



Group B (7-12 years old) - September 2014

1. Church Services (definition, classification).

„And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent” (John 17:3).

The goal of a Christian’s life is to know God and His love. It is impossible to know somebody unless one communicates with that person and he, in turn, reveals himself. It is the same thing with God: we know Him to the extent that we communicate with Him and He reveals Himself to us.

Man communicates with God through **prayer**. There are different kinds of prayer: praise, thanksgiving and request. Prayer can be private and common/public.

The private prayer is the one addressed individually by a Christian to God. This can be done anywhere and at any time since God is Omnipresent, Who knows everything and Loving. Christ Himself teaches us: „Pray unceasingly so that you may not fall into temptation” Through prayer we establish a direct relationship with God, and ask His grace and knowledge, just as Adam and Eve used to communicate with Him in paradise. When man is constantly thinking of God and asks that He come in his heart, he doesn’t have time to listen to the outside (bad) advice and, as such, he cannot sin, because God is the guiding force of his heart.

God’s desire is to abide in man’s heart and to be loved by him. The love between man and God begins with the prayer.

In his private prayer, man can fall short in the way he approaches God and through the content of his prayer. This is why he has no certainty that God hears him and bestows his grace on him. For this reason, the Church Fathers teach us how to pray in order to be heard by God: to use prayers already established by Jesus and the Saints as these contain the spirit of their prayer; then, everyone should have a prayer book and pray at the proper time, in the morning and in the evening, before the icons, attentively and trying to express the feelings born in the heart by these prayers. By so doing, in time, the Christian will come to learn these prayers by heart and to grasp their meaning, thus praying in piety using his/her own words.

2. The public prayer is the one raised by the community of the faithful, as Christ says: „For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). In the public prayer, Jesus guarantees His presence/response because, when two or three gather to praise and entreat God they imitate the unity in love of the Holy Trinity. Moreover, He is present through the grace conferred upon the clergy – bishops and priests – since the day of Pentecost.

The power of the private prayers is amplified by the prayers of the entire community, which is why He promises to be more receptive to the intercessory prayer.

The public prayer, led by the priest/bishop, is structured in certain words, formulae and gestures revealed/verified throughout the history of the Church, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and as such, infallible.

Being inspired, the words of the Church’s prayers teach us the truths about our faith as well, which makes them a source for the Christian belief.

The communal prayers of the faithful are also called Church holy services and they are a series of prayers, hymns, readings from the holy books, liturgical gestures, formulae, professions of faith, structured in a certain way, called „Church Typicon.”



The classification of Church Services according to the time they take place:

1. Daily – at certain designated hours of the day:

The 7 Church praises – every three hours, especially in the monasteries („Seven times a day I praise You, because of Your righteous judgments” (Ps. 119:164), Ps. 118:64, 54:19, 6:6, the Hours: I, III, VI, IX, the Vespers, the Compline, the Midnight Service, the Mattins.

Divine Liturgy – daily in the monasteries, on Sundays and Feastdays in all churches.

2. Periodicals – done privately or publically: Paraklises, Akathists, Canons.

3. In time of special individual or public needs: The Sacraments and other services through which the divine grace is conferred upon the faithful.

3. The classification of Church Services according to their content:

Prayers of praise to God and the Saints: Paraklises (to the Holy Virgin), **Akathists** (to the Saints and angels), **Canons** (of repentance offered to God) ordained in time by the Church. New ones can be ordained just as we can have new Saints. Through all of these, the faithful maintain their communion with the Saints, praise them for the blessings bestowed upon them by God and entreat their help.

The 7 Church Praises: Vespers (evening service, around 6:00 p.m.), **the Compline** (after supper, around 9:00 p.m.) **Midnight Service**, **Mattins** (morning service), **the Hours: I** (around 6:00 a.m.), **III** (around 9:00 a.m.), **VI** (12:00), **IX** (3:00 p.m.). They commemorate the most important moments in the life of our Savior Jesus Christ through which we gained salvation.

The 7 Sacraments: They were instituted by our Savior Himself and are officiated by the canonically ordained clergy (bishops and priests). Through them, the saving grace and the salvation of the faithful is conferred. They are absolutely necessary for salvation, that's why they are administered to the living who come voluntarily and with faith to receive the redeeming grace. They are, with some exception, celebrated in the Church and require special preparation and voluntary cooperation on part of the faithful in order to be effective. They are: **Baptism, Christmation, Confession, Communion, Holy Unction, Marriage and Ordination.**

Other Services include prayers for the blessing the people in a variety of their life's circumstances, as well as the blessing and sanctification of nature and objects for the use of the faithful. For example: prayers for the mother and the newly-born baby on the 8th and on the 40th days after birth, exorcisms, the blessing of children, food, water, homes, churches, etc. These are not absolutely necessary for salvation but help in the process of salvation and sanctification.

The Divine Liturgy/ Eucharist (Thanksgiving) is the most important Church service, instituted by Jesus Christ Himself at the Last Supper and on the Cross. During the invocation of the priest and of the faithful, the gifts of bread and wine become, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Body and the Blood of our Savior Jesus Christ and are then offered to the faithful who have prepared themselves through fasting and Confession, for the forgiveness of their sins, the healing of their body and soul and the union with God for their salvation.

Therefore, the Sacrament of the Holy Communion is at the center of the Divine Liturgy, where the entire community of the faithful offers itself and the gifts they received from God as a thanksgiving offering to Him and, in turn, receives the greatest gift offered by Him, the bloodless sacrifice of Jesus Christ, in the form of bread and wine, in order to be directly united with the His risen Body. Through the Divine Liturgy, the faithful re-enter the Paradise from which Adam and



Eve were expelled, that is the communion of unconditional love with God and their fellow human beings.

Through the Church services, man and the entire surrounding nature are liberated from the bondage of the evil one, as consequence of the original sin and the personal sins, by the power of liberation, cleansing and sanctification of the grace of Jesus Christ, which He Himslef handed down to the Apostles and from them to us, through the bishops and the priests of the Church (I Tim. 4:4-5; Rev. 21:1; II Peter 3:13).

The story of "Who are you with?"

Once upon a time there was a pious man who was praying unceasingly to God: at home, in Church, during his work. The salvation of his soul was constant in his mind. His salvation was always the object of his prayer; even in Church, during the Divine Liturgy, he would be the loudest when addressing the petitions to God. But, he was praying only for himself. He wasn't praying for other people.

When he died, his soul was carried by the angels to the gate of Paradise, where he started to shout that it be opened. From the other side of the gate, God's voice could be heard: "Who are you with?" Surprised by God's voice, he said: "Lord, it is I, John, your faithful servant who, for many years, have prayed to You for the salvation of my soul." God asked the question again: "Who are you with?" Beginning to get scared, John shouted: "Lord, how come You don't recognize me? All my life I dedicated my soul to You!" At this point, God warned him: "I didn't ask who you are, but who did you come with. For no one enters the Kingdom of God alone. Who are you bringing in your heart?"

Having heard this, John realized that he never prayed for anybody else but for himself and wasn't paying attention to the Church's prayers, which included all people. He alone was always the subject of his petitions.

Terrified at the thought that he had failed the salvation of his soul, John asked for more patience so he could bring somebody with him to God. God granted him more time, allowing him to come back to life and now he paid the most attention to the prayers of the Church for all people, and learned to ask for the salvation of others, as well as of his own.