

The Proskomedie: The Liturgy of Preparation



Upon arriving in church, the priest prays a few prayers before the iconostasis, venerates the icons and enters the sanctuary. He kisses the gospel and the Holy Altar. Next, he puts on his vestments, blessing and kissing each item which reciting Scripture. After vesting the priest washing his hands signifying that he is approaching the altar of God with a pure heart.

The priest starts the Liturgy of Preparation at the table of preparation (Prothesis) during which the bread and wine are prepared for the Eucharist.

The Prothesis represents the cave of Bethlehem where our Lord and Savior was born. The table is located in the same room as the altar table, being simply a smaller table placed against the eastern wall

On this table there are 5 small loaves (prospora) recalling the five loaves from which Christ fed the 5000. (See The Gospel of Matthew 14:13-21). The one prosphoron is symbolic of the one "Bread" that all share .

Each of the loaves is made up of two round pieces of leavened dough, which are placed one on top of another. As these two pieces of dough are baked together, they become one united piece of bread. The double loaf symbolically represents the two natures of Jesus Christ: His human nature and His divine nature. In addition, the prospora is leavened with yeast. Prospora must always be leavened because we are celebrating the Resurrection of Christ. This is symbolized as the bread being risen and living, so to speak.

On this table is a special liturgical knife, symbolically called the spear, that is used for cutting the Eucharistic bread and a liturgical spoon for administering holy communion to the people. There are also special covers for the chalice and diskos and a cross shaped asterisk or star that holds the cover over the eucharistic bread on the diskos.



With the five prospora, red wine and water, the priest begins the Proskomedie. Using the spear, the priest makes the sign of the cross over the first prosphoron three times saying, "In the remembrance of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ." Next, the priest cuts the loaf on all four sides, making it into a perfect cube so that the seal with the IC XC NIKA symbol is completely intact. This square portion, called the Lamb, is the part that becomes consecrated during the Divine Liturgy and becomes the Body of Christ that the clergy and the laity will communion from. The priest places the Lamb in the center of the Diskos with IC XC NIKA seal facing up.

Next the wine and water are blessed and poured into the Chalice.
But why do we use bread and red wine?

Firstly, Christ Himself said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst." (Jn. 6:35) He also said, "I am the living bread which comes down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." (Jn. 6:51) Christ said, "For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed." (Jn. 6:55)

Secondly, at the institution of the Eucharist we hear in the Gospel of Matthew how "Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is My Body.' Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.'" (Mt. 26:26-28) As well, in the Gospel of Luke, Christ also breaks bread and says, "Do this in remembrance of Me." (Lk. 22:19)

A clear connection is drawn between Christ's body and blood with the use of bread and wine. During His crucifixion on the Cross, Christ sacrificed his real body and blood. During the Divine Liturgy, we offer bread and wine to God and receive the grace of Christ's sacrificial offering. In turn, God consecrates this offering of bread and wine, and they become the real Body and Blood of Christ. This is the reason that we use bread and wine for Holy Communion.

From the second prosporion (loaf), a large triangle is cut out of the top and placed on the Lamb's right side. This is in commemoration of the Holy Theotokos.

From the third prosporion, nine smaller triangles will be cut from the top and placed to the Lamb's left side in three rows of three. These nine small triangles commemorate the various saints of the Church.

The fourth prosporion is used for commemorations of the living. All of the particles for the living are placed in a line below the Lamb.

The fifth prosporion is used for commemorations of the departed. All of the particles for the departed are placed in a line below the particles for the living.



At this point, if a deacon is serving, he holds the censer as the priest blesses the incense saying the Prayer of the Censer. Next, the priest takes the Star cover, holds it over the censer and places it on the Diskos. The Priest then holds each of the smaller veils over the censer and places them on the Diskos and the Chalice, respectively, saying appropriate prayers for each. The larger veil, called the Aer, is wrapped around the censer and then covers the Chalice and Diskos together. Finally, the priest takes the censer and censers the covered offerings, which now become the Gifts ready to be brought forth during the Divine Liturgy to the Holy Altar for consecration.

With the Proskomedia complete, the priest is now ready to begin the Divine Liturgy. The Royal Doors are opened...