



CATECHETICAL SERMON ON THE DIVINE LITURGY #8 THE GREAT ENTRANCE, AND AITESIS

The expression “great entrance” is perhaps somewhat misleading. Originally the offerings of bread and wine were set out somewhere other than the sanctuary—usually in a chapel in the vestibule of the church or even in a separate building, like the classical baptistery. Nowadays the gifts are prepared and left on a small table inside the sanctuary, and the clergy carry them to the Holy Table in a stylized procession out the deacon door and back in through the royal doors, mimicking the old carrying of the gifts in through the church. Once the bread and wine are set on the Holy Table they are covered while selected psalm verses and prayers are said, and then a dialogue between the leader of the service and the deacons and/or concelebrating priests takes place. This is followed by another litany which may be omitted by Ukrainians today—the so called aitesis (“supplication”) litany, characterized by the refrain, “Grant it, O Lord.” In fact, in the official service book, this litany is prescribed to be recited twice during the service, once when the gifts are set on the Holy Table and then again before the Lord’s Prayer. The fact that this litany was repeated twice in close succession may be a remnant of the dismissal of different classes of people who would not be receiving Holy Communion, since the aitesis litany belongs to the conclusion of Matins (morning prayer) and Vespers (evening prayer), and may have migrated into the Eucharistic Liturgy from there for this very reason, i.e., “ending” the service for some subgroups in attendance. Note that the very first petition by the deacon (called in Greek the plerotika) is the injunction, “Let us complete our prayer to the Lord!” But the two prayers definitely refer to the impending Eucharistic Mystery, and have a very penitential tone. Yet the prayers may not be limited simply to the Mystical Rite that will be repeated within minutes, but also to future opportunities to join in that Mystery. On any given day, one may not be able to receive Communion at that Liturgy (one may not have kept the prescribed fast, etc.), but one may still look forward to it on a day yet to come.