

Liturgy of the Word

Objective

To gain a basic understanding of the parts of the Divine Liturgy

References

- ❖ “The Spirituality of the Rites of the Holy Liturgy in the Coptic Orthodox Church” Bishop Mettaous, Bishop of St. Mary Monastery, El Sourian.
- ❖ “How to Benefit from the Holy Liturgy” Bishop Mettaous, Bishop of St. Mary Monastery, El Sourian.
- ❖ “Spiritual Meanings of the Rite of the Holy Liturgy” Fr. Zakariah El-Suriany, St. Mary Monastery, El Sourian.

Scriptural Verse

“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said: Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me. In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying: This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me” (1 Corinthians 11:23-25)

Lesson Outline

Pauline’s Procession and Readings

- ❖ After praying the absolution of the servants, the priest enters the Sanctuary.
- ❖ He puts 5 spoons of incense in the censor to start the incense procession (5 spoons symbolize the 5 men of the OT that gave an acceptable sacrifice to God: Abel, Noah, Abraham, Aaron, Zachariah)
- ❖ He proceeds around the altar three times during which he says the three short litanies for peace, the fathers, and the congregation.
- ❖ Then he goes out of the Sanctuary and circles the entire church as St. Paul went preaching the gospel to all nations.
- ❖ The priest starts the procession in the church from the left side (north) to the right (south) as through the service of St. Paul we were transferred from darkness (with those rejected on the left side) to light (with those accepted on the right side).
- ❖ The Pauline Epistle is read.

Catholic Epistle Reading

- ❖ There is no procession of incense and the priest does not come out from the sanctuary as the commandment of the Lord to His disciples was not to leave Jerusalem and wait for the promise of the Father (that is the Holy Spirit).

Acts Procession and Reading

- ❖ The priest puts one hand of incense in the censor at the beginning of the Acts procession of incense.
- ❖ After the three processions in the sanctuary (around the altar), the priest goes in the church starting from the southern side (right) to the northern side (left), not in the whole church.

- ❖ The Acts' procession of incense goes from right to left as the disciples preached to the Jews who were from the right side people (being the people of God previously), but when they rejected the faith, the apostles were directed to the Gentiles who were the people of the left side.
- ❖ The priest does not circle the entire church to symbolize the Apostles preaching in Judea and the cities of Judah, but not the whole world like St. Paul.
- ❖ After this, the priest concludes the procession before the gate of the sanctuary without going inside as in the Pauline's procession.
- ❖ The priest does not go back into the sanctuary but says the "Return Prayer" outside in front of the sanctuary, because the apostles did not return to Jerusalem but all of them were martyred in the countries they preached in.
- ❖ During the Pauline and Praxis processions the priest makes seven rounds around the altar all together which reminds us of the seven processions made by the people of Israel while carrying the Ark of the Covenant around Jericho until they entered the city. By praying and pouring ourselves before God around the altar, the walls of evil fall down.

The Synaxarium

- ❖ The word "Synaxarium" means 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 purpose of reading the Synaxarium is to enjoy the history of the faith and its heroes and to recognize the church's history through them.
- ❖ Usually, the Synaxarium is not read during the Holy Fifty days as the joy of the resurrection surpasses everything else and takes the whole attention of the church.
- ❖ The church always celebrates the day of martyrdom or departure of the saint, not his birthday, because as Solomon said in the book of Ecclesiastes "The end of a thing is better than its beginning" (Ecclesiastes 7:8) and "the day of death is better than the day of birth" (Ecclesiastes 7:1)
- ❖ It is read after the Acts as it is a continuation of the history of the church that started by the Apostles.
- ❖ The ordination of new patriarchs and bishops occur after reading the Praxis and Synaxarium since these ordinations are a continuation of the work of the apostles and their successors.

The Litany of the Gospel

- ❖ After the reading of the Synaxarium, the congregation sings the Trisagion (Agios)
- ❖ Then the priest holds the censer after putting one spoon of incense and stands before the sanctuary and prays the litany of the Gospel ("O Master Lord Jesus Christ Our God...").
- ❖ This litany emphasizes the importance of the Gospel, which the people of the Old Testament have desired to see and hear and who praise us, who now live in the grace of the New Testament.
- ❖ The priest and the deacon, who stands behind him, enter the sanctuary. The priest puts one hand of incense in the censer, and then holds the Gospel with the cross over it between him and the deacon.

- ❖ The deacon walks backwards before the priest around the altar, during which the priest prays the prayer of Simeon the Elder “Now O Lord, let your servant depart in peace...”
- ❖ The priest then takes the Gospel and the deacon takes the cross. They stand at the door of the sanctuary with the deacon on the right side and the priest on the left.
- ❖ The deacon then announces to the congregation to “Stand in the fear of God and listen to the Holy Gospel”, while he is raising the cross up in his right hand.
- ❖ The priest then says (usually in Coptic), “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord”, a phrase which was said to our Lord as He entered Jerusalem.
- ❖ This also represents the Lord Jesus Christ’s coming to teach us as He used to teach in the Temple.

The Gospel

- ❖ Then the deacon starts reading the Gospel at the podium, “Stand up in the fear of God. Let us hear the Holy Gospel. A Chapter of the Gospel according to...” Then the priest says “Penchois...” which means, “Our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ...”
- ❖ During the reading of the Gospel, the gospel is put on the “Mangalia = podium” denoting the appearance of the Lord Christ as a Teacher. After the reading, the gospel is put behind the throne that includes the chalice denoting the appearance of the Lord at that time as a Sacrifice.
- ❖ The deacon starts reading the psalm and then the Gospel, by saying, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord...” When the deacon finishes reading the Gospel, he kisses it and the congregation says, “Glory Be to God Forever. Amen.”
- ❖ The reading of the psalm before the Gospel has important meaning for the prophecy the coming of Christ.
- ❖ During the reading of the Gospel and while the congregation is listening in reverence and silence, the priest reads the prayer of the Gospel, which says, “O You Who are long-suffering, abundant in mercy and true, receive our prayers and supplications...”
- ❖ During the reading of the Gospel, two deacons stand on each side of the Gospel holding candles, this symbolizes 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)..
- ❖ After the reading of the Gospel is finished, the priest gives the sermon. Here the priest speaks the word of God (that is why it is called the Liturgy of the Word) and preaches the gospel to the catechumens and tell them of the good news of salvation to all mankind.
- ❖ After that, the deacons say the response of the Gospel. The priest stands at the door of the sanctuary and says a deep prayer called the Prayer of the Veil.

Prayer of the Veil

- ❖ “O God Who in Your unspeakable love towards mankind, sent Your Only Begotten Son into the world...”
- ❖ In this prayer the priest asks God to make him worthy to touch His Holy Mysteries without condemnation and without committing the sin of approaching God’s Holies without being prepared and worthy.

Three Long Litanies

- ❖ After the Prayer of the Veil, the priest makes a metania (bow with reverence) and prays the litanies of peace, the fathers, and the assembly.
- ❖ During the Litany of Peace of the Church, the priest signs the congregation with the cross when saying "...let not the death of sin have dominion over us, nor over your people" as with the sign of the cross, the sin was abolished.
- ❖ During the Litany of the Church Fathers, the priest points to the congregation with the incense box while saying "...and our prayers on their behalf," as incense symbolizes the prayers as king David said: "Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice" (Psalm 141:2)
- ❖ During the Litany of the Assembly, and when saying "...houses of prayers, houses of purity, houses of blessings", the priest raise the incense above the altar in the likeness of a cross as a sanctification of the altar and asking that the church will be always a house of prayers, purity, and blessings.
- ❖ When the priest raises the side of the "Prosphering" at the end of the Litany of the Assembly, he censes the Mysteries pointing to the spices and perfumes that the women came with to the tomb to put on the Lord's body on Sunday early morning.

The Creed and the Reconciliation Prayer

- ❖ The deacon, standing on the right side of the sanctuary, says "Listen with the wisdom of God. Lord have mercy. Truly we believe..."
- ❖ The congregation then, in one accord, recites the Creed loudly.
- ❖ Meanwhile, the priest washes his hands three times and sprinkles the water before the congregation as if saying "I am innocent of the blood of anyone who comes forward unworthy".
- ❖ Then the priest dries his hands, stands before the altar, facing east and starts praying the Reconciliation Prayer.
- ❖ When reciting the second part of the Prayer, he holds the veil that was put in the shape of a triangle, representing the seal on the stone on tomb (Prosphering), on and raises it before his face while a deacon is holding a cross on the opposite side of the altar.
- ❖ This refers to the unsealing of the seals at the tomb.
- ❖ At the end of the Prayer, the priest puts the veil on the left side of the altar, and with the help of the deacon standing opposite him, he lifts up the "Prosphering" while shaking it.
- ❖ This refers to the removal of the stone from the tomb and the earthquake that happened at the resurrection.

Conclusion

The Divine Liturgy is a journey through the Old and New Testaments that shows how the Lord prepared His people to receive Him as the Savior of the whole world. It reminds us of the prophecies and sacrifices of the Old Testament and then brings us back to the New Testament where the Lord was born and wrapped in swaddling cloth, baptized, crucified and rose from the dead to give us life through the partaking of His Divine Body and Blood. This part of the Liturgy is in itself a great teaching tool for new comers, guests and catechumens. If we understand it well, we should be able to explain the treasures hidden in our church rites.

Activities/Discussion Points

This lesson is best presented as a slide show or using some visual format in order to allow visualization of the events of the liturgy.