



CATEGORY | DEVELOPING

Our Sacramental Life GRADE 6

ORTHODOX SYRIAN
SUNDAY SCHOOL
ASSOCIATION

Diocese of UK, Europe and Africa



ORTHODOX SYRIAN
SUNDAY SCHOOL ASSOCIATION
OF THE EAST



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Grade 6

Category
Developing

2025

OSSAE : DIOCESE OF UK, EUROPE & AFRICA

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON SERIES
GRADE 6

Publication Information

OSSAE - Orthodox Syrian Sunday school Association of the East
The Malankara (Indian) Orthodox Church

Acknowledgements: This publication is based on the original work prepared by the Joint Curriculum Committee of the Diocese of South-West America and the North-East American Diocese of the Malankara (Indian) Orthodox Church.

Adaptations for the UK, Europe & Africa region were made by the Curriculum Review Co-ordinators, OSSAE-Diocese of U.K., Europe & Africa, with the permission of the Joint Curriculum Committee of the Diocese of South-West America and the North-East American Diocese, to tailor the content to local needs and preferences.

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Second Edition : January 2025

FOREWORD



**MALANKARA ORTHODOX
SYRIAN CHURCH**(INDIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH)

DIOCESE OF UK • EUROPE • AFRICA •
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No. E-015/AMS/2024

11 January 2024

FOREWORD

As we embrace the dawning of a new era in the Sunday School of our Diocese, it is with profound gratitude and joy that we introduce the newly launched Syllabus & text books. This milestone is not merely a culmination of efforts but a new beginning, charting a course for faith-filled learning.

Special recognition is due to the Director Fr. Jacob Mathew and the team of dedicated authors of the Diocese of Southwest America of our Church who have tirelessly woven this tapestry of knowledge and devotion. Their commitment to creating a curriculum that speaks to the heart of our tradition is truly commendable.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to His Grace Zachariah Mar Nicholovos and His Grace Thomas Mar Ivanios, our Metropolitans, whose blessings and guidance have been the bedrock of this endeavour. Their spiritual leadership has been a guiding light throughout this year-long journey of preparation and transition.

Our teachers, those steadfast beacons of knowledge, deserve a resounding acknowledgment for their adaptability and perseverance, ensuring a smooth transition to this new curriculum. Their dedication to the spiritual growth of our youth is a testament to their faith and love for the Church.

In line with the Apostle Paul's exhortation in Titus 1:9 (NRSV), "He must hold firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it," we recognise the pivotal role of sound teaching in nurturing faith. This verse echoes the mission of our Sunday School - to steadfastly impart the truth of the Gospel, fostering a resilient and enlightened community of faith.

To the teachers and students embarking on this sacred educational journey, may you be filled with enthusiasm and wisdom. May your hearts and minds be fertile grounds for the seeds of divine knowledge to flourish.

The significance of the Sunday School in our community cannot be overstated. It is here that the foundations of faith are laid, where the stories and teachings of our church come to life, and where the future guardians of Orthodoxy begin their spiritual journey.

A special word of gratitude is extended to Fr. Anoop M. Abraham, Vice President of the Sunday School for the Diocese. His leadership, along with the Director Mr. Simon Chacko, Curriculum Coordinator Mr. Suresh Daniel, Trustee Dr. Baby Cherian, Secretary Mr. Vinod Philip & Joint Secretary Mr. Robin Thomas, Text books Layout & Designer Dr. Febe Francis, Liturgical Advisory Panel Fr. Rohith Skariah, Fr. Aswin Kalloopara, Icon & Image Advisor Fr. Jeelson Varghese, Media wing support Fr. Varghese Mathew, Fr. Stanly David James, Web & online updates: Mr. Byju John, All the reviewers from various parishes across the Diocese, trainers from the American & UEA Dioceses, and all team members, have been instrumental in bringing this vision to fruition.

As we conclude, let us move forward in the spirit of Orthodox tradition, with hope and prayer that these textbooks serve not only as vessels of knowledge but also as lanterns lighting the path towards spiritual maturity and devotion.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

+ Metropolitan Abraham Stephanos

IN SEARCH OF
'WHAT CANNOT
BE SEEN'
2 COR. 4:18

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Glory to the Triune God!

I would like to express my deepest gratitude and sincere appreciation to all those who have contributed towards the development of this Orthodox Sunday school textbook for the new curriculum. It has been a long and challenging journey but with the help and support of many individuals and organizations, we have finally reached this milestone.

First and foremost, I would like to thank our Diocesan Metropolitan H G Abraham Mar Stephanos for His Grace's tireless effort to reform our Sunday School to meet the needs of our future generation by implementing the new curriculum and heartfelt gratitude to all the officials and key personalities of Northeast and Southwest American Diocesan Sunday Schools who are the backbone of this new curriculum and Talmido.

Great appreciation to all the curriculum development committee members of our diocese for their selfless efforts in editing a comprehensive and relevant textbook that caters to the spiritual needs of our Sunday School students. Your dedication, expertise, and commitment to the project were crucial in bringing this book to fruition. Special thanks to the clergy members of our diocese who generously shared their knowledge, wisdom, and experiences in shaping the lessons and activities in this book. Your input has helped to create a well-rounded curriculum that reflects the teachings and traditions of our Orthodox Faith.

I am also grateful to the head teachers and teachers who took the time to review and provide valuable feedback on the content and structure of the textbook. Your insights and suggestions have greatly enhanced the quality of the material and have made it more engaging and accessible to our young learners.

I would also like to acknowledge the role of Holy Episcopal Synod and OSSAE officials for their unwavering support and encouragement towards this new curriculum. It is with their guidance and vision that we were able to compile a textbook that aligns with the goals and objectives of our Holy Church and Diocesan Sunday School education.

Finally, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to the students who will be using this textbook. Your enthusiasm and eagerness to learn about our faith is what motivates us to continue improving and developing resources for your spiritual growth.

In conclusion, I would like to thank everyone who has been a part of this journey and has contributed in any way towards the creation of this Orthodox Sunday school textbook. May it serve as a valuable resource for many generations to come and may it inspire and nurture the faith of our young Orthodox students. Thank you all for your support and dedication.

Fr Anoop Abraham Malayil
Vice-President OSSAE – UK Europe and Africa

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LESSON

1

The Journey of Salvation

Lesson Goals :

- I can understand God's love to save all people and can build the path towards redemption.
- I can explain the involvement of the Holy Trinity in creation, the uniqueness of the creation of human beings, and God's expectation of humans.
- I can explain why God sent Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden after their fall.
- I can appreciate the role of the Sacraments in our salvation journey.
- I can name the Orthodox Sacraments and briefly describe them.



For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life



St. John 3:16



Let's imagine a beach lifeguard suddenly sees someone drowning at sea and springs into action. The lifeguard may swim out to the person in distress, dive deep underwater and pull them to the surface. Then the lifeguard might put the rescue buoy on the person and pull them to the shore. On the shore, the person might need medical attention (like CPR) to regain consciousness.

When would we consider the person saved? Would it be when the lifeguard first took hold of them and brought them to the surface? Would it be when they make it to the shore? Would it be when the person finally woke up and realised everything that had happened? It is not possible to pinpoint a single moment when the drowning person was saved. Instead, it was all those actions by the lifeguard that saved the person.

Similarly, our Lord saw that we were perishing, came down to us, and by the Cross returned us back to the shore. At the shore, our souls needed more healing and mending by the Holy Spirit. And perhaps afterwards, we woke up to understand everything that God had done for us.

There was not a single moment when we were saved, but instead all those moments are part of our salvation.

Salvation is more than the forgiveness of our sins. Salvation is a lifelong journey of experiencing the grace of God until we reach the Kingdom. We are all in the process of being saved. When we were



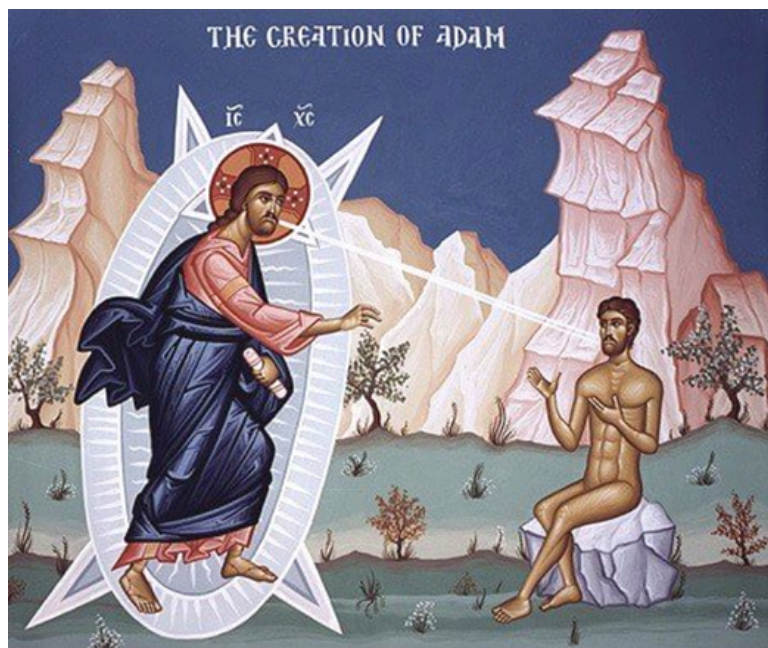
baptised, we were born again to eternal life. Each time we receive the Holy Qurbana, it is part of our salvation process. For those who receive the Sacraments of Baptism, Marriage, Confession, or Anointing of the Sick, each Sacrament is part of their journey towards the Heavenly Kingdom. The Sacraments of the Church that we receive are all ways in which we participate in the divine grace of God.

God wants us to be redeemed from our sin because He loves us. He shows us the path to be born again so that we may receive the gifts of Salvation and eternal life. Through the Church, the Holy Apostles provided us with that path: the Holy Sacraments or Mysteries. To understand why we need the Sacraments, we must look into the creation story, Adam's fall, and later events. We may have learnt about those events in our previous grades. In this lesson, we will go deeper, so that we have a better understanding of God's love for us.

The Creation Narrative

God created the universe and everything in it, and His creation is good. But God created us special. In **Genesis 1:27**, He said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness."

Unlike the rest of creation, He did not speak man into existence; instead, He created man with His hands (**Genesis 2:7**) - "*Then God formed the man out of dust from the ground and breathed in his face the breath of life; and man became a living soul.*"



The creation of Adam

After God created man, He placed him in a special place called the Garden of Eden. From the story of man's creation, we learn that each of us is a unique and special creation. We are made in the image of God by God's own touch, and a part of the earth (*the material universe*). We have God's breath of life and are children of God.

You are created in the image of God and that can **never** be taken away from you. A work of art always has the signature of its creator. God has made you beautiful, unique, and cherished. You are

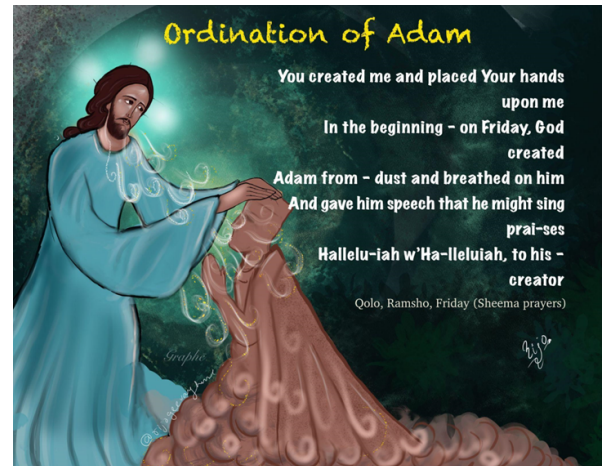
also a work of art still in progress. You are made in the image of God but are still growing more in His likeness each day. Day by day you are growing in perfection. By the working of the Holy Spirit, you are growing towards perfect love, goodness, and wisdom.

We are Made for Communion with God

This Qolo (hymn) is from the Quqlion for the Departed Clergy and paints a beautiful picture of the communion God wants with us.

Quqlion for the Departed Clergy (Daivam shrustichadathe..)

*God created Adam and
Sat down, contemplating him
He saw how fair and like the
Creature was to Creator
The earthly one came and went
Through the trees of Paradise
The angels marvelled
At how he was exalted.*



God wanted people to commune with Him eternally, but man broke the communion by disobeying God. In the Garden of Eden, man disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Then God reminded Adam and Eve of the eternal communion that they had now lost for all mankind. In **Genesis 3:19**, He said, *"In the sweat of your face, you shall eat bread till you return to the ground from which you were taken. Earth you are, and to earth you shall return."*

The Communion Lost: Was it a Punishment?

After their fall, Adam and Eve tried to hide from God because they were ashamed and knew that they had disobeyed God. Can anyone really hide from our *omniscient* and *omnipresent* God? No one can. We may try to hide our sins. Sin isolates us, but God calls us out of hiding and into communion with Him and with other people.

Because Adam and Eve ate the fruit, God cast them out of Paradise. Sadly, they lost the close, intimate communion they had with God in the Garden. Why did God expel them from the Garden? Was it a punishment for their disobedience? Let us look at the event for answers:

1. **Adam did not acknowledge his sin:** Even though God knew the answer, He asked Adam, "Where are you?" Why did God ask that question? He asked it to make Adam aware of his sin. It is like how your parents may ask, "What are you doing?" when you have been caught doing something wrong. They ask for it to make you aware of the consequences. Adam gave the excuse that he was hiding because he was naked rather than honestly responding: he had sinned by eating the fruit, which he was told not to eat.
2. **Adam did not confess:** He did not accept the responsibility for sinning; instead, he blamed God for giving him Eve, who had given him the fruit.

3. **Adam did not repent:** Even though God made Adam aware of his sin, he neither acknowledged nor confessed it. He did not apologise to God.

Since Adam did not confess and did not ask for forgiveness, he remained in sin. God did not want Adam, who was in sin, to eat from the Tree of Life because then he would remain out of communion with God forever. God did not want that to happen because He always wanted to be in communion with His creation.

About the Tree of Life: Whoever eats its fruit will live forever in whatever state they are in, holiness or sinfulness. If a sinful person eats its fruit, they will live in sin forever and be unable to be saved.

Why did God cast out Adam and Eve from the Garden? God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden not as a punishment but out of love. He did not want all people (Adam and Eve and all future descendants) to live in sin forever and to be separated from Him (**Genesis 3:22**). He wanted us to be redeemed and brought back into communion with Him; and, for that He was ready to sacrifice His Only Begotten Son. God is love.

Redemption of Humanity

After Adam, generations of humans were born outside Paradise and continued in sin. God worked to bring humanity back into communion with Him throughout those generations. He made a covenant with Abraham; He sent prophets, judges, and kings to care for the Israelites. And if they went astray, He sent foreign kings to rule over them.

Then the time came for God, the Father, to send His Only-Begotten Son to redeem humanity from the diseases of sin. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, became man so that humanity may regain its life through Him (**St. John 1:4**). He redeemed humanity through His crucifixion and gave us life through His resurrection.

Through His life, Jesus showed us the way to eternal life. In **St. John 14:6**, He says, *"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* Jesus made Baptism in Water and Spirit as the means to enter the Kingdom of God (**St. John 3:5**); He shared Himself with us as the living bread that came down from heaven (**St. John 6:47-58**). After His Resurrection, Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit on His disciples (the Apostles). He sent them out with the mission of spreading the Good News of redemption to all people (**St. John 20:21-22**). The Apostles spread the Good News and prepared the Church to continue that mission.

Orthodox Sacraments (Mysteries)

When Christ trampled death by His death, He didn't do it just for Adam and Eve. He destroyed death eternally, and He did it for us too. Our journey on that path to salvation is continuous. The Apostles handed that path to the Church; the church then gave us Sacraments or Mysteries. The Mysteries, along with other elements such as prayers, worship, feasts, fasts, etc., help us with our salvation.

St. Geevarghese Mar Dionysius of Vattasseril teaches¹ "The Holy Sacraments are decreed and instituted by our Lord as essentials for the salvation of mankind and are the very visible rituals of His invisible grace."

¹St. Geevarghese Mar Dionysius Vattasseril. (2006). **Basic Doctrines of the Church (Matopadesha Sarangal)**. MOC Publications.

Sacraments are Sacred Mysteries. They are a window through which we can have a brief glimpse of the divine. Take for example the Sacrament of Baptism. Through it, we were born again. When we entered into the baptismal font, we died to this temporary world and when we came out of the waters, we are born again to eternal life (**Romans 6:3-9; Colossians 2:12**). We experience the invisible grace of God in these visible Sacraments. The things we cannot see with our eyes become apparent to us through the prayers in the Mysteries of the Church. We experience the grace of God in the Mysteries through our other senses too: touch, taste, smell, and hearing.



St. Geevarghese Mar Dionysius

The Sacraments (Mysteries)

There are many Sacraments that the Holy Church offers to us. The first seven in the list are for individual salvation, although Holy Matrimony and Holy Ordination are optional.

1. **Holy Baptism:** For the hope of life, the remission of sins and being born again.
2. **Holy Chrismation:** The sweet fragrance of Christ, the mark and seal of true faith, and the perfection of the gift of the Holy Spirit.
3. **Holy Qurbana:** For partaking in the Holy Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, The Tree of Life's Fruit.
4. **Holy Confession:** For repentance, admission, and absolution of sins - we admit, but only God cleanses us of our sins.
5. **Holy Matrimony:** For union in the journey to the Heavenly Kingdom, the building of goodness, and learning selfless love while leading each other to salvation.
6. **Holy Ordination:** The offering of a person by The Church and blessing him with spiritual grace to administer the Holy Sacraments.
7. **Holy Unction:** For anointing the sick to heal their soul as well as their body from diseases.
8. **Consecration of a Church:** For the sanctification and dedication of a church building as God's Temple.
9. **House Blessing:** For blessing a person's or family's house.
10. **Burial:** For mourning the separation of soul and body and preparing a person's soul for a peaceful journey to Paradise.
11. **Daily and Festal Prayers:** For consecrating the daily moments of our lives to the Lord. All worship services, daily and special prayers, intercessory prayers, feasts, and blessings of objects that we use are sacramental. For us as Christians, our life itself is a sacramental journey.

Summary

Christ established and ordered the Holy Sacraments for our journey towards salvation. The Holy Spirit inspired the fathers to institute them in the liturgical form.

Just like Adam and Eve, we are created in God's image and are always growing in His likeness, becoming more perfect day by day. We are also created to have communion with God. When we sin, we turn away from God and it causes us to be isolated. But the Lord calls us out of hiding and into communion with Him and with others. The Holy Mysteries are there for us to receive that grace of God and help us in our journey out of sin and into growing in virtue. Our Lord gave us the Holy

Mysteries because of His love for us. It is the same love that compelled God the Father to send His Son, Jesus Christ for our salvation. He rescued us from a death that would have forever separated us from God. The same love also compelled Him to send the Holy Spirit to help us discover His image within us, to grow in His likeness and to guide us to the Heavenly Kingdom.

Reflection Questions

1. What does it mean to be made in the image of God and to grow in His likeness?
2. Why is it important for us to partake in Mysteries or Sacraments?
3. What would you like to understand about Mysteries or Sacraments by the time this school year finishes?
4. When partaking in Holy Communion, how does receiving His Body and Blood bring us closer to Him?

LESSON

2

Born Again

Lesson Goals :

- *I can understand the need for baptism.*
- *I can explain the Church's position on infant baptism.*
- *I can identify parts of the Baptism service.*



The Need for Baptism

When visiting another country, we need to follow the rules of entry such as having a passport. We can think of Holy Baptism in a similar way. The good news is that everyone is invited! All that is required is to have faith in the One True God, and the rules of entry include renouncing Satan. From that point onwards, we lead a sacramental life in the Church that brings us to the Kingdom of God. This is to be "born again".

Jesus explained this to Nicodemus one night. Nicodemus was a religious leader of the Jews, and Jesus taught him that no one can see the Kingdom of God unless they are born again (St. John 3:1-21). Nicodemus was confused and asked, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus explained that "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God." Baptism is our entry into life in the Kingdom of God through water and Spirit.



When God created Adam and Eve, He created them in His own image and gave them a paradise in where they could enjoy a perfect relationship with Him. He gave them free will as well, which means Adam and Eve could choose what to do. Unfortunately, they used that free will to disobey God by eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. As a result, they were forced to leave the Garden of Eden and could no longer live in perfect communion with God.

Learning Outcome Check

Explain how Holy Baptism is initiation into Eternal Life.

In Baptism, our fallen nature is put to death as we share in the death of Christ symbolised by being immersed in water. Then we rise from the water as a new being (**Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12**). This is the start of our journey to prepare ourselves for the “new life in the world to come”.

Jesus Christ was able to save us from sin and instructed His disciples to “*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*” (**St. Matthew 28:19**). That tradition has been passed down from the Apostles to our fathers to baptise us and to be servants in His kingdom.

Partner Talk

Discuss with your partner, why do you think God gave us Free will?



Infant Baptism

The Orthodox Church believes in and follows infant baptism, as was taught by the Apostles, and practised in the early Church. They taught that we should not allow sin any opportunity to grow in people. Christians should be sanctified and consecrated as infants.

Learning Outcome Check

Discuss the Orthodox Church's practice of infant baptism.



After the death of Jesus, Peter exhorted “*Repent, and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call*” (**Acts 2:38-39**). As the adults converted, their entire families (including children) were baptised.

The Jewish practice of circumcision of male children on the eighth day after birth (**Genesis 17:10-13; Leviticus 12:3**) was a preview of Christian baptism. Like the Israelites who travelled with their families through the Red Sea and escaped captivity in Egypt, baptism is the water through which the baptismal candidate escapes the captivity of sin. This was one example told to us by the Apostles and proves that redemption was offered to both adults and children. We believe we are saved by God's grace, the power of the risen Christ, and not by our human actions. Baptism is not an act of the individual or the priest. It is a divine act of God, and we are participants.

St. John the Baptist received the Holy Spirit while in his mother's womb and was already called by God for a higher purpose. We know young children are vaccinated early to protect them from sickness and diseases. Likewise, infant baptism helps redeem a baby from the sickness of sin and lays the foundation for a relationship with God. Through baptism we are all adopted as God's children. Through baptism, seeds of faith are planted. Seeds are then nurtured by living a Christian life in the Church.

Remember

The baptismal font is the divine womb where we become “alive to God” and receive the second birth as children of God. It is also a tomb where we become “dead to sin”.



Catechumens

Catechumen means 'one who hears' or 'the learner'. In the early Church, they were adults (Jews and Gentiles) who believed in the Apostles' teachings. They learned from their spiritual fathers about Jesus and were allowed to take part in the first part of the Holy Qurbana. They would participate in the hymns and hear the word of God through the Old Testament, Epistles, Gospel readings, and an explanation of the Word by the bishops or priests. They would leave the Church after reciting the Creed and could not participate in the second part of the Holy Qurbana until they had received baptism.

In our parishes today, we often see more baptisms for babies who are born into Christian families than adults. In cases where the baby cannot speak, the Godparent represents the child and speaks on behalf of the child during the baptism ceremony.

Role of the Godparent

Being chosen as a Godparent is both a huge honour and a great commitment. The Godparent accepts responsibility for watching over the person's spiritual growth. The Godparent also prepares themselves through fasting, prayer, and Holy Confession. In the case of an infant, the family brings the infant to the priest for this perfecting sacrament. They speak on behalf of the child being baptised. During the service they renounce Satan and accept Christ on behalf of the child.

After baptism, the Godparent along with the parents take responsibility to bring the child up in faith and to teach them in the teachings of the Church. They act as a good role model and teach the baptised child how to live a godly life and to live according to the Church's customs.

Remember

The baptismal font is the divine womb where we become "alive to God" and receive the second birth as children of God. It is also a tomb where we become "dead to sin".



Parts of the Baptism Service

The service begins with Introductory prayers, Bible readings and Inscription of the baptismal name, which means that their name is now written in the Book of Life (**Philippians 4:3, Revelations 3:5**). As God breathed the breath of life into Adam's nostrils (**Gen. 2:7**) and Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit on the Apostles (**St. John 20:22**), the priest now breathes upon the child's face to prepare them to receive the Holy Spirit.

Renunciation of Satan and acceptance of Jesus Christ

After prayers of exorcism, the Godparent and the child, while facing West, holds the child's left hand with their left hand and, on their behalf, reject Satan out loud three times. Next, the Godparent and the child turn to the East. The Godparent holds the child's right hand with their right hand and accepts Jesus Christ out loud three times. The Nicene Creed is then recited as a statement of Faith.

Continued on next page

(Continued)

Anointing
The child is anointed with the “Oil of Gladness” (Psalms 44:8 OSB). This means that Jesus Christ has come to fill the child with joy, peace, and happiness and to lead the baptised child from darkness to light. The child is now healed from sin and made worthy of adoption as God’s child.
Preparation of the Baptismal font
Hot and cold water are poured into the baptismal font. This symbolises life (warm water) and sin (cold water), just like the two streams (warm and cold) of the River Jordan. The priest then pours Holy Chrism into the water, representing when the Holy Spirit descended into the water at Jesus’ baptism. The priest prays over the water, asking for God’s spiritual blessing, to remove any sinful nature, and for the resurrection of the new man (sinless self) in the baptised child. Thus, the baptismal water gets sanctified. During this time, we sing the song, “Of this baptism, John spoke: ‘I baptise you with water. But the one who is to come Will baptise with the Spirit.’”
Removal of garments
This symbolises removing the old man (sinful self).
Immersion
This is the main action in baptism. The baby is either immersed underwater three times or has water poured over their head three times. The body is washed in the water to show rebirth. Triple immersion stands for the three days Jesus spent in the tomb and for the Holy Trinity, in whose name we are baptised.
Chrismation
This is the second sacrament where the candidate receives the Seal of the Holy Spirit by the priest’s anointing with the Holy Chrism (Mooron). The priest anoints every part of the baptised child’s body. This makes the body holy and dedicated to the service of God, with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.
Crowning
The baby is then clothed in new white garments, symbolising divine purity. Through baptism, the child enters the Royal Priesthood. The crown is placed on the child’s head to represent kingship. The baptised child has now been adopted as a child of the Most High.
Holy Qurbana
After baptism, the candidate can now receive the Holy Qurbana. We sing the song, “The fruit – Adam did not taste - in Paradise is Placed with joy today - in your mouth.”

The infant is taken into the Holy of Holies to kiss the four corners of the Holy Altar. Adam was not able to partake of the Tree of Life and was driven out of the Garden of Eden because of his sin. Through baptism the new Christian becomes eligible to eat from the Tree of Life (which is The Body and Blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ) and is able to re-enter Paradise (represented by the altar).

Learning Outcome Check

Explain how Holy Baptism is rebirth and regeneration.



Baptism is Just the Beginning

Just as the Prodigal Son returned from sin and his Father clothed him with righteousness, we are adopted by God and clothed with His righteousness through baptism. This is the start of our life in Christ.

Learning Outcome Check

Identify the significance of the role of our “Baptismal Garment”

We need to continue on this journey to become one with God (Theosis). Baptism cannot be repeated; as recited in the Creed, “there is only one baptism for the remission of sins.” For sins committed after baptism, the Church recommends Holy Confession (“baptism of tears”).

Reflection Questions

1. Can adults be baptised into the Orthodox Church?
2. What is the role of Godparent?
3. After a person is baptised, the entire congregation recites the Nicene Creed together. What is the significance of this moment?

LESSON

3

Becoming God's Temple

Lesson Goals :

- *I can make the connection that Chrismation sets my body apart for the service of God, and consecration of the Church sets apart a physical building for the service of God.*
- *I can understand that the faithful who are actively participating in the consecration service for the Church building are also being set apart for the service of God*
- *I can better relate to why the service of the Chrismation happens right after the service of the Holy Baptism.*



When we hear the phrase “The Temple of God” we usually think about the Old Testament place of worship in Jerusalem that was destroyed in the 1st century. Although historically correct, there is a much deeper meaning that Christians should understand about God’s temple and its importance to our spiritual growth.

The Temple of God

In the Book of Genesis, we read that God created man out of “**dust from the ground**” (**Genesis 2:7**) and placed him in a “**garden eastward in Eden**” (**Genesis 2:8**). We also read that God created us in His image and thus, together with God we are to grow in His likeness (**Genesis 1:27-28**).

Being in the very presence of God is a sacred space. It is where we are simply able to connect and communicate with Him. This invitation to God’s Holiness is basic to our Orthodox theology. The Garden of Eden was the first sacred space, created and set apart from the rest of the world. Here Adam and Eve were always in communion with God. In this Paradise, there was nothing separating man from God—not even clothes! To be this close and fully in communion with God required man and woman to be pure, holy, and sanctified.

When sin and death entered the world (Genesis 3), man became separated from God. This separation was not a punishment but a consequence of the man’s action as well as an act of mercy by God. If Adam and Eve had not been banished, what would have been the dire consequences?

St. Gregory the Theologian states that the humans, who were separated from God through sin can experience an end to sin through death. Thus, the sinful human becomes not everlasting.

In other words, expulsion from the Garden of Eden was a much more merciful solution. This banishment was temporary, too, because our loving God already had a far greater redemptive plan in mind. God turned death into a mercy because, through death, there is an end to living in sin. Had we lived forever, we would have remained in sin forever.

God still loved us. His plan for salvation was to save us from death so that we could return to be forever in communion with Him. As it is written in **Psalms 10:4**, “*The Lord is in His holy temple;*

The Lord, His throne is in heaven;”. God had a choice to rest on His throne, but the next pages of Scripture show a beautiful story of how much God loved us and brought us back into communion with Him.

God began to bring His people together as Israel. He worked through the prophets Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. With Moses, we see a more intentional teaching towards His people (the Church) on how to return to communion with God. From **Exodus 25-40**, we see God gives to Moses clear instructions on how to create His sacred space for closer communion with His people. God gave specific measurements and construction details on how to build the tabernacle (**Exodus 26:1-27:21**). Through Moses, his brother Aaron and his sons, God established the priesthood (**Exodus 29:1**).

We read how those chosen priests had to purify themselves and be consecrated with holy oil. But this was no ordinary oil! *“Furthermore, the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Also take for yourself aromatic spices, the flower of costly myrrh—five hundred shekels’ worth—and fragrant cinnamon—half as much, two hundred and fifty, and two hundred and fifty shekels of sweet-smelling calamus, and five hundred shekels of cassia, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, and a hin of olive oil. You shall make from these a holy anointing oil, an ointment compounded according to the art of the perfumer. It shall be a holy anointing oil.’”* (**Exodus 30:22-30**)

How serious was this? Aaron had two sons Nadab and Abihu. But they did not listen and offered incense in their own manner (**Leviticus 10:1-3**). The Scriptures are not clear why they did this, but the result was clearly written - *“So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.”*

This was not an unjust punishment but rather the consequence of not following God’s rules. God’s teaching to His people was to be prepared, be humble, and obedient because through these actions, Aaron and his family would have been purified and sanctified. In their disobedience, they entered the sacred space in an unholy and unprepared manner. God’s warning (like the Garden of Eden) was not that He would kill them, but that they would die. And this is exactly what happened! This is the fear and trembling with which we approach God’s Holiness. It is not because we fear a God who is unloving and angry, but because our worthiness and readiness to stand before God are very important.

Centuries later, King Solomon built the first temple in Jerusalem as *“a house of prayer for all nations”* (**Isaiah 56:7**). God interacted with His people through the priest, with very strict teachings, and specific attention to worship details. However, God’s people remained unfaithful. This temple was destroyed too (**Jeremiah 52:11-13**) and then it was rebuilt as the second temple. Sadly, this place of worship, also, became so corrupt and blasphemous that Christ Himself eventually had to clear out all the money changers (**St. Matthew 21:12-13**; **St. John 2:15-16**).

We are the Temple

God never wanted a building to be the only place that He is in communion with His children. The Almighty God clearly stated that the idea that He would be limited to one space is laughable! From **3 Kingdoms 8:25**: *“But will God indeed dwell with men on earth? If the heaven and the heaven of heaven will not be sufficient for You, how much less even this temple I built in Your name?”*

St. Paul asks a very direct and important question to the Church: *“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are”* (1 Corinthians 3:16-17).

There are two unions that are very important to our spiritual growth:

The mystery of the union of Christ and His Church and the union of God and ourselves through Christ.

God's Temple is where we meet God and through Christ, we become one with God. When St. Paul says the Church is the Body of Christ (**1 Corinthians 12:27**), he means that we become Him both individually and together with the Church's faithful members.

We know that in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, we are invited to be part of the priesthood (**1 Peter 2:9**) and given entry into God's Kingdom. Through Holy Chrismation, we are granted the Holy Spirit to comfort and guide our daily lives. These two Sacraments (Holy Baptism and Holy Chrismation) cannot be separated because life in the Church means the indwelling and union with the Holy Spirit. Every Sacrament of the Church is perfected by the Holy Spirit. Through these sacraments, we become a part of the Church which is the body of Christ.

From the beginning of time, God's plan for us was always to be in communion and in complete unity with Him. He made us special in His image and likeness. He continued to love us, even after sin and death entered the world. In the words of St. Ephrem, "Had the serpent been rejected, along with the sin, they would have eaten of the Tree of Life, and the Tree of Knowledge would not have been withheld from them any longer. From the one they would have acquired infallible knowledge, and from the other they would have received immortal life. They would have acquired divinity in humanity; and had they thus acquired infallible knowledge and immortal life, they would have done so in this body".

St. Ephrem is explaining here that if Adam and Eve had rejected the temptation set forth by the serpent, then they would have been able to eat from both trees and achieved divinity (theosis) in this body. However, this was never meant to be since Christ was ordained to save the nations from before time.

The Consecration of the Church

Now, we can begin to see this amazing connection that God dwells in the Church and within each of us. Baptism is the Sacrament through which we enter the Holy Church. After renouncing Satan and committing to Christ, we receive God through the *indwelling* of the Holy Spirit within us and, by partaking of His Body and Blood. A Church building also undergoes the same cleansing, purification, and sanctification as a person who has been baptised during the consecration ceremony.

Learning Outcome Check

Draw connection between the service of Chrismation and consecration of churches as both people and the church building becoming the temple of God.

Being in full union with Christ forever is salvation for an Orthodox Christian. This union is possible in this world and in the world to come, and it manifests in our sacramental life. Sacramental life is realised because there is a Holy Altar available in the Church. The Holy Altar is at the centre of the Church and is consecrated through the anointing with the Holy Mooron. When a human being is baptised, they are anointed also with Holy Mooron. These are the only two occasions when the Holy Mooron is used. In short, the consecration service is the baptism and chrismation of the church. Conversely, Holy Baptism and Holy Chrismation are the consecration of a human being.

Solomon's Temple consecration (3 **Kingdoms 8:61**) is still the model for Church consecrations today. Today, these ancient practices are fulfilled and even adapted through Christ. This is because the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is simply the same God we worship today during Holy Qurbana. The Sedro during the second part of the Church Consecration service vividly describes this connection:

“The prophets have prefigured this, Church. Moses, the head of the prophets has prefigured this by the tent of the Israelites. Solomon, the ocean of wisdom has seen her in advance. Isaiah, the glorious among prophets said ‘Wake up, your light has come near. The Lord’s light will shine upon you’. David said, ‘Forget your people and the house of your father, the king has desired your beauty’. Much is written about this Church. Her eyes have become red. Her garments are bright. There are many that praise her. Her architects are wise. Her children are princes. Her mysteries are hidden, and her operations are incomprehensible. The Lord of the universe is her bridegroom. John the Baptist is her servant. Prophets are her guests. Apostles belong to her bridal chamber. Martyrs are her guests. Her wedding took place in darkness and under the cloud. Unlike the Hebrew Church, she is hallowed by the Father, extolled by the Son, and protected by the Holy Spirit. Gentiles enter here and sing praise. Along with them do we also cry aloud, ‘Lord, remember Your holy Church and elevate her tower of salvation. May eternal tranquillity remain in her. May enriched peace guide her. By Your grace, grant enthusiasm to our blessed pastors, motivation to the administrators, righteousness to the kings, justice to the judges, unity to the priests, purity to the deacons, acceptable repentance to the sinners, and blessed memory to the faithful departed.”

This prayer reminds us that the consecration service of the Church is more than just sanctifying and making a physical building holy. As members of the Body of Christ, we are also anointed and made new again when we participate in the service. The Church is both a sacred place of worship and the body of the faithful worshippers. Together we are the Body of Christ: purified, blessed, sanctified, set apart and made holy. This is both our duty and calling to remain holy and in communion with God through sanctification.

Learning Outcome Check

The consecration of the Church is consecration of each faithful too.

Holy Chrism

Chrismation is receiving the Seal of the Holy Spirit. The priest anoints every part of the body of the baptised with the Holy Chrism. The body is made holy and dedicated to the service of God through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This same Chrism is also used in the consecration of the Church building for the same purpose.

Holy Chrism is also called the Holy Mooron. This is a special oil and it differs from other blessed and holy oils used during different services of the Church. The Greek word Mooron means “unguent, ointment, perfume, sweet oil, and chrism”. Holy Mooron is called Vishudha Mooron in Malayalam and Qadisho Mooron in Syriac. The process of making Holy Mooron is called the Mooron Koodasha in Malayalam. In the Malankara Orthodox Church, the head of the Church, His Holiness the Catholicos leads the Mooron Koodasha, and the entire Holy Episcopal Synod, along with 12 priests,

12 deacons (Shemmashans), and 12 subdeacons assist him. The process is the same also in the Syriac Orthodox Church.

HG Ayub Silvanos in his doctorate thesis explains the sacredness with which this Holy Oil is prepared: “... mixed oil becomes the Mooron oil when the Holy Spirit hovers over it as the Patriarch conducts special canonical liturgies, which sanctify the oil - The Sanctification of the Mooron. “It is consecrated at the third hour, for it indicates Christ, who (Himself) indicates the Trinity: the Father who anoints, and the Son who is anointed and the Spirit who fulfils the role of oil.”

The use of Mooron oil in post-baptismal anointing and in the consecration of churches, altars, altar stones (tablito) and vessels, indicates the presence of God in these places or objects. This oil perfects the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in a person when they are anointed with it. Mooron oil is usually kept in a special casket in the ‘Holy of Holies’ (Madbēḥo) in the church for use at baptism ceremonies.” Only the priest is allowed to touch it.

The preparation of the Holy Mooron, for about 7 seven hours, is the longest ceremony in the Church and the rite is performed on the 40th Friday of Great Lent. It is a detailed process. Chrism is made from around 40 different ingredients from around the world. There is no set rule as to how often this ceremony must be conducted. It is not done frequently and in recent times, generally once every ten years.

Learning Outcome Check

Investigate the process of making Holy Chrism.

Chrismation

As mentioned in our prayers, Chrismation is “the sweet fragrance of Christ, the mark and sign of true faith and the perfection of the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Chrismation is receiving the Seal of the Holy Spirit. The priest gives the baptised the Seal of the Holy Spirit by anointing him or her with the Holy Chrism.

The priest anoints every part of the body of the baptised. The body is made holy and dedicated to the service of God with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Baptism has its perfection in Chrismation. After Jesus Christ’s baptism, He is full of the Holy Spirit. He quotes prophet Isaiah, saying, “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach gospel to the poor*” (St. Luke. 4:18).

Chrismation is our participation in the anointing of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. In the Sacrament of Chrismation, the Holy Spirit descends and anoints the baptised. Just as the Church was endowed with this great gift on the day of Pentecost, so are we at Holy Chrismation.

Jesus told His disciples before His ascension to heaven that they would receive the Holy Spirit. He asked them to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the ‘promise of the Father’. We read about the coming of the Holy Spirit in the book of the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:1-4). Being anointed by the Holy Spirit reminds us of how in the Old Testament the priests, prophets and kings were chosen and anointed for a special work to be done for God in the world.

The Holy Spirit blesses us with the grace to fulfil our duties. In Chrismation, we are all made the ‘priests of the whole creation’. As St. Peter teaches, we become “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people, that you may proclaim the praise of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

Holy Chrismation is the ordination of the baptised to be a 'Christian'. Our bodies become the temple of the Holy Spirit, housing God in each of us (**1 Corinthians 6: 19-20**). The Holy Spirit lives within us, giving us the strength of God to fight temptation and live a life worthy of the Eternal Kingdom. The Spirit works within us as our inner guide and teacher. St. John makes this clear in **1 John 2:27**.

Learning Outcome Check

Examine and describe the service of Chrismation.

If we listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit and obey His guidance, we will grow in the grace of God. If we ignore His guidance, the Holy Spirit will grieve. Church history teaches us that the saints of the Church grew in the grace of God by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They were full of the Spirit and wisdom and used it, *"And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints"* (**Ephesians 6:17-18**).

The Living Stone

St. Peter makes a wonderful connection to bring together these teachings of the person and the Church. In **1 Peter 2:4-10**, he states that Christ is the foundation and the "living stone" and then expands:

"Coming to Him as a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion; A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame. Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense."

St. Peter reminds us of how special we are! *"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light, who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy."* (**1 Peter 2:9-10**)

Summary

God's love for man is eternal. His plan was for us to always be in communion with Him. Our place in creation is unique and special. To be One with Christ requires us to be holy and pure. Fr. Baby Varghese observed that "the function of liturgical space is precisely to place us before the Holy Trinity and the throne of Christ". This represents a return to the closeness and unity we had with God in the first chapters of Genesis. Our Baptism brings God closer to us. The consecration of the Church creates a sacred space. The Holy Altar is where we worship. We are close to God and receive the Holy Body and Blood of Christ from the Holy Altar. This return to communion is made possible through the actions of the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

St. Paul challenges us directly with the question, *"Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are."* (**1 Corinthians 3:16-17**).

Approaching God in any manner in an unworthy or unholy manner brings death. This is not because God is vindictive or an angry God, but rather it is a “death of consequence”. God’s love and holiness must be understood to be a blessing for those who are obedient to Him. The opposite happens to those who reject or dishonour God’s ways. There are many comparisons that help us understand this teaching better. For example, the same fire that destroys metal with impurities can also act on pure metal so that it can be shaped and made into the most beautiful objects. Another example used by Maximus the Confessor illustrates how God acts on those who are prepared and unprepared in different manners: *“God is the sun of justice, as it is written, who shines rays of goodness on simply everyone. The soul develops according to its free will into either wax because of its love for God or into mud because of its love of matter. Thus, just as by nature the mud is dried out by the sun and the wax is automatically softened, so also every soul which loves matter and the world and has fixed its mind far from God is hardened as mud according to its free will and by itself advances into its perdition, as did Pharaoh. However, every soul which loves God is softened as wax, and receiving divine impressions and characters it becomes **the dwelling place of God in the Spirit** (Ephesians 2:22)”*

We remind ourselves during Holy Qurbana that “The One Holy Father, the One Holy Son, and the One Holy Spirit, alone is holy”. To approach this holiness requires effort from us, both for repentance and sanctification.

Reflection Questions

1. What is the significance of Holy Chrism and why is it used?
2. What do we receive in the Sacrament of Holy Chrismation?
3. Who is involved in the consecration of the Holy Chrism?

LESSON

4

The Sacrament of the Kingdom

Lesson Goals :

- *I can understand that Holy Qurbana is heavenly worship that both the living and the departed participate in.*
- *I can discover a deeper understanding of how and why we prepare ourselves to receive the Holy Qurbana.*
- *I can explain the importance and significance of believing that the Eucharist is the real Body and Blood of Christ.*



In the Service of the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, we sing a deeply meaningful hymn as the newly baptised receive the Eucharist for the first time:

*The fruit – Adam did not taste - in Paradise is
Placed with joy today - in your mouth*

Only those who are Baptized in the Church can receive the Holy Qurbana. St. Paul teaches us that this is not a rule of exclusion but to protect anyone who is unprepared from receiving the Eucharist in an unworthy manner (1 Corinthians 11:27). Here is the deeper meaning of this Mystery of the Church: Holy Qurbana is the union of the Creator (God) with His creation (the faithful believers). In this Holy Communion, we are brought into an intimate union with the Divine as God shares His real Body and Blood.

Remember

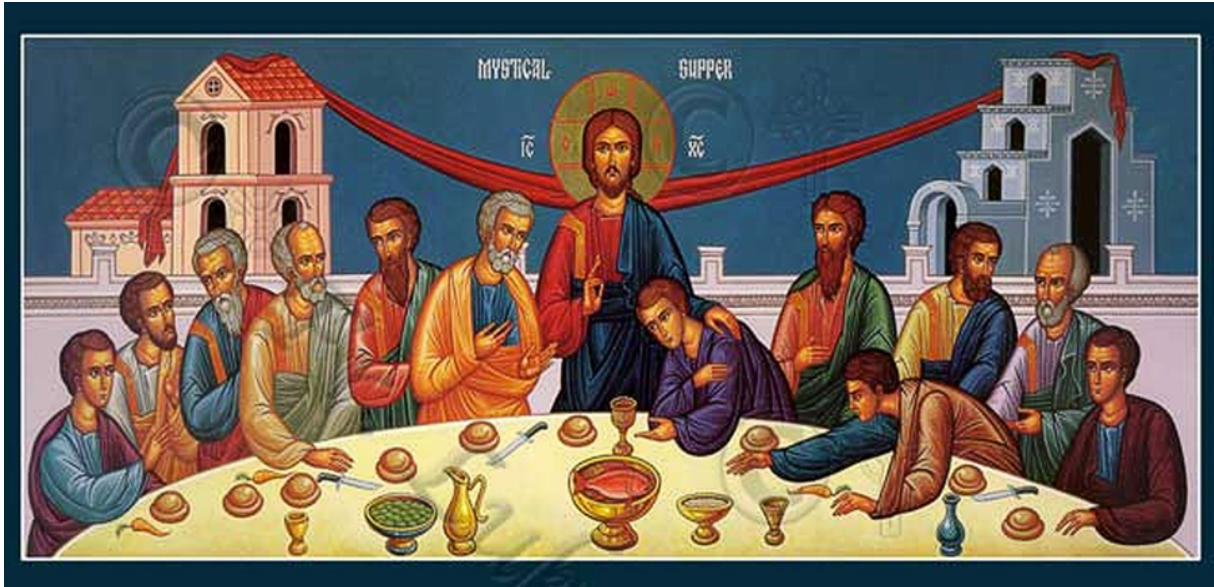
Holy Qurbana is the union of the Creator (God) with His creation (the faithful believers). In this Holy Communion, we are brought into an intimate union with the Divine as God shares His real Body and Blood.



But as the hymn reminds us, there is even more to this holy and sacred Mystery, as it brings both the living and the departed together in communion.

The Mystical Supper

On the eve of our Lord's Passion, He brought His disciples into the upper room and first established the Holy Eucharist (**St. Matthew 26:17–30, St. Mark 14:12–26, St. Luke 22:7–39, and St. John 13:1–17:26**).



Icon of the Mystical Supper

“

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is My body”. Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”



St. Matthew 26:26-28

”

We hear these same words recited by the priest during the Holy Qurbana. At the Holy Table, we fully participate in the Passover meal. The Holy Qurbana is not simply bread mixed with wine, nor does it simply “symbolise” Jesus Christ. As our Lord showed us, we are directly receiving Jesus Christ into our bodies. As we clearly read in **St. John 6:53-58**, the Holy Qurbana is the living Jesus Christ Himself: *“Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.”*

Sharing a common meal and offering thanks to God were common in the Old Testament long before Christ offered us the Mystical Supper. Before the release of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, our Lord had established the Passover meal through the Holy Prophets Moses and Aaron (Exodus 12). Once freed, they were instructed to “keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance” (Exodus 12: 14) as a reminder of their release from slavery.

When looking at Jewish tradition, we see that it is celebrated in this same way even today, as a remembrance of their ancestors’ freedom from slavery. It is this same Passover meal which Christ, the One who created the first Passover, celebrates with His disciples. Christ established the bread

and wine as His own Body and Blood. Now we are freed not only from physical slavery but from the spiritual slavery of sin and death as well.

The Holy Eucharist

How can one say that one's hand or leg is part of one's own body? There is a central nervous system and central blood distribution system that connect individual members of the body with the entire body. The same blood flows to a person's head and to a person's legs too.

Similarly, a part of the same bread and wine that have become the Body and Blood of Christ is received by every individual member of the community. Just as the Body and Blood of Christ are present in each individual member of the community, the same Christ connects each individual member of the community with each other in a mystical fashion.

As St. Paul teaches, ***"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? For we, through many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread"*** (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). St. Paul emphasises that we are all participating together in the Holy Eucharist, and this makes us one in Christ. Our participation in the Holy Qurbana makes us one in Christ.

Not only do we, the faithful living, come into communion with Christ and with each other, but we are also in communion with all of our faithful departed. All who faithfully prepare and receive the Body and Blood of Christ are united in Christ. The hymns we sing as we receive Holy Qurbana remind us of this truth:

(Rakshakanuracheythaan..)

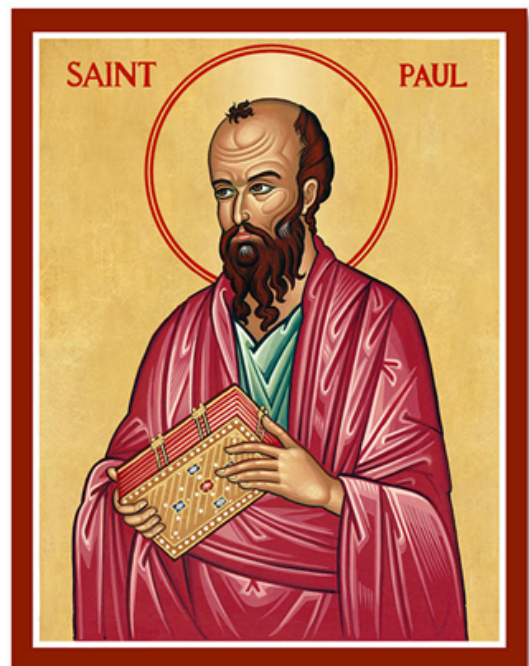
*The Lord has spoken,
"I will dwell in them
Who eat My Body
And My living Blood.*

*He who receives Me
Purely and in faith
And keeps my commands
Is Indeed My friend.*

*I will dwell in them
Who receive as food
My Holy Body
And My Blood as drink."*

Remember

Our participation in the Holy Qurbana makes us one in Christ.



St. Justin the Martyr teaches us the greatness of this gift: "For we do not receive these things as common bread or common drink; but as Jesus Christ, our Saviour, being incarnate by God's

Word, took flesh and blood for our salvation, so also we have been taught that the food consecrated by the Word of prayer that comes from Him, from which our flesh and blood are nourished by transformation, is the flesh and blood of that incarnate Jesus". Said otherwise, the same way Jesus has become the Incarnate Word of God, the Word of Prayer mystically transforms the bread and wine into the real Body and Blood of our Lord. By participating in this Holy and Divine Mystery, we unite with both Christ and with each other. Christ taught and set forth the Holy Communion for us to follow and believe in.

Among the many names we have for this sacrament, another is "The Holy Eucharist". The word "Eucharist" comes from the Greek word *eucharistia*, meaning 'thanksgiving.' We give thanks to God and celebrate His life. We rejoice because we are given the One who is life.

As Father Alexander Schmemmann said, "The only real fall of man is his noneucharistic life in a noneucharistic world." As Christians living in a world that values pride and selfishness, we are called to offer back to God what He has first given to us. Receiving the Holy Qurbana is not just an action we take when we come to Church. It is both a renewal of and a commitment to our life in Christ. Father Alexander Schmemmann challenges us to have this approach in every part of our lives, in offering everything back to God, because everything truly belongs to Him. This is how we can learn how to live a Eucharistic (thanksgiving) life.

Remember

Receiving Holy Qurbana is not just an action we take when we come to Church. It is both a renewal of and a commitment to our life in Christ. Father Alexander Schmemmann challenges us to have this approach in every part of our lives, in offering everything back to God, because everything truly belongs to Him.



Learning Outcome Check

Examine the quote "The Eucharist is the mystery of the Kingdom, the fullness and manifestation of the Church as the age to come." (Fr. Alexander Schmemmann)



The Live Coal

In Isaiah 6, we learn of a very special moment before the Incarnation of our Lord. The heavens opened to Isaiah (**Isaiah 6:3**) and he saw the Heavenly Throne with the Seraphim surrounding the Altar singing, "**Holy! Holy! Holy!**" It is not a coincidence that this is our experience in the Divine Liturgy too. We sing after the Pre-Sanctus Prayer.

"Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty by whose glory the Heaven and earth are filled, Hosanna in the highest!"

Today, our experience is more intimate than that of the Prophet Isaiah. A Seraph, using a tong, placed "burning coal" on the lip of Isaiah, saying, "*Behold, this has touched your lips; your lawlessness is taken away, and your sin is cleansed.*" (**Isaiah 6:7**) We are now not limited to just the touch of

the coal, the Body and Blood of Christ, but are able to fully consume the Holy Communion. With preparation, reverence, and wonder, we receive and consume the same fiery coal in our mouth. We listen closely as the Priest prays and gives “the atoning live coal of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ” to us. The Incarnation of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, has thus led to His redemption and purification of the world in a more personal way.

The Body and Blood

When we gather at church on Sundays and feast days, we are there to partake in and consume the *Body and Blood of Jesus Christ*. But why do we gather physically in one place to participate in the Divine Liturgy? The Divine Liturgy is not just something we do or consume as part of a checklist of our faith as Orthodox Christians. Instead, when we partake of the Holy Eucharist, we confess and affirm the faith of the Apostles, the holy priesthood, the Holy Sacraments, and the Church as the true Bride of Christ. As Fr. Schmemmann wrote, “The Eucharist is communion with the whole Church.” The Holy Eucharist is important because it is the sacrament from which the Church’s entire activity flows.

When we come to church on Sundays, we come together with all our fellow parishioners, all Orthodox Christians in the world, all of creation, our faithful departed, the saints, the Apostles, and the angels. Together, we come before the Throne of God to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice and to partake of His Body and Blood, the sacrifice that was given for the world. We call this togetherness the living Community of the faithful.

Learning Outcome Check

Analyze how the Holy Qurbana is communion with the whole Church, both living and the departed.

Often, it has been taught that the Divine Liturgy is a re-enactment of the life of Christ. However, this is an incomplete representation of what the Divine Liturgy is. We are not to be passive audience members but active participants in the Divine Liturgy and in the Body and Blood of Christ. We are not just observers of the liturgy, but to directly witness and to be filled with Life itself.

In St. Cyril of Alexandria’s 1st letter to Nestorius, which was also included in the Holy Ecumenical Council of Ephesus, he explains the importance and unifying nature of the Holy Eucharist. According to St. Cyril, when we participate in the Holy Eucharist, we accept the flesh of Jesus Christ, but “*not as common flesh do we receive it; God forbid: nor as of a man sanctified and associated with the Word according to the unity of worth, or as having a divine indwelling, but as truly the life-giving and very flesh of the Word himself. For he is the life according to his nature as God, and when he became united to his flesh, he made it also to be life-giving.*”

St. Cyril says that by partaking in the Eucharist, we are confessing that we are believers in Christ’s incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. The priests confess this in the Divine Liturgy after the prayers of the institution. He asks for God’s mercy for himself and the congregation, as together we confess these truths about Christ. St. Cyril (and the whole Church by way of the Ecumenical Council) states that we are sanctified because of the Holy Body and Blood of Christ. He ends with the most important point: we are made worthy to receive the Body and Blood of Christ because the Body and Blood of Christ, the Holy Qurbana, gives us *life*.

So, why do we gather in the church every Sunday? To approach Life and to receive Life itself. As members of the Holy Church, God allows us to approach His Body and Blood, with reverence, fear,

and preparation. We approach so that we might have life.

Remember

When we come to church on Sundays, we come together with all our fellow parishioners, all Orthodox Christians in the world, all of creation, our faithful departed, the saints, the Apostles, and the angels. Together we come before the Throne of God to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice and to partake of His Body and Blood, the sacrifice that was given for the world. We call this togetherness the living Community of faithful.



The Divine Liturgy

The public celebration of Divine Liturgy is separated into two major parts: the Liturgy of the Word (pre-Anaphora) and the Anaphora, or 'lifting up' of the Body and Blood of Christ. In between these two parts, a significant event takes place, the confession of the Nicene Creed. It is the statement of faith given to us by the holy fathers through the Ecumenical Councils and the life of the Holy Church.

Why is the Creed being confessed as a community before the Anaphora? When we participate in the Holy Qurbana, as a community and as the single Body of Christ, we are saying that we believe and confess the faith of the Holy Church. Only with this confession of faith can we bring ourselves to participate in the Body and Blood of Christ. We receive the Fruit of Life that the Church gives us because we believe everything that the Church proclaims. This is why, in the ancient Church, *catechumens* and those who were not members of the Church would leave the sanctuary during the Nicene Creed. They understood that the Anaphora was only for those who confessed the faith of the Holy Church.

When we partake in the Divine Liturgy and receive the Holy Body and Blood of Christ, we are saying as a community and as a single Body of Christ that we believe what both the Apostles and the Saints believed and all that Christ taught. When we receive the Body and Blood of Christ in our mouth, we are making a state-

Learning Outcome Check

Discover a deeper understanding of how, and why we prepare ourselves to receive the Holy Qurbana.

ment of faith through our actions that we believe and live by what the Church has taught us from all eternity. As a community of believers, we are confessing that we are united in Christ, in His Death and resurrection, and the Truth that the Church gives to us through its life and teachings.

Coming to church on Sundays and participating in the Holy Qurbana shall not be a mere weekly routine. Actions and words said in the Holy Qurbana reveal the greatest of all the sacraments and the Church's life-giving Mystery. Receiving the Holy Qurbana is a *confessional* act by the entire church community. We renew our promise to be faithful followers of the Holy Church and the Faith given to us through Christ, the Head of the Holy Church.

Remember

We are made worthy to receive the Body and Blood of Christ because the Body and Blood of Christ, the Holy Qurbana, gives us life.



Reflection Questions

1. Why is it important to prepare ourselves for the Holy Qurbana? What are some ways that we prepare for Holy Qurbana?
2. If someone were to say: “Can we simply stay at home and pray and read scripture?” How would you respond? Are they even the same thing?
3. Can you find any patterns from the Old Testament in the Holy Qurbana?
4. What are we confessing or saying that we believe when we participate in the Holy Qurbana?
5. Fr. Alexander Schmemmann observed that “The Eucharist is the mystery of the Kingdom, the fullness and manifestation of the Church as the age to come.” Can you explain this in your own words to a friend?

LESSON

5

Holy Matrimony

Lesson Goals :

- *I can understand that in marriage, husbands and wives are called to love one another as Christ and the Church do.*
- *I can understand that in marriage, the couple is called to be united together, just like the Holy Trinity is in perfect communion.*
- *I can understand that the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony establishes marriage as part of the path to holiness for those who choose to be married.*



When we hear the word “marriage,” we may think about what we see in movies, or the fancy clothes, decorations, and dances. It is important to remember that marriage is much more than these peripheral ideas.

The hymns and prayers in the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony are filled with grand forms of imagery and Biblical references to highlight what truly matters: the new couple is called to love and serve each other and their family, just as Christ loved His bride (the church), and the Church stays devoted to her Bridegroom (Christ).

Biblical Foundation

God is the Trinity: the perfect communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This communion is a community too, and it is a model of pure love. Since God exists in a community, mankind is also called to exist in a community. Marriage and family life are another form of community.

Learning Outcome Check

Correlate communion in marriage to the perfect communion of Holy Trinity.



In the Bible, we see many examples of marriage centred around the love of God. In the book of Genesis, after God created Adam, He created a companion for him to solve his loneliness. Eve, the first woman, was created from Adam (**Genesis 2:22–23**). This story shows the bond of affection and love between husband and wife. God created Adam out of love. Then Eve was created so that Adam may, too, experience love from one of his own kind. Love is the fundamental connection between God and us.

God, out of His love, gave a companion to Adam. From that same love, He gives a companion to those who approach for the sacrament of matrimony. We see many examples of couples in the Bible (Sarah and Abraham, Rebecca and Isaac, Rachel and Jacob) who are blessed by God in their marriages. The service of matrimony assures the same blessing these original couples received,

which is also given to the couple being united in marriage. It even gives the same blessing that Joseph received, which means that whatever they go through in life, God will be with them.

In addition to these examples, we are also taught about marriage and love through St. Paul, who compares the love between the husband and wife to the love between Christ and His Church (**agape**). In the same way that Christ gave himself selflessly up for the Holy Church, the husband is called to offer himself in love to the wife (**Ephesians 5:25–33**).

Learning Outcome Check

Correlate the love of husband and wife to that of Christ and the Church.

Orthodox Ceremony of Holy Matrimony

The examples and imagery are not just limited to what we see in Scripture but are also very noticeable throughout the Sacrament of Matrimony. The sacrament of marriage is not about the couple as individual people but about their unity with each other through our Lord.



Rings

There are two parts: the blessing of the rings, and the blessing of the crowns.

The rings symbolise the sign of the unity or engagement of the man and woman as husband and wife. The ring is a symbol of their covenant. The priest, representing God and the Church, places the rings on the bride and the groom showing their submission before God by their own free will and consent.



Crowns

For the blessing of the crowns, the priest places these crowns (symbolically represented in the Indian tradition by gold chains with a cross) on the bridegroom and the bride. The crowns are a symbol of the couple being a king and queen in their miniature kingdom on Earth, namely the family. They symbolise the crown of thorns that was placed on our Lord to signify the self-sacrificial love required in marriage. They also remind us of the crown of martyrdom, for the husband and wife are to give up their lives out of love for each other.

Crowning of the Bride and Bridegroom

“May the Lord adorn you the crown of righteousness and adorn you with incorruptible beauty.”



Minnu



Manthrakodi

Following the blessing of the crown, the groom ties the **minnu** around the neck of the bride. This is a symbolic act signifying the lifelong, sacred, and inseparable bond established in marriage.

Following this, the priest places the **manthrakodi** on the bride's head. This provides the imagery of Rebecca, who took a veil and covered herself when she first saw Isaac (**Gen 24:65**). The groom also accepts the responsibility to care for and cherish his bride.

Our Calling

Marriage provides a path to holiness. Have you ever thought about how different the Sacrament of Marriage is in the Orthodox Church compared to what we may see in the movies or when we attend a non-Orthodox wedding?

One significant difference is that the wedding vows are never exchanged with each other, but rather the man and woman commit to God that they will join together. The newly-wed couple will then journey together through the years, learning to love one another unconditionally. They learn to be patient with one another. They learn to submit their wills to one another. This journey is full of repentance, forgiveness, and learning to depend on God. The man and woman make a sacred vow that is stronger and more powerful than any promise that can be made to each other, as we are reminded in the concluding prayer of the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony: "Dear children, pay attention and know that you are standing before God, before the Table of Life and the Throne of our Lord Jesus Christ, before the Holy Cross and the Holy Gospel, and before the entire congregation. Realise that you do not stand before one who is ignorant but before the One who knows your hearts". Their promises are made to God that they will become one, and after the priest reminds them of this, he says, "Behold, I now entrust you to one another."

Not only are the bride and groom called into a mutually sacrificial and endless love, but as the new king and queen, they also have the responsibility of leading their family towards the Kingdom of God. Their family represents a miniature Church. If the couple has children, they have an additional responsibility to raise them to be children of the Kingdom through their love. They commit to raising their children as active members of the Holy Church.

Marriage is a commitment and responsibility that is not for everyone. Those who do not marry have their own responsibilities to carry. Marriage is only one of the paths towards salvation. Those who remain **celibate** are also called to love others, just as the Lord commanded.

Learning Outcome Check

Illustrate that Marriage is a Sacrament and a path to holiness.



They are called to live in a community, but in different ways. It is important that these individuals, if they choose not to get married, remain pure in their paths as well, because marriage and celibacy are equal callings in the sight of God (**1 Corinthians 7:8–9**).

Reflection Questions

1. The bride and bridegroom are called to imitate the marriage of Christ and His Church. What does that mean to you?
2. Why is the theme of “selflessness” needed in order to understand the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony?
3. How is the love God calls us to in Marriage different from someone your age having a crush on someone else?

LESSON

6

Holy Priesthood

Lesson Goals :

- I can understand that Priesthood is one of the many different ministries in the Church and that the General call to priesthood is vital to the particular call.
- I can understand how the Priest is a presence of Christ in the community.



After His Resurrection, Jesus asked Peter three times (St. John 21:15-17), “Do you love me?” When he answered yes, Jesus gave him three tasks: “Feed my lambs”, “Tend my sheep”, and “Feed my sheep”. This call to action was not only for the disciples but all of us! Jesus is the perfect teacher, and His disciples travelled to many places near and far to continue to teach others about God. Their ministry was vital to the spread of Christianity around the world. They were specially called by God to do so, and today when we think of ministry, we often think of a calling only for priests, but the truth is we are all chosen (just as the disciples) to serve the Lord in our own way.

Learning Outcome Check

Relate the General Priesthood of all the faithful to the particular Priesthood of the specially called ones.

Christ, the High Priest

Jesus offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice when He willingly died on the Cross for our sins. Just like the sacrifices of the Hebrew priests, Christ's sacrifice reunited His people with God. In this way, Christ is the High Priest of the Church.



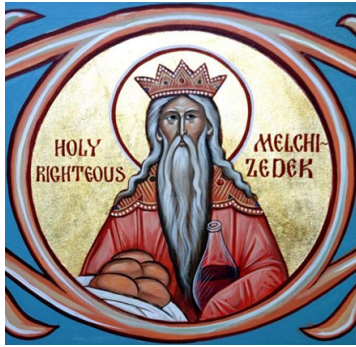
Jesus Christ, the High Priest

Priests in the Old Testament

The order of priesthood was established by God and began with Aaron, Moses' elder brother. As the Israelites were travelling to the promised land after escaping from Egypt, God commanded Moses to build a tabernacle. He then instructed Moses to anoint Aaron as the high priest of the Holy Tabernacle. After Aaron's death, his son Eleazar was anointed as the high priest, and the order of priesthood was passed on through his lineage.

The Levite tribe was proclaimed as the priestly tribe, but only those ordained within the tribe of Levi could serve as priests. To be ordained, priests were anointed with holy oil to be set apart for God's service. They wore holy garments and were appointed to offer sacrifices that were pleasing to the Lord on behalf of His people. They maintained the tabernacle (which later became the Temple),

received tithes and offerings, and were the intercessors for the people before God, offering them blessings. They also fulfilled the role of judges and taught Hebrew law.



Melchizedek

In Genesis, Melchizedek is identified as both a priest and king of the city of Salem. He is simply identified as a “priest of God Most High” and offers bread and wine and blesses Abraham, who gives the priest a title (Genesis 14:18-20). In addition, Hebrews 7:2-3 mentions that “Melchizedek is translated “king of righteousness” and then also king of Salem, meaning “king of peace,” without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually. “

Just like Melchizedek, Jesus offered His Body and Blood as a sacrifice. Psalm 109:1-4 (OSB) foreshadows Jesus Christ as the Great High Priest by referring to Melchizedek. “The Lord said to my Lord... ”You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek”.

Priests in the New Testament

The order of Levitical priesthood ended when Jesus sacrificed Himself on the Cross. When Jesus selected the 12 Apostles and his 72 Evangelists, He anointed them with the Holy Spirit to carry out His priestly work so that they could be the intercessors before God for those who seek forgiveness. With the Holy Spirit’s guidance, they anointed bishops, priests, and deacons through the laying of hands. Even St. Paul, who was called by Jesus on the road to Damascus, had to receive the blessings of the Apostles through the laying on of hands to be fully ordained for his ministry.

The Church retains the practise of male priesthood because Jesus Christ Himself officiates the eucharistic service through His priests. The priest prays, “Thou Thyself are the One who offers and is offered, who accepts and is distributed,” establishing that Jesus conducts the Eucharist with the priest as His vessel.

Learning Outcome Check

Draw the connection to the Priest as the presence of Christ in community.

Liturgical Hymns

In the Quqiliyon for departed Priests, we sing:

*Moses and Aaron received
The priesthood which was passed down
It went to Zachariah
Then it was given to John.
John then gave it to our Lord
Who ordained the apostles
And the apostles
Spread it throughout creation
(Aadyacharyathwam...)*

Before this stanza of the hymn, we sing how God created Adam, and how “the earthly one came and went through the trees of Paradise” and the “angels marvelled at how he was exalted”. Adam was created as the first priest! He was to care for God’s creation and help serve. After the fall of man (**Genesis 3**), the hymn tells the story of the Old Testament’s priesthood order that began with Moses and ended with John the Baptist. Theophany, the appearance of the Holy Trinity during Christ’s baptism, established the eternal priesthood beginning with Jesus. He is the eternal High Priest, seated at the right hand of heaven’s throne, continually interceding for His Church.

The Holy Priesthood: Our Role as Kings and Priests

“

Christ reigned over this whole world beneath the heavens and He tells us as much when He says: ‘All power in heaven and on earth is given to Me.’ ... When therefore He was ruling, He ordained the holy Apostles as princes over us; and the Apostles likewise commanded us with judgment, that is with justice.

St. Cyril of Alexandria

”

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann reflected, “Man was originally created as the king and priest of creation.” This means that from the very beginning, God designed us to play an important part in His world. Men and women had a special role in God’s creation which was to serve God and minister to all His creation. A priest follows God’s will and purpose, and in this same way we are called to follow God’s will and purpose.

In **1 Peter 2:9**, we are reminded that we are “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.” This means that every one of us, not just the ordained priests, has responsibilities to fulfil. We are all called to share in important duties that connect us with God.

One of these duties is to declare the wonderful deeds of God. This means telling others about His greatness and how He works in our lives. Furthermore, it is essential to remember that it is Christ Himself who has called us “out of darkness and into His marvellous light.”

As we reflect on these truths, let us understand that we are all kings and priests by nature and by calling, and we each play a vital role in God’s plan for creation. Let us serve Him joyfully and share His love with others.

Reflection Questions

1. What is the difference between the Old and New Testament priesthood order?
2. How do our priests reflect Christ in their service and our community?
3. How are we to be like priests in our service and our community?

LESSON

7

The Living Sacrifice

Lesson Goals :

- I can participate in the Holy Qurbana and understand the symbolism and meaning of all parts of Liturgy.
- I can distinguish that the Liturgy is for the communion of both the living and the departed.
- I can reflect on what I can personally do to prepare to receive Holy Qurbana



The Holy Qurbana always remains unchanged, but yet each celebration is also new. Our personal experience of Liturgy changes over time, as does that of the entire congregation. The community evolves as young voices become old and old voices become wise.



Praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song



Psalm 149:1 ”

As a very young child, perhaps you experienced Holy Qurbana with amazement in the first row of the Church, taking in the sights, smells, and sounds of the worship. Those front row children may receive the kiss of peace from the acolyte, and then, having been given the responsibility, they take it with joy to the rest of the Church. But over the years, that same young child has come to understand that they are carrying and giving peace to the next person. It's also possible there comes a time when they may find it hard to give peace to someone they had an argument with and would rather share the kiss of peace with their friends and parents, their siblings, or their parents.

This simple example illustrates how we should continue to grow during Liturgy and have a deeper understanding of our actions. We need to grow in awareness that the prayers from Holy Qurbana emphasise blessings, peace, sacrifice, and thanksgiving, and therefore peace has to be achieved even with their enemies before entering the church. The action brings to life what we read in Scripture - *”Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (St. Matthew 5:23-24).*

Liturgical actions such as the kiss of peace are symbols that reflect a deeper reality, a connection with God and with each other. Understanding the order and symbolism of our Liturgy can help us better understand the beauty of our Orthodox faith.



The Divine Liturgy

The Order of the Holy Qurbana

In the Acts of the Holy Apostles, the newly baptised are seen completing the Lord's command as they *"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers"* (Acts 2:42). One such Apostle is the brother of our Lord, James, who is mentioned in the book of Acts and who we commemorate in the 5th diptych as "the first Archbishop of Jerusalem."

St. James' liturgy is the main liturgy used in the Malankara Church today. If you recall from our earlier lessons, the liturgy is divided into two sections: pre-Anaphora and Anaphora, or the Liturgy of the Word, and the Liturgy of the Upper Room. The Anaphora of St. James is an ancient liturgy with roots that go all the way back to the 1st century, the time of the Apostles. This is the Anaphora upon which all of the other anaphoras of our Church are based. There are at least 77 other Anaphoras that can be used in the Orthodox Syriac tradition. By far, this is the most in any of the ancient Orthodox traditions. The Anaphoras are identified by who wrote them, like the Anaphora of St. John Chrysostom or the Anaphora of St. Dionysius Bar Salibi. The liturgies celebrated today connect us to the liturgies that were celebrated for the past 2000 years, since the time of the Apostles.

The Liturgy of the Catechumens

As the curtain opens, the priest intones, "St. Mary, who brought Thee forth, and John, who baptised Thee, intercede for us. Have mercy upon us!" We begin the Divine Liturgy with the Maneesa (Ma'nitho) of St. Severus.



This hymn is a symbol of our faith as Orthodox Christians and summarises God's love for us. While this hymn is chanted, there is a small procession taking place around the Holy Tabernacle, in which the deacon/acolyte, who is holding a candle, typically accompanied by two deacons/acolytes holding the maravastas, walks in front of the priest in procession. The deacon/acolyte holding the candle symbolises St. John the Baptist, the Forerunner, of our Lord, and the priest stands in for Jesus Christ. St. John was the one who "made way" for the Messiah, the Christ.

Following the Maneesa, the priest leads the congregation in chanting the Trisagion prayer. This prayer is traditionally said to be a combination of angelic and human hymns. When Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were carrying the body of our Lord, they heard spiritual beings crying aloud this hymn:.

*"Holy art Thou O God!
Holy art Thou, Almighty!
Holy art Thou, Immortal!"*

To this, they added, "Who was crucified for us, Have mercy on us!" (Bar Kepha, 14).

This is then followed by the Scripture readings, one from the Acts of the Holy Apostles or from the Catholic Epistles standing on the northern step to the Holy of Holies. The second reading is from the Epistles of St. Paul, standing on the southern step to the Holy of Holies. Then the priest reads from the Holy Gospel from the centre of the Madbaha. Moses Bar Kepha, a commentator on the Holy Qurbana, lived from 813 to 903 AD, said that the reading of the Holy Scripture is to give *"spiritual nourishment to the soul... just as bread and water nourishes the body."* (Bar Kepha, 16). The sermon is meant to be given after the reading of the Holy Gospel. Sometimes, the sermon will be postponed until later for practical reasons. Our lives as Christians are fulfilled when we attend to the Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ and live what the Gospels call us to. This is why, before the Gospel is read, the deacon says, *"With stillness, fear, and purity, let us attend..."*.

Following the Gospel, the priest offers a series of prayers known as *Promion, Husoyo, and Sedro*.¹ The priest first asks mercy from God for his own sins, and then, entering into the Lord's presence, asks mercy for the sins of the faithful, both the living and the departed. It is similar to the role of Moses in the Old Testament.

Learning Outcome Check

Analyse how the Holy Qurbana is communion with the whole Church, both living and the departed.

¹Definitions :

Husoyo: Prayer of absolution

Promion: Preface

Sedro: Meditative prayer after the promion



After the offering of these prayers, the priest blesses the censer, proclaiming the holiness of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit sanctifies this incense offering and unites us in worship. Incense is mentioned across the Bible, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. It says in Leviticus, “*And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from the altar before the Lord, with his hands full of the incense compound, beaten fine... and put the incense on the fire before the Lord*” (**Leviticus 16: 12-13**).

In the book of Revelations, we read how the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb (Christ) with “*golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints*” (**Revelation 5:8**). Incense, though solid, is melted on burning coal. This reaction produces sweet, fragrant smoke, which rises. Incense represents our prayers rising to God. Prophet and King David said, “*Let my prayer be set before you as incense*” (**Psalms 140:2**), an offering pleasing to God.



Following this is the proclamation of our faith: the Nicene Creed. This Creed was written during the first two ecumenical councils and is our fundamental statement of faith in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Historically, only those who confessed this faith at holy baptism would continue for the Anaphora, the next part of the Holy Qurbana. All of those who were catechumens, meaning those in the process of learning the faith before being baptised, would leave the assembly at this time.

The Anaphora

We begin the Anaphora (Qurbana) by greeting each other with the Kiss of Peace. This is a long-standing tradition of the Church in which we exchange peace with those around us. The priest blesses the deacon holding the censer, who then exchanges peace with those serving in the Holy of Holies. He then goes into the Nave, where the congregation stands, and exchanges peace with a few individuals.

These individuals then exchange the peace with other individuals, and this repeats with the peace being exchanged with everyone. It is important to note that peace comes from God at the Holy Altar and is distributed through the whole Church.



This is symbolic of how Christ's message of peace was first given to his Apostles, who then gave it to their disciples, and their disciples, and to people all over the world. This exchange of peace is necessary, as our Lord says, *"Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."* (St. Matthew 5: 23-24).



Following this is the lifting of the veil. The veil, or Shushappa (*Shushhefo* Syriac), is a decorated white cloth that covers the paten and chalice. It is a cover that is used to cover the offering of the bread and the wine. The Shushhefo also represents the stone that was covering the tomb of Christ (St. Mark 16:1-3).

At this time, the deacon calls on the faithful to "stand well," "stand with fear," "stand with modesty," "stand with purity," "stand in holiness," and "stand in love and true faith." Our attention is now fixed on God, and we are giving thanks to Him for revealing Himself to us.

At this point, the priest blesses the faithful with a Trinitarian blessing, which is based on **2 Corinthians 13:14**.

We next focus our attention on worshipping God, joining our voices with the angels that declare His glory. The priest calls us to turn our attention to the Lord: "Up above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God the Father, let our thoughts, minds, and hearts be at this hour." In the Anaphora, as the Apostle Paul has stated, the whole man is taken up where Christ is now seated at the right hand of God. We are called to "stand in fear and trembling" since the mysteries of God are being revealed to us.

Do You Know?

In the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord (Denaha) the shushhefo covers the water that is set apart and offered. Similarly in the consecration of a bishop, it is used to cover the head of the person who is being set apart and offered by the Church for this life of ministry.



The faithful then chant the Sanctus, a prayer of the Seraphim. Just as the Seraphim cry "**Holy, Holy, Holy**" (Isaiah 6:3), so we too are called to glorify God similarly. He is "Lord Almighty" since "He brought everything into existence" and "He won victory over sin, death, and Satan" (Bar Kepha, 37). We also acknowledge that those on earth as well as the heavenly ones exalt him.

We then hear the **Words of Institution** of the Eucharist. Here, the narrative of Christ instituting the Mystical Supper is recalled. St. Ephrem says, "He called the bread His living Body, and did fill it with Himself and the Spirit" (Homilies 4:4; 4:6). It is a very intimate thing that we do, which is consuming the Living Body and Living Blood of our Lord. This is why, following this, we proclaim the Mystery of our Salvation, commemorating the death of Christ, confessing His resurrection,

and saying that we are awaiting His Second coming. As the priest says at the end of the Institution Narrative, “for life eternal,” it is in His death and resurrection that we *participate* in order to enter eternal life.

The *Epiclesis* is a very intense moment during the Anaphora. The priest calls upon the Holy Spirit to descend. “*He descended in the womb of the holy Virgin Mary... He descends upon the bread and wine... and makes them the body and blood of God the Word*” (Bar Kephá, 47). While

the priest prays silently, the deacons call our attention to the event taking place: the Holy Spirit descends from the heights of heaven and rests upon the Eucharist. The priest then asks: “Answer me, O Lord,” three times, with the congregation following with “Kurielaison” three times. He then recites the prayer of consecration, in which the elements are consecrated as the Body and Blood of Christ “By His indwelling.” “His” refers here to the Holy Spirit.

At this time, with the consecrated elements on the altar, the Lord has come ever closer to us, and we are drawn ever closer to Him. Having entered into the presence of the Lord, we bring to Him the needs of the faithful and intercede for those who need prayers. This supplication for the living, the saints, and the faithful departed is called the *Diptych*. It is common for the congregation to sit during these prayers, but we still need to be active and respond with Kurielieson (“Lord have mercy”).

- ▶ The 1st Diptych is for remembrance of our living leaders of the Church and diocese, for they are our shepherds. They, too, need prayers to guide us in the right paths and to face the challenges of their ministry with grace and humility.
- ▶ The 2nd Diptych is for the sick, suffering, and all who have requested prayers of us.
- ▶ The 3rd Diptych is for those who have been given civil authority. (**1 Timothy 2:1-4**)
- ▶ The 4th Diptych, is for commemoration of the Holy Virgin Mary and the saints.
- ▶ The 5th Diptych is for the doctors of the Church who, in the face of great challenges preserved the faith through the centuries and entrusted it to us.
- ▶ The 6th and final Diptych is for all the faithful departed, our loved ones, and all those who have departed from this life. In many churches, the congregation will sit during this time. However, we should be active in prayer for all those who are in need of our intercession.

Learning Outcome Check

Discover the deeper meaning of the symbolism of the Liturgy, and how it ties to our Salvation.

Fraction

After the priest offers another *benediction* to the faithful, the curtain closes, and the priest begins the portion of the liturgy called the *Fraction*. It is during this very sober time that the priest breaks the Bread and the Wine is mixed with the broken bread for them to ultimately become the Body and Blood of Christ. The fraction commemorates the events of Holy Friday, where our Lord after his death on the Cross was prepared for burial.

The Elevation of the Mysteries

Following the Fraction service, the Holy of Holies is unveiled. Then, we pray the prayer that our Lord taught us to pray, “Our Father who art in heaven...” In Aramaic (Aboon), Our father is a word with much love, affection, and endearment. Our closeness with God was restored because of our

Lord's sacrifice on the Cross. With our Holy Baptism, we were given sonship and daughter-ship with God because, by Holy Baptism, we die to this world and rise to eternal life. At this point in the Holy Qurbana, because the sacrifice on the Cross reunites the heavens and the earth, we now have the ability to call upon God as Our Father. When we ask God to "give us this day our daily bread," it means an everlasting bread, a never-ending supply of bread for our nourishment. It is a very appropriate prayer before we receive our Lord Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life.

Next is the holy Elevation of the Mysteries. The priest lifts up the paten and chalice, which contain the Body and Blood of Christ. During this time, we offer glory to the Holy Trinity. The celebrant intones "These Holy Things are only for the pure and holy." Not being worthy enough to receive these mysteries, we respond, "The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit alone are Holy." In the book of Revelations, God is holding a scroll with seven seals, and an angel asks, "*Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?*" (**Revelations 5:2-5**). The narrator, St. John the Apostle, begins to weep, seeing that "*no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.*" *An elder consoles him, saying, "Weep not; lo, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."* This victory of the Son of God has become our victory as well. We praise and glorify the Lord who has conquered, proclaiming, "Glory be to the Father, the Son, and the living Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever."

The Procession of the Mysteries



The priest holding the Mysteries in his hands, calls on God to "stretch forth His invisible right hand". As he moves west-ward, he crosses the Paten and Chalice and proceeds to distribute the Holy Mysteries to the faithful. This is the great moment, for we receive into our bodies the One who made all things. This is the most intimate moment in our lives because thus Jesus' Body becomes part of our body.

After dispensing the mysteries, the priest ascends the Holy of Holies and asks that these Mysteries "be not for judgment nor for condemnation" but "for life everlasting". "*For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning of the thoughts and intents of the heart*" (**Hebrews 4:12**). The Mysteries, when received with a repentant heart, can lead us to a blessed union with God. If the Mysteries are not received with a repentant heart, they can, in fact, be spiritually harmful to us. (**1 Corinthians 11:27**).

Therefore, we have Holy Confession, so that we can let go of the things that are holding us back from the grace of God and also to receive guidance from our spiritual father. He is responsible for our spiritual health and does not want to give us something that would harm us. As St. Cyril of Jerusalem (350 AD) says "*partake of that bread as something spiritual and put a cheerful face on your soul*" (Cyril of Jerusalem, 22:6, 9).

Summary

The Holy Qurbana has many layers of meaning through actions and symbols, while remaining the same throughout our lives. As we grow, we experience it on different levels. When we were little, there was a certain wonder, excitement, and joy as we sat in the front row. As we grow, we start to understand the symbols in the Holy

Qurbana that are both a physical and spiritual reality. Week to week, and through the liturgical seasons of the year, we come to the Lord with different perspectives and things weighing on our hearts. The Lord, who is the same yesterday, today, and for evermore, is there for us throughout our whole lives. Holy Qurbana becomes the bedrock of our lives, from which we are able to go out into the world, sharing the love that we have received from the Lord.

Learning Outcome Check

Discover a deeper understanding of how, and why we prepare ourselves to receive the Holy Qurbana.

Reflection Questions

1. Examine why our belief that during Holy Qurbana we receive the real Body and Blood of Christ shapes the seriousness of how we worship and pray to God.
2. How must we prepare to receive the Holy Mysteries?
3. After we receive the Holy Mysteries which is the Real Body and Blood of Christ, how must we act? Think about how Holy this gift inside us is!

LESSON

8

Holy Confession

Lesson Goals :

- *I can understand the role of Holy Confession in receiving healing for sins.*
- *I can understand how Christ grants priests the authority to forgive sins through apostolic succession.*
- *I can illustrate the unconditional love in forgiveness.*



What is Confession?

Think about all the times you have gotten really sick. What do your loved ones usually do? They do everything in their power to help you get better and overcome the sickness. Likewise, the Church focuses on healing us from the sickness of sin through the sacrament of Holy Confession.

We are tempted daily by sin. When we sin, we turn away from God and separate ourselves from receiving His love and grace. This is also what happened to the prodigal son when he left home. He separated himself from the love of his father and from communion with his family. As his life fell deeper into sin, he experienced even more darkness and loneliness.

With God as our loving Father, our lives are not hopeless. He wants us to return and be in communion with Him. It is through true repentance in the sacrament of Confession that we are able to return to Him. As we see in the Parable of the Lost Sheep, Christ rejoices whenever the lost ones repent and return to Him, for *"I tell you there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner*

who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (St. Luke 15:7). God welcomes us back with open arms, just as the father fully received his repentant prodigal son.



Parable of the prodigal son



Sin is followed by shame. Repentance is followed by boldness.

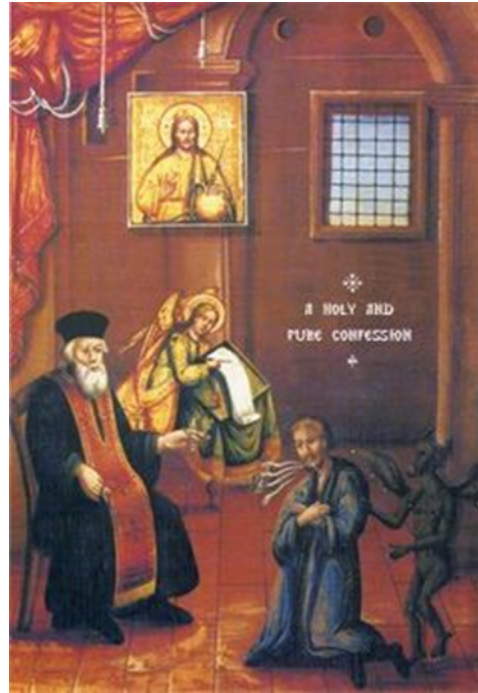
St. John Chrysostom



Preparing for Confession

Through the sacrament of Confession, we are able to return to God. But how do we confess? First, we should find and develop a relationship with your spiritual father to take confession with. You can go to confession with any priest. However, it is best to develop a trust for confession with your parish priest, who knows you and whom you are able to see consistently. This way, the priest can completely guide you on your journey to overcome your sins.

We are to speak in confession about things that make us uncomfortable. There may be things, which make us feel humiliated, hurt, and ashamed. Therefore, it is natural to be afraid and anxious about confession. In the Orthodox Church, sin is understood as sickness. One shall know that the priest has a function like that of a doctor. Just like your loved ones may take you to a doctor when you are sick for your physical health, the priest helps heal your spiritual health. It is God, who heals you from your illness and not the doctor. Similarly, it is God, who absolves your sins. However, without a doctor, you will never be healed and similarly, without priests, whom Christ has entrusted to extend the healing from sins, your sins won't be forgiven. The priest is not there to judge you or tell anyone else what you confessed. He is there to listen, guide, and ultimately pray to God on your behalf for forgiveness. While you are confessing to the priest, he serves merely as a witness and guide; in truth, you are confessing directly to the Lord. The priest is called to assist in your repentance, guide you out of sin, and deliver the forgiveness of God to you. In other words, the priest absolves you of your sins. Christ gave the authority to "forgive and retain" sins to the Apostles (**St. John 20:23**). The Apostles, through laying on of hands (ordination), gave the authority to the bishops who then gave it to the priests. The authority to forgive sins is therefore the expression of **Apostolic Succession**.



We can help overcome any and all fears about confession through preparation.

1. Before Holy Confession, we should first examine ourselves and the sins we have committed. To help with this, it is a good practise to write them down before going into confession. (You can destroy the paper after your confession as a symbol of getting rid of those sins!) *"Awake, O sinner, while there is still time for repentance! Cleanse and purify your stains with mournful tears and sighing."* **Night Vigil of Tuesday**
2. Next, we should spend time in **repentance**. In confession, we must wholeheartedly repent of our sins. Just like when you visit your trusted doctor, you tell the doctor all the ways you feel sick. Similarly, the priest can only help you as much as you are honest with him about your sins. It is only when we truly repent that we are able to receive the full benefits of confession. In preparing for Confession, it is helpful to meditate upon the Psalms of David: **Psalms 6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129, and 142**.
3. From then on, you must commit to not falling into the same sins again and work with your priest on ways to permanently overcome those sins. With this in mind, we should also forgive and seek forgiveness from those who may have hurt us or who we have hurt. Without this genuine effort

towards forgiveness, we may not be forgiven. Christ tells us, “*But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses*” (St. Matthew 6:15).

Learning Outcome Check

Connect confession of sins with healing from sins.

Learning Outcome Check

Trace the authority of binding and loosing sins given by Christ to the priest through apostolic succession.

St. Athanasius recommends going to confession every 40 days. Discuss this with your priest. Just as your doctor tells you how often to take medicine, your Achen will direct you on how often you need the medicine of confession.

A common recommendation is to confess during each of the *five canonical fasts*. Through confession, we are able to continue to fight the battle against Satan and to make great progress in growing into the likeness of God.

Remember

We are still tempted each and every day with sin. When we sin, we have turned away from God and have separated ourselves from receiving His love and grace.



Forgiving One Another

God forgives our sins when we confess before Him. But our confession becomes perfect when we reconcile with those we have sinned against. If we do not forgive our offenders, we are not eligible for forgiveness from God.

Learning Outcome Check

Illustrate the unconditional love in forgiveness.

We participate in the Kiss of Peace in Holy Qurbana. It is the occasion when we reconcile with each other. We forgive and forget any offences by anyone. Having our sins forgiven by God and having reconciled with our fellow men, we continue to walk in the newness of life.

Confession is a necessary part of life. With Baptism we are granted entry into the Kingdom. Confession helps us renew the vows taken at our baptism to renounce Satan and accept Christ. By forgiving others the wrongs they have done to us, God will also forgive us our sins and the wrongs that we have done against Him.

Think

During the Kiss of Peace we sing:

*Let us embrace each other
With the peace of our Lord God.
May it abide with us now,
Always - and for evermore.
And may His peace - and goodwill - Protect us now and always*

Where does this peace originate from?



Reflection Questions

1. Why is it natural to be nervous or afraid of going to Confession?
2. Should we go to Confession if we know we might fall into sin again?
3. What are some ways we can prepare our mind and heart for Confession?
4. Why do we confess to a priest? Why can't we confess to God directly?
5. How is Holy Confession connected to Holy Qurbana?

LESSON

9

Anointing of the Sick

Lesson Goals :

- *I can understand that Holy Unction, the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, can be given to anyone suffering from any illness of the body, mind, and soul in a hospital, home, or Church setting.*
- *I can understand that Holy Unction is first for the healing of the soul and then also for the healing of the body.*
- *I can describe how the service of Holy Unction is conducted.*



Have you ever wondered why there are so many sick people among us? Have you ever questioned why the world has so much suffering? If God loves us, why does He allow these bad temptations and pain in our lives? As humans, it is only natural to have these doubts in our minds and to question those around us. Let us try to understand why illnesses still happen and how we can seek healing from God.

Let us go back to the story of creation and to the Garden of Eden. God created man in His own image and likeness. He always wanted union with His most superior creation, humans. We were always meant to live forever in paradise, where there is no death, no sin, and no suffering. We were given free will to make our own decisions. Sadly, Adam and Eve, God's first human creations, made wrong choices: they disobeyed God, sinned against Him, and this separated themselves—and, by extension, all humanity—from God. So then sin, death, and suffering entered the world. Though we are not guilty of the original sin committed by Adam and Eve, we suffer because of it. We live in this fallen world, and we face many temptations every day. Sometimes our illnesses and sufferings are the consequences of living in this fallen world.



What is freewill?



Sin is a spiritual sickness that causes suffering. Being ill and in pain can often bring on feelings of loneliness and isolation. We don't separate physical suffering from spiritual suffering. Sometimes spiritual suffering can have a physical dimension, and physical suffering can cause spiritual distress. The most important thing to remember is that we are never alone in our suffering. God loves us, and He wants us to be whole. He is with us even in the midst of suffering. When He lived as a man, Jesus experienced all dimensions of what it means to be human, including pain and suffering. During His earthly ministry, Jesus also provided healing to numerous individuals and provided solace to those who were in distress. His healing brought both physical as well as spiritual healing,



Jesus Christ - the healer

just as when he forgave the sins of the paralytic and healed him. Many of His parables are based on healing and forgiveness of sins.

In the Malankara Orthodox Church, many prayers, hymns, and sacraments are related to healing. Our faith talks about the unity of the body and soul. This means that both physical and spiritual healing are needed for recovery from a sickness. It is important to understand that the sacrament of Holy Unction, or the Anointing of the Sick, or any of the healing prayers do not replace the physical healing that may be needed through medical care. Rather, these, along with medical care, are ways in which God heals us. Whether through prayers or medical intervention, God is the One who heals. The Sacrament of the Holy Unction and the Sacrament of the Holy Confession are the two primary sacraments of healing.

Remember

Sin is a spiritual disease, that causes suffering. The cure is found only through the spiritual hospital, the Church.



What is the Sacrament of Holy Unction?

The Sacrament of Holy Unction or the Sacrament of Anointing of the sick is a special service of healing and forgiveness, through God's power, to receive both physical and spiritual healing. It is administered to anyone who needs healing in body, mind, or spirit (physical, mental, spiritual and/or emotional illness). This sacrament serves two interconnected purposes: repentance and healing.

A person can receive the sacrament as many times as needed throughout his or her life. In the letter of **St. James 5:15** it says, “...the prayer of faith will save a sick, ...and if he has committed sin, he will be forgiven.” Therefore, the anointing of the sick is for healing of both body and soul.

There is a misunderstanding that this sacrament is given only to those who are terminally ill or nearing death. This is a FALSE assumption. Anyone who desires any kind of healing can receive this sacrament, at any stage of their life.

Learning Outcome Check

Explain when and how this Sacrament shall be conducted.

What happens during the Sacrament of Holy Unction?

During the sacrament, hymns and prayers are offered for healing and repentance. Portions of Scripture devoted to healing are read from the epistles and gospel. It gives the members of the Church an opportunity to gather together and pray for the healing of their fellow members. All faithful are called to be part of this ministry. When we pray, we are not commanding God to heal or doubting His ability to heal, but pleading for His promised mercy on all who are ill.

As St. James states in **St. James 5:14**, “If anyone is sick, let him call the elders of the church, let them pray over him, and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

During the service, the priest prays, “O Christ, Our God, the Good and True Healer, we ask for Your compassion on behalf of Your servant, who is laid up with illness and has taken refuge in Your mercy and seeks Your compassion.”

The priest puts his hand on the head and prays, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, remove from him/her all pains and illnesses and harmful scourges and trials that are beyond his/her strength. Give him/her the true strength that comes from You.” The person is then given the opportunity to make a confession. Thus, the sacrament is composed of elements of physical as well as spiritual healing.

Similar to Chrismation, the priest anoints the forehead and chest of the person with a special blessed oil that is different from the one used in baptism. This special oil is made with only olive oil and is called the Oil of Anointing (*zythe* in Syriac). The oil represents the healing presence, strength, and forgiveness of God. The oil is also a symbol of the Holy Spirit and the ultimate pardon during sickness due to spiritual disease or illness. Anointing is meaningless without true repentance. Through this process, the Holy Spirit works in our lives and helps us heal.

Learning Outcome Check

Describe the process of how the service is conducted.

Jesus Christ became incarnate to restore the human race, which was scattered and broken apart because of sin. Christ considers the healing of the sick as an important part of His mission. Christ’s mission was to free the sinner from his sins and restore him to his original state of harmony with God and humanity.

Many of Jesus’s parables are about healing of the sick. One such parable is the Parable of the Good Samaritan. After reading **St. Luke 10:25–37**, study the Orthodox Icon below. What do you notice?

Learning Outcome Check

Analyse the purpose of this Sacrament.



Icon of the parable of the Good Samaritan

A few reflection points so we can understand more on meaning of the parable:

- A traveller went from Jerusalem (place of peace) to Jericho (place of sin)
- He was attacked by thieves, who took everything from him. He was left with nothing, was wounded, and was half dead. This is what happens when one
- sins and goes away from God.
- The priest and Levite man saw the wounded man but passed by without doing anything. Important titles and worldly positions mean nothing if your faith is without good actions.
- The Samaritan passer-by had compassion. He is like Christ, who came to save sinners.
- The Samaritan used bandages, oil, and wine for the wounds. Bandages stand for the garment of Baptism, oil for the oil of Chrismation and wine for the communion blood.
- The wounded man is set on the animal.
- The inn is the Church where we receive Christ's care, through the innkeeper, who represents the Priest and the members of the Church.

Just like the Good Samaritan and the many examples set by Jesus Christ, we, too, should have compassion for those around us, especially the sick, needy, and those suffering. We have a responsibility to pray for them, visit them, console them, and support their medical care.

When we come together as one in prayer in this joyful "work of the people," communion with our Lord is truly re-established. In this way, our Liturgy as the work of the people, continues in the world through us.

Reflection Questions

1. If God loves us and cares for us, why is there still sickness and suffering among us? How can we get sick from spiritual sin?
2. Why is the Sacrament of the Holy Unction important, and why is it included as one of the seven Sacraments of the Malankara Orthodox Church?
3. What is our role as an Orthodox Christian for those among us who are sick?

LESSON

10

A Christian Home

Lesson Goals :

- *I can make the connection between the blessing of the home and the act of setting apart as an extension of the Church*
- *I can better appreciate the need for house blessing and the importance of each part of the service*
- *I can trace back to the ancient roots of this service to better understand its importance in our lives today*



What is a Christian Home?

A home is a place where family members live and interact in unity, love, and care for each other. The house, built with construction materials, becomes a home when it is blessed by God. The members live there with selfless love and unconditional care for each other, and they are in constant communion with God. It is an abode where everything can be shared, especially joy, sorrow, worries, and every great and small blessing of the family.

Our faith emphasises that each of our Christian homes is an extension of the Holy Church, and our families are the smallest unit of the Church. The family table is considered an altar, where they receive bread from God in thanksgiving. The foundation of our faith and spiritual discipline often originates within our homes, through the grace of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Our spiritual nourishment can be shared and received just like we share our dinner at the dinner table. All members of the family and the household can learn and grow from it.

In the early Church era, Christian homes were central for gatherings for worship and religious studies. Many such references are seen in the Bible, such as the gatherings at the house of John Mark in Jerusalem (**Acts 12:12**), the house of Aquila and Priscilla (**1 Corinthians 16:19; Romans 16:5**), in the house of Philemon (**Philemon 1:2**), in the house of Nympha (**Colossians 4:15**), and the house of Lydia of the city of Thyatira (**Acts 16:14–15**). Even in the current age, we see many instances where we gather in our homes for prayers.

For the household to become a church so that the devil, the enemy of our salvation, may be driven off, the homes should be filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit. Then the inhabitants of the house will be filled with peace and harmony. Just as people like priests and faithful and places like a Church are set apart, submitted, dedicated, and purified for special missions and ministries through sacraments, our homes and family members are submitted to God and purified through the sacrament of the **Blessing or Dedication of Home**. Our bodies are a temple of God, and our homes are a temple of the Holy Spirit (**1 Corinthians 3:16–17; 6:19–20**). We must not do anything to harm or *desecrate* it. Sometimes, through our words, thoughts, deeds, and acts of omission and commission, sin

enters the home. Similar to physically cleaning the house regularly, we shall spiritually cleanse and rededicate our homes regularly.

Do You Know?

The home is called *ekklesioula* in Greek, meaning “the little church.”



The Sacrament of the Blessing of the Home

This sacrament (mystery) is led by the Priests, with the participation of the believers in the Church. It starts with the Qauma, prayer, and hymns, along with ‘Promeyon,’ ‘Sedra,’ Gospel readings, and intercessory prayers. We bless water for sprinkling and for the purification of the house. The priest marks the house with the sign of the cross on all *lintels* and door-posts and blesses the house in the name of the Holy Trinity. Then, everyone recites the Nicene Creed of the Church, followed by quqilions and the burning of incense. The service ends with the final benediction.

Let us review some key aspects of this sacrament and its structure:

1. Preparation by the Family

All sacraments require preparation. The members of a family should prepare themselves for the blessing of their home. One shall arrange a small table with a white tablecloth and a small, clean bowl with water and a sprinkle. A good sprinkle here may be a bunch of leaves and twigs neatly tied together. The table will be placed facing east at the centre of the room, where the service is done. One shall ensure that there is enough space for everyone to stand behind the table. Usually, Achen brings two candles, a cross, a censor, and incense for the service. Prayer, charity, and fasting may also be part of the preparation for a house blessing. The sacraments or mysteries shall not become occasions of luxury.

2. Gospel Reading

During the service, the gospel reading is made from **St. Luke 19:1–10**, and it is about Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector. While he had great wealth and power, his soul was empty because he had been unjust all his life. Zacchaeus heard that Jesus was coming to Jericho, and he felt within him a strong desire to meet Him. Zacchaeus was short in stature, and a huge crowd surrounded Jesus. Therefore, he could not see Him. In his desire to see Christ, he climbed a sycamore tree.

Imagine how shocked everyone, including Zacchaeus, must have been when Jesus announced that He was going to stay at his house that day!



Calling of Zacchaeus

Zacchaeus received Jesus joyfully into his house in spite of all the spiteful remarks of those who grumbled about what was happening. He repented on his own and willingly agreed to give half of what he owned to the poor and restore fourfold what he had stolen from others. Jesus Christ accepted the sincere repentance of this sinner, proclaiming that salvation had come to Zacchaeus, the son of Abraham, because Jesus had come to seek and save the lost.

This story reminds us that despite our sinfulness, if we are eager to seek Him, Jesus will be willing to come into our house. He will accept our repentance and renew our relationship with Him. By doing so, we bring salvation into our homes.

Learning Outcome Check

Connect the significance of the Holy Trinity visiting Abraham and Jesus visiting the house of Zacchaeus to the blessing of the home.



3. Prayers of the Church

The prayers throughout the sacrament plead for Godly peace and tranquilly to reside in the house. The priest asks God to have mercy on the house, to drive away every evil, and to fill it with all blessings, like in the lives of the saints of the old.

In the intercessory prayers, following the 'Evangelion,' the Church comes together to plea as follows: that just as God protected Noah and his children in the ark, rescued Abraham from the King's sword, delivered Lot from the fire of Sodom, preserved Jacob in the house of Laban, protected Joseph in Egypt, and delivered Moses and the people of Israel from the Pharaoh, the prayers seek protection for the household.

The prayers also seek blessings for the house, like Abraham received by hosting the three angels; how God blessed the five loaves of bread to feed the multitude; and how the oil and flour did not run out in the widow's house, which was blessed by Elijah.

Just as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity visited Abraham and blessed his home in Old Testament times, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity visited Zacchaeus and blessed his home. This is extended even further in the iconographic tradition, where the three angels represent the Holy Trinity.

In the house blessing service, we are requesting Jesus Christ to bring salvation to the house and bless everyone and everything within it, like He brought salvation to the house of Zacchaeus. Everyone in the household prays together for the living and the departed of the family and all who live and have lived in the house.



Holy Trinity

4. Seal of the Holy Spirit

In **Exodus 12:13–28**, God instructed Moses to have a sign, made of the blood of the lamb, over the doorpost of the Israelites so that the angel of death would pass over those houses and they would be safe. Similarly, in the house blessing, the priest marks the door-posts and walls of the houses with the sign of the cross, using blessed water to protect the house and its inhabitants from sin and death.

5. Purification of the House through Sanctified Water

The blessing of home by the sanctified water reminds us of the spiritual connection between the 'family church' and the parish. The service of blessing, which begins in the church, is finished with the sprinkling of water in the home. Thus, the grace of God is extended to our individual dwellings. Washed in the baptismal waters, our homes become temples of the Holy Spirit for the fulfilment of the will of our Heavenly Father. The remaining water after the service, if there is any, will be poured where no one steps on. The best place for this will be a potted plant.

Weaving Christ into Our Home

The Fathers have instructed to conduct Blessing of the Home once a year. The service of house blessing represents not only the renewal and rededication of homes, but also our lives in Christ.

Before the house blessing, one shall clean the house and prepare for the service. As a family, we shall remove everything offensive to our relationship with God from the house and ensure that it contains nothing that leads us away from God. This includes renewing a Christian family relationship and giving up any grudges against each other

Learning Outcome Check

Examine how the blessing of the house is welcoming God

within the family. The result of the Blessing of our Homes becomes revealed through actions only when the home and all its members faithfully walk in God's commandments and love.

Reflection Questions

1. Reflect on stories from the Bible where people have received blessings as they welcomed Angels, Christ, and people into their homes. How did this bring about blessings for the entire household?
2. What are some of the ways by which the spiritual growth of the entire family can be started and continued through their homes?
3. Why do we do the Blessings of Homes as an extension to the Feast of Resurrection?

Memory Eternal

Lesson Goals :

- I can explain the Orthodox understanding of physical and spiritual death.
- I can understand the parts of the Burial service.
- I can appreciate memorial services for the departed.
- I can link the burial service with the hope of resurrection



Christ has Conquered Death

As Christians, we do not view death with dread and hopelessness because Christ conquered death and Satan through His death on the cross and resurrection, *“that through death He might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil”*. The Bible mentions two kinds of death - one which is the physical separation from this world, which we define as “departed,” and the spiritual death that comes as in **Romans 6:23** *“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord”*. God is life, and only a separation from Him would truly be death. In **St. John 11:25-26** Jesus promises: *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.”*

Parts of Burial Service

The Burial service of the Orthodox Church is based heavily on the Christian understanding of death and the promise of resurrection. The purpose of the service is to pray for the departed, comfort the living, and remind the living of their own mortality and the brevity of earthly lives.

The Church refers to the service as “the order of enshrouding” according to the ancient practise of wrapping the departed in special cloth, as in the case of our Lord's burial. It is also called the “order of accompaniment” as death was viewed by the Fathers of our Church as a journey or pilgrimage along which the departed travels, accompanied by the prayers of the faithful.

This is one of the few services that has a unique service for the clergy, men, women, and children. *There are 8 parts for the funeral of the clergy and 4 parts for the funeral of men, women, and children.* These separate services are designed to reflect the relationship of the respective groups with God. The Funeral service itself consists of the chanting of Psalms and hymns, appropriate readings from the Holy Scriptures, supplicatory songs and prayers, and a litany.

The body is washed, dressed in modest clothing, and placed in a wooden casket. It is preferable to have the lid completely removable for the funeral. A simple cross, burial shroud, and/or icons can be placed in the casket with the deceased person. During all services, the casket is placed with the

face of the deceased facing East. This is to prepare the departed to readily welcome Christ when the Lord's second coming happens.

A "wake" is performed during the first service, where people pay respects to the departed. Traditionally, it was conducted at the person's home, but it may be conducted at the funeral home or at the Church. After the services and after all mourners have had a chance to say goodbye, the casket is closed and taken to the cemetery.

At the cemetery (burial site), the priest will bless the grave, and the concluding part of the service will be completed. The body is anointed with oil, and last respects are paid by the close family before the casket is lowered into the grave. The people pay respect by throwing dirt into the grave, reminding them, as it is written in **Genesis 3:19** "Earth you are, and to earth you shall return."

Although this is a sad moment, the Burial Service is a promise of hope because of the Resurrection. The following prayer from the men's service conveys this message of hope:

*The soul says to the body:
"Remain in peace my beloved one.
For I am leaving from you
For the place God has prepared
I hope in-the Lord that I
Shall see you at - Resurrection*

The prayers also remind us that we should focus on the eternal.

*Remember where we are today
And where we may be tomorrow
Though we speak today - in our homes
We shall be silent - in our graves
Bless'd is he who lives - by this truth
My brethren, listen - carefully
Know that all things will pass away
Beauty, Pow'r, and wealth disappear
As though they had not existed
Bless the King, whose reign - shall not end*

Learning Outcome Check

Explore what it means to grieve with hope.



Service of Praise

Despite the pain and sorrow that surrounds the loss of a dear one, the burial service praises God for defeating death and for the promise of raising us from the grave like He raised Lazarus from the tomb.



Resurrection of Lazarus

The service helps understand that we are both a physical and spiritual being and while the physical being is a man of the dust and perishable like Adam; the spiritual bears the image of the man of heaven and is imperishable. The faithful departed who have partaken of Christ's Holy Body and Blood in Holy Qurbana will be raised up to life when Christ comes again. *"Whoever eats My flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day."* (St. John 6:54)

Cremation and Embalming

Out of deep respect for the creation of God, as that body was created by God Himself and is the "temple of the Holy Spirit" by Holy Chrismation, the Orthodox Church does not allow cremation in general. *This is because the Orthodox have traditionally never allowed the practise of cremation for millennia.* Traditionally, burning is considered as treatment accorded to waste, and a human body is not considered waste. As Christians, we attempt to imitate Christ's life (theosis); we also attempt to follow what happened after His death, wherein He was buried.

Embalming the body has become an accepted procedure due to funeral home guidelines and the need to have the casket open for the services. The intention behind embalming is to slow the decomposition of the body.

Learning Outcome Check

Compare and Contrast burial vs cremation.

Mourning and Ongoing Prayers

Memorial prayers help us focus on the risen Christ, who is the resurrection and life. The mourning period for the departed lasts forty days, with the *third, ninth, and thirtieth days* having special significance. The third day is important because Christ resurrected on the third day. The ninth day has special significance because there are nine choirs of angels who are accompanying the soul to the chamber of light, and the thirtieth day is because the Children of Israel lamented thirty days for Moses (**Deuternonomy 34:8**). A special service is held at Church by the family on the fortieth day. The family and close friends continue to pray for the departed for a period of 40 days of fasting. The fast is broken on the fortieth day, when family and friends come together to have a memorial service. Memorial services are conducted on the anniversary of the death henceforth, and the family is called on to remember the departed in their prayers frequently.

We continue to remember our departed in our Holy Qurbana services during the *Quqlion* for the departed, the sixth Diptych, and during special prayers. Holy Saturday is considered a day for the departed, where prayers are offered at grave sites for loved ones. The two Sundays before the start of Holy Lent are dedicated as Sunday for the departed Priests and Sunday for the departed. Prayers for the departed are not optional in the Orthodox Church. The family may remember their departed

for a generation—maybe a couple generations - but the Church is the only place where the departed are remembered forever in the prayers of the hours every day.

There is a prayer in our daily evening to remember our departed:

O Merciful Lord, renew your creation at the Resurrection. Comfort and Absolve the departed ones who died with hope in You and await your coming. O Lord, make them dwell in the bosom of Abraham, Issac and Jacob. May the living and the departed together cry out, "Blessed is He who has come and is to come and will raise the dead." Amin.

The faithful departed have become part of the Church triumphant and are living consciously, praising God. We should all be prepared, like *the five wise virgins*, for the day the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in His great glory, to judge both the living and the dead. They participate with us at every Holy Qurbana. The centre aisle of every church is kept empty for the departed faithful. You may notice that the acolyte with the censer always censes the aisle for the departed and then censes the faithful living on the right and left.

Learning Outcome Check

Analyse the hymns of the Funeral Service and the concept of saying farewell to our departed ones.

Reflection Questions

1. What is the Christian message of hope when we think about death?
2. Remembering that Jesus also wept at the death of his friend, is it OK to be sad at a funeral?
3. Why does the Church always prefer burial over cremation?

Sanctification

Lesson Goals :

- I can understand why a church building is divided into sections.
- I can defend why a church building is constructed and then consecrated and dedicated before its use as a place of worship.
- I can relate to how every Church is first sanctified and why we celebrate every year Kudosh Etho, Hudosh Etho, and the anniversary feast of the consecration.



When a congregation builds a church, they follow the Malankara Orthodox tradition to layout the worship space. Alternatively, if the congregation purchases an existing church, they keep that tradition when remodelling the worship space. That tradition is rooted in the Holy Bible and Jewish customs and developed through the Syriac and Malankara traditions.

Whether a congregation constructs a new church or remodels an existing one, the building is to be set apart - *consecrated* for use as a sacred worship space. The bishop leads the consecration service, and the faithful participate with the bishop to accomplish it. Once consecrated, the worship space becomes a temple, God's dwelling, and a holy place. Hence, you have to treat that consecrated space with reverence. We enter the Church with the same reverence with which Moses entered the holy ground and met God at the burning bush (**Exodus 3:5**). Therefore, when you enter the Church, say the following prayer, and encourage your friends to do the same. *"In reverence, will I enter Your house and offer my vows to You."* It is a symbol of our reverence for the consecrated holy ground that we also remove our shoes. Moreover, we wear Church worthy dress, which is also a symbol of showing reverence to God, who is enthroned there.

Like the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Chrismation, a church's Consecration is a significant event. Through Baptism and Chrismation, a person is transformed into the temple of God; similarly, through Consecration, a church building becomes the temple of God. In addition, there are two important feast days, *Koodhosh Etho and Hoodhos Etho*. The Holy Church scheduled those feast days at the beginning of every liturgical year to constantly remind us of our consecration and dedication as faithful and as Church.

Church: What is it?

When you think of a church, what comes to mind? A building with an altar, icons, hall, stage, lots of people, food, playground, etc., is correct? That church, the 'local church' also known as a parish, is one of the four types of churches; the other three are you, your home, and the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. Let us look at all of them, one by one, starting with 'you' as a church. When you receive the Holy Qurbana, the Holy Church is reminding you that you are the temple of God. Here is a portion of the hymn that we sing when receiving Holy Communion that reminds us that our Lord dwells in us, and therefore we become His temple:

*I will dwell in them
Who receive as food
My Holy Body
And My Blood as drink*

(Rakshakanuracheythaan..)

The Christian home is a little church. St. John Chrysostom speaks of the home as a 'little church' with the same elements one would see in their local church. A Christian home comes into being when a man and a woman come together in the sacrament of Holy Matrimony. As the husband-and-wife work hard towards spiritual perfection, their home becomes a little church. Their married life becomes the 'pulpit' from which they proclaim the Truth of Creation and the 'altar' upon which they build the 'house church.'

Let's look at the third type of church, the local church. The *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* defines 'church' as a building used for Christian religious services, where the faithful gather to worship and fellowship. However, according to Orthodox tradition, a 'local church' is more than just a building; the 'local church' is the gathering of the faithful with the sole purpose of worshipping God. Each local church is the church of God in all its fullness. What does fullness mean? You have to know the fourth type of Church, The Holy Church, to answer that question.

Does the name, the Holy Church, ring a bell? Does it sound familiar to you? Refer to the last paragraph of the Nicene Creed; it says: *"And in the One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church; and we confess one baptism..."*

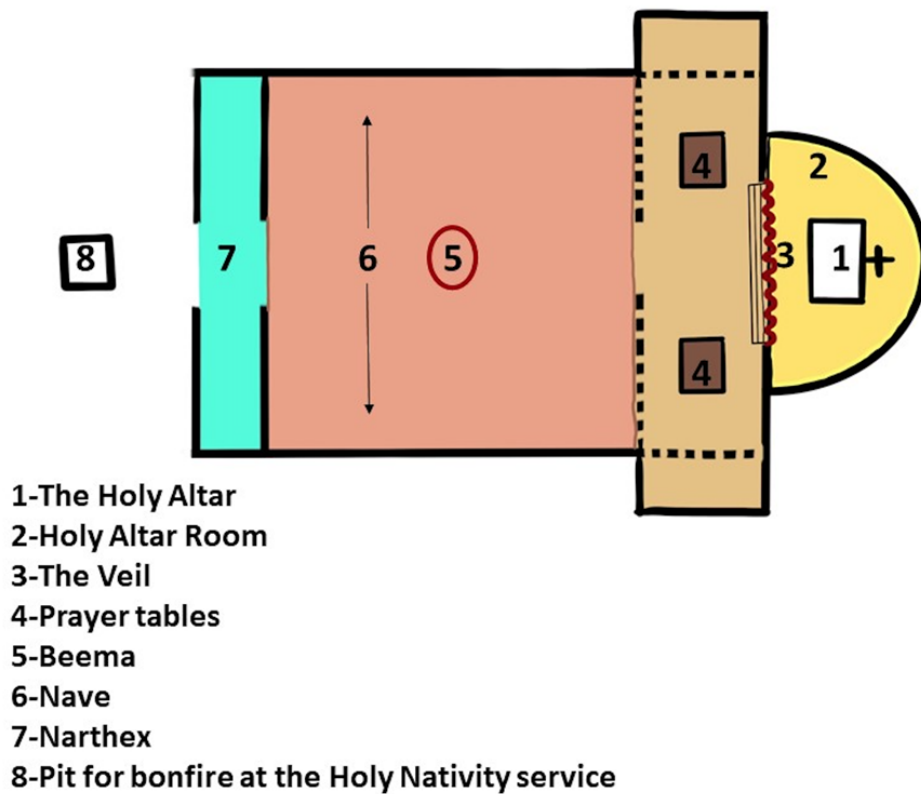
For an image of the Holy Church, let us look at **Romans 12:4-5**. There St. Paul writes, *"For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another."* In those verses, St. Paul emphasises two key points:

1. We are one body in Christ. The word 'we' refers to whom? That word includes you, your sibling, parents, grandparents, peers in the parish, cousins in India, all clergy, all living faithful, and our beloved departed ones, including St. Thomas, the Apostle, and St. Gregorios of Parumala. In short, it includes all faithful, irrespective of time and place.
2. We are all part of one body, the body of Christ, irrespective of who we are or what we do. Look at the members of your body. Your fingers, toes, eyes, ears, etc., are all different, aren't they? Also, if you look closely, no two fingers are the same. Yet, those members are all valuable parts of one body, yours. Similarly, you - a unique and special creation of God, are a part of the body of Christ.

Each local church is the Church of God in all its fullness. In other words, even though your local church is a part of the One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, your local church is whole and complete by itself. When your Achen offers the Holy Eucharist (Holy Qurbana) in your local church, Christ dwells in it in the fullness of His body. Therefore, your local church is the fullness of the Church in that place and time. In short, the local Church has all that is needed for us to be saved, and to become holy. In the lesson on the sacrament of Holy Baptism, you learned how you became a temple (church) of God. In the sacrament of Holy Matrimony lesson, you learned how your family became a little church. Lastly, by Christ's victory over evil, the Holy Church, His bride, sanctified herself for their wedding ceremony. Similarly, the building of the local church needs to be sanctified to be used for worship and become a part of the Holy Church.

The Layout of a Church

When you walk into an Indian Orthodox church, you will notice that the worship space has three main sections, the Sanctuary or Holy of Holies, the *Azhikkakam*, or transept; and the Nave. The Sanctuary with the Holy Altar is to the east; the Nave, where the faithful gather for worship, is to the west. Some churches may have a fourth section, the narthex or portico, a gathering place outside the worship space.



The Sanctuary symbolises heaven because God's throne, the Holy Altar, stands there. In the Orthodox Syrian tradition, a curtain separates the Sanctuary from the rest of the church. The use of a curtain imitates the use of veils in the Jerusalem Temple (**Hebrews 9: 3 – 7**). The curtain serves a few purposes: preserve the Holiness of the *Madbaha*, express the invisible presence of God, to point out the meaning of the *Madbaha* as heaven, which is revealed but still a mystery, and to signify the mysterious nature of the celebration of the Holy Qurbana.

The Nave represents Mount Sinai's valley. Like the Israelites gathered in Mount Sinai's valley to hear from Moses after receiving the Ten Commandments from God (**Exodus 19**), the faithful gathered in the Nave to listen to God's word, participate in the Holy Qurbana, and worship God. The faithful sit on the north and south sides of the Nave. The Nave's middle aisle is kept empty, and it reminds us of the invisible and mysterious presence of the departed faithful, as they also participate in the Holy Qurbana.

At the front of the Nave's aisle, you will notice a large table, and on it, you will find the Holy Bible.

Learning Outcome Check

Examine the Church Design & Architecture.

Originally, this was the Gospel Table, or Evangelion Mesha. There were two tables on both sides of the transept, or *Azhikkakam*, known as the *Namaskara Mesha in the old days*. Nowadays, those two tables have become one and are put in the middle as *Namaskaara Mesha*. The Evangelion Table was moved into the *Madbaha*. The transept, or *Azhikkakam*, is separated from the Nave by a wooden railing, or *arzhi*, and some churches do not have this railing now.

The *Azhikkakam* is also known as the chancel step because it is an extension of the foot of the altar. In the past, on either side of the altar, the deacons and priests would stand in two choirs, chanting and singing the prayers antiphonally (in two groups). The hourly prayers and the Sacraments of Chrismation and Marriage are typically led from this area. According to St. Ephrem the Syrian, the *Azhikkakam* represents Paradise, where angels sing hymns and praise their creator. This is actually the place for the church choir to stand.

Now that you have a good idea of what a church is and the layout of a typical Indian Orthodox church building, you are prepared to learn about the consecration service.

Consecration Service

The Consecration of a local church is a celebration because it marks a key milestone in a parish's life. The parishioners put in a lot of money and effort to make their dreams come true. They prayed, raised funds, laid out plans, and oversaw the building's construction or renovation. They have been eagerly waiting for Consecration day because the church, after its consecration, becomes a home where they can gather to fellowship, worship, celebrate sacraments, and encounter God. This consecrated church becomes a blessing not only for the members of that church but also for the surrounding community. That parish is The Church for the entire surrounding community. LL Metropolitan Yuhanon Mar Severios of Kochi teaches: Holy Church is like the government. A consecrated parish church is the government office. One shall witness the Kingdom of God on Earth in the parish church.

Yes, after it is consecrated, the building becomes a place for you to be in God's presence. Notice what the priest says during the elevation of the Holy Mysteries,

"With us is the One Holy Father; With us is the One Holy Son; With us is the One Holy Spirit."

To which we reply, "With us indeed, Amen."

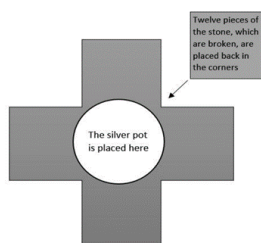
On Consecration Day, the church building is decorated; parishioners are dressed in festive attire; they congregate for worship; many bishops, priests, and deacons gather to lead the service; and many guests arrive to congratulate the parishioners.

The Consecration Service borrows elements from many such services recorded in the Old Testament, such as the Tabernacle's dedication, the Temple of Jerusalem's dedication by Solomon, and its rededication by Judas Maccabeus. In addition, you will see similarities with the Service of Chrismation in this service.

The service has two parts; the first focuses on preparation, and the second on anointing and consecration. Before the first part, the officiating bishop (only bishops can consecrate churches) lays the foundation stone of the local church. Holy Myron (for more on it, see the lesson on symbols) is used only in the second part.

Laying of the Foundation Stone

In preparation for laying the foundation stone, a large square stone is shaped into a cross by cutting out the four corners; each is further cut into three pieces. The big cross-shaped stone represents Christ; the 12 small ones represent the disciples.



In the middle of the large stone, a hole is made in the middle. In that hole, the presiding bishop places a sealed container with a small cross, incense, and a ball of strands; the strands are drawn from the entombment shroud used to wrap the cross on Holy Friday. The bishop applies a few drops of Holy Myron into the container and seals it. This container symbolises the golden pot of manna that Moses placed in the Ark of the Covenant (**Hebrews 9:4**). Just like the manna that nourished the Israelites during their journey in the wilderness to the Promised Land, the container represents Christ, the eternal manna, who nourishes the faithful on their journey to Paradise.

The bishop anoints all 13 stones with Holy Myron, consecrates them, and places them under the Altar.

First Part of the Service

The emphasis in the first part of the service is on the preparation of the faithful for the consecration. In this part, the faithful pray for God's blessings and mercy on the Holy Church; they also sing hymns of thanks and praise. The prayers and songs also remind the faithful of God's love and protection of the Church; to highlight that, here is a verse from a hymn sung during this part.

*(O Holy Church) do not be afraid of the heresies and arguments,
You are established by the hands of Christ,
Who is holy and immortal;
His promise will be fulfilled in you.*

This Sedra of this part encourages us by pointing to the great cloud of witnesses interceding to God on our behalf. The cloud of witnesses includes:

1. Adam, the root of families and races
2. Jacob, who recognised the Holy Cross
3. Daniel, who predicted Christ's crucifixion
4. The saints, who kept vigil with gladness
5. The Holy Virgin Mary, mother of God, from whom Christ had taken His body.

Lastly, in this part's Gospel reading, the celebrant reminds the worshippers that Christ established the Holy Church on the rock of the faith that St. Peter and the Apostles demonstrated.

In the reading from **St. Matthew 16:13-20**,

Jesus asks Simon Peter, "But who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

Jesus answered and said, "...you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My Church."

The rock refers to the faith of St. Peter's confession on behalf of the Apostles..

When the Bishop reads that Gospel, what is he reminding you of? The celebrant is reminding you that if you make St. Peter's confession with conviction, you, God's temple, will be on a solid foundation. So will be your family—the little church, your local church, and the Holy Church.

Second Part of the Service

This part focuses on the anointing and the consecration of the church building, dedicating it, and submitting it to God's care. In the order of the service, the celebrant uses Holy Chrism/Myron to consecrate the Altar, the Sanctuary, and the Nave.

This part has many similarities with the Sacrament of Chrismation. During Chrismation, you received Christ's Spirit as the pledge and the seal of eternal life . You were also marked forever as the sheep and soldiers of Christ. Similarly, after the Bishop applies the Holy Chrism/Myron onto the church building, it is purified, sealed, and offered to God for His purpose.

The seal that the Bishop applies is a permanent one; it is applied to a church building only once, just like the once-in-a-life-time seal that a celebrant applies to a person at baptism.

In the second part of the Consecration Service, many symbolic actions take place, such as:

1. The procession of the Holy Myron.
2. The cleansing, anointing, and sealing of the Holy Altar and *Tablita*.
3. The placing of altar coverings and other holy articles on the Holy Altar.
4. The sanctification of the Sanctuary and the Nave.

The bishops and clergy take the Holy Myron in a procession from the Nave to the Sanctuary. A priest with the cross leads the procession, followed by deacons with candles and *marawahsas*, and the priests and bishops. After the presiding Bishop reaches the Sanctuary, he raises the container and offers thanksgiving to God.

Next, the Bishop sanctifies the Holy Altar and *Tablita*. On them, he draws three sets of crosses with his thumb; in each set, he follows a common pattern to draw three crosses. In each set, he draws the first cross in the Father's name on the Altar's left, the second in the Son's name on the middle, and the third in the Holy Spirit's name on the right.

The Holy Altar represents the Tomb of Christ, and His body lies therein; hence, the Altar undergoes its own "Baptism" (washing) and "Chrismation" (anointing). To wash and purify the Altar and *Tablita*, he draws on them the first set of three crosses using his bare thumb, without the Holy Myron. After drawing each cross, the Bishop incenses the Altar, the *Tablita*, and the faithful and leads them in prayers, psalms, and songs. The act of washing is an essential step in many of our sacraments; you may have seen it in the lesson on the sacrament of Holy Baptism, where the candidate is washed before Chrismation.

Having washed and purified the Altar and *Tablita*, the Bishop starts the act of anointing them. He draws the second set of three crosses using Holy Myron. Like during the act of washing, after drawing each of the three crosses, the Bishop incenses the Altar, the *Tablita*, and the faithful and leads them in prayers, psalms, and songs. This act of anointing follows the long tradition of the Old Testament. In **Leviticus 8:11–12**, you see Moses sprinkling oil on the Altar to anoint and consecrate it and all its utensils. He also poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him to consecrate him. The same was done during the consecration of Solomon's temple (**2 Chronicles 7:1–10**) and the anointing of Saul and David as kings. In New Testament times, instead

of consecrating churches or people with oil, Holy Myron is used as the symbol of the Holy Spirit, who has been with us since the day of Pentecost.

Now that the Holy Altar and Tablito are washed, cleansed, and anointed, the Bishop dedicates them to God. He draws the third set of three crosses with his bare thumb, without the Holy Myron, while saying a single prayer: no other prayers or psalms are said or songs are sung.

Learning Outcome Check

Discover the significance of the consecration of the Holy Tablet.

Following the dedication, the Bishop and priests decorate the Altar with its garments and items, such as the candlesticks. The Bishop blesses and exalts the altar linens, candle stands, and other Altar items. Every piece of the Altar's garment has a theological purpose and meaning. The white cloth, which is on top, symbolises the winding sheet or shroud used to wrap Jesus' body. The other coverings are made with colourful and expensive material that befits a king's throne because the Altar is also God's throne. That colourful cloth also symbolises the swaddling clothes with which Christ was wrapped after his birth. You can find a list of all the garment pieces, their descriptions, and their meanings in the lesson on Symbols .

The rest of the church building is anointed at the following spots:

1. Three walls (east, north and south) of the Sanctuary
2. East walls of the Nave near the Sanctuary
3. Above the main doors and windows of the north and south walls of the Nave
4. Above the main door on the west wall of the Nave
5. Inside the baptismal font
6. Other important areas of the walls

Before anointing those spots, the Bishop leads the faithful in prayers, psalms, and songs. They remind the faithful of God's magnificence, love, grace, and faithfulness. Here is a prayer that he says:

Now You (God) have appointed this earthly visible church; Your fingers have fashioned it. You constructed it with your priceless blood. You adorned her with the garment woven by the Holy Spirit. You did arrange baptism as a divine mother. You perfected her with the divine and spiritual decoration of victorious priests and devoted and victory announcing deacons. You called her "the city of famous salvation" and "the resting place of wanderers." You erected in her your Holy Cross, which is the Altar for sacrifice, and on this Altar You broke and distributed Your body and mixed Your blood into the salvific chalice, and by Your grace renewed her. With Your divine gifts, You invited the distant gentiles and brought them to your holy ones. In this church, they sing due praises to You, and venerate your Holy Cross and bless your Name.

If multiple bishops are in attendance, they assist the presiding Bishop in anointing the above spots simultaneously to save time. They use Holy Myron to draw three crosses, each in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit's names. As the Bishops move around to anoint those spots, priests and acolytes follow them with the Holy Myron, the Holy Bible, lighted candles, and fans (*maravhasa*). The bishops and clergy return to the Sanctuary after anointing the spots in the Nave. The Bishop exalts the cross that would be placed on the Altar. He holds the cross and chants the exaltation of the cross, beginning with "He whom the Angels Minister" *haw'd malakhe* while raising it in the sign of the cross. He exalts the cross three times on each of the four sides of the Sanctuary. First, he faces

the east, then the west, north, and south. He then places the cross in the top and middle of the main Altar.

A church's consecration is only complete after the Bishop celebrates the Divine Liturgy. He uses St. James' Anaphora because it is the first and foremost one of the Syrian Orthodox Church.

Learning Outcome Check

Identify details of the four parts of the consecration service and understand that everything has a biblical foundation.



The Naming of a Church

We name churches after saints, apostles, or martyrs because they serve as role models. By naming churches after them, we get an opportunity to celebrate their memory, thereby reminding ourselves of what we are capable of becoming holy. It is essential to remember that all churches are dedicated to God only and consecrated in the name of St. Mary and one or more saints. Each Church is named after one Saint who becomes the patron saint of that local parish.

Koodhosh Etho and Hoodhos Etho

Now that the sacrament of consecration and dedication of a church building is complete, it is good to remind ourselves what a church is. Is it you, your family, the local church building and the congregation of believers, or the Universal Catholic Church? All of them are.

As a participant in a church building's consecration and dedication service, the Holy Church reminds you and other worshippers of your consecration at the time of Holy Baptism. In addition, you are rededicating yourselves. In its divine wisdom, the Holy Church regularly reminds us of our sanctity (remember, you are called to be a saint) and our dedication (remember, you are God's child). It did not want such vital reminders to be left to chance. When did you attend a church's consecration last? Consequently, the Holy Church set aside the first Sunday of the Liturgical year as Koodhosh Etho or Sanctification of the Church, and the second Sunday as Hoodos Etho, or Dedication of the Church.

On those two Sundays, all the faithful are sanctified and renewed together. In addition to renewing our personal dedication that was made on the day of our baptism, we also renew the dedication of the local church that was made on the day of its consecration.

Summary

Sanctification is a process in which something or someone is set apart, made holy, and dedicated for a sacred purpose. In this way, the Sacraments of baptism and a church's consecration have many similarities. Like a person who is transformed into a temple of God through the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Chrismation, a church building becomes God's dwelling place through the sacrament of Consecration. The focus of all sacraments is us. Their purpose is to make us holy and acceptable in God's sight. To remind us of our sanctity and purpose, the Church instituted two days, Koodhosh Eetho and Hoodosh Eetho.

Reflection Questions

1. Where does God dwell?
2. At the beginning of the Liturgical year, the first two Sundays are set apart. What is its purpose? How does it help in our spiritual lives?
3. Discuss with the Vicar of your parish and the senior members regarding the consecration of the church building that may have happened in your local parish and understand a little of the history of the parish.

LESSON

13

Who is a Priest?

Lesson Goals :

- *I can understand that Priesthood is one of the many different ministries in the Church and that the General call to priesthood is integral to the particular call*
- *I can understand the different orders of the Priesthood and their traditional and practical purposes.*
- *I can understand that the importance of laying on of hands for sacramental priesthood is rooted in Scripture.*



Priesthood in Eden

God established the priesthood when he created Adam and placed him in the Garden of Eden. This may not be so apparent from the creation narrative in Genesis. When God places man in the Garden, He tells him to have dominion over the earth, to fill the earth, and to subdue it (**Genesis 1:26-28**). This means that what mankind was supposed to do was continue the creative work that God began in the garden and take it to the rest of the earth. By doing God's work, he represents or images God to the rest of creation. This interfacing function is at the core of priesthood.

Priesthood continues to develop in Scripture, especially with the giving of the law, and incorporates the role of offering sacrifices to God on behalf of the people. Some very important examples are Abel, Noah, Abraham, Job, Aaron, and others. These patriarchs of the Old Testament all pray for and make sacrifices to God on behalf of their kindred or those whom God has put under their spiritual care and leadership. Here, the priesthood is now representing or imaging the people before God. Priesthood is shown in Scripture in the way that God interacts with His people through certain individuals whom He chooses.

Sacerdotal Priesthood

Priesthood first functioned as the role of the patriarchs of families and tribes, and then, with the giving of the Law in Exodus, was narrowed to a specific group of people—Aaron and his descendants. Since these people were all part of the tribe of Levi, this type of priesthood is referred to as Levitical Priesthood. From the time of the Exodus to the time of Christ, the Levitical priests offered sacrifices to God on behalf of the people in accordance with the Law of Moses. Eventually, this becomes corrupted by the Sadducees, when they take over control of the priestly duties and administration of the temple in Jerusalem. The priesthood is redeemed by Christ when He, the True High Priest, offers Himself as a sacrifice on behalf of the people and shows what the true relationship between God and man is supposed to be.

Jesus chose twelve apostles and consecrated them for ministry. He commanded them to preach repentance, heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out demons (**St. Matthew 10:5-**

8). He gave them the authority of absolving and binding sins: *"Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven"* (**St. Matthew. 18:18**). He instituted and celebrated the Holy Eucharist with them and commanded them to continue the practise until He returned. While He was being raised to heaven, He commanded them to go and make disciples for the Kingdom of God (**St. Matthew 28:19–20**). As the Apostles helped spread the word, they were particular about maintaining order and discipline in the Churches that they had founded. They appointed overseers (bishops) in these Churches and as we read in the New Testament, the Church begins to have the three-fold ministry of deacon, priest, and bishop. Although this ministry is somewhat modelled on the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament, it is taken further to its fulfilment in the Church.

An Orthodox priest is one who offers the gifts to God on behalf of His people as well as being the one through whom God acts to consecrate the earthly elements. The priest becomes an instrument of God who acts on the elements of the sacrament and comes to us in a very special way through the sacraments. One of the prayers of absolution that the priest prays over us in the sacrament of Confession is, "By the authority of the priesthood, which was entrusted by our Lord Jesus Christ to the Apostles, who in turn entrusted it to their successors, the bishops, until it was given to me." The priest has been given the authority by the Church through Christ to administer the sacraments. Only a priest (and bishop) has the function and authority to consecrate the elements of bread and wine to become the Body and Blood of Christ. Only the priest has the function and authority to bless water and oil in Holy Baptism and Holy Unction and to sanctify material objects for devotional and spiritual purposes. Only the priest blesses the rings and crowns that adorn the bride and groom at marriage and brings them into union. Only a priest has the function and authority to absolve people of their sins.

Male Priesthood

In Genesis, we read that God created humans in His image, and He created them male and female. This is very unique because, during biblical times, there was no equality between men and women. It is only at this time, and furthered during early Christianity, that men and women are both seen as equally created in God's image. While Christ taught that men and women are equal in their human nature, they are blessedly and entirely different in their human function. Even from the time of Christ and the early Church, there were other religions with priests and priestesses, but Christ chose twelve men and sent them out to establish churches, administer sacraments, and preach the Gospel. The Church is not a secular institution that can be governed by democratic processes. The Church is a spiritual organism, a supernatural monarchy with God as King and Supreme Judge. We Orthodox Christians declare that while men and women are equal in the eyes of God and under secular law, they are very different in their social roles because God has created them for different functions. When we are at worship, the priest becomes an icon of Christ. Christ is God, but He is also a fully perfect human man. That means that a priest, as His icon or most true symbol, must also be a man. God chose to become a man because He wanted to take to Himself His bride, which is the Church. In like manner, God also chose men to represent Him as the head of the human Church family. God decided that the function of consecrating, blessing, and absolving is the role of man in our human existence on earth.

A few things to note about allowing only males to be ordained:

- Jesus called only males to be apostles, and the Twelve did not include women. However, there were many women disciples who followed Christ. Many women became some of the most important

voices to spread the word about Christ. Important examples are, of course, St. Mary the God-Bearer, along with Photini (the Samaritan woman at the well), the sisters Mary and Martha, Mary Magdalene, and the other myrrh-bearing women. God calls men and women to serve Him in different capacities and functions.

- Not all males may serve at the Holy Altar. Only those with specific laying of hands by the bishop may go in. The bishops and priests represent the people and make offerings on their behalf, while deacons assist him.
- Serving at the Holy Altar is not an expression of power or authority, but true servant-hood. The individual identity of the priest ceases to matter as he becomes the icon of Christ, and it is Christ who acts in and through him to administer the sacrament. This is not an opportunity to show off talents or to take devotion and worship away from God. The priest is a conduit between the people and God and, if done properly, does not get in the way.

Ordination

The leaders of the Churches were chosen carefully based on the faith and life of a candidate; “Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands,” (**1 Timothy 5:22**). The candidate:

“...must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behaviour, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well... must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.”

1 Timothy 3:2–9

In various places in the New Testament, we see the Apostles laying hands on the candidates and praying over them as part of the ordination. Laying on of hands is the practise where the apostle or his successor, the bishop, places his hands on the candidate for ordination and says prayers. By the laying on of hands, the candidate receives the Holy Spirit. This process of the Apostles choosing their successors and performing this service to consecrate a new bishop, priest, or deacon is called Apostolic Succession. This means that all the deacons, priests, and bishops can trace their predecessors back through the line of bishops and all the way back to one of the Apostles of Christ. Being able to trace apostolic succession is important because it shows our continuity back to the apostles and Jesus Christ and our steadfast commitment and faithfulness to God’s commandments. Through the service of ordination, the candidate receives the gift of the Holy Spirit and is given authority to perform Christ’s ministry and administer the sacraments. This special authority to perform the ministry through the laying of hands is called the Ordination. The candidates are reminded not to neglect the gift that has been bestowed upon them and to fulfil their responsibilities to the best of their ability.

Sacramental priesthood is not something that can be bought. When Simon the Magician offers the apostles money for spiritual gifts, St. Peter chastises him, saying, “May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money” (**Acts 8:20–24**). Even in the Old Testament, when people tried to rebel against the ordained priests, God punished them. We



read in **Numbers 16** that when Korah, Dathan, and Abiram rebelled against the authority of Moses and the priesthood of Aaron, the earth swallowed them up and fire consumed them. Even Aaron's own sons, Nadab and Abihu, are struck dead when they try to offer incense without the proper ordination (**Leviticus 10:1–7**).

In **St. John 15:16**, Jesus reminds the apostles, “*You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He may give you*”. Similarly, God chooses the people that are to be set apart for ordination to the Holy Priesthood. Ordination is not something that someone can desire and receive immediately. The Holy Spirit places the calling upon the heart of whomever He chooses. That person must then seek the blessing of his local bishop in order to begin preparations to learn and be well-versed in the teachings and ways of the Church. Then, after the appropriate length of preparation and when deemed fit by the bishop, he will be ordained to serve the Church. Only a bishop can perform an ordination in the Orthodox Church and that person is ordained to serve obediently under that bishop. In the Malankara Orthodox Church, bishop candidates are elected by a large meeting of representatives of all parishes called the Malankara Association, and then those elected are confirmed by the Holy Episcopal Synod. The Synod, under the leadership of the Catholicos, consecrates these candidates as bishops.

Learning Outcome Check

Extrapolate the scriptural instances of the Laying of Hands to the Order of the Laying of Hands (Ordination).

The Orders of Priesthood

Many lists exist regarding the orders or different ranks of the ordained offices. As previously mentioned, in the New Testament we see a structured priestly ministry in the early Church, namely bishop, priest, and deacon. Today, this set of three orders is often referred to as the Major Orders because they are specifically listed in the New Testament and considered the original orders. In apostolic times, the apostles would travel to different regions, establish churches in various cities, and appoint bishops to oversee those churches. As the number of churches increased, bishops could not always be present at all churches, and so presbyters (or priests) were ordained to shepherd a congregation on behalf of the bishop. In **Acts 6**, we see the selection and ordination of the first group of deacons, who were called to assist the apostles, and later the bishops and priests, in the service of the Eucharist and distributing the mysteries to the faithful.



As the Church continued to grow and flourish, additional orders were added. Each order had its own functions and responsibilities. These additional orders are called the Minor Orders. Depending on the time period and the jurisdiction, there could be an additional four to nine minor orders. Many of these roles have fallen out of use altogether, while others, like Reader, are assumed by deacons and acolytes (altar servers). Some ancient writings try to tie the total number of ranks to the classification of angels. There are considered to be nine ranks of angels, and in parallel, some texts try to detail nine ranks of priestly offices. The convention in the Malankara Orthodox and West Syriac traditions is to specify seven orders of priesthood.

The orders used in the Malankara Orthodox and West Syrian traditions are:

1. Baptised member of the Church (Ma'moditho)
2. Maumono (Confessor)
3. M'zamrono (Singer)
4. Korooyo (Reader)
5. Yawpadiakono (Sub-deacon, Watcher at the doors of the church)
6. M'shamshono (Full-deacon)
7. Kashisho/Kohono (Priest)

An Acolyte is a glorified form of the baptised member of the Church, who is specially called to serve in the Holy Madbaha. All the orders listed above, through various functions, are meant to connect God to His people and the people to their God. This is done either directly through the priestly role of making offerings, or indirectly in assisting or supporting the priest in his service.

Notice that in the list above, the seventh “priestly order” is the baptised faithful member of the Church. This means that every member of the Church has a role in connecting God with His people. When we expand on this idea, we also can see that the Church serves as the priestly conduit connecting God to all creation.

This larger notion where all the faithful represent God to all people and the Church connecting God with all creation is fulfilling the idea of the Royal Priesthood.

The Royal Priesthood

This idea is mentioned as early as Exodus when God says to the Israelites, *“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine. You shall be to Me a royal priesthood and a holy nation.”* (Ex. 19:5-6). Here we see that God has set Israel apart from the other nations. They are expected to keep the covenant with God through obedience to Him and to be an example to the other nations to do the same.

This priesthood sees its fulfilment in the Church, as St. Peter says in his general epistle when he writes, *“You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ”* (1 Pet. 2:5). What the priesthood does is make sacrifices on behalf of the people. Here Peter explains that the Church offers sacrifices on behalf of all humanity. Again in verse 9, he says, *“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.”* Here he quotes almost directly from the previous verse in Exodus and shows how the royal priesthood reaches its created potential and purpose to make known the goodness of God to all creation. The Church is set apart from all creation as God’s own special people to “proclaim” the saving works of God to them—to bring God to the creation.

Another way of looking at the imagery of the “Royal Priesthood” is to consider that the Church and all Her members comprise a kingdom of priests, which is the language used in Exodus. Every

member of the kingdom has a priestly role in that they contribute in their own ways to the mission of bringing God to those outside of the kingdom. Israel exists as a special kingdom created by God to be a shining example to other nations. What started with Israel sees its true fulfilment in the Church, which is an example to the whole world of the nature of the relationship that God desires with us. Every believer in the Church who is baptised and chrismated (anointed with Holy Chrism) is a member of God's royal priesthood and has a role to play in supporting this priestly mission.

All of us who are members of the Church, whether ordained to an office or not, have important roles in the mission of this Royal Priesthood. At the time of our baptism, we are dressed in a white garment that symbolises the garment of salvation we will be vested in at the final Resurrection. It is something that we symbolically wear our entire lives as members of the priesthood. Bishops, priests, and deacons all wear a white robe as the bottom layer of their vestments, which represents this same garment of salvation. In essence, at our baptism, we receive a “priestly garment.”

The Holy Spirit blesses members of the Church with different gifts for the spiritual growth of the Church. Some are called to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (**Ephesians 4:11**) so that the Gospel can be preached and Christians can grow in faith and knowledge of God. Not everyone can function in all roles and perform all duties. However, each person is appointed by God and called to serve in their own capacity. St. Paul says again in **1 Corinthians 12:28**, “*And God has appointed these in the Church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, administrations, and a variety of tongues.*” He continues and shows that not all people can be called to fulfil all the ministries of the Church; however, each person has a role to fulfil in the priestly mission of the Church.

If our calling is not to ordained office, we can still teach, serve in the parish administration, or be part of the various spiritual organisations in our parishes. We are all called to participate in the prayers and liturgies of the Church. Our responses—even a simple “Amen”—complete

the prayers offered by the priest. When we pray for others, help others, provide a listening ear to someone who needs it, or provide a shoulder for someone to cry on, we are engaging in this ministry. When we put aside our wants and desires in order to fulfill the needs of others, whether they are friends and family or complete strangers, when we even do the simplest and humblest task of picking up trash, we are performing a priestly service. We are making an offering of ourselves and our efforts for others, which is at the core of the priesthood. By doing these things, we show genuine love to others, to our communities, and to all creation. God is love, and when we manifest this love to others and creation, we are manifesting God to them, which is the ultimate function of the Royal Priesthood.

Learning Outcome Check

Examine the different orders of the Priesthood.

Reflection Questions

1. Why is Apostolic Succession necessary for the priestly ministry?
2. How can one serve as part of the Royal Priesthood without being ordained?
3. Why did St. Paul instruct the Church to “not be hasty in the laying on of hands,” (**1 Timothy 5:22**)?

LESSON

14

The Luminous Eye

Lesson Goals :

- I can connect how the symbols of Holy Qurbana signify a divine reality that is present in the service.
- I can identify different ways the Church teaches us more about heaven and the world to come.
- I can appreciate the uniqueness of our Church and our Syrian heritage.



“

Blessed is the man who has acquired a luminous eye with which he will see how much the angels stand in awe of Thee, O Lord, and how audacious is man.

- St. Ephrem the Syrian

”

Have you ever heard someone say our Church is “heaven on earth”? We do believe that liturgical worship, as experienced during Holy Qurbana, is a taste of the new life in the world to come.

However, for many of us, the Church seems very long and repetitive. We may feel restless, bored, or even frustrated. These are not feelings that come to mind when we think about heaven!

How can we make sense of this teaching that emphasises prayers and that Holy Qurbana is a heavenly experience? Let's turn to the writings and liturgical hymns of St. Ephrem to better understand, and in fact, his teaching is of such great depth that the Orthodox Church venerates him as one of our greatest Saints and theologians. St. Ephrem also adopts poetry and songs that help us better understand theology. This is why he is also known as the “Harp of the Holy Spirit”.

St. Ephrem teaches us that the truth and beauty of God is revealed more as we follow our Church teachings and become more like Christ. This requires us to become like little children (**St. Matthew 18:3**) which helps bring the humility needed to learn more about God's love. St. Ephrem talks about this change as being the “inner eye” that is opened by Christ.



St. Ephrem the Syrian

In his book about St. Ephrem, "The Luminous Eye", Sebastian Brock explains that "the inner eye of the mind or of the soul functions by means of faith, in much the same way that the exterior, physical eyes function by means of light. The presence of sin darkens the inner eye by keeping out the light of faith, and so, in order that this inner eye may see properly, it needs to be kept lucid and clear."

The following poem by St. Ephrem compares Eve and St. Mary to illustrate this teaching point. St. Ephrem describes Eve's eyes as darkened and unable to see clearly, which led to her falling for Satan's temptation, while St. Mary's eyes were luminous, and she saw clearly what God had intended:

*Mary and Eve in their symbol
Resemble a body, one of whose eyes is blind and darkened,
While the other
Is clear and bright,
Providing light for the whole.*

*The world, you see, has two eyes fixed in it:
Eve was its left eye,
Blind,
While the right eye,
Bright, is Mary.*

(Hymn 37 on the Church)

The light that brightens is none other than Christ! If we are willing and humble, we become more like Christ and are then able to see more clearly the depth and beauty of the Church!

This beautiful imagery from St. Ephrem helps us understand the Holy Qurbana more clearly. In fact, this imagery helps us better understand the song we sing before the curtain is first opened and Holy Qurbana begins:

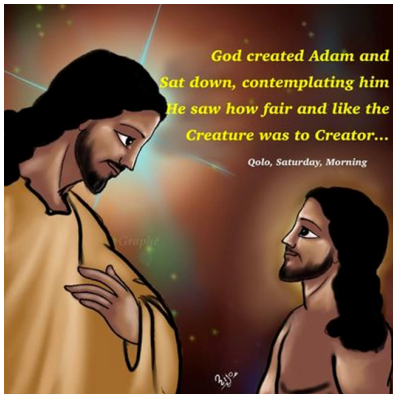
Pre-Qurbana Hymn

*By Your light we see the light, Jesus - full of light
You are the True Light which enlightens creatures
O Splendour of the Father
Shine Your joyous light on us!*

(Velivuniranjo..)

The more we learn and become like Christ, the more we start to see and experience Church in ways others may not.

St. Ephrem also teaches us that God is present everywhere and that He had a plan for us from the day He created us. There is still so much we don't know about God. That is what we call the mysteries.



But God always had a plan for us to be with Him. As we grow in our understanding, God reveals more. We are made in God's image and likeness (**Genesis 1:27**), and our purpose was to grow with Christ and take care of all that God had created (**Genesis 1:28**). God is everywhere, and this is also emphasized by St. Ephrem:

*Wherever you turn your eyes, there is God's symbol
Whatever you read, there you will find His types*

(Virginity 20:12)

This is especially true when we come to Church. Our worship brings us closer to God, and everything points to God. The words of St. Ephrem are particularly true in the Church, as every word, action, and object points to Christ. In this way, symbols in the Church are more than just interesting facts but intended for us to meditate and "open our eyes" to see the deeper truths that may be hidden to those who don't believe.

The symbolism in our Church that carries deeper truths includes the liturgical hymns, the iconography, the Church architecture, and even the different roles in the Church. An example is the Priest who is an Icon of Christ. From the robes that the Priest puts on before the Holy Qurbana to the gestures made during the Holy and Divine Liturgy, what we are to see is Christ Himself presiding over the sacred worship.

The deacons and acolytes symbolise the heavenly choirs, and even the bells and marvahtho (the liturgical fan that is usually gold or silver in colour with bells) serve a dual purpose of alerting us to special moments of the Liturgy as well as reminders of the angels worshipping our Lord along with us.

The songs remind us of this spiritual reality that should bring to our minds wonder, awe, and fear:

*Isaiah saw in the heights
Seraphs of fire and spirit
Each one of them with six wings
Serving Your divinity
Two wings covered their faces

To shield them from divine light
And two wings concealed their feet
From being consumed by the fire
They flew with two wings, and cried:

"Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord!"
Holy are you, Son of God
Bless'd be Your honour on high!*

(Sraappikale..)

This song during the prayers of Fraction as the curtain is closed during Holy Qurbana should remind us of the Trisagion Prayer that we pray so often:

Priest, an Icon of Christ



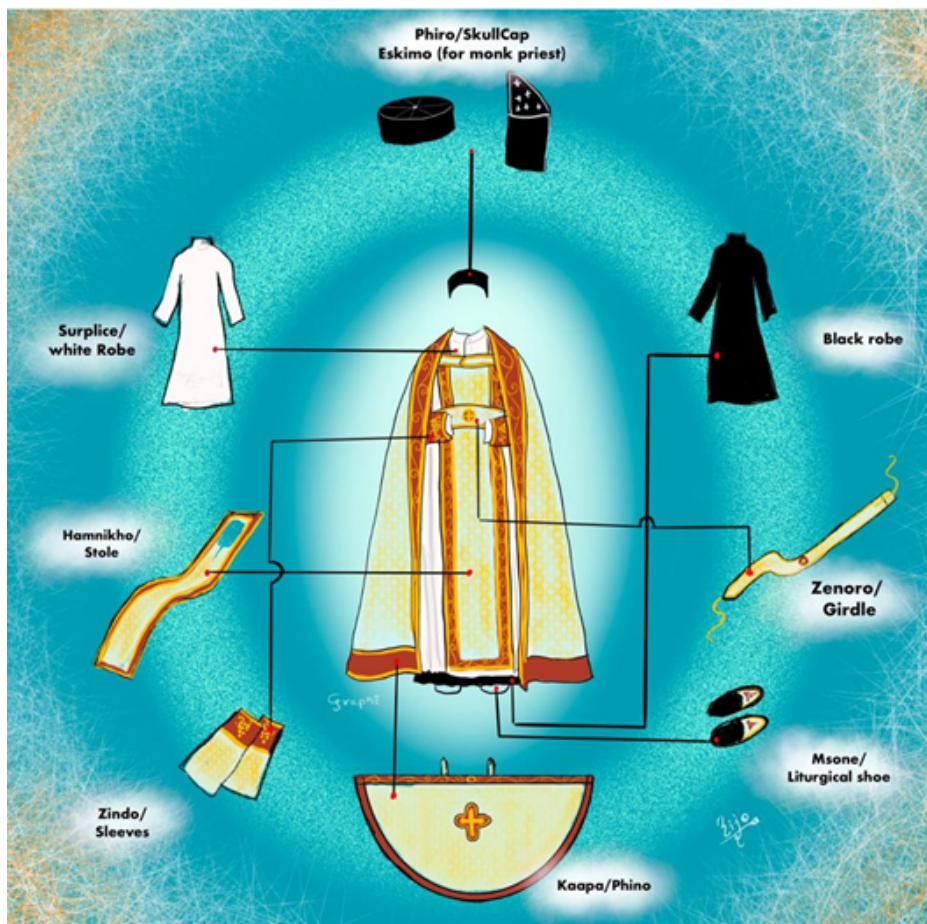
Fiery Seraphim and Marvahtho (Liturgical Fan)



*Holy art Thou, O God!
 Holy art Thou, Almighty!
 Holy art Thou, Immortal!
 Crucified for us -
 Have mercy on us!*

As mentioned earlier, the priest represents Christ, and each of his colourful and regal vestments also represents something special. During the morning prayers in preparation of Holy Qurbana, the priest enters the Holy Altar and puts on each garment as an armour to prepare for a spiritual war (**Ephesians 6:13–17**). All the items, including the belt, the breastplate, the shoes, the cape, the hat, etc., are put on with a special prayer in a specific order. After vesting, the priest kneels in front of the Holy Altar to prepare for the sacred Divine Liturgy.

LITURGICAL VESTMENTS OF ORTHODOX PRIEST



But did you know that you also have the armour of God? At the time of our Baptism, we are clothed in white after the sacrament is complete. White is a symbol of purity and holiness, and even our clothing has symbolic meaning even to this day! This is why, as Orthodox

Learning Outcome Check

Discuss and articulate the vestments as armour of God. Examine how we have our own "vestment"

Christians, we prepare ourselves to come to Church, which includes fasting, praying, and cleaning ourselves and our bodies. In ancient tradition, everyone on Sunday wore white! This is a good practise to do even today, as it is a reminder that we are also engaged in spiritual warfare, and just like the priest, we also wear armour to help us fight against evil. We come together to be renewed and united in communion with God, worshipping him with all the heavenly hosts and our departed.

Liturgical Symbolism and our Salvation

A symbol, by definition, is a thing that represents or stands for something else. As Christians, our understanding should not just stop at the intellectual level but continue to be drawn to the deep inner beauty that has been revealed to those who believe. God is the only Creator, and in love, He created us in His image and likeness (**Genesis 1:27–28**).

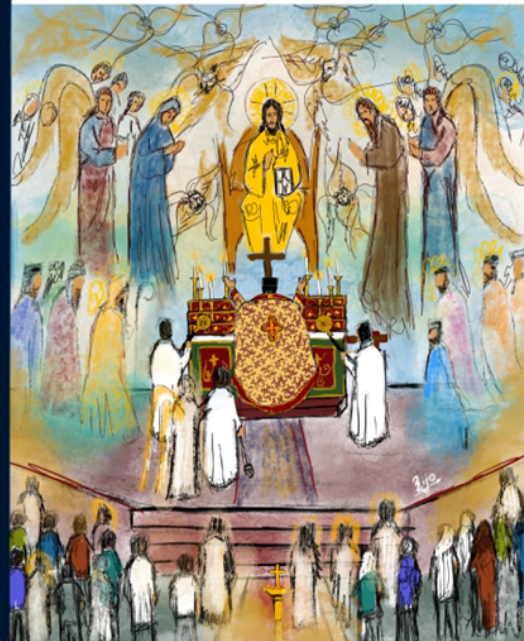
Learning Outcome Check

Discover the deeper meaning of the symbolism of the Liturgy, and how it ties to our Salvation.

How it looks



How it really happens



The Holy Qurbana is a divine reality. This means that although we can see with our eyes what is happening before us, we know that God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is present, along with the Holy Theotokos, the saints, and the spiritual beings. We cannot see these things with our physical eyes. There are those who have been able to get a peak into this divine reality while on earth—the saints. Their spiritual eyes were opened through their love for God. This love, like fire, purified their hearts and opened their (spiritual) eyes.

The Holy Qurbana is an *anamnesis* (Greek), meaning “remembrance.. During the Holy Qurbana, we don’t simply remember at an intellectual level; we actually participate in heavenly worship. The Holy Altar is also known as the “thronos” or Throne of God. It is at His Feet that all creation comes together joyfully and sings heavenly praises.

We also experience the life of Christ. This is also not a simple “remembering” of what has happened in the past; we live the Life of Christ, and through our participation, we become One with Christ. One important teaching of the Church is that the Body and Blood of Christ are Real. The bread and wine become the true Body and Blood. This is one thing in the Church that is not a mere symbol! Although it may appear as bread and wine to those who cannot see it, we know as fact and truth that it is the Body and Blood of Christ (**St. John 6:48**). In Christ is our salvation and the fulfilment of the purpose for which we were created (**Genesis 1:28**). We are all a royal priesthood (**1 Peter 2:9**). Our communion with God at Church on Sunday is truly the experience of our life everlasting with God.

Reflection Questions

1. What are some ways the Church architecture reminds us of the “new life in the world to come”?
2. With **1 Peter 2:9** in mind and **Genesis 1:27–28**, how can we also be considered priests in service of God and His plan?
3. Explain how the Body and Blood of Christ given to those who believe are not merely symbolic.

Worship and Prayer

Lesson Goals :

- I can offer a general description of what prayer is and the importance of regular prayer.
- I can understand prayer and different practises to build a strong prayer life.
- I can memorise 2-3 prayers listed in this lesson.



...pray without ceasing



1 Thessalonians 5:17



What is Prayer?

St. Gregorios of Parumala, lovingly known as Parumala Thirumeni, once said, “Prayer is the inspiration of childhood, the refuge of youth, and peace during old age.” Prayer can be defined as a conversation with God, a union with God, and the elevation of our mind and heart to God. This happens because prayer involves all of our senses and physical nature. Our entire being participates in prayer; this includes our bodies, minds, and souls. This can especially help us when we are aiming to strengthen our relationship with God and deepen our spiritual lives.

Prayer can be divided into two groups that serve as a foundation for our spiritual life: public prayer and personal prayer. Public prayer is when the community prays together and as a whole for worship, such as Holy Qurbana, or for the daily prayers (for example, evening prayer).

In our Orthodox Churches, the community gathers as Christ’s body, offering a united prayer together. It is worship that is on behalf of all and for all. Personal prayer is personalised and individual. This is our own personal and private conversation with God.

Christ teaches us in **St. Matthew 6:6**, “But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father, who is in the secret place.” Both forms of prayer are important, and one does not replace the other. In order to grow in our spiritual lives, we must be able to relate to the members of the Body of Christ together as well as to God as a person.

Another aspect that is important to consider is the need for prayer. Why do we pray? We are all aware of the basic reasons that we pray. Reasons such as thanksgiving to God for all His blessings, asking for forgiveness, and praying for others as well as ourselves. However, there is a deeper meaning to prayer. We pray not only to come closer to God but also to become more like Him in our actions, thoughts, and words. On the importance of prayer, St. John Chrysostom teaches, “He who is able to pray correctly, even if he is the poorest of all people, is essentially the richest. And he who does not have proper prayer is the poorest of all, even if he sits on a royal throne.” Prayer aids us not only

with our worldly difficulties, such as with school, work, or family life, but it also helps us with our invisible struggles. It helps us fight our temptations and work on our shortcomings. When we come to God in prayer and call on His name, we open ourselves to His grace and love, which can become pillars in our own lives.

Resources in the Church (Sh'himo/Pampakuda)

When it comes to prayer, our Church has given us many resources to help us when we pray. We may all be familiar with the Service Book of the Holy Qurbana, but our Church has also given us resources such as the Sh'himo and the Pampakuda.

The Sh'himo contains the daily prayers of the Church. In our liturgical tradition, we pray seven times a day, as we see King David write in **Psalms 118:164**, "I praise You seven times a day for the judgements of Your righteousness." The primary purpose of the Hours is to praise God throughout the day, engaging in a cycle of continuous prayer that prepares us for eternal life.

Within the Sh'himo prayers, there is a schedule of prayers for each day. It begins with Ramsho (evening prayer), then Soutoro (Compline), Lilio (Night Vigil), Sapro (Morning prayer), the 3rd hour (9 AM), the 6th hour (12 PM), and the 9th hour (3 PM). Then the cycle restarts the following day with an evening prayer.

The Pampakuda prayers (Common Prayers) are a compilation of prayers taken from various sources. Within the Pampakuda are numerous prayers that include common prayers, special prayers for each day, special prayers for Sundays and Feast days, prayers for meditation, and general special prayers. Within the Pampakuda are practical prayers for daily activities such as before and after reading the Bible, before and after eating a meal, prayers for students, and prayers for travelling. With the help of these prayer books, we have the ability to surround ourselves with prayer for even the most basic tasks that we do.

The Sh'hima prayers and some of the Pampakuda prayers are intended to be used in public prayer. This will help us with prayer with and for the community as a whole, which is very important as the one body of Christ. When we participate in the hourly prayers at Church, we are able to receive the fullness of the prayers. We are able to put ourselves in front of the Holy Altar and surround ourselves with the Cross and icons of the Church. We are also able to sign the hymns together as well as smell the incense that is offered. We come together in public prayer and devotion towards God, as well as in prayer for each other and the world.

Establishing a Prayer Rule

Now that we have an idea of what prayer is, the differences between public and private prayer, and the different prayers the Church has to offer, let us look at how we can put it into practise. Consistent prayer takes time and effort; it does not happen overnight. A good way to begin incorporating prayer into our daily schedules is to develop a prayer rule. A prayer rule is an outline of our daily prayer routine and is usually done outside of the scheduled prayers (the Sh'hima). This means a prayer rule is private prayer, not public prayer. It is something we do on our own.

Having a prayer rule is important and helpful because it gives us a set time to pray each day, a set order of prayers so that we do not struggle to find the words, and it helps us form a sense of discipline in our prayer life.

When developing a prayer rule, there are three things to take into consideration. First, we need to find a time of the day that works best for us.

This time will vary for everyone because it depends on our personal lives and schedules. Whether it is in the morning, afternoon, or evening, we should find the same time every day so that we can pray consistently.

Secondly, we should find a place in our homes where we can practise our prayer rule. This area should be a quiet place in the home. Somewhere that we will not be disturbed, somewhere that is not too busy (like the living room), and somewhere there are no distractions. If your house already has a designated area for prayer that is quiet, then use that area. If you do not have such a space, then you can use your own bedroom or another area where you will not be disturbed. Third, in your prayer area, make sure you have tools that will help your prayer time. Such as icons, a candle (ask your parents for help lighting it!), a Bible, and prayer books like the Sh'himo or Pampakuda.



A quiet space for prayer.

When we begin our prayer rule, it should be a sequence of prayers from these prayer books as well as Scripture readings. However, when developing the details of a prayer rule, we should first speak with our Spiritual Father or Parish Priest for guidance. They are the ones that should know us best and what our struggles are, and since they know us, they can provide direction. We should not make the prayer rule too long or too short. We need to do what we are capable of, and once we get that down, we can add on more things as our prayer life grows.

An example of prayer rule is reciting the Qaumo, reading Psalms 51, saying the Nicene Creed, reciting the Jesus Prayer, followed by prostrations, prayers from the Pampakuda, and Scripture readings. This is just an example. Again, we should do what works for us with the help of our Spiritual Father. When we do our prayer rule, we should do it without worrying about our past successes or failures. No matter how difficult it may be, we should always try to start again and be consistent. When we pray, we should approach prayer with a receptive and listening heart. God is always speaking to us, but we are so busy in our lives that we may not hear Him. **Psalms 145:18** says, *“The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call upon Him in truth.”* We do not want to pray merely to fulfil some sense of religious obligation or to feel better about ourselves. We want to cultivate a life-giving relationship with our Creator.

Learning Outcome Check

Discover a deeper understanding of how and why we prepare ourselves to receive the Holy Qurbana.

Reflection Questions

1. What is prayer, and why do we pray?
2. What are some resources the Church gives us to aid in prayer?
3. Prayer takes time and practise; what are some ways we can improve our prayer life?
4. Why are the Psalms usually chanted in our services?

The Sacramental Life

Lesson Goals :

- *I can understand the role of the Sacraments in my life*
- *I can discover the purpose and calling that the Sacraments place in my life*



Trees can be majestic things. Over the course of decades, and sometimes even centuries, a tree can very slowly grow to incredible heights. In the course of its growth, sometimes looks can be deceiving. Sometimes, a tree might look amazing on the outside, but inside, it's rotting. Other times, the tree may look beat up on the outside, but inside it's strong and healthy, strong enough to produce tonnes of fruit. The same applies to mankind as well. There are times when a person on the outside can look like they have everything together, that they are perfect, but they may be rotting from the inside out. And there have been times throughout the centuries when there have been people whom the world judged, but truly the person was a saint.

Roots

The roots of a tree are hidden from sight. But, without them, the tree cannot take up nourishment from the soil. In addition, those roots also serve as an anchor for the tree. If a tree has shallow roots and a strong wind comes and pulls on the leaves and branches of the tree, the entire tree will uproot and topple over. Over time, with proper growth, a tree's roots will always extend even farther than the width of the canopy of the tree. They will also go deep into the ground, where they will find a more consistent source of water. Sometimes, if a root cannot find a healthy source of water, it will break into unclean sources of water (e.g., the pipes of the sewer system) and draw in toxins that will destroy the tree from the inside out. This is the nature of our soul as well. When we do not fill our hearts with healthy and life-giving sacraments, our soul will settle for the things of this world that will pollute and destroy us from the inside out. For example, mankind has a need for dignity, but when a person does not readily receive that from the Creator whose image he/she bears, they



will try and steal it from others in pride and arrogance. Another example is mankind's need for communion and connection. Without receiving that from communion with God and mankind in the form of healthy relationships, people will become envious or try to obtain it through gossip, slander, or lust. The same applies for most of the passions and vices, including greed, sloth, and gluttony. Even one of these sins has the ability to destroy a tree completely from the inside out. If the root of a tree is drawing up sewage, the fruit of that tree will also contain it. Even a tiny amount of sewage in fruit would be unacceptable. And similarly, we cannot justify even a tiny amount of sin in our lives. Instead, we have to continually repent through the Sacrament of Confession, cutting those roots that are drawing from unhealthy sources and digging deeper to find the pure spring water below.

“

Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.



St. John 4:14 ”

The nourishment we receive comes from the sacramental life of the Church. Through the sacraments, we are nourished by the Holy Spirit, and we grow in the likeness of the Lord. Through the sacraments, we cut off vices and nurture virtues. It's through the sacraments that we receive the grace of God and the power of His love for us. It's through the sacraments that we commune with the Divine and with each other.

Fruits

Through the sacraments, we receive/gain purpose in our lives as well. In Holy Baptism and Holy Chrismation, a person receives their calling to be a light to the world. In Holy Matrimony, a person receives a calling to walk hand in hand with their spouse to the Kingdom. In the sacrament of Holy Ordination, a person receives a calling to be an offering for the life of the world. In the Holy Qurbana, we are nourished at the table of life and then go out into the world to serve and love mankind, proclaiming the Gospel of our Lord. God has given us a ministry of stewardship over all Creation. We are all called to the general priesthood, offering and interceding for all of Creation. This is part of who we are. Christians are not mere consumers but stewards with responsibility. When our roots are dug deep into the ground and nourished from the spring beneath, we produce fruit, which gives nourishment to the world around us and eventually becomes a forest.

Branches

“

*The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, Halleluyah....
Like cedars of Lebanon - they shall grow*



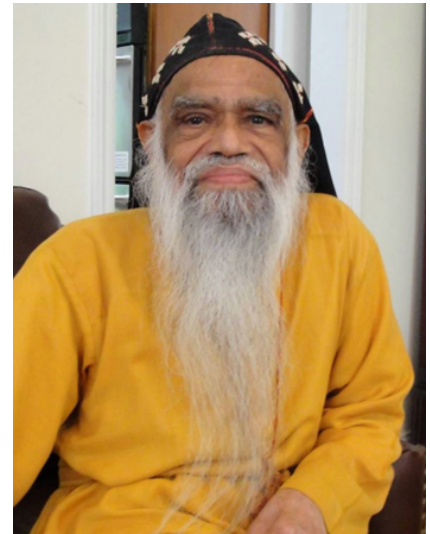
Psalms 91:13 ”

The saints are compared to the Cedars of Lebanon because of the cedar's ability to grow in very difficult terrain. The Cedars of Lebanon were known for growing on the tops of mountains far above where other trees could grow. They were able to dig their roots into the rock and sometimes even grow out at an angle from the sides of mountains as well. The strength of the tree's roots allowed it to withstand torrential storms and drought. The saints, in the same way, are people who grow under very difficult circumstances and yet withstand them by digging their roots deep into the ground.



The desert fathers and mothers, through their **ascetic** disciplines of fasting and prayer, dug their roots deep into the ground and produced a spiritual oasis in the desert. The martyrs, under great persecution, endured suffering in this present life, knowing that the present distress is nothing compared to the everlasting bliss of the Kingdom. The doctors of the Church remembered in the 5th Diptych (Thubden) remained faithful to the Apostolic faith they had received in the face of heresies that perverted the Truth of what God has done for our salvation.

Even in recent times, His Grace Mathews Mar Barnabas came as a shepherd to the United States and found a diocese and a generation of youth in great turmoil. But through prayer (both liturgical and private), writing articles, leading by example, and speaking the truth in love, Thirumeni worked hard, even suffered humiliation at times, to till the ground into a beautiful garden.



H G Mathews Mar Barnabas

This is the legacy of the saints. They all lived very difficult lives, but through it they persevered relying fully on the grace of God. When one looks at a 400-year-old tree on the outside, it has many twists and turns, and broken branches. Some trees you can even see the black marks from past forest fires that destroyed everything else. But these trees withstood those circumstances. The same is promised for you as well.

Through the disciplined fasting and prayers, and participation in the sacraments of the Church, your roots will grow deep into the ground. And whatever will come your way over the next years and decades, you will remain standing, not because of your own strength but because of the grace of God that is at work within you. And by that same grace of God, you will also produce fruit that will have a deep impact on the world around you

Reflection Questions

1. Throughout this whole year, we have learned about the Sacraments, how has that changed your approach to the Sacraments through the year?
2. When we don't fill our soul with the Holy and Life-Giving Sacraments, what types of things do people's roots settle for?
3. In what ways do the Sacraments instil purpose in our lives?



ST. THOMAS, THE APOSTLE OF INDIA
PRAY FOR US



O S S A E
Diocese of UK, Europe and Africa

SECOND EDITION
2025