

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION AND EXPLANATION OF THE DIVINE LITURGY OF THE ARMENIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

I. THE PREPARATION

1. The Vesting (pg 1-4) – Vesting is performed privately. This shows that the assumption of a sacred function by a sinful man, representing the people in the church, is a mystery. The priest covers his sinfulness and performs the Liturgy as a functionary of Christ.

2. The Purification (pg 4-6) – The priest's washing his hands for ritual purity signifies the necessity of cleansing the soul of all uncleanness before approaching the saving mystery of the sacred Liturgy.

3. The Accession (pg 6-7) – The priest enters God's presence to perform his duty of celebrating the Divine Liturgy.

4. The Prothesis (pg 8-11) – The priest does two things. First, he receives in the name of God the offerings of the faithful (bread and wine), brought to him by the deacon. Second, he sets them on the Table of Prothesis, presenting them to God the Father in remembrance of the offering by Christ.

II. THE SYNAXIS

1. The Censing (pg 11) – The descending of the priest into the congregation and his walking among the people signifies the teaching ministry of Christ, when he came down from heaven and, doing honor to the human nature, assumed manhood and instructed men in the divine truths.

2. The Enarxis (pg 11-13) – the initial blessing proclaims the fact that the Church is the Kingdom of God.

3. The Lesser Entrance (pg 13-17) – Together with the angels, men are adorned with all the gifts of God. The Trisagion (Sourp Asdvadz),

addressed to the Second Person of the Trinity, is a glorification of the Word of God.

4. The Lections (pg 17-18) – Readings from the Old and New Testaments, along with the Gospel are read. After these, the sermon is traditionally delivered, to help explain and teach the Word of God. However, because parishioners arrive late to the Liturgy, the sermon has been pushed back in the service.

5. The Creed (pg 18-19) – This is the essential proclamation of the Christian faith, of which the Church is the depository.

6. The Prayers after the Lections (pg 19-22) – These prayers conclude the Synaxis, (bringing to mind Christ's sufferings on the cross, which the faithful too have to endure in this world) and a request for peace.

III. THE EUCHARIST

1a. The Great Entrance (pg 22-25) – This refers to the entrance of the gifts into God's presence on the Altar. It also represents Christ's entry upon his redemptive work through his passion and crucifixion. It shows the going of Christ up to Jerusalem and to the Cross, which was "the altar" of Christ's sacrifice.

1b. The Laying of the Gifts (pg 25-26) – This symbolizes the laying of the body of Christ in the sepulcher. After laying the gifts on the altar, the priest censes them in remembrance of the incense which the women brought to the tomb (Luke 24:1).

1c. The Kiss of Peace (pg 27) – This is an act of reconciliation for the unity of the Church in the love of God. This is when the faithful hug and kiss one another, declaring, "Christ is revealed amongst us" to which others respond, "Blessed is the revelation of Christ".

2a. The Prologue (pg 28-30) – This is the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer, the main prayer of the Divine Liturgy. Eucharist means 'thanksgiving', which is the very act we as faithful are performing: showing thanks to God for all that He does for us.

2b. The Anamnesis (pg 30-32) – This is a recount of all the salvific acts God has performed throughout history. The very act that Christ performed, establishing the Divine Liturgy at the Last Supper.

2c. The Epiclesis (pg 33-34) – This corresponds to the moment when Christ's body in the tomb was changed into a living, glorified body. Through the calling of the Holy Spirit, the Gifts now are infused with the Holy Spirit, transposing the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. This shows that the elements remain the same in every respect except that they receive a new function and power.

2d. The Diptychs (pg 35-39) – Those that have passed away are remembered, showing and emphasizing the fact that the souls of the dead are part of the living Body of Christ. It is here that the Eucharistic Prayer is completed.

2e. The Lord's Prayer (pg 41) – The faithful have 'received the spirit of adoption whereby we cry: Father'. The congregation exultantly bursts into singing the Lord's Prayer.

2f. The Inclination (pg 41-42) – This signifies the profound truth of the paradox that we can only have the right to be proud by being humble, just as Christ went through the uttermost degree of humility before he rose and ascended into heaven.

2g. The Elevation (pg 42) – This brings to mind the ascension of Christ, whereby he went up to heaven, to his holiness and 'sat with the Father', and shows the highest point of the upward process of the life of the soul.

2h. The Doxology (pg 43-44) – It is beautifully and dramatically expanded and made expressive, because of its importance with reference to the high point of spiritual experience developed in the Divine Liturgy. In saying 'Amen' three times, after each person of the Holy Trinity, the faithful seal their participation in the Sacrifice of Christ.

3a. The Intinction (pg 44) – Blood is the symbol of life. By the immersion of the sacramental Body of Christ, representing the

Church, in the sacramental Blood, this salvation by Christ's blood is signified.

3b. The Fraction (pg 45) – The breaking of the one Host signifies how the many members of the Church, the faithful, all belong to one body, Christ Jesus.

4a. The Prayers Before Communion (pg 45-46) – This is an expression of joy and gratitude for the privilege of being accounted worthy of communicating with Christ and also entreaties addressed to God to make the communicants worthy of the great mystery, in spite of their unworthiness.

4b. The Tasting (pg 45-47; 49-50) – This is when, first the priest and then the people, receive Holy Communion, truly becoming one body in Christ.

4c. The Thanksgiving (pg 50-52) – After receiving Holy Communion, the faithful together express their thanks for 'being filled by Your good things'.

IV. THE DISMISSAL

1. The Prayer Amid The Church (pg 52-53) – This is a closing prayer, spreading, as it were, the blessings of the Holy Sacrifice over the whole Church of Christ and the world.

2. The Last Gospel (pg 53-55) – This reading points to the theological foundation of the doctrine of the Sacrament of Holy Communion according to the teaching of the New Testament. "And the Word was made flesh" is the key phrase in the Gospel reading. The reception of the Word is paralleled with the reception of the Body and Blood of Christ through the Holy Sacrifice.

3. The Dismissal (pg 55) – The faithful kiss the Gospel and take "mahs" for those that could not participate in the Liturgy.

*St. Sarkis Armenian Orthodox Church
1805 Random Road
Carrollton, TX 75006
Prepared by Rev. Fr. Ghevond Ajamian*