Third Class and Fourth Class there are two Intermediate Classes, Kathelicon and Small Bells.

### First Class Feasts—Feasts of the Lord

Elevation of the Holy Cross, September 14  
Nativity of Christ (Christmas), December 25  
Theophany (sometimes called Epiphany), January 6  
Palm Sunday, the Sunday before Pascha  
Ascension, forty days after Pascha  
Pentecost, fifty days after Pascha  
Transfiguration, August 6

\* Most of these feasts have both a forefeast and a leavetaking (exceptions: Palm Sunday has neither; Ascension and Pentecost have a leavetaking but no forefeast).

\* An All-Night Vigil is appointed for the eve of the feast.

\* At Great Vespers

- The kathisma reading from the Psalter that follows the litany of peace is omitted unless the feast coincides with a Sunday, in which case the first kathisma (Psalms 1-8) is read at Great Vespers on Saturday evening as usual (exceptions: the first kathisma is omitted on the eve of Pentecost and on the eves of Nativity, Theophany, and Transfiguration when those feasts fall on a Sunday).

- Old Testament readings follow the prokeimenon.

\* Festal Orthros

- The polyeleos (Psalms 134 and 135) is chanted immediately after the second poetic kathisma (on a Sunday it replaces the amomos (Psalm 118) as the third reading from the Psalter).

- Select Psalm verses from the eclogarion can follow the polyeleos, if desired.

- There is a gospel pericope for the feast (chanted from the holy doors and without a veneration following).

- The praises and the great doxology are chanted.

\* At the Divine Liturgy for the feast, the patronal troparion of the temple is suppressed.

\* The divine services are for the feast alone; all other commemorations are suppressed (even on a Sunday).

\* When the feast falls on a fasting day, the fast is relaxed to permit fish, wine, and oil.

### Second Class Feasts—Feasts of the Theotokos

Nativity of the Theotokos, September 8  
Presentation of the Theotokos, November 21  
Dormition (Falling Asleep) of the Theotokos, August 15  
Presentation of Christ, February 2+  
Annunciation, March 25+

+ These are considered Feasts of the Theotokos, but they also share certain characteristics proper to First Class Feasts.

\* These feasts have both a forefeast and a leavetaking.

- \* An All-Night Vigil is appointed for the eve of the feast.
- \* At Great Vespers
  - When the feast falls on any day other than Sunday, the kathisma reading appointed for the day is replaced by the first stasis of the first kathisma (Psalms 1-3) (exceptions: at the Great Vespers for the Presentation of Christ and Annunciation the kathisma reading is omitted altogether).
  - When the feast falls on a Sunday the first kathisma (Psalms 1-8) is read at Great Vespers on Saturday evening as usual.
  - Old Testament readings follow the prokeimenon.
- \* At Festal Orthros
  - The polyeleos (Psalms 134 and 135, or Psalm 44 with its poetic refrains) is chanted immediately after the second poetic kathisma (on a Sunday it replaces the amomos (Psalm 118) as the third reading from the Psalter).
  - Select Psalm verses from the eclogarion can follow the polyeleos, if desired.
  - There is a gospel pericope for the feast (chanted from the holy doors and without a veneration following).
  - The praises and the great doxology are chanted.
- \* At the Divine Liturgy for the feast, the patronal troparion of the temple is suppressed.
- \* When the feast falls on a Sunday the services for the feast are combined with those of the Resurrection from the Octoechos.
- \* When the feast falls on a fasting day, the fast is relaxed to permit fish, wine, and oil (exception: when Annunciation falls during Holy Week, wine and oil (but not fish) are permitted; when Annunciation falls on Holy Friday or Holy Saturday, wine (but not oil or fish) are permitted).

### Third Class Feasts—Vigil and Polyeleos Commemorations (which include a complete akolouthia)

- \* These feasts generally do not have a forefeast or a leavetaking (exceptions: the commemorations of St. Demetrios (October 26), the Nativity of the Forerunner (June 24), Ss. Peter and Paul (June 29), and the Beheading of the Forerunner (August 29) each has a leavetaking).
- \* An All-Night Vigil may be appointed if there is a text for Little Vespers in the Menaion, in which case the commemoration is designated Vigil. Otherwise, an All-Night Vigil is not appointed and the commemoration is designated Polyeleos.
- \* At Great Vespers
  - When the feast falls on any day other than Sunday, the kathisma reading appointed for the day is replaced by the first stasis of the first kathisma (Psalms 1-3).
  - When the feast falls on a Sunday the first kathisma (Psalms 1-8) is read at Great Vespers on Saturday evening as usual.
  - Old Testament readings follow the prokeimenon.
- \* At Festal Orthros
  - The polyeleos (Psalms 134 and 135, or Psalm 44 with its poetic refrains) is chanted immediately after the second poetic kathisma (on a Sunday it replaces the amomos (Psalm 118) as the third Psalter reading).
  - Select Psalm verses from the eclogarion can follow the polyeleos, if desired.
  - There is a gospel pericope for the feast (chanted from the holy doors and without a veneration).
  - The praises and the great doxology are chanted.
- \* When the feast falls on a Sunday the services for the feast are combined with those of the Resurrection from the Octoechos.
- \* When the feast falls on a fasting day, the fast is relaxed to permit wine and oil (exception: the Beheading of the Forerunner (August 29) is always observed as a strict fast day when it falls on a weekday; when it falls on a Saturday or Sunday wine and oil are permitted). If it is the patronal feastday, fish may be permitted.

*This list was compiled and edited from various sources by Stan Takis.  
More information is available at [www.newbyz.org](http://www.newbyz.org).*