

# Worship Services of the Orthodox Church

## The Daily Cycle

The Daily Cycle of divine services is the recurring pattern of prayer and worship that punctuates each liturgical day in the life of the Orthodox Church. Monasteries generally serve the entire cycle of services. Some cathedrals do, as well. Most parishes do not.

The Divine Liturgy is not itself a part of the Daily Cycle but is inserted into the cycle, usually after Orthros or the Sixth Hour. In some cases it is combined with Vespers. The service of Typika is related to the Divine Liturgy and is often celebrated on days the Divine Liturgy is not appointed.

### Services

The services of the Daily Cycle are usually contained in a bound collection called the Book of Hours, also known as the Horologion (Greek) or Chasoslov (Slavonic).

The Daily Cycle follows this pattern:

- \* Vespers (sunset)
- \* Compline (after-dinner) - also known as Apodeipnon
- \* Midnight Office (12:00am) - also known as Mesonyktikon
- \* Orthros (sunrise) - also known as Matins
- \* First Hour (6:00am)
- \* Third Hour (9:00am)
- \* Sixth Hour (12:00pm)
- \* Ninth Hour (3:00pm)

### Aggregations

Although each service of the Daily Cycle has a particular time traditionally associated with it, in current practice the services are more commonly served together in one of three aggregations.

\* The Evening Aggregate usually consists of Ninth Hour, Vespers, and Compline. It commences shortly before sunset.

\* The Dawn Aggregate usually consists of Midnight Office, Orthros, and First Hour. It usually begins shortly before sunrise.

\* The Midday Aggregate consists of Third Hour and Sixth Hour. The Divine Liturgy or Typika may be included in the Midday Aggregate.

On days when Great Compline is appointed (e.g., weekdays in Great Lent), it constitutes the entirety of the Evening Aggregate. Vespers is shifted to the Midday Aggregate.

### All-Night Vigil

On the eves of First Class Feasts, Second Class Feasts, and certain Third Class Feasts, a special aggregate, known as the All-Night Vigil, may be served. In such case, the other aggregations may be altered slightly (e.g., including Little Vespers in the Evening Aggregate). Although there is some variance in practice, the All-Night Vigil generally includes at least Great Vespers, Orthros, and First Hour.

## Vespers

The office of Vespers is the evening prayer given prior to the celebration of the next day, such as the feast day of a Saint, an event in the life of Christ or the Theotokos, or the Resurrection of Christ, which is celebrated on every Sunday of the year. Since in Orthodox tradition the day begins at sundown, Vespers is actually the first service of the day.

The general structure of the Orthodox service of Vespers is as follows (psalm numbers are according to Septuagint):

- \* Vespers opens with the Trisagion and then the Proemial Psalm 103 (Bless the Lord, O my soul; O Lord my God, Thou hast been magnified exceedingly).
- \* Litany
- \* A collection of psalms, called a kathisma is read. On Saturdays, the first kathismata is read (Psalms 1-8).
- \* Psalm 140 (Lord I have cried unto Thee), 141, 129, and 116 are chanted in the tone of the week. Starting with the last two verses of Psalm 141, verses about the feast day (or Christ's resurrection on a Saturday evening) are chanted alternately with the verses.
- \* The hymn "O Joyous Light" is sung.
- \* The Prokeimena are chanted.
- \* On occasional feast days, there are one or more readings from the Old Testament.
- \* The prayer "Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this evening without sin" is read.
- \* Litany of Fervent Supplication
- \* On major feast days, a Liti will be served at this point. The clergy and the cantors will process to the back of the church in front of an icon of the feast or saint being commemorated. After the cantors chant hymns pertaining to the feast, the deacon or priest will read a long litany while the cantors chant "Lord, Have Mercy." The priest ends with a long prayer invoking the intercessions of the saints and the Theotokos. After the petitions, the priest will bless five loaves of bread in the center of the church, which are distributed to the faithful after the service. Liti ends after the hymn "O Theotokos and Virgin" is chanted. Then the service continues as normal.
- \* The Aposticha are chanted. These are verses that teach about the feast day (or on a Saturday evening, Christ's resurrection).
- \* The Nunc dimittis, the canticle of St Simeon ("Now lettest thou Thy servant depart in peace") is read. (from the Gospel of Luke II:29-).
- \* The Apolytikia (Troparia) are chanted, which commemorate the feast of the following day.
- \* The closing prayers are read.

## Orthros

Orthros, also called Matins, is the longest and most complex of the daily cycle services. Unless it is celebrated as a vigil in the evening, orthros (Greek for "early dawn" or "daybreak") is celebrated in the morning. While some sections of Orthros follow the eight-tone cycle, others follow the eleven-part cycle of the Resurrectional Gospels.

- \* Sunday Orthros opens with the priest's exclamation Blessed is our God ..., Heavenly King ..., and the Trisagion Prayers. (Note: Heavenly King ... is omitted between Pascha and Pentecost.)
- \* The chanter or reader reads the Royal Troparia (Lord, save your people and bless your inheritance ...).
- \* The deacon offers a brief litany.
- \* The six psalms (3, 37, 62, 87, 102, and 142 - Septuagint numbering) are read.
- \* The deacon intones the Litany of Peace.
- \* Theos kyrios and the apolytikion are chanted.
- \* The small synapte is offered by the deacon.

- \* The kathismata are chanted.
- \* The reader chants the evlogetaria (Blessed are you, O Lord, teach me your statutes).
- \* The small synapte is offered again by the deacon.
- \* The Hypakoe is read by the chanter to prepare for the message of the Gospel reading.
- \* The Anavathmoi (hymns of ascent) are chanted.
- \* The Prokeimenon are chanted.
- \* The order of the Gospel is followed: the deacon intones Let us pray to the Lord ..., the priest responds with a prayer, and the chanter sings three times, Let everything that breathes praise the Lord. One of eleven Gospels is read; these Gospels each address a different part of the Resurrection narrative, because it is Sunday, the feast of the Resurrection. Having beheld the Resurrection of Christ ... is read by the chanter.
- \* The 50th Psalm is chanted.
- \* Glory..., both..., and a hymn are chanted.
- \* The deacon prays, O God, save your people and bless your inheritance ...
- \* The canons are chanted: first and third odes; small synapte; mid-ode kathisma; kontakion, oikos, synaxarion (commemorating the saints of the day); and katavasies (odes 1-8).
- \* The chanter sings the Magnificat while the deacon censes the church.
- \* The ninth ode of the katavasiai is chanted.
- \* The deacon again prays the small synapte.
- \* The chanter sings Holy is the Lord our God three times.
- \* The Exapostilaria (hymns related to the day's Gospel, or the day's feast) are chanted.
- \* The Lauds or Ainoi are chanted, slowly (Let everything that breathes praise the Lord.), followed by the doxastika.
- \* The Great Doxology is chanted. (Many consider the doxology to be the first part of the Divine Liturgy, as this often follows the Sunday Orthros.)

There are seven types of Orthros:

### Basic Forms

- \* Sunday Orthros: the longest of the regular orthros services. If this service is celebrated in its entirety it can last up to three hours. It contains three canons, apart from any additional festal canons which may be added. As a result, in most practical situations, abbreviations are made. Often, this Orthros is part of a vigil.
- \* Daily Orthros: there is no Gospel.
- \* Feast-day Orthros with Gospel.

### Special Forms

- \* Lenten Orthros: penitential material added (hymns and prayers).

Orthros services related to the Paschal feast:

- \* Great and Holy Friday Orthros: there are twelve Gospel lessons; Antiphons are used (originating in a different office). The troparion sung at the 15th antiphon: Today is hung upon the cross... (Simeron krematai).
- \* Great and Holy Saturday Orthros. This contains some elements of the old cathedral office: procession with epitaphios, reading of three pericopes (OT, epistle, Gospel) at the end.
- \* Paschal Orthros. This is celebrated from Pascha Sunday until Thomas Sunday. The six psalms and the praises are not part of this service.

## The Divine Liturgy

The Divine Liturgy is the central worship service of the Church. Its components will not be listed here. Its purpose is to celebrate the sacrament of the Eucharist, or Holy Communion. There are four liturgies in use by the Orthodox Church: the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, which is celebrated on most ordinary Sundays, the Liturgy of St. Basil, which is celebrated during Great Lent and on other special occasions, the Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts, which is celebrated on Wednesdays and Fridays during Great Lent, and the Liturgy of St. James which is celebrated on October 23.

### Paraklesis

A paraklesis (pl., parakleses) is a service of supplication specifically for the living (as opposed to a Memorial Service, which is a supplication for the departed). This service is most often addressed to the Theotokos, but may be used to seek the intercessions of any saint. The distinguishing feature of a paraklesis is the inclusion of a supplicatory canon to the saint whose intercessions are being sought. A paraklesis can be served as a stand-alone service or, in a slightly abbreviated form, in conjunction with vespers. It is appropriate to be served at any time of need.

#### Dormition Parakleses to the Theotokos

During the Dormition Fast (August 1-14), a paraklesis is appointed to be served each evening, except on Saturday evenings and the eves of the feasts of Transfiguration (August 5) and Dormition (August 14.) The parakleses of the Dormition Fast use, on alternate days, the Small Supplicatory Canon to the Most Holy Theotokos (composed by Theosterictus the Monk in the 9th Century) and the Great Supplicatory Canon to the Most Holy Theotokos (composed by Emperor Theodore I Ducas Lascaris in the 13th century). The cycle of the Dormition parakleses is determined by two rules of thumb: (a) the cycle begins with the Small Supplicatory Canon whenever August 1 falls on a Monday through Friday; and (b) on Sunday evenings, the Great Supplicatory Canon is always appointed.

#### Paraklesis to the Theotokos outside the Dormition Fast

Outside the Dormition Fast, a paraklesis directed to the Theotokos is always chanted with the Small Supplicatory Canon. The texts of various supplicatory canons can be found in many popular prayer books, service books, and horologia.

### Classification of Feasts

In the Orthodox Church, liturgical celebrations are ranked according to a hierarchy of several classifications. Each class has its own characteristics and is expressed in the divine services and disciplines of the Church in a particular way.

Pascha is in a class of its own, ranking above all other commemorations.

The twelve Great Feasts are divided between First Class Feasts (feasts of our Lord) and Second Class Feasts (feasts of the Theotokos). The lesser classes—Third Class Feasts, Fourth Class Feasts, and Fifth Class Feasts—commemorate the lives of the saints, holy events, and holy objects. Between the Third Class and Fourth Class there are two Intermediate Classes.

#### First Class Feasts—Feasts of the Lord

- Elevation of the Holy Cross, September 14
- Nativity of Christ (Christmas), December 25

Theophany (sometimes called Epiphany), January 6  
Palm Sunday, the Sunday before Pascha  
Ascension, forty days after Pascha  
Pentecost, fifty days after Pascha  
Transfiguration, August 6

\* Most of these feasts have both a forefeast and a leavetaking (exceptions: Palm Sunday has neither; Ascension and Pentecost have a leavetaking but no forefeast).

\* An All-Night Vigil is appointed for the eve of the feast.

\* At Great Vespers

- The kathisma reading from the Psalter that follows the litany of peace is omitted unless the feast coincides with a Sunday, in which case the first kathisma (Psalms 1-8) is read at Great Vespers on Saturday evening as usual (exceptions: the first kathisma is omitted on the eve of Pentecost and on the eves of Nativity, Theophany, and Transfiguration when those feasts fall on a Sunday).

- Old Testament readings follow the prokeimenon.

\* Festal Orthros

- The polyeleos (Psalms 134 and 135) is chanted immediately after the second poetic kathisma (on a Sunday it replaces the amomos (Psalm 118) as the third reading from the Psalter).

- Select Psalm verses from the eclogarion can follow the polyeleos, if desired.

- There is a gospel pericope for the feast (chanted from the holy doors and without a veneration following).

- The praises and the great doxology are chanted.

\* At the Divine Liturgy for the feast, the patronal troparion of the temple is suppressed.

\* The divine services are for the feast alone; all other commemorations are suppressed (even on a Sunday).

\* When the feast falls on a fasting day, the fast is relaxed to permit fish, wine, and oil.

### Second Class Feasts—Feasts of the Theotokos

Nativity of the Theotokos, September 8

Presentation of the Theotokos, November 21

Dormition (Falling Asleep) of the Theotokos, August 15

Presentation of Christ, February 2+

Annunciation, March 25+

+ These are considered Feasts of the Theotokos, but they also share certain characteristics proper to First Class Feasts.

\* These feasts have both a forefeast and a leavetaking.

\* An All-Night Vigil is appointed for the eve of the feast.

\* At Great Vespers

- When the feast falls on any day other than Sunday, the kathisma reading appointed for the day is replaced by the first stasis of the first kathisma (Psalms 1-3) (exceptions: at the Great Vespers for the Presentation of Christ and Annunciation the kathisma reading is omitted altogether).

- When the feast falls on a Sunday the first kathisma (Psalms 1-8) is read at Great Vespers on Saturday evening as usual.

- Old Testament readings follow the prokeimenon.

\* At Festal Orthros

- The polyeleos (Psalms 134 and 135, or Psalm 44 with its poetic refrains) is chanted immediately after the second poetic kathisma (on a Sunday it replaces the amomos (Psalm 118) as the third reading from the Psalter).

- Select Psalm verses from the eclogarion can follow the polyeleos, if desired.

- There is a gospel pericope for the feast (chanted from the holy doors and without a veneration following).

- The praises and the great doxology are chanted.

\* At the Divine Liturgy for the feast, the patronal troparion of the temple is suppressed.

\* When the feast falls on a Sunday the services for the feast are combined with those of the Resurrection from the Octoechos.

\* When the feast falls on a fasting day, the fast is relaxed to permit fish, wine, and oil (exception: when Annunciation falls during Holy Week, wine and oil (but not fish) are permitted; when Annunciation falls on Holy Friday or Holy Saturday, wine (but not oil or fish) are permitted).

### Third Class Feasts—Vigil and Polyeleos Commemorations

Third Class Feasts are commemorations for which the Menaion includes a complete akolouthia.

\* These feasts generally do not have a forefeast or a leavetaking (exceptions: the commemorations of St. Demetrios (October 26), the Nativity of the Forerunner (June 24), Ss. Peter and Paul (June 29), and the Beheading of the Forerunner (August 29) each has a leavetaking).

\* An All-Night Vigil may be appointed if there is a text for Little Vespers in the Menaion, in which case the commemoration is designated Vigil. Otherwise, an All-Night Vigil is not appointed and the commemoration is designated Polyeleos.

\* At Great Vespers

- When the feast falls on any day other than Sunday, the kathisma reading appointed for the day is replaced by the first stasis of the first kathisma (Psalms 1-3).

- When the feast falls on a Sunday the first kathisma (Psalms 1-8) is read at Great Vespers on Saturday evening as usual.

- Old Testament readings follow the prokeimenon.

\* At Festal Orthros

- The polyeleos (Psalms 134 and 135, or Psalm 44 with its poetic refrains) is chanted immediately after the second poetic kathisma (on a Sunday it replaces the amomos (Psalm 118) as the third reading from the Psalter).

- Select Psalm verses from the eclogarion can follow the polyeleos, if desired.

- There is a gospel pericope for the feast (chanted from the holy doors and without a veneration following).

- The praises and the great doxology are chanted.

\* When the feast falls on a Sunday the services for the feast are combined with those of the Resurrection from the Octoechos.

\* When the feast falls on a fasting day, the fast is relaxed to permit wine and oil (exception: the Beheading of the Forerunner (August 29) is always observed as a strict fast day when it falls on a weekday; when it falls on a Saturday or Sunday wine and oil are permitted). If it is the patronal feastday, fish may be permitted, as well.

### Intermediate Classes (Katholicon and Small Bells), Fourth Class Feasts, and Fifth Class Feasts

#### **Other Services**

The Orthodox Church also has many Sacramental services for confessions, healing (unction), baptisms, chrismations, ordinations, weddings, and also for funerals, memorials, consecrations, blessings (such as the artoklasia) and for other special occasions such as the Akathist Service (Salutations to the Virgin Mary or Cheretismi), celebrated on the five Fridays before the Annunciation (March 25).

(This list was compiled from various sources by Stan Takis. More information is available at [www.newbyz.org](http://www.newbyz.org).)