

Getting the Right Vision of Liturgy

By Father Thomas J. Loya, STB, MA

Recently after a Sunday Divine Liturgy two cantors from my parish started to approach me. I could tell by their countenance that they were not happy about something. They wanted to register a complaint with me. No, it was not the chant settings in the green pew book. **“Father Tom,”** they said, **“the way that we are praying the Matins service at this parish prior to the Sunday Divine Liturgy is too short. It is not complete enough. Can we do an even fuller version of Matins each Sunday prior to the Liturgy?”** The Matins service prayed at my parish on Sunday morning begins at 9 a.m. and it usually concludes about 9:50 a.m. It runs nearly a full hour. The Divine Liturgy that follows just a few minutes later at 10 a.m. usually lasts over an hour. Yet my cantors wanted Matins to be longer!

Maybe as you just read the previous paragraph you are incredulous. Or maybe you are thinking, “What? The Liturgy itself goes over an hour and the cantors want the Matins to be longer? Don’t they know the Liturgy is too long already and it’s turning people off?” If this is what you might be thinking then this is precisely why you need to go “Back to SCHL.” Actually it is why we as the Church of Parma need to go “Back to SCHL” if there is any hope of Assembly 2014 bearing fruit.

Remember, **“Going Back to SCHL”** means **to retrieve or rediscover for the first time the Sacramental-Catholic-Human-Liturgical (SCHL) worldview that is the genius and soul of Byzantine Catholicism.** It is to see our experience of Liturgy and the very mission and purpose of the church through the sacramental-liturgical glasses, to see the ultimate “why” of church and Liturgy and to apply that vision to every aspect of church and of life itself.

As long and as rich as our services are – Matins, Vespers, Liturgy, etc. – how on earth could cantors be motivated to want them to be longer? It is because these cantors, praise God, have gone “Back to SCHL”? The cantors supported their reasons for a “longer” Matins by articulating to me what was dynamic, personally moving and transformative about the liturgical text of our Matins service. The cantor’s request was not about wanting more

“time,” for church to be even “longer.” **It was about wanting more of the genius of their own church and time be damned!** Hallelujah! Somebody is getting it right! The supposedly “too long” service of our Byzantine Church did not turn these cantors away. Rather it turned them on to Jesus Christ, to **the evangelical power that is innate to Byzantine liturgical worship** and they just can’t seem to get enough.

Pope Benedict XVI often taught that if in the church we get worship right then everything else will go right in the church. Conversely, if we don’t get worship right, nothing else in the church will go right. The assembly process unfolding in the Eparchy of Parma is all about getting the right vision of the very Liturgy in which we all worship and then configuring and renewing our entire eparchy and our lives according to that vision.

I often get phone calls on the weekends asking: “What time is your Mass?” I respond, “Our *Divine Liturgy* begins at 10 a.m. on Sunday.” The caller invariably follows up with, **“How long is it?”** My response: **“It’s timeless!”**

Father Loya is the pastor of Annunciation Byzantine Catholic Church in Homer Glen, Illinois and is the author of *Going Back to SCHL* for «Horizons» the official newspaper for the Eparchy of Parma. He is the host of “A Body of Truth” www.catholicradiointernational.com; host of “Light of the East Radio” www.byzantinecatholic.com; and member of the Tabor Life Institute www.taborlife.org and a founding member of EasternChristianMedia.com.