

LITURGY OF THE PRE-SANCTIFIED GIFTS

During The Great Fast the Ukrainian Catholic Church celebrates the Presanctified Liturgy on Wednesdays and Fridays. During the weekdays of the Fast (Monday thru Friday) the Divine Liturgy was not celebrated because of its joyful and festive nature. The people fasted from this type of celebration. However, the faithful needed to be strengthened by the Eucharistic Christ. They needed to know that He was with them as they struggled with the journey of The Great Fast. The Church therefore offers the faithful a Communion service – the Presanctified Liturgy.

The Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts may be characterized, without exaggeration, as the heart, the center of the services of The Great Fast. In some ancient manuscripts of the service books, it is known as the “Liturgy of the Great Quadragesima.” In fact, it is the service which best typifies this sacred time of the year.

The essence of this service is revealed in its very name: it is the “Liturgy of Gifts Pre-Sanctified.” This distinguishes it from the liturgies of St. Basil the Great and of St. John Chrysostom, in which the Eucharist, the offering and sanctification of the Gifts, takes place. During this service we are offered the Holy Gifts “pre-sanctified,” i.e. already sanctified at a liturgy served on a previous day.

This liturgy takes place in the context of Vespers, and consists of three parts. The first part is a regular Vesper service: consisting of the reading of psalms, the ancient hymn “Joyful Light”, and readings from the Old Testament. The readings are from the books of Genesis and Proverbs – the story of God’s creation and choosing His people and the ancient saying of wisdom. This part of the service includes the blessing with light – symbolizing Christ who dispels the darkness we experience in our life as we reflect on our sinfulness during this time of The Great Fast. We conclude with three profound bows, and the reading from the Book of the Proverbs.

The second part of the liturgy is the great incensing. It consists of a solemn incensing of the altar together with fervent prayer while we kneel. We pray to be made worthy of receiving the Body and Blood of the King. The rising incense reminds us of our prayer rising to the throne of the King. This part also is concluded with three profound bows.

The third part begins with the transfer of the Sacred Gifts – a Great Entrance. This is very solemn entrance, which we greet on our knees, for it is not bread and wine that is carried in, but the Lord Himself who comes as food for all to bring eternal life. The Sacred Gifts are carried in silence. As the Gifts are placed on the altar, we acknowledge the Presence of the Lord with three profound bows.

The Communion service takes place and we sing "Taste and see how good the Lord is", followed by prayers of thanksgiving.

The Presanctified Liturgy gives us a profound sense of the great reverence that is due our God. The service's connection to The Great Fast is reflected in its special "mournful" character. The Altar Table and sacred vessels containing the Holy Gifts are covered with dark-coloured vestments. Prayers are read with a sense of humility and tenderness. Overall, the entire service is marked by a special sense of mystery. We join all the saints who are around the throne of God, falling down before Him and giving Him glory!

For more information try this website: <http://www.easternchurchmusic.com/presanctified.html>