

THE HISTORY OF THE LITURGY OF THE PRESANCTIFIED GIFTS



LITURGIES IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

- ❖ Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom (most Liturgies throughout the year)
- ❖ Liturgy of St. Basil the Great (10 times/year)
 - ❖ 5 Sundays in Lent, Holy Thursday, Holy Saturday, Eves of Christmas & Theophany, January 1st
- ❖ Liturgy of St. James (the Just, brother of the Lord, October 23rd)
- ❖ Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts
 - ❖ During the weekdays of Lent (not Saturday or Sunday, nor Annunciation)
 - ❖ Holy Monday, Tuesday & Wednesday
 - ❖ For Saints that fall during Lent, like the 40 Holy Martyrs (March 9th)
 - ❖ The 5th Thursday of Lent, when the Canon of St. Andrew is prayed.

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- ❖ These Liturgies were well known and practiced before much of it was written down formally, being handed down by oral tradition, then recorded to be preserved.
- ❖ So, it's a little difficult to accurately determine when each of them began, especially the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts.
- ❖ However, ...

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- ❖ Our tradition is to fast during Lent, more with the foods from which we abstain.
- ❖ Ancient tradition speaks about a total fast from food until 3:00 p.m., at which time the faithful would first come to church for Evening Prayers before having their evening meal.
- ❖ This may have then developed from Evening Prayers, to Vespers, to Vespers with Communion, and then Presanctified as we know it today.
- ❖ Canons of the Church that precede the Presanctified:
 - ❖ Synod of Laodicea (363 A.D.)
 - ❖ Canon 49: During Lent the Bread must not be offered except on the Sabbath Day and on the Lord's Day only.

ST. BASIL THE GREAT (330-379 A.D.)
LETTER XCIII
TO THE PATRICIAN CÆSARIA, CONCERNING COMMUNION

‘It is good and beneficial to communicate every day, and to partake of the holy body and blood of Christ. For He (Jesus) distinctly says, ‘He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life.’

And who doubts that to share frequently in life, is the same thing as to have manifold life. **I, indeed, communicate four times a week,** on the Lord’s day, on Wednesday, on Friday, and on the Sabbath, and on the other days if there is a commemoration of any Saint.

It is needless to point out that for anyone in times of persecution to be compelled **to take the communion in his own hand without the presence of a priest or minister is not a serious offence,** as **long custom** sanctions this practice from the facts themselves.



ST. BASIL THE GREAT (330-379 A.D.)
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All the **solitaries** in the desert, where there is no priest, take the communion themselves, keeping communion at home.

And at Alexandria and in Egypt, each one of the **laity**, for the most part, keeps the communion, at his own house, and participates in it when he likes.

For when once the priest has completed the offering, and given it, the recipient, participating in it each time as entire, is bound to believe that he properly takes and receives it from the giver.

ST. BASIL THE GREAT (330-379 A.D.)
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And even in the church, when the priest gives the portion, the recipient takes it with complete power over it, and so lifts it to his lips with his own hand. It has the same validity whether one portion or several portions are received from the priest at the same time.”

So, it seems as if there was a practice to partake of communion without the formal Liturgy; they would take the Gifts home like they did the antidoron (bread at the end of Liturgy). But because of abuses, this practice was eventually stopped.



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- ❖ The first certain information about its celebration in the capitol of the East (Constantinople) comes to us from the **Paschalion** (616 A.D.):
- ❖ "In the fourth year of Emperor Heraclius (614 A.D.), under Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople (610-638), **commencing with the first week of Lent**, the people, following the Psalm '**Let my prayer ascend to You**' and the celebrant's invocation 'Through the gift of Christ,' while the Presanctified Gifts were being carried to the altar, immediately started to sing '**Now the Powers of heaven**'. This hymn is sung not only during Lent, but every time the Presanctified Gifts are celebrated." (cf. P.G. 92,989)

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❖ Canons of the Church, continued:

❖ Quinisext Council (692 A.D., in Trullo), Canon 52

❖ On all days of the holy fast of Lent, except on the Sabbath, the Lord's day, and the holy day of the Annunciation, the Liturgy of the Presanctified is to be said.

❖ Later, it was limited to Wednesdays & Fridays, and Holy Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, the 5th Thursday, and Saints' Days during Lent.

❖ So, it is thought by some that the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts came into existence formerly in the 6th century in Antioch, Syria, and was then transferred to Constantinople for further liturgical evolution to receive its current shape. But by the 7th century (after 614), it was well developed and celebrated in Constantinople, with its hymns, and then limited to the Lenten season by the above Council in Trullo.

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- ❖ The oldest text of the Presanctified Liturgy as celebrated in the Byzantine Rite today can be found in the often-mentioned Codex Barberini, from the eighth century. Its author is not mentioned.
- ❖ Only later manuscripts from the 11th-12th centuries ascribe its authorship to various Fathers, like St. Basil (d. 379), St. Epiphanius (d. 403), St. Gregory the Great - the Dialogus (d. 604), St. Germanus (d. 732), or some of the Apostles.
- ❖ No historical basis states any one author, so, the author technically remains unknown ...
BUT...

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- ❖ The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts was first documented by [Pope Gregory I](#) (540–604), who had been the [papal legate](#) to [Constantinople](#) (Catholic Encyclopedia).
- ❖ At one time it was supposed that he had composed the Liturgy himself, but now it is generally supposed that he simply recorded what was otherwise being practiced at [Constantinople](#).
- ❖ And so, in the Presanctified Liturgy itself, he is still commemorated as its traditional author.

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- ❖ The oldest description of the Presanctified Liturgy belongs to St. Theodore Studite (d. 826), who wrote a short essay entitled "Explanation of the Divine Liturgy of the Presanctified."
(cf. P.G. 99, 1687-1680)
- ❖ The ritual as described by St. Theodore in his work is very similar to the one used at the present time.

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- ❖ In fact, it was this St. Theodore the Studite who corrected the abuses about each person, monk or nun, having their own private communion. He said:
- ❖ “It is not licit even to touch the Holy Gifts by those who are not priests, except in the case of necessity.” (cf. P.G. 99, 1661)
- ❖ So again, this private communion was substituted with the more solemn communion in church, which eventually developed into the Presanctified Liturgy.

REFERENCES

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