

The Divine Liturgy

Raising of Incense and the Offertory

Objectives

To gain a basic understanding of the rites of the raising of incense and the offertory and to become familiar with the symbols used and their meaning

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

“Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne” (Revelation 8:3)

Lesson Outline

- ❖ The Liturgy is actually a divine journey of the life of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and His incarnation from its beginning to end. The Liturgy refers to the birth of our Lord, His baptism, His preaching, His death on the cross, His resurrection until the Communion, which refers to the ascension of the Lord into the Heavens.
- ❖ The priest opens the veil of the sanctuary from left to right symbolizing our transfer from the left side to the right side by the work of redemption of the Lord Christ.

The Raising of Incense: The Thanksgiving Prayer

- ❖ After finishing the Thanksgiving Prayer, the priest steps inside the altar and makes the sign of the cross on the incense box three times (in the name of the Trinity) and puts five spoonfuls of incense in the censer.
- ❖ These five spoonfuls are symbols of the five men in the Old Testament who offered acceptable sacrifices to God: Abel, Noah, Abraham, Aaron, and Zachariah.
- ❖ After putting the incense, the priest takes the censer and makes three complete processions around the altar and the deacon holding a cross proceeds before him.
- ❖ During these processions, the priest prays for the peace of the Church, the Church fathers, and the assemblies.
- ❖ The priest then comes out of the sanctuary and offers incense in the likeness of a cross before the altar, the icon of St. Mary, the west side of the church and lastly before the icon of St. John the Baptist.
- ❖ During this, the congregation chants the Verses of Cymbals in which we offer greetings to all the heavenly hosts and to the church, the house of the angels.

The Litanies

- ❖ In the evening raising of incense (vespers), the priest prays the Litany for the DEPARTED as the evening symbolizes the setting of the sun and the approaching end of our life on earth.
- ❖ The Litany for the DEPARTED is also prayed in the matins of Saturdays as we remember the presence of the Lord in the tomb.
- ❖ In the matins of Monday to Friday, the priest prays the litanies for the SICK and the TRAVELERS.
- ❖ These two groups are remembered as they cannot come to the Church.
- ❖ The Litany for the Travelers is prayed only in the mornings as this was the custom in the old days.
- ❖ In the Matins of Sundays and the Lord's feasts, the priest prays the litanies for the SICK and the OBLATIONS and not the TRAVELERS as everyone should be at the Church on these days bringing their offerings and oblations.
- ❖ The priest prays the Litany for the Oblations at the altar as the offerings are considered a sacrifice.
- ❖ After the litany(-ies), the priest enters the sanctuary and puts a spoonful of incense in the censer and starts the procession of the incense throughout the Church.
- ❖ We notice during the procession that the priest offers incense before the main gate of the altar, before the Gospels on the Mangalia, the relics of the saints, the bishop (if he is in the Church), other priests, and the icons of the saints.
- ❖ The procession of the incense takes place in a counterclockwise direction as a symbol that in the Church we are above time and the movement of the Church is opposite that of the world.
- ❖ This procession of incense symbolizes that of Aaron by which he blessed the people and stopped the plague among them (Book of Numbers, Chapter 16).
- ❖ We notice that when the priest offers incense before the Gospel, he does this by putting the palm of his hand on the Gospel, followed by the back of his hand, and the palm once more before kissing it. This means that we give honor to the Gospel from within (the palm) and without (the back of the hand) and even more so from within meaning our heart and soul.

The Prayer of Efnoti Nai Nan

- ❖ At the end of the Creed, the priest holds a cross with three candles on it and faces the East praying, "O God have mercy upon us, settle mercy upon us, have compassion upon us."
- ❖ Then, he turns to the north and says "hear us." Then to the west, towards the congregation and says, "bless us." Then, he turns to the south and says, "keep us," before turning to the East once again, saying, "help us."
- ❖ Then, while facing towards the East, he concludes by saying, "take away Your anger from us, visit us with Your salvation, and forgive us our sins."
- ❖ The three candles on the cross indicate that the One who was crucified was the light of the world.
- ❖ The prayer starts and concludes towards the East as it is directed towards God requesting His mercy and forgiveness.

The Gospel Procession

- ❖ After the prayer of Efnoti Nai Nan, the priest takes the censer and prays the Litany for the Gospel.
- ❖ At the end of the Litany, the deacon enters the sanctuary *first* followed by the priest.
- ❖ Both of them make a procession around the altar and the priest takes the Gospel from the deacon while praying inaudibly, “Lord, now You are letting your servant depart in peace, according to Your word...” (Luke 2:29-31)

The Gospel

- ❖ At the end of the procession, the priest stands at the door of the sanctuary facing west and raising the Gospel above his head as a sign of veneration.
- ❖ After that the Gospel and the psalm are read.
- ❖ If the bishop is present, he is the one who reads the Gospel.
- ❖ During the reading, two deacons hold two candles on either side of the Gospel.

The Five Short Litanies

- ❖ After reading the Gospel, the priest stands before the door of the sanctuary holding the censer and prays the five short litanies.
- ❖ These are the litanies for the peace, the fathers, the place, (waters, plants, or fruits), and the assemblies.

The Absolutions

- ❖ While the congregation recites the Lord’s Prayer, the priest, facing the East, reads the first and the second absolutions inaudibly.
- ❖ At the end of the second absolution, the priest, facing the congregation, signs them with the cross and says the third absolution.
- ❖ After this, the priest places the cross upon the Gospel and the other priests and the deacons come and kiss the cross and the Gospel, during which they all chant the appropriate closing hymn.

The Short Blessing

- ❖ At the end, the priest says the benediction and dismisses the congregation in peace if during vespers or he enters the sanctuary to continue the liturgy if during the morning raising of incense.

Offering of the Lamb: Praying the Psalms

- ❖ The Priest and the deacons put on the white tunics of the service before praying the Psalms of the hours.
- ❖ The church prays the Psalms of the 3rd and the 6th hours on non-fasting days, Saturdays (except Bright Saturday), Sundays, and the Holy Fifty Days.
- ❖ The 9th hour Psalms are also prayed on fasting days
- ❖ On the weekdays of the Great Fast and the Fast of Jonah, the psalms of the 11th and the 12th hours are added.

- ❖ The Lamb should be in the church while praying the Psalms as they include prophecies about the life and works of the Lord Christ.

Washing Hands

- ❖ The priest washes his hands three times before going outside the Sanctuary to choose the Lamb. This is done as preparation for touching the bread that will be changed into the holy Body.

Choosing the Lamb

- ❖ The priest stands at the gate of the Sanctuary facing westward and a deacon stands before him holding the basket containing the loaves of bread. On the right hand of the priest stands another deacon holding a cruet with the wine.
- ❖ The number of loaves of bread from which to choose should be an odd number (3, 5, 7, ...) as the sacrifice of the Lord is unique and is without equal.
- ❖ The priest examines the wine before signing it and the basket of bread before choosing the best loaf to become the Lamb.
- ❖ The congregation chants "Lord have mercy" 41 times during the examination process. This represents the sufferings that the Lord endured during His trial (39 lashes, the crown of thorns and the rod that he was hit with).

Baptizing the Lamb

- ❖ The priest enters the Sanctuary while holding the Lamb and takes water on his right hand to wash the Lamb on both sides. This is a symbol of the baptism of the Lord Christ.
- ❖ Then, the priest puts his hand on the Lamb and prays an inaudible prayer mentioning the names of all who asked him to pray on their behalf, along with all who are sick or suffering in any way.

The Procession of the Lamb, the Signings, and the Thanksgiving Prayer

- ❖ The priest covers the Lamb with a veil, places the cross upon it and raises the Lamb above his head while standing at the Sanctuary gate facing the congregation and saying "Glory and honor..."
- ❖ In raising the Lamb above his head, the priest declares that this is the living bread that comes from heaven.
- ❖ The cross upon the Lamb symbolizes the Lord carrying the cross on His shoulder.
- ❖ Then the priest proceeds around the altar while praying inaudibly, "Remember O Lord those who asked us to remember them in our supplications..."
- ❖ This procession around the altar while the Lamb is over the head of the priest represents the Salvation that was accomplished for the whole world.
- ❖ After the procession, the priest stands on the left side of the altar and places the Lamb on his left hand close to the wine and the water in the hands of the deacons.
- ❖ Then, he signs all of them three times (in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) loudly and then places the Lamb in the paten under the star.
- ❖ After this, the priest unveils the chalice and holds the cruet of wine and signs the congregation with it while saying, "Peace be with you."

- ❖ Then the priest pours the wine in the chalice and pours water in the wine cruet (up to a third) and shakes it before pouring this water in the chalice.
- ❖ This is done while the priest prays the Thanksgiving Prayer.

The Absolution of the Servants

- ❖ After the Thanksgiving Prayer, the priest holds the cross in his right hand and prays the prayers of the prothesis of the bread and the wine inaudibly.
- ❖ After finishing this prayer, he covers the paten with a veil and also the chalice with another veil. Then, with the help of the deacon standing opposite him on the other side of the altar, he covers the table with the “Prospharine”.
- ❖ Then he places a veil in the shape of a triangle above the “Prospharine”.
- ❖ The priest bows before the altar, stands up, then kisses the altar and proceeds around the altar from the right side and exits the sanctuary.
- ❖ Then the priest prays the Absolution of the Servants.

Conclusion

The Divine Liturgy is rich with symbolism about our Lord Jesus Christ, the Old and New Testaments. A better understanding of the liturgy will result in a deeper involvement in the prayers of the Church which will have much spiritual benefit.

Activities/Discussion Points

This lesson should be presented in a visual format in order to enhance understanding of the events taking place. Questions can be formulated as you present the slides.