

# Orthodox Worship

## The Daily Cycle<sup>1</sup>

- **Vespers**—the Orthodox day begins at sundown with Vespers. Typically one does Daily Vespers, also called Small Vespers. Great Vespers is celebrated on the eve of Great Feasts or on Saturday evenings in preparation for Sunday, the day of resurrection.
- **Compline**—the evening service that is done after supper but before bedtime. This service also comes as Small Compline or Great Compline. Compline sometimes has a “canon” (a specific type of musical unit) placed in the middle of it. One of our Lenten services, the Akathist Service, for example, is a canon that is placed in the middle of Great Compline.
- **The Midnight Office**—this service is done in the middle of the night. The only time we celebrate this in church is right before the Resurrection Service on Pascha.
- **Matins or Orthros**—this is the major morning service of the Orthodox Church that we do every Sunday morning. It also has daily versions and Sunday resurrectional versions.
- **The Hours**—These are short services that originally would have been prayed throughout the day (First Hour=6 am; Thirdly Hour=9 am; Sixth Hour=noon; Ninth Hour=3 pm). There are “regular” versions and “Lenten” versions. For Christmas, Theophany, and Paschal, they are all combined into the “Royal Hours.” During “Advent” and the “Apostles’ Fast” there are “Mid-Hours,” and during “Bright Week,” there is a special “Paschal Hours.” In Church use today, they are usually attached to the other services: the First Hour is usually said after Matins; the Third and Sixth Hours are usually done together around mid-day, or, in Russian usage, right before Liturgy (instead of Matins); and the Ninth Hour is usually said right before Vespers.
- **Vigil**—In Russian practice, but not in Greek practice, Great Vespers, Matins, and the First Hour are celebrated back-to-back in the evening as a “Vigil.” Sometimes, on a feast day, Liturgy may immediately follow.
- **Divine Liturgy**—is not a part of the regular daily cycle. It is celebrated for special festal occasions. Every Sunday is considered “festal” because it’s a celebration of the Resurrection.

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<sup>1</sup> Note: During Holy Week, we celebrate services “in anticipation.” This means that we’re so excited to get to Pascha, we celebrate the services earlier than normal. So, for example, Matins, which is a morning services, gets celebrated the night before, and Vespers, which is an evening service, gets celebrated in the morning. This rearranging of services is only done during Holy Week.

## Special Services Through the Year

- **The Akathist (“Not Sitting Service”)**—this service is done on Fridays during Great Lent. It is a beautiful service that honors the Mother of God.
- **The Paraklesis (“Supplication Service”)**—This service can be a supplication of Christ, his Mother, or any of the saints. The most popular one is the one to the Theotokos, which is done the first two weeks of August. However, anyone can pray the Paraklesis, or request it, for any need at any time.
- **Pre-Sanctified Liturgy**—During Lent, Divine Liturgy is not allowed to be celebrated on the weekdays due to the solemnity of the season. However, because it’s a spiritually intense period, the church has given us the Pre-Sanctified Liturgy so that we can be sustained with the Body and Blood of Christ during the week. The priest consecrates an extra lamb on Sunday to be used for communion during this service. It is, essentially, a Vespers with communion added on to the end.

## Putting the Services Together

- **The Horologion (“Book of Hours”)**—this book contains all the fixed parts of the Daily Cycle, the parts that get repeated every time you do that particular service. Its backbone is the Psalter.
- **The Parakletiki or Octoechos (“Book of Eight Tones”)**—contains all the weekly variable texts based on the tone of the week (there are 8 tones). This book is credited to St. John of Damascus.
- **The Menaion (“Book of Months”)**—contains all the hymns for specific days, including fixed feasts. It is a 12 volume set, one book for each month. So, for example, if you wanted to find the Christmas hymns, you’d find volume 12 (December) and turn to the 25th.
- **The Triodion (“Book of Three Odes”)**—This is the book that contains all the Lenten hymns.
- **Pentecostarion (“Book of Pentecost”)**—This book contains all the hymns from Pascha to the Second Sunday after Pentecost (The Sunday of All Saints).
- **Typika**—this is the “rule” book that tells a priest how to put the services together and which hymns to sing on particular day or feast.
- **Euchalogion and Liturgikon**—These books contains the priest’s parts and prayers for the the Daily Cycle and Liturgy.
- **Book of Needs**—These books contains the order of services for occasional prayers (for example: baptisms, weddings, funerals, house blessings, icon blessings, etc.).

# Divine Liturgy

The Divine Liturgy is divided up into a few different parts.

- **The Proskomede** is done by the priest privately; it is the service where the priest prepares the bread (called “**Prosphora**,” which means “Offering”) and wine.
- **The Liturgy of the Word** (or sometimes it’s also called the “Liturgy of the Catechumens”) is the first part of Divine Liturgy; This part contains the Great Litany, Antiphons, the Hymns of the Day (**Apolytikia and Kontakion**), the Trisagion, the Epistle Reading, the Gospel Reading, and the Homily.
- **The Liturgy of the Faithful** is the second half of Liturgy. It begins with the **Great Entrance**, when the priest brings the gifts to the altar; it continues with the **Anaphora** (the “Lifting Up”) the **Epiclesis** (the “Consecration” of the Gifts), Communion, and then the Thanksgiving Prayers.

As I pointed out in the Bible Session, humans were meant to be priests in the earthly temple by serving as two way mirrors: reflecting God’s good stewardship into the world, and reflecting creation’s praises and thanksgiving back to God. However, we failed in this task. The Divine Liturgy allows us to reclaim this royal and priestly calling.

We offer bread and wine (which are made by human hands and don’t appear naturally in nature) to God on behalf of the world. This, along with our hymns of praise, is our thanksgiving to God for all that he had done for us.

In return, God accepts our gifts and transforms them into his Body and Blood, and offers them back to us. When we commune, we are transformed into the Body of Christ so that we can go out into the world to reflect his good stewardship into it. We do this by proclaiming the Gospel and caring for the “least of these.”

Because Liturgy is the fulfillment of our calling, of what it means to be truly human, **it is critical that every Christian regularly attend Liturgy, partake of communion, evangelize, and perform charity.**

## HERE ARE SOME SPECIFIC PRAYERS TO HELP YOU BETTER GRASP THE LITURGY:

“O God, our God, you sent the heavenly bread, the food of the whole world, our Lord and God, Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer and Benefactor, blessing and sanctifying us: now bless this offering, and accept it on your altar above the heavens. **Remember, as you are good and a lover of humankind, those who offer it and those for whom it was offered;** and keep us blameless in the celebration of your divine mysteries. For sanctified and glorified is your all honorable and majestic name, of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.” (From the Proskomede)

“We give thanks to You, O Lord God of Hosts, Who has made us worthy to stand even now before Your holy Altar of sacrifice and to fall down before You seeking Your compassion for our sins and those committed in ignorance by the people. **Accept, O God, our supplication. Make us worthy to offer You prayers, supplications, and bloodless sacrifices for all Your people.** By the power of Your Holy Spirit, make us, whom You have appointed to this, Your ministry, free of blame or stumbling and, with the witness of a clear conscience, able to call upon You at every time and in every place, so that, hearing us, You may be merciful to us in the abundance of Your goodness.” (First Prayer of the Faithful)

“Lord God Almighty, You alone are holy. **You accept the sacrifice of praise** from those who call upon You with their whole heart, **even so, accept from us sinners our supplication, and bring it to Your holy Altar of sacrifice. Enable us to offer You gifts and spiritual sacrifices for our own sins and the failings of Your people.** Deem us worthy to find grace in Your sight, that our sacrifice may be well pleasing to You, and that the good Spirit of Your grace may rest upon us and upon these gifts presented and upon all Your people.” (Offertory Prayer)

“It is proper and right to hymn You, to bless You, to praise You, **to give thanks to You, and to worship You in every place of Your dominion.** For You, O God, are ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible, existing forever, forever the same, You and Your only-begotten Son and Your Holy Spirit. You brought us out of nothing into being, and when we had fallen away, You raised us up again. You left nothing undone until you had led us up to heaven and granted us Your Kingdom, which is to come. **For all these things, we thank You and Your only-begotten Son and Your Holy Spirit: for all things we know and do not know, for blessings manifest and hidden that have been bestowed on us. We thank You also for this Liturgy, which You have deigned to receive from our hands ...**” (Prayer from the Anaphora)

“Your own of Your own **we offer to You, in all and for all. ... We praise You, we bless You, we give thanks to You, and we pray to You, Lord our God.**” (Prayer from Anaphora)

“... **Again we offer You this spiritual worship for the whole world,** for the holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, and for those living pure and reverent lives. For civil authorities and our armed forces, grant that they may govern in peace, Lord, so that in their tranquility we, too, may live calm and serene lives, in all piety and virtue.” (Prayer from the Anaphora)

“Hearken, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, from Your holy dwelling place and from the throne of glory of Your Kingdom, and **come to sanctify us,** You Who are enthroned with the Father on high and are present among us invisibly here. And with Your mighty hand, grant Communion of Your most pure Body and precious Blood to us, **and through us to all the people.**” (Prayer right before Communion)

## PREPARING FOR COMMUNION

Orthodox Christians are expected to prepare to receive communion in the following manner, however, be sure to always consult your spiritual father:

- **Saying pre-communion prayers.** It is most common to say a few pre-communion prayers before coming to church on Sunday. They are found in your Orthodox Prayer Book. If you find yourself short on time, try saying them the night before, or one or two with your daily prayers as you get closer to Sunday. You may find that there are too many to say all at once. My recommendation is to start slowly by saying one or two and switching which ones you say each week. As you grow in your prayer life, you can say more.
- **Fasting.** Fasting for communion means not eating or drinking anything from midnight until you commune in the morning. It also means refraining from all sexual activity. If you have health issues, or need to take medication with food, you may adjust your fasting to fit your circumstance. My advice is to consult your spiritual father in these situations.
- **Being right with others.** Our Lord said in Matthew, “So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.” (Matthew 5:23-24). If there is forgiveness that needs to be given or asked for, please do that as a part of your preparation for communion. You may also think about asking for confession; see your spiritual father.