

Proskomedia: Preparing the Gifts

By Fr. Anthony Hernandez

The Proskomedia takes place before the public Divine Liturgy begins. The practical purpose of the Proskomedia is to prepare the bread and wine to be offered and sanctified at the Anaphora of the Liturgy. But there are other wonderful layers of meaning that are expressed in the Proskomedia. One major theme is the unity of all things in Christ. The

Apostle Paul tells us that the eternal plan of God was "to bring all things in the heavens and on earth under Christ's headship." Eph. 1:10.

The uniting of all in Christ, is expressed and brought about in the Divine Liturgy. This is clearly shown in how the prosphora (bread for offering) is prepared in the Prothesis Rite. Traditionally, five loaves are prepared.

The first loaf is called the Lamb. At the Epiclesis (invocation of the Holy Spirit), the bread and wine are changed into the true Body and Blood of Christ. From the second loaf a triangle is cut to commemorate and honor the holy Theotokos. It is placed at the "right hand" of the Lamb. The third loaf is for commemorating the nine groups of

Heavenly Powers (seraphim, cherubim, archangels, angels, etc), and also various groups of saints. For this purpose nine particles are cut from this loaf. With the fourth loaf different groups of people who are living are called to mind: hierarchs and clergy, our fellow church members, and those who are in special need. A particle of bread is cut for each category and for individuals who are being remembered. Particles from the fifth loaf are to commemorate all the departed: departed clergy, family and parish members, those who died long ago, and those who have recently died. We pray for their blessed repose. All of these cut particles from the four prosphora are placed around the Lamb, Jesus Christ. They are placed on a raised plate called the diskos.

The diskos' round shape symbolizes that Christ reconciles "to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross".

In Christ all are brought into unity: God and all creation, angels and human beings, men and women, people of all ethnicities, rich and poor, those who are alive and even those who have died.

Excerpt from Christ our Pascha: *The Participation of the Faithful in the Proskomide.*

The priest serves the Proskomide in the sanctuary behind the closed Royal Doors. Nevertheless, each member of the faithful also participates in it in a direct way. The faithful take part in the Proskomide by presenting requests for prayers for themselves and for others, and by bringing offerings. Placing of the named particles side by side on the diskos shows that all the faithful belong to the one Body of Christ. Their communion with God and with one another is thus expressed. Each of the faithful is a unique person, whom God knows by name, and at the same time no one is sufficient unto themselves. When we bring and offer to God "all the cares of our life," we transcend our private lives and enter into a new and ecclesial, comprehensive and universal communion. Now the faithful are ready for the communal work—the Liturgy. (#353)

A Note from Father Geoff:

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

On January 22, 1973, the Supreme Court decided on the case *Roe vs. Wade*, making abortion legal in the United States. In the 48 years since, over 59 million abortions have taken place.

The Catholic Church firmly and unequivocally proclaims the sanctity and dignity of all human life from conception to a natural death. Both at the national level and at the global level, Catholic bishops from the Pope on down, have repeatedly called for changes to our policies – and more importantly, changes of *heart* – regarding the value of lives which society considers “problematic” or “inconvenient.” In Pope John Paul II’s 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (“The Gospel of Life”), the Holy Father decried the “culture of death” which was growing in the Western world. This document summed up the Catholic position of what is sometimes called a “consistent ethic of life,” which is a way of thinking theologically, linking all issues of human life.

As Eastern Christians, in particular, we have a deep theological tradition of viewing each and every human person as having “the image of God” implanted in their very person. Just as we would not deface or destroy an icon in the church, every individual person is a priceless icon, and image, bearing the Savior’s likeness.

As we Catholics continue to advocate for just laws which will protect and defend the most defenseless among us, the unborn as well as the born, let us not make the mistake of thinking that our political advocacy is the end of our work. Let us ask ourselves: in our daily lives, do we make life a priority? In my decisions with my money and my time, am I supporting life-affirming and life-protecting causes? Do I care for the needy in my own neighborhood? Are there concrete ways that my family could contribute our efforts or our resources to making life an attractive option for a person in an unplanned pregnancy?

My brothers and sisters, let us pray for the end to life-threatening and life-ending policies in this and every land. But let us also pray, with earnest hearts, that the Lord would direct and guide **us** to do our parts to give our world an alternative to the “culture of death” and embrace the “Gospel of life.”

To Jesus be glory forever!

In the Giver of Life,

Fr. Geoff

A Prayer to the Theotokos for Life By John Paul II

O Mary, bright dawn of the new world, Mother of the living, to you do we entrust the cause of life. Look down, O Mother, upon the vast numbers of babies not allowed to be born, of the poor whose lives are made difficult, of men and women who are victims of brutal violence, of the elderly and the sick killed by indifference or out of misguided mercy. Grant that all who believe in your Son may proclaim the Gospel of life with honesty and love to the people of our time. Obtain for them the grace to accept that Gospel as a gift ever new, the joy of celebrating it with gratitude throughout their lives and the courage to bear witness to it resolutely, in order to build, together with all people of good will, the civilization of truth and love, to the praise and glory of God, the Creator and lover of life. Amen.

Sunday of Publican and Pharisee

“I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

The Gospel reading for this Sunday (Luke 18:10-14) pictures a man who is always pleased with himself and who thinks that he complies with all the requirements of religion. He is self-assured and proud of himself. In reality, however, he has falsified the meaning of religion. He has reduced it to external observations and he measures his piety by the amount of money he contributes to the temple.

As for the Publican, he humbles himself and his humility justifies him before God. If there is a moral quality almost completely disregarded and even denied today, it is indeed humility. The culture in which we live constantly instills in us the sense of pride, of self-glorification, and of self-righteousness. It is built on the assumption that man can achieve anything by himself and it even pictures God as the one who all the time “gives credit” for man’s achievements and good deeds.

Humility - be it individual or corporate, ethnic or national - is viewed as a sign of weakness, as something unbecoming a real man. Even our churches - are they not imbued with that same spirit as the Pharisee? Do we not want our every contribution, every “good deed,” all that we do “for the Church” to be acknowledged, praised, publicized?

- Fr. Alexander Schmemmann

Non-Fasting Week

This week (from the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee to the Sunday of the Prodigal Son) according to our Liturgical calendar, is a fast free week. The prayer of the Pharisee was to boast that he fasts twice a week. In order to eliminate all pride before the beginning of the Great Fast, the holy fathers directed that we do not fast at all this week.



Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner!

ECF Reflection, Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee

Today in the Gospel we are reminded that there are two "ways" in which we can walk in this life and the outcome or goal of those ways are strikingly different. The first of those "ways" is the way of the world, in which financial success and reputation are prioritized and the ultimate goal is personal aggrandizement, no matter the "way" in which it is attained. The second "way" is the way of God, in which charity and honesty are not only prioritized, but are the way and the goal as well.

In other words, the second "way," the way of God, is a good in itself, for this "way" is the life of God or eternal life. Following this second "way" leads one to look beyond themselves and live in a way that is always oriented towards others. Just as God the Father, from all eternity, poured out his life in love to the Son, so the one who walks the second "way" lives a life which is a constant act of self-giving love.

Please notice that both "ways" have an interior and hidden aspect that greatly affect which path or "way" that we walk in this life and ultimately it greatly affects how we will live forever. While one may outwardly appear to be walking in the "way" of God, as the Pharisee in the Gospel must have appeared to those around him, it is possible for that person to actually be walking the opposite path in life due to the hidden or interior disposition of his heart.

Challenge questions:

1. Do we often live a double-life? Do we act polite and nice to those around us while harboring resentment or anger toward those same people? Do we say one thing with our mouths and think another thing with our heart?
2. In the Divine Liturgy do we pray do we pray for everyone and ask for God’s mercy and forgiveness? Have we truly forgiven others in the way we ask God to forgive us?
3. Is there someone in our life whom we are angry with or that we have not really forgiven from our heart? Can we find a way to forgive them and show them that we love them?

Pre-Lenten Sundays

There are four more Sundays within Byzantine Pre-Lent (including today). The “Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee” calls us to consider our life, and to repent of our sins for repentance is the door through which we enter the Holy Forty Days Fast. The “Sunday of the Prodigal Son” calls us to “come to ourselves” and return to the Father, who eagerly awaits our return. The “Sunday of the Last Judgment” reminds us that while the Lord’s mercy is immeasurable even He does not forgive those who do not repent. And, finally, on “Forgiveness Sunday” we remember Adam’s expulsion from Paradise and the proper method of fasting (don’t put on a gloomy face).



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Holy Mystery of Reconciliation Before and after Liturgies
Holy Mysteries of Initiation Contact the church office
Holy Mystery of Anointing Ask prior to surgery or serious illness
Holy Mystery of Marriage Contact the church office eight months prior to wedding
Religious Education Classes September through May, following Sunday Divine Liturgy
St. George Ladies' Guild & Men's Club Everyone welcome to participate

God gives us His Grace, when we are humble. (Elder Porphyrios)