

Liturgy and Evangelization

I

The liturgical worship of the Orthodox Church was and remains one of the most powerful vehicles for mission and evangelization. Yet, even after more than two hundred years in North America, the Orthodox Church has not been able to fully utilize its rich and varied liturgical worship. Though the reasons for this vary there nevertheless exists a common attitude which undermines liturgical worship in general and the missionary imperative of the Gospel in particular. This attitude is primarily derived from a **crisis** that has altered the way Orthodox Christians perceive and participate in liturgical worship.

The word **crisis** is linked to the act of deciding. That there is a liturgical **crisis** in the Church points to a decision that has been made within the Christian community which has removed corporate worship from the core of human life. As a result, the human person stands in **crisis** because worship has been relegated to the periphery of life. Whereas liturgy and life had once been tightly integrated and were virtually understood as being synonymous they now exist in a state of spiritual or psychological schism. Two extremes have resulted from this schism. The first is the most obvious. Worship is no longer necessary for the existence and development of human life. The second extreme, while not so obvious but just as tragic and pernicious, is formalized worship which for all its external pomp is unable to convert the mind and heart. In both extremes there is no longer the self identification of the human person as **homo adorans** i.e. as one who prays to the living God. From an anthropological perspective prayer is a universal phenomenon basic to human existence. "To suppress adoration is to cut man in half"^[1] resulting in an undeveloped and disintegrated personality.

To heal the schism between liturgy and life is a formidable task. Detailed strategies and programs claiming to [re]energize a parish at best offer external or cosmetic results. If liturgy – the public and communal prayer of the Church – is to become the foundation of parish life, if it is to be the nourishing and guiding source of evangelical outreach, then it is imperative that the local flock be engaged in ongoing spiritual warfare which begins with **repentance**. Repentance ensures the integrity of liturgy as a divine and human event. With regards to the Eucharist, repentance enables the Spirit to transform those con-celebrating the liturgy i.e. clergy and laity into the body of Christ. It is Christ who commissions the Church to continue his ministry in the world for the life of the world and its salvation.

From the perspective of evangelization, repentance has an **internal and external dynamic**. On the one hand the Church must be introspective and therefore continuously in the process of spiritual renewal. For, on the other hand, it is only by being alive and new that the Church can convincingly, and without coercion, extend the call to repentance beyond itself so that the world might be drawn into the kingdom which is at hand.

Through repentance, lived out ascetically i.e. in a way which struggles to bring one's life and all of creation back to God, worship comes to be understood and experienced as being necessary for the salvation and transfiguration of all creation. In the Chrysostom liturgy it is stated that the "reasonable worship" (Romans 12:1) is offered for the whole world. Thus, the prayer of the local Church culminating in the celebration of the Eucharist is a divine and human public work with universal qualities which go beyond the parameters of time and space.

Worship in the **present** draws to itself the **past** and the **future**. This uniting of the past and the future in the context of the present is associated with the act of **remembering**. Remembrance (anamnesis) binds the faithful of all times to the saving acts which God has accomplished. These saving acts provide the evangelical foundation for liturgical worship. They reveal how, even though humanity chose to clothe itself in sin and mortality, God never abandoned his creation. In time and space God continued and still continues to work with his creation so as to open the way to new and eternal life. "My Father is working still, and I am working." (John 5:17) In the **anaphoras** of both the Chrysostom and Basil liturgies we are **membered** to all the saving acts that lead to and depart from the **economy** of God's incarnate son. We are **membered** to the cross, tomb, resurrection on the third day, the ascension into heaven as well as **the second and glorious coming**.

As the evangelical expression of the Church, liturgy provides the context from which the Church proclaims the Gospel. Therefore liturgical worship cannot be understood as just another source of teaching and spiritual life. On the contrary, as Father Alexander Schmemmann wrote some years ago, liturgy and hence liturgical tradition "is the ontological condition of theology, of the proper understanding of kerygma, of the Word of God, because it is in the Church, of which the leitourgia is the expression and the life, that the sources of theology are functioning precisely as sources."^[2] From this keen and compact insight comes the challenge to recover and maintain the worship of the Church in which the **kerygmata** and **dogmata** maintain their existential integrity i.e. that they proclaim, articulate and reveal the ecclesial experience of transfigured or deified life for all who desire to possess it.

II

The human person is a worshipping being who has God as a constant point of reference for self-identification which in turn develops as a relationship with God continues to be forged. This relationship with God enables the human person to also relate and co-exist with his natural surroundings.

Human beings pray personally and corporately. These two modes or contexts are not opposed to each other. Too often personal prayer is understood as a **private** act separated from the **community**. **Personal and corporate prayer sustain** each other. Because "Christian existence is essentially corporate" all prayer is bound to the community without the uniqueness of the **person** ever being compromised. "Prayer 'in

common' is still personal engagement. Joint prayer is still the prayer of persons. The very act of 'joining' is a personal act."^[3]

Human beings, personally and corporately, are able to worship because of their ability to use in an intricate and sophisticated manner their other divine like qualities of **knowing, creating and playing**. These fundamental qualities interacting with all of creation are incorporated into liturgical worship which expresses the creative and dynamic relationship between God, humanity and the cosmos. From this relationship liturgical worship becomes the Church's context from which to proclaim the Gospel. Within this context the Church reveals that what has been assumed by Christ the incarnate Son and Word of God is saved and transfigured.

There are two strands of worship which are tightly entwined. The first is **doxology**.^[4] The Church offers praise to God But the praise offered by the Church does not stand apart from conveying what is true. Praise or, to be more precise, **orthodox[ology]** i.e. correct praise conveys and teaches the **doctrine** of the Church.^[5] Scripture, salvation history, creedal statements as well as Christological, triadological and anthropological formulations are basic sources and components of liturgy which, over time, have been woven into the fabric of the Church's worship. From the liturgy of the hours to the celebration of the Divine Liturgy they proclaim and bolster the faith of the baptized. They prepare catechumens for baptism and chrismation. They challenge the serious seeker with the transforming power of the Gospel.

Liturgical worship utilizes the creation. Through worship creation finds its proper relationship with God. Here again Saint Paul's reference to "reasonable worship" (Rom.12:1) can be used. This rich term, **logiki latreia**, is more than a reference to the fact that animal sacrifice has no place in Christian worship. With regards to the celebration of the Eucharist, **logiki latreia** also affirms the inaugurated restoration of every one and every thing in relationship to the Logos of God.

Liturgical worship in general and the celebration of the Eucharist in particular provides the **locus** in which creation – beginning with the human person – no longer finds itself divided and confused by sin and corruption. Liturgical worship reveals creation as the place and means through which God and humanity encounter and commune with each other. Within liturgical worship a concrete vision of the restored creation is presented even to those who are not yet initiated into the body of Christ. All life and therefore all facets of life – even death – receive their proper meaning and purpose. Within liturgical worship the "sources of theology" are formed by and also contribute to the ongoing development of doxology, doctrine and catechesis.

III

So long as liturgical worship remains subordinate to life and therefore apart from life, the Church will not be able to **properly and fully** proclaim the Gospel of

salvation. Since the Church is by its very nature evangelical, its liturgy is inseparably joined to the missionary mandate of the Lord. This is perhaps most clearly expressed in the Russian Primary Chronicle (Laurentian Text, 11th -12th c.).^[6] From this account it appears that it was the liturgical worship of the Church, more than any other conduit of missionary activity, that ultimately led to the conversion of Saint Prince Vladimir and the baptism of Rus. It is the **spirit** of the account described in the Chronicle more than its historical detail or accuracy that focuses attention on the Church's worship. It was the Church's worship which drew the emissaries of Saint Vladimir into an experience in which they "**knew not whether they were in heaven or on earth**".

The vision of heaven on earth with Christ as the one High Priest concelebrating with all of humanity needs to be the basis of liturgical renewal and expansion. But this renewal and expansion cannot have the **past** as its only point of reference. Because liturgy and life are synonymous, worship must also be alive and not an exercise in imitating the practices of the recent or distant **past**. The **past** should be used for guiding, not ignoring worship in the **present**.

The **past** is the depository of all that has been consecrated by the Church during its historical sojourn for the proclamation of the Gospel. Yet, the **past** does not exhaust or deprive the **present** of the creative outpouring of the Spirit. Hence, from a theoretical and more importantly from an existential perspective liturgy will continue to **develop** so long as the Church remains faithful to its missionary responsibility. By being faithful to the Lord's command to baptize all nations the Spirit will remain alive and active among those who gather as Church to worship as well as to celebrate the kingdom of the triune and tri-personal God. The symbiosis and synergy of Spirit and faithful will reveal liturgical worship as being always new, vibrant and life giving. All the **sources** acting in liturgy will be joined into forming a composite whole that proclaims and also reveals the economy of the incarnation in a particular time, in a particular place for a particular people.

The current liturgical crisis of the Church can be overcome when we, personally and corporately, take responsibility for rediscovering our liturgical identity. But this is easier said than done. Even when there is the personal desire to pray as a community and even when the local parish offers a rhythm of liturgical prayer many choose to stay away. Consequently, the Gospel cannot be brought into the world and the world into the reality of the Gospel. The liturgical crisis remains until we decide to be a people who "**worship in Spirit and in Truth**".

Father Robert M. Arida

^[1] Danielou, Jean, *In The Beginning... Genesis I-III*, trans. by Julien L. Randoff, Helicon Press, 1965, p. 41

[2] Schmemmann, Alexander, *Theology and Liturgical Tradition, in Worship in Scripture and Tradition*, ed. Massey and Shepherd, Oxford University Press, 1963, p. 175, quoted by Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation*, Pueblo Pub. Co., N.Y. 1978, p. XII

[3] Florovsky, Georges, *Worship and Every Day Life: An Eastern Orthodox View*, Collected Works, vol. XIII, Belmont, MA, pp. 95, 97

[4] cf. Pelikan, Jaroslav, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, Yale University Press, 1993, p. 302

[5] Florovsky, Georges, *The Elements of Liturgy: An Orthodox View*, Collected Works, vol. XIII, Belmont, MA, p. 93

[6] trans. and ed. by Samuel Hazard Cross and Olgerd P. Shervowitz-Wetzor, Cambridge, MA 1953, pp. 110-111