

# Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts

The **Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts** (Slavonic: *Liturgija Preždeoscjaščénnych Darov*) is a service unique to the Byzantine Rite. It is celebrated during the Great Fast, and provides the faithful with the opportunity to receive Holy Communion on those days when then the Eucharistic Sacrifice is not celebrated. The word «**Presanctified**» indicates that the "gifts" (the Body and Blood of Christ) which are distributed at the service are those consecrated at a previous Eucharist<sup>1</sup>.

In the liturgical books, this service is actually referred to as a **Divine Liturgy** (*Božéstvennaja Slúžba*). In English, these words usually refer to the Eucharistic sacrifice, with a consecration of bread and wine which become the Body and Blood of Christ. Therefore, the word "Divine" is often omitted from the title of the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, in order to avoid confusion.

This service is celebrated on the Wednesdays and Fridays of the Great Fast, the evenings of certain major feast days, and the first three days of Great and Holy Week. Depending on regional and local custom, it may also be celebrated on

- Wednesday and Friday before the start of the Fast, during Cheesefare Week.
- The first day of the Great Fast (Clean Monday in the first week)
- Thursday in the fourth week of the Fast, the day on which we chant the Great Canon of Saint Andrew of Crete.
- Any weekday of the Great Fast on which the Eucharist is not celebrated.

This service is not celebrated on Saturday or Sunday, the Church's principal Eucharistic days, or on the one great feast which falls during the Great Fast - namely, the feast of the Annunciation (March 25).

On those days, the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom or of Saint Basil is celebrated, and the celebrant consecrates additional Gifts to be distributed during the next days at the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts.

## Outline of the service

The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is a fusion of two elements: the celebration of Great Vespers, and a solemn service of Holy Communion. This celebration allows the faithful to break their fast on the strictest fasting days of Lent with the reception of Holy Communion. The service is held in the evening because the traditional fast continues through the end of the day. The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is not normally combined with any other service.

## Texts and sources

The official **Church Slavonic** texts for the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts can be found in the Ruthenian *Služébnik* (for the priest and deacon).

These texts must be supplemented from the Triodion, and (on a small number of feast days) from the Menaion.

Several English texts of the service have been published for use in the Byzantine Catholic Church: Monsignor William Levkusic's edition was the standard for the Archeparchy of Pittsburgh (until the publication of official books for the service in 2010, see below); while the eparchies of Parma and Passaic prepared later more extension books of their own.

In 2010, the Council of Hierarchs of the Byzantine Catholic Metropolia of Pittsburgh published official books for the service (a liturgikon or book for the clergy, and books for the people, with and without music) which may be used in any of the eparchies of the Metropolia.

### **The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts in the Parish**

In Europe and North America, the celebration of the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts largely died out in the course of the 20th century, being replaced by daily celebrations of the ordinary Divine Liturgy during the Great Fast, in imitation of Roman Catholic practice. (In the Christian West, the Eucharist or Mass is celebrated more frequently during the Fast, with appointed texts for each day, while in the Byzantine Rite, the weekdays of the fast are "aliturghial" - that is, the Eucharist is not to be celebrated.) The 1980's and 1990's witnessed a re-appearance of this service in parishes across the Byzantine Catholic Church.

The particular law of the Byzantine Catholic Church *sui iuris*<sup>2</sup> of Pittsburgh (promulgated in June 1999) required priests to celebrate the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, rather than the Divine Liturgy, on weekdays of the Great Fast.

Many parishes celebrate this service twice each week, while others (especially those that share a pastor with another parish) may celebrate it only once. On weekdays when the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gift is not celebrated, other devotions (such as the Moleben to the Cross, or the service of the Akathist to the Mother of God) may be held.

Many parishes hold a noonday service such as the Sixth Hour on Lenten weekdays, especially when the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts will be held in the evening. The Metropolitan Cantor Institute has prepared a booklet for the combined office of the Third and Sixth hour during the Great Fast, for such occasions.

### **Recommended reading**

- Alexopoulos, Stefanos. *The Presanctified Liturgy in the Byzantine Rite: A Comparative Analysis of its Origins, Evolution, and Structural Components*. (Liturgia Condenda Series, Peeters Publishers, 2009).
- *The Holy Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts according to the Byzantine Rite tradition*. Byzantine Leaflet Series, No. 21. (Pittsburgh: Byzantine Seminary Press, March 1981).
- Uspensky, Nicholas. *Evening Worship in the Orthodox Church*. (Crestwood, NY: Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985).

### **End Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> During Lent, the Roman Catholic Church has daily Masses. Only once during Lent is there a vestige of the «Presanctified Liturgy» - on Good Friday. The communion hosts are consecrated at the *Mass of the Lord's Supper* held on Holy Thursday evening.

<sup>2</sup> Latin canonical term meaning: *having full legal rights*.

