

THE ORTHODOX SERVICES AND THEIR STRUCTURE

(i) The Five Cycles

From the liturgical viewpoint the life of an Orthodox Christian is composed of various cycles.

First of all, there is the great cycle embracing a man's whole life from birth to death, from cradle to coffin. This consists in actions which are not repeated, but occur once only during the earthly existence of each person: baptism; chrismation or confirmation; burial. To this cycle belong also the sacraments or sacramental blessings which confer special grace for a particular office or vocation within the Christian community: marriage; monastic profession; holy orders.¹

At the other extreme from this major sequence involving a Christian's entire life, there is the daily cycle of prayers and praises offered by the Church once in every twenty-four hours. In the liturgical life of Orthodoxy, as with the Jews and other ancient peoples, the day is considered to begin at sunset. Accordingly the Church observes the following order:

¹ Certain minor qualifications must be added. Under exceptional circumstances, chrismation may be repeated: for instance, an Orthodox who has apostatized to Islam is received back into the Church by anointing with chrism. Second marriages occur after the death of the other partner or, less commonly, after divorce: but this is in some measure a departure from the strict norm. There are various degrees in monastic profession and holy orders: but no single degree is ever repeated, each being conferred once for all.

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Vespers (Gk. *έσπερινός*; Slavonic, *vechérnya*)

Compline (Gk. *άπόδειπνον*; Slavonic, *povechérie*)

Midnight Office or Nocturns (Gk. *μεσονυκτικόν*;
Slavonic, *polúnoshchnitsa*)

Μattins (Gk. *όρθρος*; Slavonic, *útrenya*)

First Hour

Third Hour

Sixth Hour

Ninth Hour

Such is the basic daily pattern. To complete the series there may be added:

(i) The 'Interhours'. During certain periods of fasting, each of the Hours (Gk. *ώραι*; Slavonic, *chasý*) is followed by an intermediate office or 'Interhour' (Gk. *μεσώριον*; Slavonic, *mezhdochásie*).

(ii) The Offices for the Blessing of the Table (a) at midday (b) in the evening.

(iii) Morning and Evening Prayers, and the general commemoration of the Living and the Dead which has its own liturgical form. These are of a more informal character than the other offices. They are read by lay people before the icons in their own homes; in monasteries they are sometimes recited by each member of the community individually in his or her cell, while in other cases they take a corporate form and are read aloud in chapel.

The Holy Liturgy is frequently included in this daily cycle: its place is normally after the Sixth Hour, but during fasts it is celebrated after Vespers. It is somewhat misleading, however, to treat the Liturgy as part of the daily cycle. In the first place, it is not in fact prescribed to be celebrated each day: according to Orthodox practice, except in cathedrals and large monasteries a daily Eucharist has always been the exception rather than the rule. Secondly, and more important, the Eucharist in its deeper reality does not properly belong

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to the 'liturgy of time', and therefore stands apart from the daily cycle. The celebration of the Lord's Supper is always an 'eschatological' event, in which the *eschaton*, the Age to Come, breaks in upon this present age: and so, although occurring in time, it transports the participants to a point altogether outside time—to the 'heavenly places' where there is no past, present, or future, but only the eternal Now. The Eucharist, then, cannot simply be integrated into the temporal sequence nor set on a level with daily offices such as Mattins and Vespers.

Connected with the Liturgy is the service of the Typika (Gk. τυπικά; Slavonic, *izobrazitel'naya*), which is sometimes read after the Sixth Hour on days when there is no celebration of the Eucharist.¹ On occasion it may also precede the Liturgy.

Obviously the great majority of Orthodox are not able to participate in the whole of the daily cycle. It is usually performed in its entirety only in monasteries, and even here there may be considerable abbreviations. In many parish churches Vespers and Mattins are not celebrated daily, but only at weekends and at major feasts. On working days a devout lay Christian will be content to read the Morning and Evening Prayers, in a shorter or a fuller form according to the time at his disposal.

Between these two extremes—the daily sequence, and that of a man's entire life—there are three intermediate cycles which together comprise the Church's Year:

- (i) The weekly cycle of the Eight Tones.
- (ii) The annual cycle of movable feasts, centred upon Easter.
- (iii) The annual cycle of fixed feasts, commencing on 1 September.

In daily worship these three cycles are combined together

¹ During fasts, after the Ninth Hour.

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and superimposed one upon another, thus endowing the liturgical year with a constant and unfailing variety. The material for each cycle is contained in a special book or set of books:

- the weekly cycle in the Octoechos;
- the annual cycle of movable feasts in the Triodion and the Pentekostarion;
- the annual cycle of fixed feasts in the twelve volumes of the Menaia.¹