

Cherubic Hymn and Great Entrance

People: We who mystically represent the Cherubim sing the thrice holy hymn to the life-giving Trinity. Let us set aside all earthly cares that we may receive the King of all....

Priest: *(in a low voice, while the above is being sung)* No one bound by earthly desires and pleasures is worthy to approach, draw near or minister to You, the King of glory. To serve You is great and awesome even for the heavenly powers. But because of Your ineffable and immeasurable love for us, You became man without alteration or change. You were called our High Priest and, as Lord of all, You entrusted to us the celebration of this liturgical sacrifice, without the shedding of blood. For You alone, Lord our God, rule over all things in heaven and on earth. You are carried upon the Cherubic Throne, Lord of the Seraphim and King of Israel. You alone are holy and rest among the holy. Therefore I entreat You, as alone good and ready to hear, look upon me, Your sinful and unworthy servant, and cleanse my soul and heart of evil consciousness. Enable me, by the power of Your Holy Spirit, to stand before Your holy Table vested with the grace of Priesthood, and to celebrate the mystery of Your holy and pure Body and Your precious Blood. To You I come with bowed head and pray: do not turn Your face away from me or reject me from among Your children, but make me, Your sinful and unworthy servant, worthy to offer to You these gifts. For You, Christ our God, are the Offerer and the Offered, the One who receives and is distributed, and to You we give glory, together with Your Father without beginning and Your holy, good and life-giving Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Priest censens reciting in a low voice the prayer "Having beheld Christ's Resurrection" and the 50th psalm, then lifts up the gifts and goes around the church in solemn procession:

Priest: May the Lord God remember all of you in His kingdom, now and forever and to the ages of ages.

People: Amen. *(sing the remainder of the cherubic hymn)*... invisibly escorted by the angelic hosts. Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.

(The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, pp. 12-14)

After the completion of the Scriptural readings we begin the mystical journey that leads us to partaking in the body and blood of Christ. The priest recites in a low voice the prayer that will enable him to celebrate the liturgi-

cal sacrifice, also called a **bloodless sacrifice**, in contrast with the animal sacrifices offered by the Israelites in the Temple.

The prayer reminds the **celebrant** that he is unworthy to approach the Throne of God. Even the angels are overcome with awe when they do so. But in His great love for us, God became man, He became one of us, making it possible for us to approach Him "with the fear of God, faith and love." By the grace of the Holy Spirit, we mystically represent the **Cherubim**—high ranking angels that carry the Lord upon His throne, praising His holiness—and the priest represents the Lord Himself. Thus, when the priest offers the humble gifts of bread and wine, Christ offers the most exalted gift of His own flesh and blood. That is why He is both the One who makes the offering, and the One being offered as a sacrifice, both High Priest and Lamb.

As the priest prepares himself in the altar, what are we supposed to do? We too must get ready, by laying aside all earthly cares. We cannot ascend to the Throne of God if our minds are stuck on earth. If we do not free our minds, all we experience is the priest walking through the church with two covered vessels preceded by altar boys holding fans and crosses, but if we receive the Holy Spirit and expand our vision, then we begin to experience Christ as He willingly goes to the Cross in order to offer Himself on our behalf, accompanied by the hosts of angels. This is why we sing "that we may receive the King of all, invisibly escorted by the angelic hosts."



The solemn procession with the gifts around the church used to have very practical purpose. The faithful would bring their offerings of bread and wine to the Narthex, and the deacons would bring them at this point into the altar to be **consecrated**. Even today, our **prosporo** bakers (*prospora* means "offering") bring the special loaves regularly, and many people donate wine for Holy Communion. The priest prepares the gifts on the disk and in the chalice, and covers them with special prayers during the **Proskomede** service, which we will discuss in our March retreat.

