

## INTRODUCTION

These notes are intended for the pupils on the Religious Education Program of the Geez Rite Catholic Community in the Archdiocese of Toronto. They are a first introduction to the bases of the Divine Liturgy (DL) in the ancient Geez Rite as celebrated on Sundays and on other major Solemnities.

It is a common complaint of the younger generation that at our liturgical celebrations they cannot understand both the language and the meaning of the ceremonies carried out during the celebrations. As a response in order to meet their request the Divine Liturgy (DL) in the Geez Rite is celebrated in English once a month, and the present notes hope to respond to the other requests of the youth, that the ceremonies be explained to them so that they can follow the spirit of the Liturgy as well. It is hoped that with this aid they may come closer and appreciate more the richness of the worship of their grandfathers. Not only, but that they also willingly and gratefully own this form of worship and will be able to pass it to their offspring. It is in fact the desire of the church that the faithful of the Eastern and Oriental Rites (E/OR) wherever they live, preserve their own way of worship and thus enrich the Universal Church and the particular local churches, if they are incorporated to a Diocese outside their own tradition.

It is only when the youth embrace the spirit and the practice of our Divine Liturgy that we will feel confident that the torch we have been handed out on the day of our baptism is effectively passed over to them and our way of worship will be perpetuated also in this New World.

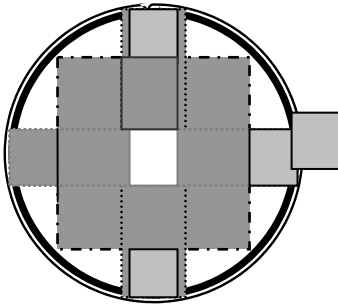
THESE NOTES GO WITH THE DOCUMENT: ***ORDER OF THE MASS IN GEEZ AND LATIN***

**THE DIVINE LITURGY (DL)**  
**IN THE GEEZ RITE**  
**THE ORDINARY (INITIAL) PART OF THE MASS**

**1. PREPARATORY RITES**

*These rites include the preparation of the the eucharistic elements: bread; the processional entrance and its antiphon and the offertory.*

The bread for the Eucharist is made of pure unleavened wheat flour prepared like a round "Gogo", cm 15 of diameter. It is baked immediately before mass and is brought to the altar right from the oven so that at Communion time it is still warm. The Orthodox Tewahdo generally ornate the upper surface with 12 small crosses, embedded within a larger cross. The uppermost and lowest most portions of the crosses are for the communion of the main celebrant and his assistant, then central part is dipped into the chalice and with that he signs the other portions of the consecrated bread, then the deacon receives it for his communion.



The wine for the Orthodox Tewhado is prepared the night before the DL from raisins. Only people of recognized integrity of life are assigned to the ministry of preparing the bread and wine for the Liturgy. The Catholics have adopted the Eucharistic elements as in the Roman rite.

Before starting Mass the celebrant prepares the chalice for the wine and he puts the host in the paten. While doing so there are prayers that he is expected to recite over each item, as well as over his vestments. Then the priest, the deacon and the congregation should read a meditation on the sacredness of the mystery they about to celebrate, followed by a prayer of immediate preparation:

*O Most High Lord God, you have taught us about this great Mystery for our salvation. You also called us, unworthy as we are, to serve you in this great Sacrifice. O divine Master, make us worthy by the power of the Holy Spirit to offer you this offering of Thanksgiving, praise and glory so that it may not be for our judgment and condemnation. You, o God, giver of salvation and grace, you who do all for everyone, make our oblation*

*acceptable in your presence. Yes, Lord, we entreat you, God our Lord, do not abandon your people because of their sins, or, even worse, because of my sins. . Your Holiness is holy as the richness of the Holy Spirit. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ to whom honor, thanksgiving, strength is due together with you and the Life giving Holy Spirit who is consubstantial with you, now and for ever, Amen.*

In the Catholic Church all the celebrants, namely, the deacon carrying the cross, his assistant, the one who carries the incense (5 people) the concelebrant priest, and the main celebrant process from the sacristy to the Altar in that order. In the Orthodox Tewahdo Church instead, the deacon and his assistant come to the Church from the "Betlehem" ("house of bread", namely the small house next to the church where the Eucharistic bread is baked) with three loaves in the "Mesoba work" or a golden basket, and the sub-deacon carries the wine crockery and present them to the celebrant in front of the Altar. The priest washes his hands and with wet hands chooses the one loaf for the Eucharist, and leaves the other two in the basket for the "*eulogia*".

The rubrics recommend that the communicants stay alert and devout to listen to the Word of God, avoiding chatting and laughing. In case anyone does so, the rubrics continue, "*if he is a priest let him enter into a seven day retreat, if a layperson let him be dismissed from the Church and denied communion.*" During the procession the deacon rings a hand bell and the congregation sings the "Entrance Antiphon" which for Sundays is:

*"Whoever acts justice and honors the Sabbath is righteous. Let the exile who has come near the Lord not say: 'Will he cut me off from his people?'. Whoever acts truly and respects the Sabbath is righteous."*

The Eucharistic celebration starts with the sign of the cross by the priest at the foot of the Altar and a call to the faithful to stand prayerfully during the sacrifice for the Holy Spirit is hovering over the oblations and overshadowing them.

Then the priest blesses and offers the bread recalling the offering of Abel, the offering of Melchizedek, that of David at the threshing of Ornan the Jebusite and the widow's mite at the Temple. He does the same with the wine recalling the miracle of Cana of Galilee where water was changed into wine by Jesus. He asks that the offerings brought to the altar be transformed into the Body and the Blood of Christ and blesses them in the name of the Trinity.

The priest concludes this part by asking the faithful to pray for him so that he can perform his priestly ministry like Melchizedek, Aaron and Zechariahs, and invites the faithful to say together the Our Father in a low voice.

## **2 - PRAISE AND WORSHIP**

*This part of the Mass has the following components:*

*The proclamation of the Oneness of God; The call for praise and thanksgiving with the prayer of St. Basil; The presentation of the personal offerings and a prayer over them*

*The first General Absolution; The Prayer of the faithful; The great prayer of incense and of adoration.*

The above mentioned silent recitation of the Our Father is kind of passage from the first to the second part, namely the part dedicated to a deep and long moment of worship that

include praise, presentation of the offerings, a moment of repentance and intercession and adoration.

At this point the rubrics ask for the priest to stand straight, with wide stretched hands, facing East and with loud voice proclaim: "*One is the Holy Father, one is the Holy Son, One is the Holy Spirit*", to which the congregation, in equally mystified posture, respond: "*Indeed holy is the Father, holy is the Son, Holy is the Spirit.*" and the continue with the Ps 117.

A long prayer of thanksgiving, attributed to St. Basil, is led by the priest. It is good to analyze the structure of this prayer because it is the format of most of the liturgical prayers:

a. The priest mentions the intention of the prayer:

*Let us give thanks to the merciful Lord, the Father of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, who does good things for us, for he has delivered us and helped us. He protected us, brought us near to himself and received us. He shielded us, strengthened us and brought us to this hour, Let us therefore pray that our Lord, God Almighty, may keep us in complete peace on this holy day and all the days of our life.*

The deacon invites people to pray: *Pray!*

b. The priest continues addressing the praise and thanksgiving directly to the Father:

*Lord God almighty, Father of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, we give you thanks over everything, for everything, and in everything, for you have covered us and helped us. You have protected us and brought us near to you. You have welcomed us and shielded us, strengthened us and brought us to this hour.*

The deacon now drives the congregation to pass from the praise into a petition:

*Pray and beseech that the Lord may have mercy on us, that he may have compassion on us, and according to what is fitting at all times, that he may accept the prayer and intercession of his saints on our behalf. May he make us worthy to participate in the blessed mystery and forgive us our sins.*

c. The priest then accept the invitation and passes to petition the blessings requested by the deacon and concludes with the doxology:

*... Through him, with him and with the Holy Sprit, the life-giver who is consubstantial with you, glory, honor and dominion are yours, now, for ever and ever, and world without end. Amen.*

The congregation participates with a silent recitation of the Lord's prayer, the invocation: *Kyrie eleison*, and the final Amen.

Quite often the second and third part of the priest prayer are merged into one. This could be a well defined model for any prayer: start by celebrating a divine attribute, continue with a well worded request and conclude with a doxology to the Trinity.

After the St. Basil's prayer, the assistant celebrant invites the faithful to pray for those who have brought their offering in cash or in kind as well as for those who do not have enough to be able to give. Why the prayer for the collection is done at this point is not clear to me, since the Coptic (Egyptian and the Syriac) traditions do not have it here. One reason could be that immediately afterwards, the priests offers again a prayer over the Eucharistic oblations and so he could include also our participation in the sacrifice with a

personal donation. This gives more meaning to the Eucharist intended to be for our spiritual and physical healing, for the forgiveness of sins and the growth in our life in the Spirit.

The priest proceeds to cover the bread and wine with the veil: a symbolic gesture that reminds of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, the Pharisee on the Calvary on the first Good Friday.

At the invitation of the deacon the congregation fall to their knees for the "Absolution of the Father". The prayer recalls the mission entrusted by Jesus to the priest to forgive sins and entreats the Lord Jesus to break and cut every bond of the presents' sins whether committed knowingly or unknowingly, in deceit or in evilness of heart, whether in deed or in word, or through narrow mindedness. He goes in great details for the gift of God's mercy and forgiveness: "*Purify, absolve, free all your people. Fill us with the fear of your name and make us stand in the doing of your holy will.*" The petition is concluded as always with the ritual doxology.

While the people remain still in deep prayer the deacon from the lectern leads the intercessory prayers for the Universal and local Church, which include the hierarchy, the monks and the virgins, the laity, the prisoners, those deprived, sick, the deceased, the climate and the yields of the fields. At the invitation:

*Let us then stand in the Holy Spirit, in order to grow in wisdom and grace so that we can glory in his name and be built upon the foundations of the prophets and the apostles. Let us therefore approach the Lord and God so that he can hear and accept our prayers.*

everybody stands up. If incense is used at Mass (which should be the general case, only that Geez rite Catholics have introduced the "low" and "high" Mass style of the Latin rite) here the incense and the burning coals are blessed and a few grains of incense are burned into the censer. Naturally, the smoke of the incense (symbol of the prayers of the faithful that are presented to God by the saints in heaven cf. Ap. 5:8; 8:3) is presented to the Triune God as a sign of adoration. The Blessed Mother is asked to present the pure smoke and the offerings to God on our behalf. Presenting the incense the priest chants the divine attributes:

*Eternal God, without beginning and without end, the first and the last, great in your wisdom, powerful in your works, admirable in your counsels, steadfast in your promises, you are everywhere and in everything. Be now with us, stay among us to purify us and sanctify our minds, hearts and spirits. Grant us to sacrifice of blessing, which you will receive within the veil of the Holy of Holies, your eternal dwelling place.*

Then the altar is censed with prayers for the Church, the hierarchy, the country and its leaders, and the faithful.

At the foot of the altar with the censer in hand the priest chants with loud voice: Priest:

*Let us bow down*

Congregation: *Before the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit*

Priest: *Peace be to you*

Congregation: *O Holy Church, dwelling place of God*

Priest: *Pray for us*

Congregation: *O Virgin Mother of God*

Priest: *You (to the Blessed Mother) are*

Congregation: *the golden censer that bore the fiery coal ...*

while the choir chants this Marian antiphon, the priest incenses around the altar towards the four cardinal points of the world with a Trinitarian doxology each time. Then the priest incenses the clergy one by one, the faithful and the icons in the Church. Back at the altar the celebrant still with the smoking censer in his hands once more prayer for the forgiveness of his and the faithful' sins. Recalling God's powerful deed in front of the walls of Jericho he prays that the same miracles happens now with the wall of his and the faithful' sins.

With this second part of the celebration also has come to an end.

### **3. THE LITURGY OF THE WORD**

*Introductory prayers, - the readings from the Pauline, Catholic letters and the Acts of the Apostles - Responses of the faithful - Prayer of the incense, the Trisagion - Reading of the Gospel: Introductory prayers - Responsorial Psalm - the Gospel - the homily: silence, it is God's time - Intercessory prayers - the Creed - Purification - Prayer for Peace.*

After the solemn moment of worship and praise which ends with the sanctification of the whole Church with the smoke of the incense, everybody is invited to sit down and prepare themselves for the Word of God that is going to be proclaimed from the lectern. In the Geez rite there should be four readings at each celebration: the first from the letters of St. Paul or the letter to the Hebrews, (read by the deacon facing West), the second from the catholic letters or the Apocalypse (read by the sub-deacon facing North), the third from the Acts (read by the assistant celebrant facing South) and finally the Gospel (read by the main celebrant facing East).

This section of the Mass is opened with a prayer by the celebrant who asks that the conversion experienced by St. Paul, who from a persecutor turned into an apostle and a preacher of the Gospel, happens again in each one of the present. He asks for a mind focused on the message, an understanding which brings the listener to practice the message.

The deacon goes to the Lectern proclaiming: *"If someone does not love Jesus Christ, and does not believe in his virginal birth from Mary, Virgin in body and virgin in mind, let him be an anathema, until Jesus' second coming."*

After the reading he ends with the blessing: *"May the blessing of the Father, the love of the Son and the richness of the Holy Spirit which descended on the Apostles in the Upper Room descend upon me and upon each one of you."* To which the congregation replies: *"Saint Paul you who were rewarded with a martyr's crown and whose message has a healing power, pray for us that for his holy name and by his great love and mercy, Jesus may save us."*

Likewise, the second and third readings are introduced with a prayer by the celebrant, a proclamation by the readers before and after the readings and the related responses by the congregation.

The Gospel instead is introduced with a more solemn and longer ceremony. The priest puts some grain of incense in the censer with relative prayer and blessing, at the foot of the altar alternates with the congregation a long prayer of praise and worship which ends

up with the statement: *"O Christ, our Redeemer, you are the incense which has come to save us, have mercy on us."*

The deacon and his assistant(s) line up outside the sanctuary facing the priest and the congregation, each holding their processional crosses with their right hand and a burning candle with the other hand. The priest starts the solemn Trisagion: *"Holy Lord, Holy mighty one, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us"* followed by a short form of a creed and the Prayer of the Kidan (prayer of the Covenant), which ends up with the Trinitarian doxology: *"To the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be thanksgiving and glory always, now and for the ages to come."*

The Gospel prayer which follows asks God and Jesus Christ to make us worthy to hear the Good message because he had proclaimed the apostles blessed since they could hear and see what prophets and kings of the past wished but did not get to see and hear. The response of the congregation is: *"May he make us worthy to hear the holy Gospel."*

The deacon now turns to the altar and sings three times an appropriate verse from the psalms, according to the celebration and the Gospel of the occasion. Each time the congregation repeats the same verse in the tune. At major celebrations the drum accompanies the verses and the joyful sound (ululation) of women give to the moment a unique solemnity. The priest blesses the four corners of the world and asks God to let the word sown through the Gospel reading yield thirty, sixty and hundredfold more. He burns a few grain of incense and incensing the Gospel, held up open by the deacon at his head height, blesses it:

*"Blessed be God, the Father, the almighty!"* Response: *"Give thanks to the Father!"*

*blessed be the only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ"* Response: *"Give thanks to the Son!"*

*blessed be the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete."* Response: *"Give thanks to the Holy Spirit!"*

Holding the Gospel open at the reading of the day and lifting it up, the celebrant sings in a loud voice, while solemnly processing around the altar with the all the servants:

*The Holy Gospel proclaimed by N.N. (or preached by John) !!!*

The Congregation reacts with the acclamation: *"Glory to you o Christ, my Lord and my God, all the times!!!"* He then presents the servers the Gospel with the statement: *"Here is the Gospel of the Kingdom of heaven!"* and the response by each individual is: *"We believe in the Word of the Gospel!"* After a short blessing adapted to the celebration and the congregation, the priest invites everybody to say the Lord's prayer and finally proclaims the Gospel reading of the day, followed by a conclusion proper to each Gospel writer. Equally, the congregation response will be a different one according to the Evangelist.

At this point the missal makes a consideration. I will simply translate it, since it is very plain and clear:

*At prayer time and during the DL when the Word of God is proclaimed it is fit that everybody keeps silent and let themselves be caught by the newness of the message, and be moved to give glory and sanctify him while listening to the words of his Majesty's Gospel. Because when the proclaim of a world king is read not one person dares talk, otherwise he would be punished and humiliated. How much more so then would we show respect and attention to the word of the heavenly King.*

The rubrics continue with two self explaining regulations.

1. *After the reading of the Gospel the celebrant, the other priests present and all the faithful kiss the book of the Gospel saying privately: "We believe in the Holy Gospel" While doing so men should uncover their head. Even those who for any reason are not able to uncover their head during prayer and at the DL, they should do it at least during the reading of the Gospel, even if this practice is not in use.*

2. *Between the Gospel and the reception of the Holy Communion and the final blessing of the priest it is not convenient that people leave the Church unless on an emergency.*

At this point, generally, Catholic would have the homily, i.e. an explanation and application of the readings of the day. This is the moment when the written word becomes spoken and applied word, so that it can shed light to our steps and lamp for our daily journey during the coming week. It is very important to pay attention and focused during the homily because, practically it is almost the most important part of our Sunday worship this far. The priest has been praying and preparing himself for this homily and so you can trust that through his mouth the Holy Spirit is to teach you important points of your belief, showing you on how to respond to God's grace and to react against the devil's attacks, how to reach out to your neighbor and be a witness to him. Often it is not the whole homily that strikes you, but a sentence, a biblical quote, an example or also the strength with which the message is passed. Sometimes you will feel elated by the message, other times you will feel challenged or even threatened. Your response should be equally thankful and thoughtful. Other times you may be unable to grasp the main message. It does not matter, some time later something of what you heard today will click in with another experience and the first sermon will make sense. Once in a while, no matter how focused you are you may feel bored by the homily. Stay humble and quiet, someone else may be touched by that very homily, be cooperative with the grace of God. Remember this: "what you will get out from the homily is proportioned to your preparedness to receive, nothing more nothing less." St. Paul's experience on the way to Damascus is a once in a life time experience. God cannot keep you falling from the horse, you would end up with all your bones broken ...

In the early centuries, when there were adult catechumens preparing for the Christian Initiation Rites, they were allowed to participate at the liturgy up to this point and after the homily the deacon would be invited them to leave the congregation. Even though there are not catechumens any more, the Geez liturgy has still retained the invitation for them to vacate the building. The time after the homily and before the Eucharistic Prayer is a moment when the faithful exercise in a special way their priestly role: The priest announces three intentions of intercessory prayers: For the Universal Church, for the worldwide and local hierarchy, and finally for the local Congregation. The Congregation responds with the petition: *Kyrie eleison!* And the third time: "*bless our Congregation with peace!*" thus anticipating the next intention of prayer. Before that though, the deacon invite everybody to say the Creed in the "Wisdom of God." In this way the People of God exercise their prophetic ministry of proclaiming the revealed truth.

Again, before passing to the prayer for peace, the priest pass to symbolically washing his hands announcing this severe warning: "*Let those of pure heart approach to receive of the mysteries, but those with impure heart, with anger, evilness and sexual offences let them keep at a distance so that they do not receive the pain reserved to Satan and his*

*followers."* The deacon reinforces the admonition adding a few more cases that prevents one from receiving Holy Communion, like: *lack of interest in the divine, disrespect in Church, evil intentions.* A rubric warns the celebrant not to skip this admonition in order to shrug any responsibility from himself.

Now the congregation is ready to pray for peace, for healing from wounds caused by anger, envy, evil thoughts and deeds, evil memories as a cause of death. The priest prays for a holy peace whose effects are immortality and celestial richness found in Christ. The congregation join the priest in singing the Angels song in Bethlehem, and respond to the deacon: "*O Christ our Lord, make us worthy to exchange a holy kiss like the saints do.*"

This ends the first part of the Mass. It started with the washing of the hands of the priest and a prayer that the Holy Spirit descends on the offerings, it ends with the washing of the hands a second time and the hope that Christ's peace fills the congregants' hearts. This indicates that something very holy is about to happen, because the washing of the hands is a preparatory sign rather than a conclusion.