Anafora and Liturgy

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**Coptic Orthodox Church**

*“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?*

*The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?”*

(1Co 10:16 NKJ).

The [Last Supper](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Last_Supper) appears in all three [Synoptic Gospels](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Synoptic_Gospels): ([Mark 14:22-25](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+14%3A22-25&version=NIV), [Matthew 26:26-29](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+26%3A26-29&version=NIV), [Luke 22:13-20](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+22%3A13-20&version=NIV)). The Gospel according to St. John did not repeat the same details but mentioned the words of our Lord that explained the effects and consequences of eating His flesh and drinking His blood (John 6:50-56). The [First Epistle to the Corinthians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Epistle_to_the_Corinthians) (1Co 11:23-27) and the book of Acts, suggests how early Christians celebrated what [Paul the Apostle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_the_Apostle) called the Lord's Supper, and the Acts called the “breaking of bread” (Acts 2:42) and “ministering Λειτουργούντων” (Acts 13:2).

This sacrament existed as early as the church itself, because there is not church without the Eucharist. The bread and wine, by the role of the Holy Spirit, converts into the true Body and true Blood of Christ and is given for our salvation, remission of sins and eternal life to those who partake of it.

These concepts are common in the Oriental Orthodox Churches as well as the Catholic Church. Our Churches believe that the Eucharist is a great divine mystery and considers it one of the seven sacraments of the church.

**The Anafora:**

"Anafora" is a [Greek](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_language) noun ἀναφορά. “The verb ἀναφe,ρw (avna, + fe,rw) means a "raising up", or "offering". The [Septuagint](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Septuagint) used the verb and its derivatives about the Old Testament sacrifices (cf. Lev. Ps 51: 19). In the New Testament the verb ἀναφe,ρw “raise, offer” and its derivatives are used in all the Christian church prayers since Apostolic times when speaking about the offering of Christ on the cross. An example is (Heb. 7: 27) “*who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices”*. Hence the word was introduced in the Eucharistic prayers… The term is used in the Apostolic Canons (Book 2: chapter 59:4, Book 8 chapter 47: 3) and it means liturgy.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

**The Anafora of the Coptic Liturgy consists of**:

**1-The Institution narrative:** starting with the priest saying, “**He instituted for us this great Mystery of godliness**. For being determined to give Himself up to death for the life of people, He took bread into His holy hands, which are without sport or blemish, blessed, and life-giving. He looked up towards heaven to you, O God, who are His Father and master of everyone. And when He had given thanks He blessed it, He sanctifies it, He broke it and gave it to His own holy disciples and saintly apostles saying, “Take, eat of it, all of you. For this is My body… Likewise also, the cup after supper, He mixed it of wine and water…. ” etc.

**2-Anamnesis:** (greek ἀνάμνησις meaning reminiscence and/or memorial sacrifice)[[2]](#footnote-2): The priest says, “For every time you eat of this bread and drink of this cup, you proclaim My death confess My resurrection and **remember Me till I come**”… “Therefore, as **we also** **commemorate** His holy passion, His resurrection from the dead, His ascension into heavens, His sitting at your right hand, O Father, and His second coming from the heavens, awesome and full of glory, we offer unto You Your gifts from what is Yours, for everything, concerning everything and in everything.”

**3-Epiclesis: (**greek ἐπίκλησις "invocation" or "calling down from on high") is that part of the [Anaphora](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anaphora_%28liturgy%29) (Eucharistic Prayer) by which the [priest](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Priest) invokes the [Holy Spirit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy_Spirit) (or the power of His blessing) upon the Eucharistic bread and wine**:**[[3]](#footnote-3)

**“**Epiclesis in Christian theology refers.. most particularly to the solemn invocation of the Holy Spirit in **the most sacred part of the eucharistic liturgy**, after the words of institution (‘This is my body’) so that the eucharistic gifts might be consecrated and transformed. The epiclesis was a feature of almost all ancient liturgies… In the East the liturgical consecration was generally regarded as effected by the special operations of the Spirit (although the operations of God are from the single and undivided Trinity), and according to the teaching of Gregory of Nyssa (*Catechetical Oration* 96-97) and John Chrysostom (*Homily 1 On Judas’ Betrayal*, par. 60, as occurring only after the prayer of epiclesis. **To this day, in Orthodox ritual, it is not until the moment that the clergy and people fall down in worship before the sacrament**.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

The deacon says, “Worship God in fear and trembling”, and everyone kneels. While kneeling with outstretched hands, the priest says the Prayer of the Descent of the Holy Spirit (the Epiclesis) inaudibly: “And we ask You, O Lord our God –we Your sinful and unworthy servants, we worship You by the pleasure of Your goodness –that **Your Holy Spirit descend upon us and upon these gifts set forth, and purify them, convert them, and manifest them as a sanctification for Your saints**”.

Everyone raises their heads, and three times the priest quickly signs with the sign of the cross the oblation and says aloud: “**And this bread He makes into His Holy Body… and this cup also the precious blood of His new covenant**.”

**Transmutation or Convert**

**St. Irenaeus** (c.180) says:

“**And then, when we have perfected the oblation, we invoke the Holy Spirit, that He may exhibit this sacrifice, both the bread (the body of Christ) and the cup (the blood of Christ)**”[[5]](#footnote-5)

We believe that after the consecration of the bread and of the wine, they are converted into the true Body and true Blood of our Lord, under the accidents (outward appearance) of bread and wine. Of course the bread and wine do not change into meat and blood (corpuscles, plasma etc.), but remain bread and wine.

“The belief in a ‘real presence’ of the living Christ in the Eucharist is common to east and west and very ancient. In what way is such a ‘real presence’ to be explained? It is clear, and uncontested, that in every detectable way the bread remains bread, the wine wine, and yet they are now ‘really’ Christ’s body and blood.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

In the Coptic liturgy of St. Basil the priest says in the prayer of the Descent of the Holy Spirit (the Epiclesis) inaudibly, while he points to himself and to the oblation present before him: “…*descend upon us and upon these gifts set forth, and* ***purify them, convert them****, and manifest them as a sanctification of your saints.*”

As the Holy Spirit came upon Virgin Mary, He consecrated her belly (as the altar vessels are consecrated), purified and sanctified her, in the same manner He comes upon the bread and wine purifying and changing them. And, as the Word of God was united to the human nature in the belly of St. Virgin Mary, in the same manner He is united with the bread and wine. This is considered an extension to His incarnation not a repetition of the incarnation. However, it is the role of the Holy Spirit to convert the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ.

**St. Irenaeus** **said**:

“[**The wine and bread] having received the Word of God, become the Eucharist**, **which is the body and blood of Christ**.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

We believe that in the Eucharist we partake of the same body of Christ born in Bethlehem, baptized in the Jordan, crucified, buried, rose again, ascended, sits at the right hand of the God and Father, and is to come again in the last day. The Eucharistic bread is an extension to the divine incarnation and not a recurrence of it. It takes the same path of the bread that Jesus Christ used to eat for His body to grow united with the Divinity. His Humanity united to His Divinity in the same moment of the incarnation and this was never repeated.

St. Mary baked bread for Christ as a child in order to nourish and grow up. He grew up but we never consider the bread he ate -which added to His weight- as a new incarnation, but just an extension. The same apply to the bread and wine of the Eucharist at the moment of the dwelling of the Holy Spirit upon the oblation.

**St. Irenaeus** says:

“For the bread, which is produced from the earth, when it receives the invocation of God, is no longer common bread, but **the Eucharist-consisting of two realities, earthly and heavenly**.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

**On the unity between the Word and His Flesh St. Cyril the Pillar of Faith wrote:**

“And we do not say either that God the Word, of the Father, was transformed into the nature of the Flesh, or that the flesh passed into the Word (for Each remaineth that which it is by nature, and One Christ of Both); but in a manner unspeakable and passing human understanding, the Word united to His Own Flesh... **He therefore that eateth the Holy Flesh of Christ, hath eternal life: for the Flesh hath in Itself the Word Which is by Nature Life.** Wherefore He saith, I will raise him up at the last day. Instead of saying, My Body shall raise him up, i. e., him that eateth It, He hath put I : not as though He were other than His Own Flesh (and not wholly so by nature), for **after the Union He cannot at all be severed into a pair of sons**.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

There is no lapse of time between the formation of the human nature in Christ, its sanctification and its unity with the incarnate Logos. Similarly, the dwelling of the Holy Spirit on the bread and wine sanctifying and changing them coincides with the coming upon of the Word and its union with it. The Holy Spirit performs an extraordinary act in changing the bread and wine to become the body and blood of Christ at the same moment the Word of God unites to it. Hence the bread becomes His own Body and the mingled wine in the chalice becomes His own blood.

**The following extracts from the early fathers clarifies the early church view, which is our view till now, in regards to the Eucharist.**

**The Early Church View of the Eucharist**

**The Didache** (c. 80-140) mentions:

“You gave food and drink to men for enjoyment, that they might give thanks to you. **But to us you freely gave spiritual food and drink and life eternal...**”[[10]](#footnote-10)

“But every Lord’s Day, gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after **having confessed your transgression**, that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one that is at variance with his fellow man come together with you, **until they are reconciled**, so that your sacrifice may not be profaned.”[[11]](#footnote-11)

**St. Ignatius of Antioch** (c. 105) one of the Apostolic Fathers said;

“I desire **the bread of God, the heavenly bread, the bread of life-which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, the Son of God**… And I desire the drink of God, namely His blood, which is incorruptible love and eternal life.”[[12]](#footnote-12)

**St.** [**Justin Martyr**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Justin_Martyr) (c.160) says:

“**We do not receive these as common bread and common drink**. Rather, Jesus **Christ our Savior, having been made flesh**… had both flesh and blood for our salvation. So, likewise, we have been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which (by transmutation) our blood and flesh are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

“This prophecy refers to the bread which our Christ gave us to eat, **in remembrance of His being make flesh** for the sake of His believers, for whom also He suffered. And it refers to the cup which He gave us to drink, in remembrance of His own blood, with giving of thanks.”[[14]](#footnote-14)

**St. Irenaeus** (c.180) says:

“Our opinion is in accordance with the Eucharist, and, in turn, the Eucharist establishes our opinion. For we offer to Him His own, announcing consistently the fellowship and union of the flesh and spirit. For **the bread, which is produced from the earth, when it receives the invocation of God, is no longer common bread**, but **the Eucharist-consisting of two realities, earthly and heavenly**. So also our bodies, when they receive the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of the resurrection to eternity.”[[15]](#footnote-15)

“The oblation of the Eucharist is not a carnal one, but a spiritual one. And in this respect, it is pure. For we make an oblation to God of the bread and the cup of blessing, giving Him thanks in that He has commanded the earth to bring forth these fruits for our nourishment. And then, when we have perfected the oblation, **we invoke the Holy Spirit,** thatHe may exhibit this sacrifice, both the bread (the body of Christ) and the cup (the blood of Christ) in order that those who receive these antitypes may obtain remission of sins and life eternal.”[[16]](#footnote-16)

**St. Cyprian** (c250) said:

“He says that whoever will eat of His bread will live forever. So it is clear that those who partake of His body and receive the Eucharist by the right of communion are living. On the other hand, **we must fear and pray lest anyone who is separate from Christ’s body -being barred from communion- should remain at a distance from salvation**. **For He Himself warns and says, “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.**”[[17]](#footnote-17)

“**In the priest Melchizedek, we see the sacrament of the sacrifice of the Lord prefigured**… It says, “And Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought forth bread and wine.” Now, Melchizedek was a priest of the Most High God, and he blessed Abraham. The Holy Spirit declares in the Psalms that Melchizedek was a type of Christ.”[[18]](#footnote-18)

“**That the Eucharist is to be received with fear and honor**. In Leviticus: “But whatever soul shall eat of the flesh of the sacrifice of salvation, which is the Lord’s, and his uncleanness is still upon him, that soul shall perish from his people.” Also in the first to the Corinthians: “Whosoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.”[[19]](#footnote-19)

**Stories related by St. Cyprian illustrating how the fathers taught people to honor, respect and fear the sacraments:**

“Learn what occurred when I myself was present and a witness. Some parents who by chance were escaping, being little careful on account of their terror, left a little daughter under the care of a wet-nurse. The nurse gave up the forsaken child to the magistrates. They gave it, in the presence of an idol whither the people flocked (because it was not yet able to eat flesh on account of its years), bread mingled with wine, which however itself was the remainder of what had been used in the immolation of those that had perished. Subsequently the mother recovered her child. But the girl was no more able to speak, or to indicate the crime that had been committed, than she had before been able to understand or to prevent it. Therefore it happened unawares in their ignorance, that when we were sacrificing, the mother brought it in with her. Moreover, the girl mingled with the saints, became impatient of our prayer and supplications, and was at one moment shaken with weeping, and at another tossed about like a wave of the sea by the violent excitement of her mind; as if by the compulsion of a torturer the soul of that still tender child confessed a consciousness of the fact with such signs as it could. When, however, the solemnities were finished, and the deacon began to offer the cup to those present, and when, as the rest received it, its turn approached, the little child, by the instinct of the divine majesty, turned away its face, compressed its mouth with resisting lips, and refused the cup. Still the deacon persisted, and, although against her efforts, forced on her some of the sacrament of the cup. Then there followed a sobbing and vomiting. In a profane body and mouth the Eucharist could not remain; the draught sanctified in the blood of the Lord burst forth from the polluted stomach.”

“And another woman, when she tried with unworthy hands to open her box, in which was the holy (body) of the Lord, was deterred by fire rising from it from daring to touch it. And when one, who himself was defiled, dared with the rest to receive secretly a part of the sacrifice celebrated by the priest; he could not eat nor handle the holy of the Lord, but found in his hands when opened that he had a cinder.”[[20]](#footnote-20)

**The Divine Liturgy[[21]](#footnote-21)**

“The word “Liturgy” is a Greek word (Λειτουργία) that consists of two parts: lei/toj = lao,j meaning “people” and e;rgon meaning “work”, therefore the word means “public work”. However, in translating the Torah into the Greek (the Septuagint) the term was used religiously to designate “the temple services”. During the early Christian era… the term was introduced as an expression of Christian rituals of worship. The Divine Liturgy (Θεία Λειτουργία) is a [Eucharistic](http://orthodoxwiki.org/Eucharist) service (εὐχαριστία ‘giving of thanks’).

**The Divine Liturgy consists of two main sections**: the first is instructive and it includes the psalmody, the readings, the sermon, the litanies; this section is named the Liturgy of the Word or the Synaxis (su,naxij). In old days it used to be named the Liturgy of the Catechumen. The second section is the prayers of effecting the sacrament, it includes the offering of the oblation, the anaphora, the sanctification, the diptychs, the communion and absolutions. This section is sometimes called the Liturgy of the Mystery, or the Liturgy of the [Eucharist](http://orthodoxwiki.org/Eucharist). In old times it was named the Liturgy of the Faithful.

The Divine Liturgy started at the Last Supper when our Lord gave His disciples His Body and Blood after the paschal meal, [and after Judas left cf. Jn 13: 31]. This sacrament was handed over from the Lord to His disciples and the holy church practices it in remembrance of the Lord till His second coming (cf. Lk 22: 19, 1Cor. 11: 24-26). The Lord during this Supper prayed as a high priest (Jn 17: 1-26); taught His disciples to pray (Jn 14: 13, 16: 23, Lk 6: 12, Mt 6: 5-9, Lk 11: 2-4); He and His disciples praised (Mt 26: 30) meaning that they sung the psalms of the Jewish Pascha.

Our churches consider this procedure as their archetype: prayer – psalm (psalmody) – teaching – Eucharist – communion. Besides, the instructive or tutorial meetings of the Jewish synagogue that the church -the New Israel- had inherited, this formed during the Apostolic times and thereafter the unwritten tradition of the Divine Liturgy, through the church by the Apostles, who handed down the ceremonial rituals of the sacrament, together with the tutorial meetings.

This tradition was formed everywhere according to the divine economy with local elements and spiritual contribution of all the people of Christ according to the previous capability and knowledge of each. Therefore, when it was written in the fourth century, different liturgical texts were produced, carrying names of writers who are fathers of the church, while the texts refer back to the Apostles themselves who established the church. Hence, the liturgical tradition of each local church started.[[22]](#footnote-22)

These texts were examined throughout the ages, sections were added, others deleted, but they all remain faithful to the first tradition, and the basis that developed during the fourth and fifth centuries AD.

The liturgies of the Christian world are categorized -according to the places on geographic basis- into families called “Liturgical Types”. These Types depend upon the internal features of these families. Every liturgical type has one liturgy or more, but it is a complete type of worship formed of sacramental services, other holy rituals, midnight services, daily prayers, festivals, etc.

The worship in our church has similar as well as different structures than other parts of the world, but this leads to excessive richness in worship.

**Liturgical types are divided into two big families**:

1-Easter Liturgical Type: (a-Egyptian family, b- Antiochene Syrian family)

2-Western Liturgical Type

The Coptic Orthodox Church belongs to the Eastern Liturgical Type, the Egyptian Liturgical Family. ”

**Early Church Liturgy**

“*As they* ***ministered (Λειτουργούντων)*** *to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them*.” (Act 13:2 NKJ).

The Greek work used in this verse is Λειτουργούντων (verb participle present active genitive masculine plural) meaning “to be a public servant, i.e. to perform religious functions”. Its noun is Leitourgi,a meaning “public function (as priest ‘liturgy’)”.[[23]](#footnote-23) This proves that there were liturgical services since the time of the Apostles.

**The following extracts presents sections of some liturgical texts used by the early church:**

**The Didache** mentions (c. 80-140):

“Now concerning the Thanksgiving (Eucharist), thus give thanks. First, concerning the cup: We thank thee, our Father, for the holy vine of David Thy servant, which Thou madest known to us through Jesus Thy Servant; to Thee be the glory for ever. And concerning the broken bread: We thank Thee, our Father, for the life and knowledge which Thou modest known to us through Jesus Thy Servant; to Thee be the glory forever. Even as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became one, so let Thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy kingdom; for Thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever.”[[24]](#footnote-24)

“But after ye are filled, thus give thanks: We thank Thee, holy Father, for Thy holy name which Thou didst cause to tabernacle in our hearts, and for the knowledge and faith and immortality, which Thou madest known to us through Jesus Thy Servant; to Thee be the glory forever. Thou, Master almighty, didst create all things for Thy name’s sake; Thou gavest food and drink to men for enjoyment, that they might give thanks to Thee; but to us Thou didst freely give spiritual food and drink and life eternal through Thy Servant. Before all things we thank Thee that Thou art mighty; to Thee be the glory forever. Remember, Lord, Thy Church, to deliver it from all evil and to make it perfect in Thy love, and gather it from the four winds, sanctified for Thy kingdom which Thou hast prepared for it; for Thine is the power and the glory for ever. Let grace come, and let this world pass away. Hosanna to the God (Son) of David! If anyone is holy, let him come; if anyone is not so, let him repent. Maranatha. Amen.”[[25]](#footnote-25)

**St. Justin Martyr** (c.160)

“And on the day called **Sunday**, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the **memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read**, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, **when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen. Then [the Eucharist] is distributed to everyone**, and everyone participates in [the bread and wine], over which thanks have been given.”[[26]](#footnote-26)

**St. Cyprian** (c. 250):

“The priest, by way of preface before his prayer, prepares the minds of the brethren by saying, **“Lift up you hearts.” The people respond, “We lift them up unto the Lord.”** He does this so he may be reminded that he himself would think of nothing but the Lord.”[[27]](#footnote-27)

**Apostolic Constitution** (compiled c 390)

“In the middle, let the reader stand upon some high place: let him read the books of Moses, of Joshua the son of Nun, of the Judges, and of the Kings and of the Chronicles, and those written after the return from the captivity; and besides these, the books of Job and of Solomon, and of the sixteen prophets. But when there have been two lessons severally read, let some other person **sing the hymns of David**, and let the people join at the conclusions of the verses. Afterwards let our **Acts be read**, and the **Epistles of Paul** our fellow-worker, which he sent to the churches under the conduct of the Holy Spirit; and afterwards let a deacon or a presbyter **read the Gospels**, both those which Matthew and John have delivered to you, and… Luke and Mark. And while the Gospel is read, let all the presbyters and deacons, and all the people, stand up in great silence… In the next place, let the presbyters one by one, not all together, **exhort** the people, and the bishop in the last place, as being the commander…

After this, let **all rise up** with one consent, and **looking towards the east**, after the catechumens and penitents are gone out, pray to God eastward… let that deacon who is at the high priest’s hand say to the people. Let no one have any quarrel against another; let no one come in hypocrisy. **Then let the men give the men, and the women give the women, the Lord’s kiss**. But let no one do it with deceit, as Judas betrayed the Lord with a kiss. After this let the deacon **pray for the whole Church, for the whole world**, and the several parts of it, and the fruits of it; for the priests and the rulers, for the high priest and the king, and the peace of the universe. After this let the **high priest pray for peace upon the people, and bless them**, as Moses commanded the priests to bless the people, in these words: “The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and give thee peace.” **Let the bishop pray for the people**, and say: “Save Thy people, O Lord, and bless Thine inheritance, which Thou hast obtained with the precious blood of Thy Christ, and hast called a royal priesthood, and an holy nation.” After this let the sacrifice follow, the people standing, and praying silently; and when the oblation has been made, **let every rank by itself partake of the Lord’s body and precious blood in order, and approach with reverence and holy fear**, as to the body of their king. Let the women approach with their heads covered, as is becoming the order of women; **but let the door be watched, lest any unbeliever, or one not yet initiated, come in**.”[[28]](#footnote-28)

**Some forms of Early Liturgies are found in:[[29]](#footnote-29)**

1- The Constitution of James, the Holy Apostle and Brother of the Lord (p. 486-491)

2- The Divine Liturgy of James, the Holy Apostle and Brother of the Lord (p.537-550)

3- The Divine Liturgy of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Mark (p. 551-560)

4- The Liturgy of the Blessed Apostles (p.561-568).

**Leavened Bread and Wine Mingled with Water**

In our church, for the Eucharist we use leavened bread, since Christ on the cross carried our sins (leaven). The bread of the oblation is made out of only three ingredients: fine [wheat flour](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wheat_flour) (since He is blameless), pure water, and leaven. Our tradition is that our Lord used leavened bread, and wine mingled with water when giving the sacrament to His disciples. It took place Thursday evening before sunset so leaven was still not removed.

Besides, the wine used should be fermented grapes’ juice with no alcohol. It was the Jewish tradition to mingle water with wine in the paschal meal.

**St. Cyprian wrote**:

“The cup should be mingled with a mixture of wine and water.. The cup that the Lord offered was mixed and it was wine that He called His blood.”[[30]](#footnote-30)

We stamp the bread of the oblation with a special liturgical seal because Jesus Christ said: “*Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because* ***God the Father has set His seal on Him***" (Jn 6: 27). The seal has the Trisagion written in coptic, a big cross in the middle, 12 small crosses around, and five holes signifying the five injures in the body of Christ on the cross (two in His hands, one in His feet, one in place of the spear in His side, one for the crown of thorns on His head).

The bread used in the [Divine Liturgy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divine_Liturgy) should be fresh when presented at the [altar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Altar). Several ones will be baked, and the priest chooses the best one for the [Lamb](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lamb_%28liturgy%29) that will be [consecrated](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consecrated). All of it should be distributed, nothing at all to be left. Moreover, all the remaining loaves are offered to the congregation after the end of the [Divine Liturgy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divine_Liturgy).

Never more than one bread is to be consecrated, and never more than one cup. The Eucharist is never celebrated more than once on the same altar during the same day, and a priest cannot pray except one liturgy per day.

**St. Ignatius wrote:**

“Take heed, then, to have **only one Eucharist**. **For there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup to the unity of His Blood**.”[[31]](#footnote-31)

In our church only a priest (or a higher priestly rank) can carry the Holy Body and distribute it.

**St. Cyprian wrote:**

“Certainly, **only the priest** who imitates that which Christ did [i.e. using wine mixed with water] **is the one who truly discharges the office of Christ**. He only offers a true and full sacrifice in the church of God the Father when he proceeds to offer it in the manner that he sees Christ Himself to have offered it.”[[32]](#footnote-32)

**The Coptic Liturgy**

At the present time, the [Coptic Orthodox Church](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coptic_Orthodox_Church) uses three Divine Liturgies: The Coptic Liturgy of St. Basil (4th Century AD) which is most widely used, the [Liturgy of St. Mark the Apostle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liturgy_of_St_Cyril), this liturgy is also known as the Liturgy of St. Cyril, and the [Liturgy of St Gregory the Theologian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liturgy_of_St_Gregory_the_Theologian). The three liturgies have common themes.

 “The Coptic liturgy grew from the original Greek rite of Alexandria, developing by the 4th century its own native characteristics. This process took place mainly in the monasteries.”[[33]](#footnote-33)

**Structure of the Coptic Liturgy:[[34]](#footnote-34)**

Our Eucharistic service is preceded by the Vespers raising of incense, Midnight praises and Matins raising of incense, which are preparations in order to make us worthy to be ready physically, psychologically and spiritually for the divine liturgy.

**Liturgy of the Catechumens:**

It begins with the blessing of vestments followed by praying the canonical prayers of the Hours then the Offertory.

**The offertory:**

Choosing the Lamb presents the agreement of the Divine Trinity to the hypostasis of the “Son”… During the offertory the congregation chants “Lord Have Mercy” 41 times fervently.. After completing the choice of the Lamb the priest baptizes the Lamb with water… The priest holds the Lamb wrapped in the silk corporal, above his head while standing at the Royal door facing westward and says, “Glory and Honour, Honour and Glory to the Holy Trinity…” until the “procession of the Lamb” is completed. The priests starts by doing the three signs of the cross followed by the prayer of thanksgiving, then covers the lamb with clean corporal, and likewise the Chalice. The altar is covered with the Prospherin (a large altar covering). The Priest prays the absolution of ministers then enters the sanctuary to start the raising of incense. He comes out with the censor and proceeds to raise incense to the entire congregation to bless them, during which they chant some hymns.

**The Readings:**

1. Pauline Epistle – from the Epistles of St. Paul.
2. Catholic Epistle – from the Epistles of Saints James, Peter, John and Jude
3. Praxis – a chapter from the Acts of the Apostles
4. Sinaxarium - biography of saints of the day.
5. The Gospel followed by a sermon.

**The Three Major Litanies**

The Litanies of Peace, of the Fathers and of the Gatherings. These litanies are full of strong pleadings, for the safety of the Church and the whole world, for protecting the Church fathers, and for the gatherings of the church, so that they may be conducted without any obstacles from the Church’s enemies or devils etc.

**The Liturgy of the Believers:**

The Liturgy of the believers begins with the Orthodox Creed of Faith recited by the whole church, audibly declaring our faith in One God in the Holy Trinity, the work of redemption fulfilled by the only- begotten Son, and the work of the Holy Spirit in our sanctification and purification.

**Prayer of Reconciliation:**

The priest mentions the wonderful work of Jesus to reconcile man with his creator. He also mentions the story of salvation made by our Lord Jesus Christ for mankind when He destroyed the death which entered into the world through the envy of the devil, and He filled the earth with peace which is from heaven. At the end of the first part the deacon calls the congregation saying, “Pray for the perfect peace, for love, and for the pure apostolic kisses”. In the second part of the prayer of reconciliation the priest asks God to fill our hearts with his divine peace that surpasses the mind, to keep our hearts and thoughts in Christ Jesus, the king of Peace. The ‘prayer of reconciliation’ in some books is called ‘prayer of kissing’ in some old liturgical books, as at the end of the prayer the deacon says to the congregation, “**Greet one another with a holy kiss**” and the congregation greet each other. Men greet men and women greet women.

The congregation sing, “Through the pleadings of the Mother of God, St. Mary, Lord grant us the forgiveness of our sins. We worship you, O Christ, with Your gracious Father and the Holy Spirit for You have some and saved us. The gift of peace, the sacrifice of praise.”

**The Anaphora:**

The Anaphora is the most solemn part of the [Divine Liturgy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divine_Liturgy), in which the offerings of bread and wine are consecrated as the body and blood of [Christ](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus).

**St. Cyprian** (c. 250) said:

“The priest, by way of preface before his prayer, prepares the minds of the brethren by saying, **“Lift up you hearts.” The people respond, “We lift them up unto the Lord.”** He does this so he may be reminded that he himself would think of nothing but the Lord.”[[35]](#footnote-35)

This is how the anaphora of the Coptic Church starts. The priest says, “The Lord be with you”, and the congregation responds, “And with your spirit”. The priest then says, “**Lift up your hearts**”, the congregation responds, “**They are with the Lord**”. When the priest sees this, he thanks the Lord and urges the congregation to thank Him by saying adds, “Let us give thanks to the Lord” and the congregations responds, “He is worthy and righteous”.

The priest chants a part that starts with “Right and Worthy, truly You are right and worthy” that God is worthy of all thanksgiving, glorification and praise because He is creator, worshipped by the holy powers seen and unseen. The deacon says, “You seated stand up”. The priest says, “Before whom stand the angels, the archangels, the principalities, the authorities, the thrones, the lordships and the powers…”. The deacon says, “Look towards East”. The priest says, “For around You stand the Cherubim, full of eyes and the Seraphim of six wings, praising You continuously without ceasing saying” and the congregation sings, “…Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts. Heaven and Earth are full of your Holy glory” (cf Isaiah 6).

**The Three Holy ‘Agios’:**

The priest takes this praise, said by the congregation and recites it in a beautiful tune as he makes the sign of the cross upon himself, then upon the servants on either side of the altar, and finally upon the congregation. This is followed by the story of our creation, the fall, God’s mercy by sending His prophets, and then His incarnation at the fullness of time in order to redeem us from sin and give us the possibility of holiness once again. He descended into hades and freed all those who died in the hope of the coming redeemer. The congregation recites, “Amen I believe”. The priest completes “He rose from the dead on the third day…” He completes the incident of His resurrection, and His second coming which will be fulfilled at the end of ages, when the Lord Jesus will judge the world and reward everyone according to their deeds. When reminded about the second coming and the general judgment, the congregation proclaim saying, “Let it be according to Your mercy O Lord, and not according to our sins”.

**The Consecration or the Institution Narration:**

This is considered the most solemn part of the liturgy as it includes The Institution, the Anamensis (remembrance), the Epiclesis (the dwelling of the Holy Spirit, thus, the conversion of the bread and wine into true body and true blood of Christ).

The priest points to the bread and wine saying, “He **instituted** for us this great mystery of godliness. For He was determined to give Himself up for the life of the world”. The congregation responds, “Truly we believe”. The priest takes the Bread into his hands and says, “He took bread upon His Holy immaculate undefiled and blessed life-giving hands…”. Beginning with this statement the Divine Liturgy teaches us the method by which the Lord followed to institute that great Mystery for godliness and redemption. The congregation says, “We believe that this is true, amen”. The priest places his right hand on the Bread that is on his left hand, lifting his eyes toward heaven saying, “He looked up towards Heaven to You, O God, His Father and Master of everyone. And when He had given thanks, He blessed it, He sanctified it”. The congregation each time respond by saying, “Amen”, then they say, “We believe, confess and glorify You”. The priest carefully divides the Bread saying, “He broke it, and gave it to His own holy disciples and pure Apostles saying, Take, eat of it, you all, for this is My Body, which is to be broken for you and many others, given for the forgiveness of sins. Do this **in remembrance** of Me”.

The priest places his hands on the rim of the chalice and says, “Likewise the chalice also after supper, He mixed it of wine and water, and when He had given thanks, He blessed it, and he sanctified it”. The congregation each time responds by saying, “Amen”, “Again we believe, confess and glorify”. The priest holds the chalice in his hands, while he continues the prayer saying, “He tasted, and gave it also to His own holy disciples and pure Apostles saying, Take, drink of it you all, for this is my Blood of the new Testament which is shed for you and many others. Do this in remembrance of me.”

The priest motions towards the Body and the Chalice saying, “For every time you shall eat of this Bread and drink of this Cup, you preach my death, confess My resurrection and **remember Me until I come**.” The congregation responds with this wonderful hymn, “Amen, amen, Amen, we preach You death, O Lord, Your Holy Resurrection and Ascension we acknowledge, We praise You, we bless You, we thank You, O Lord, and supplicate You, O our Lord.”

The priest says, “Therefore, as we also **commemorate** His Holy Passion, His Resurrection from the dead, His ascension into the Heaven, His sitting at Your right hand, O Father, and His second coming from Heaven, awesome and full of glory. We offer You these your oblations, from that which is Yours, concerning all things and for all things”. The deacon says, “Attend to the Lord in awe and reverence”. While kneeling, the congregation recites, “We praise You, we bless You, we serve You and we worship You”. The whole church in silence awaits the dwelling of the Holy Spirit. The priest kneels before the altar, calling the Holy Spirit inaudibly to dwell on the congregation and to dwell on the bread and wine to convert them.

**Invocation of the Holy Spirit:**

The priest inaudibly prays the litany of invocation of the Holy Spirit: “… We ask You O Lord, our God, we Your sinful servants, **that you Holy Spirit may descent upon us and upon these oblations which are placed here, purify them, convert them**, and reveal them as sanctification for Your saints.” The deacon says, “Let us attend Amen.”

The priest stands and makes the sign of the cross over the body three times saying, “And this bread He makes it into the Holy Body which is His”. The congregation cry out, “Amen, I believe”. The priest stands and blesses the chalice three times with the sign of the cross crying out, “And this chalice too He makes into the honoured blood of the New Testament which is His”. The congregation responds, “Again I believe Amen.” The priest prays inaudibly, “Our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, given for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life to those who shall partake of Him”. The congregation arises saying, “Lord have mercy”.

**The Litanies:**

Once the body and blood of Emmanuel our God are present on the altar the priest prays this wonderful supplication: “Made us all worthy, O our Master, to partake of Your Holies for the purification of our souls, bodies and spirits, that we may become one body and one spirit and may find a share and inheritance in all the saints who have please You since the beginning”.

Then the priest begins to recite the seven Litanies: The Litany of peace, the litany of the fathers, the litany of the priests, the litany of mercy, the litany of place, the litany of water, vegetation and the air, and the litany of oblation.

**The Synaxis of Saints:**

The priest starts by saying, “Since this O Lord is the command of Your only-begotten Son, that we partake in the commemoration of your saints, graciously accord, O Lord, to remember all the saints who have pleased You since the beginning: our holy fathers the patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles, the preachers, the evangelists, the martyrs, the confessors, and all the spirits of the righteous perfected in faith. Most of all, the pure, full of glory, ever-virgin, holy Theotokos, Saint Mary who truly gave birth to God the Logos, and Saint John the forerunner, Baptist and martyr, St. Stephen… St. Mark the Evangelist, apostle and martyr…”

After mentioning the most famous church fathers who were righteous and holy, the priest concludes saying, “And all the host of Your saints through whose prayers and supplications, have mercy upon us and save us for the sake of Your Holy name which is called upon us”.

The deacon responds, “Let the readers recite the names of our holy fathers the patriarchs who have departed, O Lord repose their souls and forgive us our sins.” The congregations responds “Glory be to You O Lord, Lord have mercy, Lord Have mercy, Lord bless me, Lord repose them, Amen.”

**The Diptych:**

The priest says the following diptych inaudibly, “Remember also O Lord, all those who departed and reposed from amongst the priesthood, and from the orders of the laity. Graciously O Lord, repose all their souls…”. He then places one spoonful of incense into the censer and mentions others who have departed.

Then the priest says, “Those O Lord whose souls You have taken, repose them in the paradise of joy, in the land of eternal living, in the heavenly Jerusalem. And we also, the foreigners in this place, preserve us in Your faith and grant us You peace until the end”. The congregation sings, “As it was, so shall it be, from generation to generation and to the age of ages, Amen.”

The priest says, “Guide us into Your kingdom, that as in this, as likewise also in everything, Your great holy name be glorified, blessed exalted in everything, Honorable and blessed, with Jesus Christ Your beloved Son and the Holy Spirit”.

We notice this is the first time the priest says, “Peace be with you all”, without making the sign of the cross. The reason is because after the dwelling of the Holy Spirit and the conversion of the oblation into the Holy Body and Blood of our Lord, the Lord is present Himself and the priest is standing in the presence of the High Priest. We notice that the statement is repeated many times from there on and without the sign of the cross.

**The Fraction:**

The priest prays the introduction to the Fraction by saying, “Again, let us give thanks to the Almighty God… for He also has made us worthy now to stand in this holy place, to lift up our hands and to serve His holy name. Let us also ask Him to make us worthy of the communion and partaking of His divine and immortal Mysteries”.

The priest takes the Body with his hands and says, “The Holy Body”, the congregation kneel saying, “We worship Your Holy Body”. He dips his finger into the Blood saying, “And the honored Blood”, the congregation says, “And Your honored blood”. The priest says, “Pertaining of His Christ, the Almighty Lord our God”. The deacon says, “Amen. Amen. let us pray”, the congregation, “Lord have mercy”.

The fraction is a supplication to God Who is pleased with the sanctification of the oblation by the Holy Spirit, so that they may purify the bodies and souls of His servants, thus making us worthy of partaking of the Holy Body and Blood of Christ and stand before Him as children that we may dare with favor and without fear to call Him “Our Father…”

The prayer of the Fraction are many and varied, some are annual, others specific for fasts, Lordly feasts, feasts of St. Mary, the angels, saints and others.

The dividing of the Body into fractions symbolizes the pains which the Lord suffered. The portions which the priest makes in the Body are called the wounds. To prove this meaning the priest places one third on top of the two thirds so that they form a cross, then divides the Holy Body to form a cross.

The prayer of the Fraction is divided into sections. Whenever the priest completes a section, the congregation proclaims with enthusiasm and spirituality, “Lord have mercy”.

At the end of the Fraction prayer, the whole church prays the Lord’s prayer, “Our Father…” in one voice.

**Prayers of Submission and Absolution:**

After completing the Lord’s prayer the priest begins to pray three reverent prayers inaudibly, the deacon invites people to repentance by saying, “Bow your heads before the Lord”, and all the congregation kneel before God, as it is a moment of repentance and confession, to that they may be worthy to accept the Prayer of Absolution from the priest. The congregation says, “We bow before You, O Lord”. The deacon says. “Let us attend in fear of God”. The priest prays the absolution prayer. He requests from God to accept the repentance of His servants who are standing before Him, humbly confessing their sins and prays that they may be absolved from every sin, every curse, every denial, before they proceed to partake of the Divine Mysteries. He prays that their names be inscribed with the saints in the kingdom of heaven. He prays for those who asked prayers from him, for the sick, for the reposed, for the oppressed, for the troubled etc., and finally he mentions himself. Then the priests says the litanies of the peace, fathers, gatherings..

The celebrant priest takes the Espadikon (center of the Bread which symbolizes the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ) between the tips of the fingers of his right hand, and carefully lifts it up, while bowing his head, saying, “The Holies and for those who are Holy”. Then he makes the sign of the cross over the chalice with the Espadikon, then he dips it into the Blood and carefully lifts it again and makes the sign of the Cross on the Holy Body present on the Paten, saying, “Blessed by the Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Amen”. The congregation responds, “One is the All-Holy Father, one is the All-Holy Son, one is the All-Holy Spirit. Amen.” The priest gives the congregation peace, then makes the sign of the cross over the Body once again with the Espadikon dipped in the Blood and says, “The Holy Body and the true honored Blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of our God, Amen.” The congregation says, “Amen. I believe.” The celebrant priest then makes the sign of the cross over the Body the third time with the Espadikon, saying “The Holy, honored Body and the Blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of our God, Amen.” The congregation responds “Amen I believe.” The priest overturns the Espadikon and holds it between his fingers turned upside down. He lifts it to the Chalice, makes the sign of cross on the Blood, and places the Espadikon into the Blood, saying, “The Body and the Blood of Emmanuel, our God. This is true, Amen”. The congregation responds, “Amen, I believe”.

**The Confession:**

The priest says, “Amen. Amen. Amen. I believe, I believe, I believe and confess to the last breath that this is the life-giving flesh that Your only-begotten Son, our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ, took from our lady, the Lady of us all, the holy Theotokos, Saint Mary. He made it one with His divinity without mingling, without confusion, and without alteration. He confessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate. He gave It up for us upon the holy wood of the Cross, of His own will, for us all. Truly I believe that His divinity parted not from His humanity for a single moment, nor a twinkling of an eye; given for us for salvation, remission of sins, and eternal life to those who partake of Him. I believe, I believe, I believe that this is true. Amen.”

The deacon responds, “Amen. Amen. Amen. I believe, I believe, I believe that this is true. Amen….” The priest prays inaudible prayers then starts distributing the divine mysteries while the congregation rise from kneeling saying, “Glory unto you O Lord, glory unto you” and chants, “Alleluia, sing with praises” (Ps 150).

When the priest comes with the paten containing the Holy Body, toward those who will be receiving the sacrament, the congregation bows and say, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord”. The priest gives the Eucharist to all those who are prepared.

At the end the priest dismisses the congregation by the sprinkling of water.

**Secondary Remarks:**

1-A person who wants to partake of the Holy Communion must fast (from food, drink, sexual intercourse) at least nine hours beforehand as mentioned in the Apostolic cannons. The nine hours represent the nine hours the Lord Jesus suffered on Good Friday. In case of afternoon liturgies, one should fast from midnight the night before.

2-After one receives the Holy Body he covers his mouth with a corporal, as if to cover this precious jewel, until he completely consumes it. After one drinks the blood one should drink some water so that none of the Holy Communion remains in the mouth.

3-We do not prostrate or bow after partaking of the divine sacraments because we are in a joyous situation, carrying the Lord Jesus inside us.

4-People avoid to spit, to brush their teeth, to take out seeds or anything from their mouth, to smoke etc. after taking communion.

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