

Orthros Explained

Orthros is part of the daily cycle of services of the Orthodox Church. In addition to offering prayers and scripture readings, these services celebrate and teach us about the saints and events of the day upon which the service is given.

Orthros is the second service of the day after Vespers, the evening service. (In the Church, a day begins at sundown.) It is the service at daybreak. Orthros is not by definition a preparatory service for the Divine Liturgy, although it can serve that purpose on days when a Divine Liturgy is given.

The content of the Orthros service can be classified in two parts:

- **The Ordinary** – Readings, Prayers, Petitions, and Hymns that are done in almost every Orthros service.
- **The Proper** – Parts of the service that apply to the specific day of the service.

The contents of the **Sunday Proper** are dependent on 3 factors:

- The musical Tone of the week. There are 8 tones that cycle through the year.
- The gospel reading, one of 11 concerning the Resurrection that cycle through the year.
- The feast of the day, and/or a festal season.

Feasts and Seasons

- **The Menaion** – This is a calendar of feasts that are attached to specific days of the year. They do not move from these dates.
- **The Triodion** – This is a schedule of moveable feasts that occur four weeks from the beginning of Lent through to the Saturday of Holy Week.
- **The Pentecostarion** – Another schedule of moveable feasts beginning with Pascha through to the Sunday of All Saints.

Major feasts last for a period of days, starting with days before the feast and ending with days after the feast. The more important the feast, the longer the period. There are also dates of a festal season that determine when to chant a certain kontakion or an Orthros canon. (These dates are listed in an appendix of the **Sunday Orthros Ordinary** book.)

The **structure** of most Sunday Orthros services is as follows:

- **First Ordinary:** The opening prayers, the reading of Psalms 3, 37, 62, 87, 102, and 142, and the Litany of Peace.
- **First Proper:** The hymn “The Lord is God” (Theos Kyrios) and the apolytikia of the day in the tone of the week. Although the text of Theos Kyrios is the same for each tone, the apolytikia differ.

- **Second Ordinary:** A short set of supplications.
- **Second Proper:** The kathismata, or “seated hymns” in the tone of the week. Text differs for each tone.

- **Third Ordinary:** The Blessings (Evloghitaria) and more supplications.
- **Third Proper:** Preparations for the gospel reading—hypakoe, hymns of ascent (anavathmi) and prokeimenon (prelude) in the tone of the week, and readings of the kontakion, oikos, and synaxarion of the day.

- **Fourth Ordinary:** The first eight odes of the Canon (In modern practice, usually only the last verse of each ode, the katavasies, is chanted). The default set of katavasia is for the Theotokos, although this may be replaced on special feasts or festal seasons.
- **Fourth Proper:** If the Katavasia of the Theotokos are not chanted because of a special feast, a festal canon is inserted.

- **Fifth Ordinary:** Preparatory litany and hymn for the reading from the Gospel.
- **Fifth Proper:** The Gospel Reading of the week.

- **Sixth Ordinary:** A prayer and the intoning of Psalm 50. More hymns and petitions follow. After these, the Megalynaria, which are hymns and verses dedicated to the Theotokos, followed by the ninth ode of the canon (or katavasia).
- **Sixth Proper:** If there is a festal canon, there is a different megalynarion and ninth ode (or katavasies).

- **Seventh Ordinary:** A short set of petitions and a hymn is the last part of the Ordinary.
- **Seventh Proper:** The exapostelaron, a hymn commenting on the gospel reading, is chanted. Often, a second exapostelaron on the celebration of the day is added. Then the Praises (Lauds or Ainoi), which are psalm verses followed by stichera, hymns on the celebration of the day. The last verse of the Praises is an elongated hymn called the doxastikon. This is followed by a Theotokion and the Great Doxology in the tone of the week. The last hymn of Orthros is the morning hymn, the default for Sundays being “Today Salvation has Come” (Simeron Sotirias).

Orthros is primarily to be chanted by the people attending the service. The role of the priest is small. Since Orthros is the most complex service of the day, trained chanters are assigned to lead the congregation, or to chant for the people. It is up to the chanters to prepare for each service, so that they know what to chant and how to chant it.

Where can music for
Orthros be found?

For the Greek hymns, books with music in Byzantine notation are plentiful and easy to find.

There are also websites in Greece that provide Byzantine music.

Analogion.gr
is one.

What about music in modern staff notation?

Although there is an advantage to learning Byzantine notation for Greek chanting because of the wealth of available materials, it is not nearly as well-known as modern staff notation. The disadvantage of chanting with staff notation is that it's rare to find it in Greek. English Orthodox hymns, on the other hand, are mostly in staff notation, but resources are limited, and the quality is uneven.

The non-changing parts of the service can be found in The Sunday Orthros Ordinary, a book that can be downloaded for free at **newbyz.org**. Primarily in English, it has some repeated hymns in Greek. The book works best when used in a 3-ring binder, so that the proper hymns of the day can be inserted into the book at the correct places to form a single, continuous service book.

The Anastasimatarion of N. Roubanis is a hand-written 300-page book of the Proper Sunday Orthros hymns in Greek and in staff notation.
It is available at **newbyz.org**.

Fr. Seraphim Dedes of Missouri has translated the most common Orthros hymns, set them into staff notation and collected them in books.

As a supplement to his books,
Fr. Seraphim has a website,
agesinitatives.org,
where the Proper hymns for specific dates
are available.

Another online source for Orthros
hymns in staff notation is from St.
Anthony's Monastery in Arizona at

stanthonysmonastery.org

And, of course, our website, **newbyz.org**, has a growing library of free Orthodox sheet music in Greek and English.

In the Orthros workshop this weekend, you will prepare and chant the Orthros service from the free resources on the Internet. From this experience, it is hoped that you will better understand Orthros and the office of chanter.

This presentation prepared by Stanley Takis