



SPIRITUAL EDIFICATION

The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts*

The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts consists of the Service of Vespers and the appointed liturgical particulars for the Communion of the Faithful with the Holy Gifts. It is celebrated daily [primarily in monastic communities], except for Saturday and Sunday, during the period of Great Lent, and notably on Wednesday and Friday [in parishes], with Holy Bread—that is, the Body of Christ—which has been intincted in the Holy Blood and consecrated at the preceding complete Liturgies on Saturday or Sunday.



The reason for this Liturgy is that the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, festive and Resurrectional in character, is not allowed during the Great Lent and the somber period of the fast, according to ancient tradition and the forty-ninth Canon of the Synod of Laodicea [336].

However, from their side, the faithful children of the Church, engaged in the abstemious struggle of the Great Fast and having a clear and particular need for reinforcement by the Immaculate Mysteries during this period of intensive spiritual combat, desired to commune as often as they could, since Holy Communion was indeed their life and sustenance.

For this reason, so that the faithful not be deprived of the Holy Eucharist on the weekdays of the Great Fast, but that they might be able to commune from the Presanctified



Holy Bread [the Body of Christ], the Church, by way of the fifty-first Canon of the Fifth-Sixth [Quinisext] Synod [692], appointed that the Divine Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts take place on the weekdays of the Great Fast.

In his explanatory scholia on this canon, St. Nikodemus the Hagiorite († 1809), in his *Pedalion* [Rudder, or Book of Canons], citing the canonologist Matthew Blastaris [fl. 14th century], reminds us that the faithful resemble wrestlers [in the arena]; just as wrestlers cease their matches in the afternoon to take nourishment, in order to strengthen themselves for the upcoming bout, so the faithful commune from the Body and Blood of the Master during the period of spiritual combat in the Great Fast, that they might be reinvigorated and reinforced by the Lord, thus to continue their match against the passions and the spiritual enmity of the devil with renewed powers and more valorously.

The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is attributed to St. Gregory the Dialogist († 604), Pope of Rome, or to Patriarch Germanos of Constantinople (†732); but in actuality, it is not the work of any one individual, but is a composite work coming down to us from Holy Tradition [and of ancient provenance].

The Presanctified or “abridged” Divine Liturgy, since it is affixed to Vespers, is normally celebrated in the late afternoon, when Christians, having fasted [completely] until that time, commune, afterwards eating a meal of dry foodstuffs (dried fruits and nuts).

May the Lord grant us repentance during this holy period of fasting and abstinence, and, having pre-



pared ourselves spiritually and with the blessing of our spiritual Father, may we approach the Divine Mystery with faith and yearning, that we might become partakers in eternal life!



(*) A synopsis of observations about this ancient service by His Grace, Bishop Klemes (Clement) of Gardikion, Secretary of the Holy Synod. His Grace has written widely on Orthodox theological issues. He is a graduate of the Theological School of the University of Thessaloniki, Greece.