

## 5. THE HOLY ANAPHORA

**D**eacon: *Let us stand aright; let us stand with fear; let us attend, that we may offer the Holy Anaphora in peace.*

Choir: *A mercy of peace, a sacrifice of praise.*

*Let us stand with fear*

With the Holy Anaphora, which now begins, we reach the most sacred moment of the Divine Liturgy. That is why the deacon calls on us to pay attention to how we stand, both in soul and body: *Let us stand aright; let us stand with fear.* In St John Chrysostom's time, this exclamation took a slightly different form: 'Stand up; let us stand aright.'<sup>1</sup>

St John interprets the meaning of this exhortation as follows: We should 'elevate our base and earth-bound thoughts and rid ourselves of the spiritual paralysis induced by the cares of this life, so that we can present our souls upstanding before God... Think in whose presence you are, and with whom you will call upon God – with the Cherubim... So no one should take part in these sacred and mystical hymns indolently... On the contrary, one should expel all things earthly from one's mind and transport oneself totally to heaven, and then offer the all-holy hymn to the God of glory and majesty as if standing before the very throne of glory and flying with the Seraphim. That is why the deacon

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<sup>1</sup> The corresponding exclamation in the *Apostolic Constitutions* reads: 'Stand up; let us be standing with fear and trembling to make our offering to the Lord' (*Constitutions*, 8.12, PG 1.1092A).

exhorts us to *stand aright* at this moment... In other words, to stand with fear and trembling, with a sober and watchful heart.’<sup>2</sup>

The Divine Liturgy is called an *anaphora*, meaning an ‘offering up’ in Greek, because we ourselves and our precious Gifts are offered up – raised up to God. And we must ‘stand with reverence and fear at the terrible moment of the Holy Anaphora, for with whatever disposition of soul and whatever thoughts each person has at that time as he stands before God, he is raised up to the Lord with that same disposition.’<sup>3</sup>

The precious Gifts are not simply offered on the earthly Altar, but are raised up to the Altar above the heavens. We are all called to be raised up to the realm of undisturbable peace, and our translation to that realm must take place *in peace*. ‘Great peace and quiet is needed’ at this moment and place.<sup>4</sup> When the Holy Anaphora is offered on the Altar above the heavens, angelic powers stand round about in fear and trembling. They cover their faces in reverence and sing in praise of the triple Sun of the Godhead.

### *A mercy of peace, a sacrifice of praise*

To the celebrant’s exhortation to offer the Holy Anaphora *in peace*, the faithful reply: ‘We offer it in peace and in love towards the Lord and our brother. We offer a *mercy of peace*. We offer *mercy*, that is, love, which is the fruit of peace.’ Indeed, ‘when no passion disturbs the soul, nothing prevents it being filled with mercy’.<sup>5</sup>

God tells us through the Prophet Hosea that the offering of our love to Him and to our brethren is preferable to a sacrifice that is offered without love: *I desire mercy and not sacrifice* (Hos. 6: 6). Furthermore, ‘all the commandments of the Old Testament

<sup>2</sup> *On the Incomprehensible*, 4.5, PG 48.734.

<sup>3</sup> St Anastasius of Sinai, *Homily on the holy Synaxis*, PG 89.833BC. The Greek word *ἀναφορά* (*anaphora*) comes from the verb *ἀναφέρω* (*anaphero*) and means an upward movement, an elevation.

<sup>4</sup> St John Chrysostom, *On the Birthday of Jesus Christ*, 7, PG 49.361.

<sup>5</sup> St Nicholas Cabasilas, *Comm. Liturgy*, 26, PG 150.424B.

concerning sacrifices and whole burnt offerings are contained in the commandment of mercy and love'.<sup>6</sup> In consequence, it is not possible to offer the sacrifice of glorifying God before we have offered the sacrifice of our love. The sacrifice offered with love is a sacrifice well pleasing to God. It is a sacrifice that glorifies and hymns His own love: *a sacrifice of praise*.

The sons of the Kingdom, whose hallmark is peace, offer a *mercy of peace* and *a sacrifice of praise*. 'Mercy towards everyone who is suffering misfortune and needs help. But a *mercy* of peace. When we love the peace that is extended towards all, when we have demolished all enmity and conflict with everyone, then we offer the true sacrifice of praise.'<sup>7</sup>

This is the sacrifice that God asks of us: *Sacrifice to God, a sacrifice of praise* (Ps. 49: 14). 'In other words, a sacrifice of thanksgiving, of sacred hymns and of deeds that glorify God... You should live in such a way that your Lord is glorified. This is also what Christ taught when He said: *Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven* [Matt. 5: 16]... So let your life be such that your Master is glorified, and then you will have offered the sacrifice in its entirety.'<sup>8</sup>

The faithful Christian knows what sort of sacrifice is well pleasing to God, and addresses His love in these words: 'I will glorify You from my heart, from the altar of my soul. And for Your sake I will offer the sacrifice of praise, which is preferable to a myriad of whole burnt offerings. I will celebrate it for You, the perfect God.'<sup>9</sup>

In the Divine Liturgy, we offer the supreme *sacrifice of praise*.

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<sup>6</sup> St Basil the Great, *On Isaiah*, 1.27, PG 30.172C.

<sup>7</sup> St Maximus the Greek, in: Grigoriou Monastery, *Agios Maximos o Grekos, o Photistes ton Roson* [*St Maximus the Greek, Enlightener of the Russians*], (Athens: Armos, 1991), p. 125.

<sup>8</sup> St John Chrysostom, *On Psalm 49*, 5, PG 55.248.

<sup>9</sup> St Basil the Great, *On Psalm 115*, 5, PG 30.113B. The whole burnt offering (in which the whole of the sacrificed animal was burnt on the altar) was the highest sacrifice according to the Law of Moses.

Through Christ, the faithful *offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is the fruit of lips that confess His name* (Heb. 13: 15). At the Holy Anaphora, the faithful offer ‘prayers, hymns, thanksgiving. These are the “fruit of the lips”... And “confessing His name” means that we give Him thanks for everything, and especially for what He has suffered for us.’<sup>10</sup>

The Lord loves this *sacrifice of praise* because therein lies the road to man’s salvation: *A sacrifice of praise honours me, and there is the way whereby I will show him my salvation* (Ps. 49: 23). ‘Communion in the Body and Blood of the Master is rightly called “God’s salvation”...because it was given for redemption from sins.’<sup>11</sup> At the Divine Liturgy, we offer God a *sacrifice of praise*, and God offers us His *salvation*, which is Christ (cf. Luke 2: 30).

Priest: *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*<sup>12</sup>

Choir: *And with your spirit.*

### *A trinitarian gift*

At the Divine Liturgy we become partakers of the gifts of the Holy Trinity: from the source, which is *the love of God the Father*, through the way and door, which is *the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*, *the communion of the Holy Spirit* comes upon the assembly of the Church and upon each believer individually.

<sup>10</sup> St John Chrysostom, *On Hebrews*, 33.4, PG 63.229–230.

<sup>11</sup> St Hesychius of Jerusalem, in St Nikodimus of the Holy Mountain, *Ermeneia eis tous 150 psalmous* [Commentary on the 150 Psalms], vol. I (Thessaloniki: Orthodoxos Kypseli, 1979), p. 720.

<sup>12</sup> 2 Cor. 13: 13.

This prayer ‘offers us the good things of the Holy Trinity... *grace* from the Son, *love* from the Father, *communion* from the Holy Spirit. The Son’s providence for us is *grace*, because He offered Himself as our Saviour without our contributing anything, and indeed when we were debtors. Because the Father has been reconciled with mankind through the Passion of His Son and shown love to those who were hostile to Him, His offering to us is called *love*. And finally, because He *who is rich in mercy* [Eph. 2: 4] should share His good things with His reconciled enemies, the Holy Spirit accomplishes this by descending upon the Apostles. That is why the Holy Spirit’s goodness towards men is called *communion*.’<sup>13</sup>

The Divine Liturgy is the communion of human beings in the grace of the trinitarian God. The life which is offered to man, and brings him alive, is a gift from the Holy Trinity: ‘Our life is given by God, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit.’<sup>14</sup> In general, every divine blessing that comes upon man is a gift of the Holy Trinity. For ‘whatever is of the Holy Trinity is indivisible. Where there is the communion of the Holy Spirit, it is found also to be that of the Son. And where there is the grace of the Son, there is also that of the Father and the Holy Spirit.’ So ‘there is one gift and one authority of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit’.<sup>15</sup>

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The people’s response (*and with your spirit*) to the blessing given by the celebrant signifies that the faithful participate actively in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. In relation to this

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<sup>13</sup> St Nicholas Cabasilas, *Comm. Liturgy*, 26, PG 150.424B. St Nicholas explains why this prayer is necessary, given that all good things were given to human beings when Christ came to earth: ‘So that we may not lose these things once we have received them, but may keep them to the end. This is why the celebrant does not say “may they be given to all of you”, since they have already been given, but “may they be with all of you”.’

<sup>14</sup> St Basil the Great, *Against Eunomius*, 3.4, PG 29.664C.

<sup>15</sup> St John Chrysostom, *On 2 Corinthians*, 30.2, PG 61.608 and *On John*, 86.3, PG 59.471.

St John Chrysostom says: 'The celebrant does not touch the Gifts which lie before him until he has invoked the grace of the Lord upon you, and you have replied, *And with your spirit*. With this response, you remind yourselves...that the Gifts offered are not the work of man; rather, it is the grace of the Holy Spirit, which is present and hovers over all, that prepares this mystical Sacrifice.'<sup>16</sup>

Priest: *Let our hearts be on high.*

Choir: *We have them with the Lord.*

### *The miracle of the liturgical transfiguration*

The Gospel account of the Transfiguration of Christ reads: *Jesus took Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them* (Mark 9: 2). The same thing happens at the Holy Anaphora, which is the miracle of the liturgical transfiguration: *the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ 'takes' us out of the world in which we live, and 'leads us up' [in Greek *anapherei* – the verb from which *anaphora* derives] the high mountain of the love of God the Father, where the mystery of the communion of the Holy Spirit is celebrated.*

When God asked the patriarch Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, He said to him: *Take your son, your only son Isaac whom you love, and go to the high land and offer him there as a burnt offering* (Gen. 22: 2). It is up to this high land that the celebrant exhorts us also to go, so that we may offer the eucharistic Anaphora. Let us then imitate the patriarch Abraham, who did not allow either his slaves or his animals to approach the place of sacrifice. St John

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<sup>16</sup> *On Pentecost 1, 4, PG 50.458-9.*

Chrysostom explains: 'You too should not allow any of the slavish and base passions to accompany you [to the place of the Holy Anaphora]. Go alone up the mountain where he ascended, there where nothing else is allowed to ascend... Let nothing disturb you at that moment, but become higher even than the heavens themselves.'<sup>17</sup> 'Keeping our hearts on high with God, let us observe that outstanding vision – our human nature, coexisting eternally with the immaterial fire of the Godhead.'<sup>18</sup>

*Let our hearts be on high*, says the priest. By the words *on high*, he indicates the place where the encounter between the soul that loves God and Christ the bridegroom happens. This is not a pre-determined place. We are talking about a divine ladder which rests on the holy Altar, the top of which is inaccessible to human sight. The saints are characterised by an eternal motion. They move from the Altar to the vision of the uncreated light, and back to the Altar, which is filled with light. For upon it Christ – the Light of the world – lays down 'His illuminating Body'<sup>19</sup> for the nourishment and life of the world.

The soul climbs up unceasingly. And the further up it goes, the higher it longs to go. The ascent kindles its desire, and the food of the Divine Eucharist increases its hunger for mystical contemplation. St Symeon the New Theologian, who looked upon the beauty of the uncreated light and was nourished on the food of incorruption, uses a unique image: 'I do not know which gives me greater delight, the sight and enjoyment of the purity of the rays of the Sun, or the drinking and the taste of the wine in my mouth. I want to say the latter [the taste of the wine], and yet the former [the rays of the Sun] attracts me and seems sweeter. And when I turn to them, then I enjoy still more the sweetness of the taste of the wine. So the sight [of the rays] does not lead to satiety,

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<sup>17</sup> *On 2 Corinthians*, 5.4, PG 61.432-3.

<sup>18</sup> St Gregory Palamas, *Homily 21*, PG 151.285B.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* In *Defence of the holy Hesychasts*, 1.3.25, *Chrestou I*, p. 436.

nor can I have enough of drinking [that wine]. For when it seems that I have drunk my fill, then the beauty of the rays sent forth makes me thirst greatly, and again I find myself hungry and thirsty.’<sup>20</sup>

The soul ascends so as to encounter God, and the effort it expends to do so gives it strength. It discovers new powers within itself as it climbs the liturgical Tabor: ‘It makes its way ever upwards, continuously renewing its powers from the heights it has attained so far.’ At this point man moves beyond reason: so as to satisfy his desire, he does not ask to see God as he himself is able to but as God actually is. And God’s divine love for mankind satisfies this desire for that vision by showing the impossibility of the request, for ‘it is characteristic of true contemplation of God that the desire of the one who gazes steadfastly upon Him never ends’.<sup>21</sup>

*We have them with the Lord*, the faithful reply to the celebrant. With this response, they assure him that they have already ascended ‘up to the heights...to the throne of God’.<sup>22</sup> Their hearts are on high, *where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God* (Col. 3: 1).

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<sup>20</sup> *Catechesis* 23, SC 113, p. 24.

<sup>21</sup> St Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses* 2, PG 44.401A, 404A.

<sup>22</sup> St Methodius of Olympus, *Symposium*, 8.10, PG 18.153A.