

## 1. THE LITANY OF PEACE AND THE ANTIPHONS

**T**he Priest, lifting up the Gospel Book, and making the sign of the cross with it over the *Antimension*,\* proclaims in a clear voice: *Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and for ever, and to the ages of ages.*

Choir [of chanters]: *Amen.*

### *The Liturgy transforms earth into heaven*

At Christ's Incarnation, the mystery of the triune God was revealed to man. 'Because the rites performed in the Divine Liturgy are a sacramental initiation into the Incarnation of the Lord, it is necessary for the Holy Trinity to shine forth and be proclaimed from the very beginning of the Liturgy.'<sup>1</sup> This is why the priest begins with the trinitarian doxology: *Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.* The Divine Liturgy is the revelation of the blessed Kingdom of the triune God.

The Liturgy, as a manifestation of the Kingdom, is at the same time the mystery of Christ's presence, for that is what the Kingdom is. 'What is the Kingdom of God?' asks Christ, through St John Chrysostom. And He replies: 'It is my presence.' It is the actual presence of Christ that is celebrated in the Divine Liturgy. Throughout the Liturgy, Christ 'appears in the Mysteries themselves'.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> St Germanus, *Contemplation*, PG 98.401B.

<sup>2</sup> *On Matthew*, 41.2, PG 57.447; *On the Incomprehensible*, 4.4, PG 48.733.

It is Christ's presence in the sacrament of the Eucharist that 'transforms earth into heaven... For that which is most precious in heaven is shown to you on earth below...the Lord Himself, the Lord of angels and archangels.' The place in which Christians gather to give thanks to the Lord is 'a place of angels, a place of archangels, the royal palace of God, heaven itself'.<sup>3</sup>

'Before the Word of God became man, the Kingdom of heaven was as far from us as heaven is from the earth. But when the King of heaven came to us and was well-pleased to unite Himself with us, then the Kingdom of heaven came near to us all [cf. Matt. 4: 17].'<sup>4</sup> By His Incarnation Christ opened the door of the Kingdom, and by means of the Divine Liturgy we go through that door. In the Divine Liturgy, we have a foretaste of the good things of the Kingdom, for the Divine Liturgy is the Banquet of the Kingdom, and those who partake of it are transported by death 'from one Banquet to another Banquet, from that which is still veiled to that which is already revealed'.<sup>5</sup>

Those who partake in the Liturgy are journeying towards the Kingdom which is beginning to be revealed.

### *The Cross is the symbol of the Kingdom*

As the priest blesses the Kingdom of God, he makes the sign of the cross over the Holy Table with the Gospel Book. The first words of the Divine Liturgy are a doxology, and the first act is the making of the sign of the cross. The Divine Liturgy is the Kingdom of God, and it is through the Cross that we are able to reach the Kingdom.

The Cross is the proof that Christ is the only true King. The thief who was crucified on Christ's right speaks theology from the height of the Cross: 'The Cross is the symbol of the Kingdom.

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<sup>3</sup> St John Chrysostom, *On 1 Corinthians*, 24.5 and 36.5, PG 61.205, 313.

<sup>4</sup> St Gregory Palamas, *Homily 31*, 6, PG 151.392C.

<sup>5</sup> St Nicholas Cabasilas, *On the Life in Christ*, 4, PG 150.625A.

I call Christ ‘King’ precisely because I see Him crucified. For it is the mark of a king to die for the sake of his subjects. As Christ said, *The Good Shepherd gives up his life for His sheep* [John 10: 11]; hence the good king sacrifices his life for his subjects. He sacrificed His life, and that is why I call Him ‘King’: *Remember me, Lord, in your Kingdom* [Luke 23: 42].<sup>6</sup>

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Before Christ was crucified, ‘a cross signified a death sentence, but now it has become an object of honour. Previously it was the symbol of condemnation, but now it is the foundation of our salvation.’ Through the Cross, we have found the way that leads to the Kingdom: ‘On account of the Cross, we no longer wander in the wilderness because we have come to know the true way. We no longer remain outside the palace of the King, because we have found the door.’ The Kingdom of God has been bestowed on us through the Cross. The Cross ‘has opened Paradise which was closed... For Christ said [to the thief], *Today you will be with me in Paradise* [Luke 23: 43].’<sup>7</sup>

The Cross of Christ is not only the road leading to Paradise and the door by which we can enter; it is also ‘the beautiful paradise of the Church’. It is the tree of new and incorruptible life which nourishes the faithful:

The wood in former times brought bitterness into Eden,  
but the wood of the Cross has blossomed with sweet life.  
For Adam ate, and fell into corruption;  
but we delight in the flesh of Christ  
and live and are mystically deified,  
receiving the eternal Kingdom of God.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> St John Chrysostom, *On the Cross and the Thief*, 1.3, PG 49.403.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 1.1, 2, PG 49.399–401.

<sup>8</sup> Sunday of the Veneration of the Cross, *sticheron\** at Vespers; *Octoechos*, Tone 8, Wednesday Matins, *kathisma*.

Christ is King of the Kingdom that has come and is coming. It came through the Cross, and it is coming with the Cross. For when the end comes, *then will appear the sign of the Son of man* (Matt. 24: 30), that is, the Cross. When the light of this world is extinguished once and for all, the sign of the cross will shine like a new sun. And just as ‘before a king enters a city, the soldiers will take up banners and lift them upon their shoulders to herald his entry’, so it will be at the Second Coming: ‘When the Lord descends from heaven, He will be preceded by hosts of angels and archangels bearing the Cross upon their shoulders, and they will announce to us His royal entry.’<sup>9</sup>

The Cross of Christ is the road, the door and the herald of the Kingdom of God.

### *The faithful conclude with the Amen*

The faithful set their seal on the doxology pronounced by the priest by singing *Amen*.<sup>10</sup> With this response, the faithful accept the truth expressed in the celebrant’s proclamation, and pray that they may taste the good things of the Kingdom of the Trinity.

The faithful ‘conclude with *Amen*, and thus make everything that the priest says their own’. This ending to every pronouncement of the priest signifies that what ‘is lacking in the perfection of the priests is completed by the action of the people, and God accepts *the least with the greatest* [Ps. 113: 21] in one unity of spirit. For the congregation also believe that their prayers are accepted when they join them to the prayers of the priests.’<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> St John Chrysostom, *On the Cross and the Thief*, 1.4, PG 49.404.

<sup>10</sup> *Amen* is a Hebrew word meaning ‘indeed’, ‘let it be so’. St Jerome compares the singing of the *Amen* with thunder from heaven (*On Galatians*, PL 26.355B).

<sup>11</sup> St Nicholas Cabasilas, *Comm. Liturgy*, 15, PG 150.401AB; St Cyril of Alexandria, *On 1 Corinthians*, P. E. Pusey, ed., *Sancti patris nostri Cyrilli Archiepiscopi Alexandrini in D. Ioannis Evangelium*, vol. 3 (Oxford, 1872), p. 296. Cf. PG 74.893B.

With the assent of the faithful, the priest's blessing ascends to the Altar above the heavens. The faithful actively participate in the Divine Liturgy, which at every moment confirms its name: it is a work of the people.<sup>12</sup>

Deacon:<sup>13</sup> *In peace, let us pray to the Lord.*

Choir: *Lord, have mercy [Kyrie eleison].* And so after each petition.

### *The Mystery of the peace of God*

Immediately after the blessing of the Kingdom of God, our Mother Church teaches us the way of liturgical prayer: *Let us pray to the Lord in peace.*

The road that leads to the Divine Liturgy is peace of soul. Without this peace, we cannot take part in the Liturgy: 'Without tranquillity of thoughts, the human intellect cannot explore hidden mysteries.' Real participation in the eucharistic Mystery is proportionate to our inner peace: 'The more the heart ceases to be disturbed by recollections of external things, the more the intellect is astounded by understanding divine meanings.'<sup>14</sup>

True peace of soul, however, is to be had at the heavenly Altar where the Holy Anaphora is celebrated: 'True peace is from

<sup>12</sup> The Greek word *leitourgia* is a compound of *leitos*, meaning 'common' or 'public', and *ergon* meaning 'work'. So *leitourgia* means a common work, a work of the people. Thus the designation *Liturgy* cogently manifests the fact that the faithful actively participate in the eucharistic Mystery, and that without their presence and consent the priest is unable to celebrate.

<sup>13</sup> When there is no deacon concelebrating in the Divine Liturgy, the deacon's words, except for those that are addressed by him directly to the priest, are spoken by the priest. For this reason, in the commentary special distinction is not always made with regard to whom is saying the petition.

<sup>14</sup> St Isaac the Syrian, *Homily 5* and *Homily 4, Asc. Hom.*, p. 45 and pp. 35-6. The translations here are adapted to the Greek text.

above.’ And we approach the Altar *in peace*. St Basil writes: ‘Seek peace... Acquire a calm mind and a state of soul untroubled and undisturbed... that you may acquire the peace of God *which passes all understanding* [Phil. 4: 7] as the guard of your heart.’<sup>15</sup>

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The fact that man has been created in the image of God means that human nature has been created ‘peaceable, free from strife and faction, bound to God and to itself by love’. The peace which man received as a gift from God was enjoyed by living a virtuous life close to Him. For ‘nothing gives such peace to our soul as knowledge of God and the acquisition of virtue’.<sup>16</sup> Sin, however, brought confusion and trouble to man and to the world. ‘For evil by its nature is dispersive, unstable, multifarious and divisive.’ Through sin, man became an enemy both to himself and to God. Once man had reached that point, Christ alone was able to help him and give him peace. ‘Christ is the only one who can reconcile us with God, the only one who gives peace of soul.’ It was for precisely this reason that ‘in His love for man God became man so that He might unite human nature to Himself and stop it from acting evilly towards itself, or rather from being at strife and divided against itself’.<sup>17</sup>

The peace that Christ brought by becoming human is acquired through repentance: ‘From her unceasing tears, the soul receives peace in her thoughts. And from peace in thoughts she is raised to the limpid purity of the intellect. And through this limpidity of the intellect a man comes to see the mysteries of God.’<sup>18</sup> Tears of

<sup>15</sup> St Basil the Great, *On Psalm 33*, 10, PG 29.376BC.

<sup>16</sup> St Maximus the Confessor, *Various Texts on Theology, the Divine Economy, and Virtue and Vice*, 1.46, PG 90.1196B (*Philokalia*, vol. 2, p. 174); St John Chrysostom, *On Psalm 4*, 11, PG 55.57.

<sup>17</sup> St Maximus, *ibid.* 1.49, PG 90.1197A (*Philokalia*, *ibid.*); St Nicholas Cabasilas, *Comm. Liturgy*, 44, PG 150.464B; St Maximus, *ibid.* 1.47, PG 90.1196C.

<sup>18</sup> St Isaac the Syrian, *Asc. Hom.*, 18, p. 96.

repentance are the beginning of the road. They form the first rung of the ladder that takes us up to contemplation of the divine Mysteries. The second rung is peace of soul.

When we approach Christ in repentance, He sends us to the place where His peace reigns: *Go in peace* (Luke 7: 50). He sends us into the church, which is the ‘impregnable palace of [God’s] peace’. There our soul, guided by Christ the High Priest, occupies itself with the contemplation of God in the Holy Spirit; that contemplation which is ‘peaceful and free from any disturbance’.<sup>19</sup>

The Divine Liturgy is the Mystery of the peace of God: ‘This Mystery is a Mystery of peace.’ For the Divine Liturgy is our encounter with Christ, who is ‘the true peace’ for man.<sup>20</sup>

Deacon: *For the peace from on high and for the salvation of our souls, let us pray to the Lord.*

### *Christ is our peace*

Having instructed us in the first petition how we should pray, the Church now teaches us what we should first ask for: the peace of God and the salvation of our souls. That is what Christ taught us when He said, *Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness* (Matt. 6: 33), for ‘*the salvation of our souls* means the Kingdom of God, and the *peace from on high* means righteousness’. The righteousness of God is virtuous life, the life that man scorned when he fell, and that has been given us anew as a gift from Him *who became for us...righteousness from God and sanctification* (1 Cor. 1: 30).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> St Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogy*, 23, PG 91.697D.

<sup>20</sup> St John Chrysostom, *On Matthew*, 50.3, PG 58.508; *Octoechos*, Doxastikon for the sixth Sunday Matins Gospel.

<sup>21</sup> St Nicholas Cabasilas, *Comm. Liturgy*, 12, PG 150.393C.

As the angels heralded at His birth, *Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill among men* (Luke 2: 14), Christ brought true peace to the earth. The angels guarded well the place assigned to them 'and are at peace with God, for they heed His will in all ways and remain steadfast in righteousness and sanctity. We wretched humans, on the other hand, exalted our own desires in opposition to the will of the Master and assumed an attitude of enmity towards Him. This enmity was annulled by Christ, for He is our peace and through Himself He united us with God the Father, putting sin to flight... So Christ became peace and goodwill for us.'<sup>22</sup>

The reconciliation of earth with heaven came about through Christ: *Now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For He is our peace, who has made the two one and has broken down the dividing wall of enmity...that He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and reconciling both to God in one body through the Cross, thereby slaying enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near* (Eph. 2: 13-7).

Christ became human, and offered human beings the peace of God. On the Holy Table 'Christ lies slaughtered. For whom was He slaughtered, and why?' asks St John Chrysostom. And he answers: 'In order to make peace between heaven and earth, to make you a friend of the angels, to reconcile you with the God of all. To make you a friend, you who were an enemy and adversary... This Sacrifice took place in order that you might be at peace with your brother.'<sup>23</sup>

Through the grace of Christ's peacemaking Sacrifice, we are able to overcome the obstacles that separate us from the Kingdom

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<sup>22</sup> St Cyril of Alexandria, *On Luke*, 2, PG 72.493CD-496A.

<sup>23</sup> *On the Betrayal of Judas*, 1.6, PG 49.381-2.



of peace: 'Once we recover from the inebriation of the passions and rise up against the wiles and tyranny of the Devil...we will then receive invisibly within us the irenic presence of Christ, the gentle King of peace.' When man attains the realm of dispassion, his intellect, 'the temple mystically built by peace, becomes in spirit the dwelling-place of God'.<sup>24</sup>

God's peace transforms man into a temple. And God comes to dwell in man: *His abode has been established in peace, and His dwelling-place in Zion* (Ps. 75: 3).

*Deacon: For the peace of the whole world, for the stability of the holy Churches of God, and for the union of all, let us pray to the Lord.*

### *The peace of the whole world*

All believers have the Lord as their common Father and are members of His spiritual family, the Church. With the eyes of love we embrace our brethren, however distant they may be, and petition the Lord for them. 'That is what the eyes of love are like: distance is no object to them, nor do they grow weak with the passage of time.' Love is a 'spring of fire' and 'imitates the path of flame' — in other words, it imitates the swift movement of flame.<sup>25</sup> Love courses over the entire world; it extends through the whole of time.

In the same petition, we ask the Lord to grant the fruits of His peace: the stability of the local Churches, the union of all in His

<sup>24</sup> St Maximus the Confessor, *Letter 43*, PG 91.640AB; *Two Hundred Texts on Theology*, 1.53, PG 90.1104A (*Philokalia*, vol. 2, p. 125).

<sup>25</sup> St John Chrysostom, *Letter 36*, PG 52.630; St John Climacus, *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 30.18, PG 88.1160B; St John Chrysostom, *Letter 222*, PG 52.734.

truth. Peace bears fruit in the *stability of the holy Churches*. In God's peace, the ship of the Church sails on an even keel towards the calm haven of the Kingdom. That is why in the Liturgy of St Basil we ask: 'Remember, O Lord, Your holy catholic and apostolic Church, and give it peace... Speedily bring to an end the uprisings of heresies by the power of Your Holy Spirit... Grant us Your peace and love, O Lord our God.'<sup>26</sup>

The fruit of peace is unity in Christ. Peace 'is the power that unites all, the power that engenders and produces concord and unity among all'. The unifying power of peace is stressed also by St Paul: Brethren, preserve *the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace* (Eph. 4: 3). Indeed, 'it is not possible for the unity of the Spirit to exist amidst enmity and dissension... St Paul writes this because he wants believers to be bound together. Not simply to be at peace, not simply to love, but to be all one, one soul.'<sup>27</sup>

Confusion and tumult, particularly as interior states, distract our mind. 'A mind that is agitated cannot possibly be united with God... Just as peace unifies the many, so tumult changes the one into many', that is to say, it fragments a person. Peace unites us among ourselves, and also unites us with God. That is why we ask the Lord: 'Lord, You have given us peace, concord among ourselves. Give us also the peace that is indivisible unity with You, so that being at peace with Your Holy Spirit, whom You placed within us when first You created us, we may be inseparable from Your love.'<sup>28</sup>

It is in this bond of peace through love that St John Chrysostom bids us be bound to one another and to God. 'This bond is a good bond. In this bond let us bind ourselves, both to one another and to God.' This bond does not constrict those it binds, it does

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<sup>26</sup> Liturgy of St Basil, prayer after the Consecration.

<sup>27</sup> St Dionysius the Areopagite, *Divine Names*, 11.1, PG 3.948D; St John Chrysostom, *On Ephesians*, 9.3, PG 62.72-3.

<sup>28</sup> St Nicholas Cabasilas, *Comm. Liturgy*, 12, PG 150.396A; St Isidore of Pelusium, *Letters*, 1.122, PG 78.264C.

not put pressure on them. On the contrary, it lets them feel freer than the 'free', and 'brings them bountiful ease'.<sup>29</sup>

Bound together in peace and love, the faithful reach the spaciousness of God's love through the Divine Liturgy.

*One who seeks peace is searching for Christ*

Living as we do in the world, we often see the 'sea of life surging', but we do not feel the presence of Christ, the Lord of peace. Our life is like a journey travelled in pitch darkness. Within us, contrary winds blow strongly. We are battered by waves and have no sense of consolation, whether divine or human. So we experience what St Gregory the Theologian describes: 'The voyage at night; no beacon anywhere; Christ is asleep [cf. Mark 4: 37-8].'<sup>30</sup>

In this state, we come to the house of God. There we feel that 'the Church of Christ is tranquil peace'. And when the Divine Liturgy begins, we ask with all our might for peace from above, peace in our souls, peace for the world. In seeking peace however, we are in reality seeking Christ Himself: 'One who seeks peace is searching for Christ, for He is peace.'<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *On Ephesians*, 9.3, PG 62.73.

<sup>30</sup> *Octoechos*, Tone 6, Canon, *eirmos* of the 6th ode; *Letter 80*, PG 37.153C.

<sup>31</sup> *Apostolic Constitutions*, 2.20, PG 1.637A; St Basil the Great, *On Psalm 33*, 10, PG 29.376C.