Divine Liturgy Of Saint John Chrysostom

Divine Liturgy Of Saint John Chrysostom *Downloaded from old.oplm.com by Alessandra & Everett*

THE HEARTBEAT OF ORTHODOX WORSHIP: UNDERSTANDING THE DIVINE LITURGY OF SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

For millions of Christians around the world, the spiritual life is anchored in a single, transcendent experience: the celebration of the Eucharist. Within the Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Catholic traditions, this sacred service is most commonly known as the **Divine Liturgy Of Saint John Chrysostom**. More than just a weekly service or a ritual to be observed, this Liturgy is understood as a mystical journey that bridges heaven and earth. Its prayers, chants, and structured movements invite the faithful into direct communion with God, making it the centerpiece of Orthodox spirituality. To understand this ancient service is to understand the very soul of Byzantine Christianity.

The Liturgy is traditionally attributed to Saint John Chrysostom, the 4th-century Archbishop of Constantinople whose eloquence earned him the title "Golden-mouthed." While the final form of the Liturgy was shaped over centuries, its core—the Anaphora (Eucharistic Prayer)—bears his profound influence. It is a service of profound beauty, theological depth, and communal participation, designed not merely for passive attendance but for active, conscious engagement in the mystery of Christ's presence.

What is the Divine Liturgy? A Definition in Motion

Before diving into the specific parts of the **Divine Liturgy Of Saint John Chrysostom**, it is essential to understand what the term "Liturgy" itself means. The Greek word *leitourgia* translates to "the work of the people" or "a public service." In the Orthodox context, this "work" is not a burden but a holy offering. It is the corporate act of worship where the Church, the Body of Christ, gathers to remember, celebrate, and participate in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is an act of thanksgiving (*Eucharist*), a memorial, and a real encounter.

The service is structured as a dialogue between God and His people. It is divided into three primary parts, each with a distinct purpose and character. This tripartite structure is not arbitrary; it reflects the spiritual journey from preparation to proclamation, and finally, to intimate communion.

The First Movement: The Liturgy of Preparation (Proskomedia)

You might find that many popular descriptions of the Divine Liturgy begin only when the chanter sings the opening blessing. However, the service begins in silence. Before the main congregation arrives, the priest and deacon perform the **Proskomedia** (meaning "offering"). This private preparation takes place at the Table of Oblation (Prothesis), located on the north side of the altar.

- **The Preparation of the Gifts:** The priest takes a single loaf of leavened bread (*prosphora*) and cuts a central cube, known as the *Lamb*, which will be consecrated to become the Body of Christ. He pierces it with a spear, recalling the soldier's lance that pierced Christ's side, and pours wine and water into the chalice.
- **The Commemoration of the Saints:** Particles are removed from the prosphora in honor of the Theotokos (Mother of God), the angelic hosts, and the saints—including Saint John Chrysostom himself. These particles are arranged on the diskos (paten) in a specific order, forming a visible icon of the Church hierarchy.
- **The Commemoration of the Living and the Dead:** Finally, the priest removes particles for the living and the departed, bringing their names before the Lord. This act visually demonstrates that the entire Church—triumphant in heaven and militant on earth—is present at this offering.

This preparatory part ends with the priest censing the gifts and the altar, signifying the prayers of the saints rising to God and the presence of the Holy Spirit. The **Divine Liturgy Of Saint John Chrysostom** then begins in the public sphere.

The Second Movement: The Liturgy of the Word (The Synaxis)

Once the preparation is complete, the curtain opens, and the public service begins. This section is centered on instruction and proclamation. It is the part of the Liturgy where God speaks to His people through Scripture and preaching.

The Great Litany and the Antiphons

The Liturgy opens with the exclamation, "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." This immediately sets a tone of eschatological joy. Following this, the deacon intones the Great Litany (or Litany of Peace), a series of petitions for peace, salvation, the Church, and the whole world. The choir responds with *Kyrie eleison* ("Lord, have mercy"). These petitions are not mere wishes; they are active prayers of the community taking responsibility for the world.

Then come the Antiphons—three sets of psalms or hymns. The second antiphon is particularly famous for its hymn, *Only Begotten Son*, composed by Emperor Justinian. These hymns weave together Old Testament types and New Testament fulfillment, preparing the heart to hear the Gospel.

The Little Entrance and the Chanting of the Troparia

A pivotal moment occurs with the Little Entrance. The clergy process from the altar, carrying the Gospel Book. This procession represents the appearing of Christ in His public ministry—the Word of God stepping into the midst of the world. The priest prays, "Make ready our entrance to be the entrance of holy angels," highlighting the invisible, celestial dimension of the Liturgy.

Following the entrance, the choir chants the Troparion and Kontakion of the day. These variable hymns summarize the feast day or the saint being commemorated, offering a rich cycle of theological poetry that connects the faithful to the liturgical calendar.

The Trisagion Hymn and the Readings

Before the Scripture readings, the choir sings the **Trisagion**: "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us." This ancient hymn is believed to have been revealed by angels. In the **Divine Liturgy Of Saint John Chrysostom**, it serves as a bridge between the entrance and the Word.

The service then proceeds to the readings from the Epistles (Apostolos) and the Gospel. The reading of the Gospel is preceded by a solemn procession and the chanting of the Alleluia, creating a moment of intense expectation. The Gospel is read from the center of the church, symbolizing Christ preaching to all. Following the reading, the deacon or priest delivers a homily, explaining the Scripture and applying it to the lives of the faithful.

The Great Litany and the Prayer of the Catechumens

After the homily, the service ascends in prayer through the Great Litany (Litany of Fervent Supplication) and the Litany for the Departed. Then, a historical remnant of the Early Church appears: the dismissal of the Catechumens. In the ancient Church, those preparing for baptism were not allowed to witness the Eucharistic mystery. Today, while catechumens may remain, the prayer serves as a reminder of the sacred nature of what is about to occur and calls the faithful to spiritual discipline.

The Third Movement: The Liturgy of the Faithful (The Divine Sacrifice)

This is the heart of the **Divine Liturgy Of Saint John Chrysostom**. Once the unbaptized learners have been dismissed (symbolically or literally), the focus shifts entirely to the altar, where the Sacrifice of Christ is made present.

The Great Entrance and the Cherubic Hymn

The Liturgy of the Faithful begins with the Cherubic Hymn, one of the most beautiful and solemn moments of the entire service. The choir sings, "Let us who mystically represent the Cherubim… lay aside all earthly cares." As this hymn is sung, the priest and deacon process through the congregation with the diskos and chalice, carrying the prepared Gifts from the Table of Oblation to the altar. This Great Entrance symbolizes the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem, His voluntary journey to His Passion.

The faithful are called to "lay aside all earthly cares"—to set aside distractions, resentment, and worldly thoughts—and to focus entirely on the King of All, who is coming to be with them.

The Kiss of Peace and the Creed (Symbol of Faith)

After the Gifts are placed on the altar and covered, the deacon proclaims, "Let us love one another, that with one mind we may confess." The faithful respond by bowing to one another (historically with a kiss of peace), signaling that reconciliation with one another is necessary before communion with God.

This leads directly to the recitation of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. This is not a mere doctrinal statement to be repeated by rote; it is a confession of the community's shared faith. In the **Divine Liturgy Of Saint John Chrysostom**, the Creed acts as the boundary and foundation of the Eucharistic prayer. It is a declaration that the Church is united in faith before offering the sacrifice.

The Anaphora: The Eucharistic Prayer

This is the summit. The priest begins the Anaphora with the dialogue: "Let us lift up our hearts!" The faithful respond, "We lift them up unto the Lord." The priest then recites the great prayer of thanksgiving, recounting the economy of salvation from creation to the Incarnation. The climax is reached when the priest recites the Words of Institution: "Take, eat, this is my Body… Drink of it, all of you, this is my Blood…"

Then, the priest prays for the descent of the Holy Spirit (*Epiclesis*) upon the Gifts and upon the faithful. He blesses the bread and wine, and the Orthodox believe that at this moment, the bread and wine become truly and substantially the Body and Blood of Christ. This is the consecration. The moment is marked by the choir singing, "We praise you, we bless you, we give thanks to you, O Lord."

The prayer continues with intercessions for the Church, the Theotokos, the saints, the departed, and the civil authorities. The name of Saint John Chrysostom is commemorated at this point, acknowledging him as the author of this specific liturgy.

The Preparation for Communion

Following the Anaphora, the church prepares for Holy Communion. The Lord's Prayer is recited, uniting all voices in the petition for "daily bread"—which is understood in this context as the Bread of Life. The priest prays, "Holy things for the holy," and the choir responds that Jesus Christ alone is holy.

Communion of the Clergy and Faithful

The clergy first commune inside the altar. Then, the curtain is opened, and the Royal Doors are opened fully, signifying the removal of the barrier between heaven and earth. The priest brings the chalice out and says, "With the fear of God, faith, and love, draw near." The faithful approach, with arms crossed, to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. In the **Divine Liturgy Of Saint John Chrysostom**, this is the intimate union for which the entire service was prepared. It is not a symbol; it is a real partaking of the risen Lord.

The Conclusion: After Communion and the Dismissal

After Communion, the priest blesses the congregation with the remaining gifts, and the choir chants, "We have seen the true Light." The faithful are led into the world with a final blessing. The priest prays that the Lord will "increase the number of those who believe in You." The service concludes with a final litany of thanksgiving and the dismissal, where the priest sends the people forth into the world to live out the Gospel they have just witnessed and received. The final prayer of Saint John Chrysostom is often read, asking the Lord to remember the faithful in His Kingdom.

Conclusion: A Life-Shaping Encounter

The **Divine Liturgy Of Saint John Chrysostom** is far more than a collection of ancient prayers and chants. It is the spiritual home of the Orthodox Christian. It is a structured, theological, and mystical journey that transforms the participant from a spectator into a member of the heavenly host standing before the throne of God. Each petition, each hymn, and each procession builds upon the last, creating a rhythmic flow that carries the soul from the concerns of this world into the very presence of the Trinity. To attend this Liturgy is to enter a school of prayer, a hospital for the soul, and a foretaste of the eternal banquet. It remains, after nearly 1,700 years, the most profound and beautiful expression of the Church's faith, hope, and love for the God who came to be with us.