

The Divine Liturgy († Dionysios, Metropolitan of Serbia and Kozani)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



Every day, a certain task is completed on earth. It's the most important and sacred task that people can undertake. It's the Divine Liturgy, the continuation of the Last Supper which Jesus Christ held with His disciples. People can do many and varied great things, but nothing greater, nothing more important than the Divine Liturgy.

This is a unique privilege, given to us by God, because even the angels are unable to celebrate the Divine Liturgy. At this service, the angels work together with us, as we hear in the tropario of Saint Spyridon: 'and in the singing of your holy prayers (i.e. the celebration of the Divine Liturgy), you have angels concelebrating with you'. Indeed, as Saint Peter writes, 'on these things the angels desire to look', referring to what takes place on the holy altar through the hands of the priest.



‘Liturgy’ means ‘a public task’, in other words, a task undertaken for the people, the people of God. The Church prays for the whole world, but celebrates the Liturgy only for the faithful: ‘For the devout and Orthodox Christians’. The Church is the people of God, and therefore the Divine Liturgy, as a public task, is conducted by the people, on behalf of the people. Our priests don’t act by themselves, or in secret, but always celebrate the Divine Liturgy in conjunction with the people. When we talk about ‘the people of God’, we don’t mean the laity as opposed to the clergy, but both the laity and the clergy together. We’re all the people of God, laity and clergy.

It’s not easy to say what the Church is, but we understand and experience it when we celebrate the Divine Liturgy, which we don’t attend merely as spectators but are all participants. We’re God’s people and we celebrate the Divine Liturgy together with the ministers of the Church who, through their ordination, have the grace of the priesthood. This is why all the prayers and hymns of the Divine Liturgy are written in such a way as to make it clear that it’s not only the priest who’s celebrating, but all the Christians who are present in the congregation. The deacon says ‘Let us pray to the Lord’ and ‘Let us attend’, that is, all the people, because we’re the Church and we celebrate the Divine Liturgy all together.

Every time we gather in church, we say we have an ‘assembly’, which doesn’t mean that we simply go to church, but that we gather in order to become the

Church. But even more than this, we're the Church not only when we assemble but when, together with the priest, we celebrate the Divine Liturgy. The Divine Liturgy reveals what the Church is. The liturgical assembly is the Church. The Divine Liturgy's the centre of all the services which the Church conducts within a church. Always with the presence of the priest among us, because without the priest and without the Divine Liturgy we're not the Church, but simply a gathering, such as those arranged by clubs and associations. 'The Church' means the people, the priest and the holy altar, that is the Divine Liturgy. Of course, the Divine Liturgy isn't something that we've simply thought up; it's the greatest and most sacred sacrament, founded and propounded by Jesus Christ. To put it better, Jesus Christ founded the sacrament of the Divine Eucharist and the Church celebrates it, continuing this great and most sacred sacrament. This is why it's called both 'Liturgy and 'Eucharist', because it's the same thing: the sacred and holy rite of the Church, at which Christ's bloodless sacrifice is continued.

The Divine Liturgy or Divine Eucharist is the same sacrifice as that made by Christ when He offered Himself for the salvation of the world. On the evening of the Last Supper, He broke the bread, gave it to His disciples and said: 'Take, eat, this is my body...'. He then blessed the chalice, gave it to His disciples and said to them: 'All of you drink from this; this is my blood...'. Both times he stated clearly and meant literally what he wanted to say: 'This is my body' and 'This is my blood'. But He didn't merely confirm this to them, He also gave them a command: 'Do this in remembrance of me'. Do this and remember me. So now, at Christ's command, the Church celebrates the Divine Liturgy and continues the same sacrifice, the sacrament of the Divine Eucharist.

Within Christ's words to His disciples is the continuation of His sacrifice and the communion of His Body and Blood. In other words, the Liturgy, the Divine Eucharist, isn't merely a sacrifice and the remembrance of the Last Supper, but the communion of the faithful. The Church celebrates the Divine Liturgy and continues the sacrifice of Jesus Christ so that we can partake of His Body and Blood. When we talk about the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we mean His death on the Cross, but also His Resurrection three days later. And when we celebrate the Divine Liturgy, as the priest says in one of the prayers during the service, 'we announce His death and we confess His resurrection'. At the Last Supper, when Christ promulgated the sacrament of the Divine Eucharist, He spoke of His death and resurrection; of His holy Body, which would die on the Cross and of His holy Blood, which would flow from His side. His holy Body, which He assumed at the Incarnation, would rise, incorrupt and immortal, after three days and would then be given at the divine sacrament 'for the nourishment of the faithful, for the remission of sins and for life

eternal’.

There isn't room in our mind for everything that happens at the Divine Liturgy, which is why we have to have the faith to experience it within us. It's always much more a thing to experience within ourselves than to understand merely with our brain. The Divine Liturgy isn't a dead action, but a living one on the part of the Church, which we understand better the more we take part in it. Not when we follow what's happening in church as spectators, but when it's we ourselves who are alive to the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. I repeat and say again the basic truth and divine reality: the Church isn't something foreign to us, outside us, that does its job and we simply go along to the service of the Divine Liturgy, but we, gathered together, are the Church and it's we ourselves who celebrate the service every time it's conducted.

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