

The Episcopal Divine Liturgy

The Divine Liturgy served by the bishop is the expression of the Catholic Church *par excellence*. The celebration of the Eucharist by the bishop, surrounded by his clergy and people, all playing their part within the Church's order and receiving the grace of God in the Holy Mysteries, is at the heart of the Christian life.

In the Episcopal Liturgy, there are a number of differences from when the Liturgy is served by a priest. There is some variety here, even within Russian Orthodox tradition. As our parish from time to time hosts bishops who serve the Divine Liturgy, and especially as this is not part of our weekly experience, it is important to know these differences, which are detailed below as practised at our parish:

- The Reception of the Bishop

Prior to the arrival of the bishop, a single bell is rung at regular intervals, ceasing when he reaches the door of the church. The bishop is greeted at the door by a parishioner with the customary gifts of bread and salt. Some brief words of welcome may be given. As the bishop crosses the threshold of the church, the choir sings the hymn "From the rising to the setting of the sun" at a stately pace. During this hymn, the bishop is clothed in his mantle, and he and clergy venerate the Cross.

- The Prayers of Preparation

After the deacon's exclamation of "Wisdom!", the choir sings the zadostoinik from the Divine Liturgy while the bishop and clergy move to the solea and the prayers of preparation are said. This is usually "It is truly meet" but varies according to the feast or season in the same way as at the Anaphora. It should be sung very slowly, to cover the prayers, but should not go on for too long so that the bishop is waiting for the choir to finish. Ideally it should be sung only once but, if necessary, the end of the hymn may be repeated. An indication that the prayers are due to finish is that the bishop will turn to the icon of the Saviour, then to that of the Mother of God, before finally bowing low before the Holy Doors.

- The Vesting of the Bishop

After the zadostoinik, one of two things happens:

- 1. If a shortage of servers means that the bishop is to vest simply, he turns to the people and blesses them, while the choir sings "Eis polla et, Dhespota!". He then enters the altar where he will vest quietly. The blessing is given for the Hours to begin. The Hours are read from the kliros as usual.*
- 2. If the bishop is to be vested in the normal way, in the middle of the nave, he turns to the people and blesses them from the solea. The deacon exclaims "Eis polla eti, Dhespota", then the choir sings "Ton Dhespotin" very briskly. What is then sung is subject to some variation, even within ROCOR.*

Our parish custom is to sing the following:

- "The prophets proclaimed thee", sung slowly as the bishop is divested of his mantle, klobuk, outer cassock, and so forth.
- "Let thy soul rejoice in the Lord", sung slowly and repeatedly until the bishop is fully vested.

After the deacon's exclamation, "Let thy light so shine", when the bishop blesses the people, the choir majestically sings "Ton dhespotin" while the bishop blesses in four directions.

The blessing is then given for the Hours to begin. The Hours are read by a reader who stands to the bishop's left, having left the altar with the senior priest at the end of the vesting. The priest stands to the bishop's right and gives the customary exclamations.

▪ The Hours

The Hours are read as usual, with the exception that instead of "Father, bless", the reader says, "Master, bless", and instead of "Through the prayers of our holy fathers...", the priest says "Through the prayers of our holy master...". If the bishop is seated in the nave, when the blessings are given, as well as the exclamation after the Our Father, the reader and priest turn and bow to the bishop. If an ordination to minor orders is performed, it takes place during the Third Hour (for a reader) or the Sixth Hour (for a subdeacon), after the third psalm of the hour, with its Glory...Both now...Alleluia.

▪ The Small Entrance

"Come, let us worship" is sung slowly by the clergy and not the people. When the clergy reach the "Alleluia" at the end, the choir, slightly overlapping with the clergy, repeats the hymn at the usual pace from the words "O Son of God, Who..." onwards. The clergy then repeat the same part of the hymn, bringing it to its conclusion.

The bishop performs a lesser censing after the Entrance, during which a trio sweetly sings an elongated setting of "Eis polla eti, Dhespota". According to the service rubrics, at the end of this, the clergy sing the acclamation "Eis polla eti, Dhespota" once. However, our parish practice is for the choir to join them.

The entrance hymns (the appointed troparia and kontakia of the day) are sung as usual with the exception that the final kontakion, with its "Both now and ever", is sung by the clergy alone.

▪ Prayer of the Thrice-Holy

Uniquely, when a bishop serves, the exclamation of this prayer is introduced with:

Deacon: Let us pray to the Lord.

People: Lord, have mercy.

The exchange between the deacon and people at the end of the prayer of the Thrice-Holy is also divided differently when the bishop serves.

Instead of the usual:

Deacon: O Lord, save the pious, and hearken unto us.

People: O Lord, save the pious, and hearken unto us.

We sing:

Deacon: O Lord, save the pious.

People: O Lord, save the pious.

Deacon: And hearken unto us.

People: And hearken unto us.

- The Trisagion

The Trisagion is sung in a special format, outlined below:

1. The choir sings the Trisagion once to the set tune.
2. The clergy repeat.
3. The choir chants the Trisagion simply.
4. The bishop says "Lord, Lord, look down from heaven...". Then he blesses the people while the choir sings only the words "Holy God", slowly.
5. The bishop repeats "Lord, Lord..." then blesses again, while the choir sings only "Holy Mighty", slowly.
6. The bishop says "Lord, Lord" for a third time. While he blesses, the choir slowly sings "Holy Immortal, have mercy on us".
7. The choir chants the Trisagion simply.
8. The clergy sing the Trisagion.
9. The choir chants "Glory... both now", and then concludes the Trisagion in the usual way.

It is worth noting that there exists a variant practice, widespread in the Moscow Patriarchate and not unknown in ROCOR. In this practice, at point 4, the bishop says "Lord, Lord, look down..." **once only**. Then he himself **says** the Trisagion quietly while he gives the three blessings. In this case, the choir does not divide the Trisagion into three parts as indicated in points 4, 5, and 6, but rather sings it straight through. If an unfamiliar bishop is serving, it may be necessary to ascertain from the bishop beforehand which practice will be followed.

- The Gospel

After the Gospel, the bishop blesses the people, during which the choir sings "Eis polla eti, Dhespota!"

- The Litany of Fervent Supplication

During the petition for the hierarchy, at the mention of the name of the ruling/serving bishop, the clergy within the altar give the threefold "Lord, have mercy" to a special setting. At the end of this, the people give their threefold response of "Lord, have mercy", to the same setting.

- **The Great Entrance**

The ceremonies within the altar before the procession are more extensive when the bishop serves. The choir may need to sing the Cherubic Hymn more slowly or repeat the third system more times than usual.

After the Entrance, at the conclusion of the Cherubic hymn, the bishop blesses the people, who sing "Eis polla eti, Dhespota!"

If there is an ordination of a priest, it comes immediately after the conclusion of the Cherubic hymn, and the blessing and "Eis polla..." are deferred until after the final "Axios" of the ordination rite.

- **The Anaphora**

There are some small differences to the order and number of the minor responses given in the Anaphora. The choir just needs to be attentive to the music book.

If there is the ordination of a deacon, this is done after the blessing "And may the mercies", following the Anaphora. After the final "Axios" of the ordination rite, the Liturgy continues with the Litany before the Our Father.

- **Communion of the Clergy**

With the bishop's communion and likely that of visiting concelebrants, the communion of the clergy will undoubtedly go on for longer than usual. The reader and choir should be prepared with enough prayers and hymnody to accommodate this.

- **We have seen the True Light**

When the bishop exclaims, "O God, save thy people, and bless thine inheritance", he blesses the people. The people sing "Eis polla eti, Dhespota" before they take up the singing of "We have seen the true Light".

- **The Dismissal**

Instead of "Father, bless", the people sing "Master, bless". There is a post-revolutionary practice within the Moscow Patriarchate of changing the form of address at this point according to the rank of bishop ("Most Reverend Master, bless", "Very Reverend Master, bless", and so forth). This is not our custom in ROCOR.

- **The Polychronion**

If the bishop who serves the Liturgy is not the ruling bishop of the diocese, then the visiting bishop's name and see are added to the polychronion after those of the ruling bishop. The same is done for any concelebrating bishops, who are added in rank order.

- **The Prayers of Thanksgiving**

Instead of "Father, bless", the reader says "Master, bless".