

# Introducing the Divine Liturgy

Liturgy and us

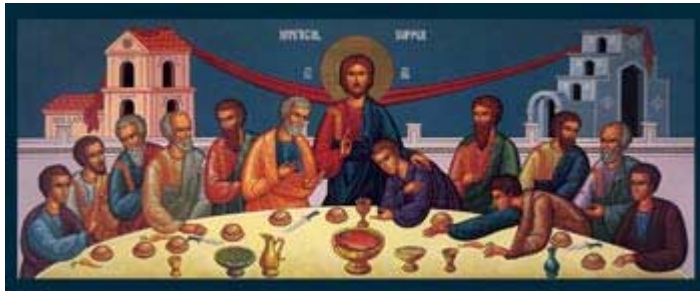
Each week as Christians, the Divine Liturgy is the highlight of our lives. Does this sound silly? Why do so many roll their eyes at the thought of attending Church Sunday morning? Perhaps we do this by not understanding what the Liturgy is, where it came from and what it means.

*Question: Does anyone know reasons why the Divine Liturgy is so important?*

The Liturgy is crucial to us because of the Sacrament of Holy Communion (Holy Eucharist). For Orthodox Christians Eucharist is absolutely necessary for salvation.

Where Divine Liturgy Comes From

For many Churches today Sunday worship is a modern celebration featuring loud music resembling a concert. Orthodox Divine Liturgy is very ancient, actually being modeled after the Last Supper.



*Question: Does anyone know what makes the Last Supper different than other meals the Apostles had with Jesus?*

The Last Supper had a special blessing and significant events:

Jesus blessed, gave thanks, broke bread and offered wine. He also commanded the disciples to repeat these activities. This is very different from the other suppers that the Apostles had with Him.

**Mark 14:22** And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, *blessed and broke it*, and gave it to them and said, "*Take, eat; this is My body.*" **23** Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. **24** And He said to them, "*This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many.*" **25** Assuredly, I say to you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." **26** And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

**Luke 22:17** He took the cup, and *gave thanks*, and said, "*Take this and divide it among yourselves;*" **18** for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." **19** And *He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."* **20** Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "*This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.*"

**Matthew 26:26** And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, *blessed*<sup>[2]</sup> and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "*Take, eat; this is My body.*" **27** Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "*Drink from it, all of you. 28 For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*"

If you look at this really hard, you'll see five things happening:

1. He blessed

2. He gave thanks
3. He broke bread and offered it with the cup
4. He commanded His Disciples to repeat what He did
5. He invited the Disciples to eat the bread as His Body, and the wine as His Blood.

These five things are the basic parts of our Divine Liturgy; 1) Blessing, 2) Thanksgiving (Eucharist) 3) Breaking of Bread 4) Remembrance and 5) Communion.

Remember that the word for thanksgiving, “eucharista” became the name for the Liturgy, and the Greek word “Litourgia” meaning “work for the people” came to be the name for this sacrament.

The Apostles did continue this practice and spread it throughout the early Churches. They continued in the truth that the center of Christian worship is to receive the Body and Blood of our savior. As Christ said

**John 6: 53** Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.  
**54** Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

Early Liturgy

It is apparent from early passages in the Bible that the Apostles did replicate the events of the Last Supper each time they gathered in Jesus’ name. The book of Acts and the Epistles (letters from the Apostles to the Churches) all show that they did this.

The first Christians celebrated Divine Liturgy in the evenings, just as Jesus had. The services were simple, having a prayer service and an “Agape” (love) meal. The prayer service has Bible readings, narrations of Jesus’ teachings, prayers of thanks and the words Jesus told the Apostles “Take eat: this is my body. Drink of it all of you; for this is my blood of the New Covenant.”

Everyone at each Liturgy would receive Holy Communion. It is plain from early writings that the meal was never thought to REPRESENT Christ, but was always thought of as being His actual Body and Blood.

The early Church grew rapidly, and they soon began holding Liturgy in the morning and having the common meal in the evening.

### Early Christian History

81 Domitian persecution begins  
 98 Trajan persecution begins  
 100 Justin Martyr is born  
 110 Martyrdom of Ignatius  
 117 Hadrian persecution begins  
 130 Conversion of Justin  
 130 Irenaeus is born  
 135 Justin writes Dialogue  
 138 Antonius Pius persecution begins  
 150 Justin's writes First Apology  
 150 Clement of Alexandria is born  
 155 Martyrdom of Polycarp

From the time of the Apostles to the the 100’s, we don’t have a written record of exactly how Christians celebrated the Liturgy, but we do know they held it on Sunday morning and followed the 5 points of the Last Supper. Very early in this time a special prayer was added asking the Holy Spirit to bless the faithful and make the change of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus.

Its important to remember the amount of persecution the early Christians had to go through.