

Celebrating Our Faith

Byzantine Catholic Worship: *Our Church, Its Customs and Rich Heritage*

Feast of Christ, Lover of Mankind

(Most Sacred Heart of Jesus)

*“O most sacred heart of Jesus,
You are heaven’s shining glory;
You revealed Yourself to mankind,
We proclaim Your wondrous story.”*



THE SERVANT OF GOD †Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky once said, “Christian piety has struggled for centuries to give the fullest possible worship to Christ the Saviour, as God and as Man. Meditating on the love of Christ, the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who dwells in her and leads the faithful to the knowledge and love of God, has become more and more conscious of the fact that love is the basic cause of all that Christ has done for mankind. Love is the motive of all His actions. The veneration of the human love of Christ, and with it, the entire internal, spiritual life of Christ, came to be represented in the universal Church by the Heart of Christ, and venerated as the symbol of His love.”

A great authority and lover of the Eastern Rite, Metropolitan Sheptytsky frequently spoke of God’s love in his pastoral letters. He was so overwhelmed by this love that he did not regard the veneration of God’s love under the form of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus out of harmony with the spirit and practice of our Rite, and therefore, he zealously commended it. “The real object of the adoration of the Sacred Heart of Jesus,” he says, “is all that in the human nature of Christ can be embodied in that symbol — even those things which do not flow from the interior feeling of love.”

The church services of the Eastern Church are noted for their profound devotion to the Divine Love and Mercy of God. The Wednesday and Friday services are filled with sincere devotion and reverence toward the Cross, toward Christ’s sufferings, His wounds, and His pierced side. When the Holy See revised our liturgical books in the 1940s, the feast was retained, but under the name “The Feast of the Most Sweet Lord and God our Saviour Jesus Christ, Lover of Mankind.”

In His promises given to St. Margaret Alacoque, Jesus Christ promised the venerators of His Sacred Heart the necessary graces for their state of life; peace in their families; consolation in their pains and trails; assured refuge in life, and especially the grace of a happy death. Millions of souls throughout the world have found peace and happiness, growth in love, and the practice of Christian virtues in the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Divine Liturgy 101: The Antimins

THE ANTIMINS, (from the Greek: *antiminsion*, "instead of the table"; in Slavonic: antimins), is among the most important furnishings of the altar in Eastern Christian liturgical traditions. It is a rectangular piece of cloth, of either linen or silk, typically decorated with representations of the entombment of Christ, the four Evangelists, and scriptural passages related to the Eucharist. A small relic of a martyr is sewn into it. The Eucharist cannot be celebrated without an antimins.

The antimins is placed in the center of the altar table and is unfolded only during the Divine Liturgy, before the Anaphora. At the end of the Liturgy, the antimins is folded in thirds, and then in thirds again, so that when it is unfolded the creases form a cross. When folded, the antimins sits in the center of another slightly larger cloth, the eileton (Slavonic: Ilitón) which is then folded around it in the same manner (3 x 3), encasing it completely. A flattened natural sponge is also kept inside the antimins, which is used to collect any crumbs which might fall onto the Holy Table. When the antimins and eileton are folded, the Gospel Book is laid on top of them.



The antimins must be consecrated and signed by a bishop. The antimins and the chrism are the means by which a bishop indicates his permission for priests under his omophorion to celebrate the Divine Liturgy and Holy Mysteries in his absence, being in effect the church’s license to conduct divine services. If a bishop were to withdraw his permission to serve the Mysteries, he would do so by taking back the antimins and chrism from the priest. Whenever a bishop visits a church or monastery under his omophorion, he will enter the altar and inspect the antimins to be sure that it has been properly cared for, and that it is in fact the one that he issued.

Only a bishop, priest, or deacon is allowed to touch an antimins. Since the antimins is a consecrated object, they must be vested when they do so—the deacon should be fully vested, and the priest vested in at least stole (epitrachelion) and cuffs (epimanikia).

The antimins is a substitute for the altar table. A priest may celebrate the Eucharist on the antimins even if the altar table is not properly consecrated. In emergencies, when an altar table is unavailable, the antimins serves a very important pastoral need by enabling the use of unconsecrated tables for divine services outside of churches or chapels. Formerly if the priest celebrated at a consecrated altar, the sacred elements were placed only on the eileton. However, in current practice the priest always uses the antimins, even on a consecrated altar that has relics sealed in it.

At the Divine Liturgy, during the Litanies (Ektenias) that precede the Great Entrance, the eileton is opened fully and the antimins is opened three-quarters of the way, leaving the top portion folded. After the Entrance, the chalice and diskos are placed on the antimins and the Gifts (bread and wine) are consecrated. The antimins remains unfolded until after all have received Holy Communion and the chalice and diskos are returned to the Table of oblation (Prothesis). The deacon (or, if there is no deacon, the priest) must very carefully inspect the antimins to be sure there are no crumbs left on it. Then, it is folded, followed by folding the eileton, and after which the Gospel Book placed on top of it.

St. John the Baptist, Forerunner of Christ

AMONG ALL THE SAINTS whom the Eastern Church venerates, St. John the Baptist holds a unique place. He alone, of all the Saints, except for the Mother of God, has a feast honouring his Conception, and another honouring his Nativity. The great esteem he enjoys in the Eastern Church is evident from the fact that during the Church Year as many as six feasts are celebrated in his honour: his Conception (September 23); his Nativity (June 24); his Beheading (August 29); the First, Second (February 24) and Third Finding of his Head (May 25); and the Synaxis following the Feast of the Theophany (January 7).

Among all holy persons of the Old Testament, St. John the Baptist is especially outstanding, because he stands on the border of the Old and New Testaments. He closes the doors on the prophets and opens them to the Apostles. He is not only a prophet, but also a precursor (forerunner) of Christ, a baptizer and a martyr. John, already cleansed of original sin while still in his mother Elizabeth's womb, is the only person given the privilege of baptizing "Him Whose coming the other prophets had foretold but did not live to see."

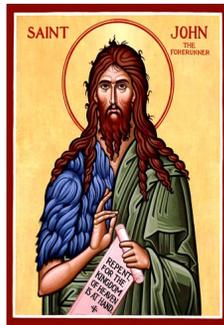
The life of John the Baptist was an unbroken chain of sacrifice and penance. He preached the people new doctrines never proclaimed before: a baptism of repentance, the nearness of the kingdom of God, the presence among them of Jesus, their Messiah and Saviour. John baptized Jesus in the river Jordan and later pointed him out as the "Lamb of God." (John 1:36). He fearlessly exposed and denounced all sin and scandal. He intrepidly addressed the proud Pharisees: "You offspring of vipers! Who showed you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Luke 3:7) He does not fear to censure the sins and scandals of the royal house: "For John said to Herod: 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.'" (Mark 6:18)

His holy life and teaching was crowned by his heroic death. He fell like a soldier at his post, giving up his life for the highest ideals: the service of God and his people. Therefore, he remains for all times an everlasting symbol of an heroic champion of all that is holy, courageous and sublime.

Our service in honour of the feast of his Nativity praises his singular virtues, heroic character, and unique role as forerunner of the Messiah, bestowing upon him various titles, such as: "mighty preacher of penance", "desert-loving turtle dove", "Lamp of light", "star of the Sun of Justice", "the greatest prophet", "the universal apostle", "true friend of Christ, the Bridegroom", "illustrious star", "God-marked voice", "preacher of the Lamb of God and the Word", "the end of the prophets and the beginning of the Apostles", "earthly angel and heavenly man", "the forerunner, star above all stars."

"O Prophet and forerunner of the coming of Christ, we, who lovingly honour you, are at a loss to praise you worthily; for your mother's barrenness and father's silence were both ended by your honoured and glorious birth."

from the Troparion of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist



Liturgical Colours in Our Church and What They Represent

THE BYZANTINE RITE does not have a universal system of colours — the service books of the Byzantine tradition only specifying "light" or "dark" vestments. In the Greek tradition, maroon or burgundy is common for solemn feast days, and a wide variety of colours are used at other times, the most common of which are gold and white. Many clergy who follow Byzantine practice have adopted the more complex colour scheme that was developed in Slavic practice, but you will also see many diverse colours used in vestments that do not easily fit into the that scheme.

Some Slavic-use churches and others influenced by Western traditions have adopted a cycle of liturgical colours which may change from church to church.

Generally, the following traditional liturgical colours are used:

White: The symbol of God's uncreated Light. White vestments are worn on the great feasts of Easter, Christmas, Theophany, the Ascension and the Transfiguration.

Red: Used on Sundays during Great Lent, during the Christmas Fast (also known as Pylypivka or Nativity Fast), on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, and sometimes on the feastdays of the great martyrs. (According to an ancient Byzantine custom, red is the colour of mourning for popes.)

Gold: The colour of glory, greatness and virtue. It is assigned to Sundays, as the days of the Lord — the King of glory. In addition, the Church in golden vestments notes the days of His special anointed ones — the prophets, the Apostles, and the hierarchal saints.

Green: The colour of plants and a symbol of new life. It is used on Palm Sunday and Pentecost Sunday, and throughout the feast of the Holy Trinity (until its end).

Light blue or blue: The colour of the feastdays of the Most Holy Mother of God. It is the colour of the sky, and it conforms to the teaching about the Mother of God who held the Resident of the Heavens in Her Most Pure Body.

Black: Nearest in spirit to the weekdays of Great Lent. It is the symbol of renunciation from worldly strife, and the colour associated with repentance and strictness to oneself.

Orange or rust: Worn in some places for Ss. Peter and Paul fast (from the Monday after Pentecost until the feast (June 29), and in other places for Ss. Peter and Paul feast through the Transfiguration (August 6).

The symbolism of colours may serve to underline moods appropriate to a season of the liturgical year or may highlight a special occasion. As you can see, there is great variety in ways of doing things.

For more information, visit www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liturgical_colours.