

The History of the Liturgy

THE FIRST FOUR CENTURIES

Introduction:

+The Liturgy and its rites were delivered by the Apostles to the churches, which they had established. (Mark 14:22-23) (1cor 11:23-26)

+The Apostles were taught by the Lord himself, who for forty days, following His resurrection spoke to them “of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).

+Saint Paul emphasizes this fact when he says, “For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which He was betrayed took bread ...” (1cor 11:23-26). Here, St. Paul emphasizes the fact that each Apostle received the liturgical tradition from the Lord Himself (Mark 14:22-23).

+“Every local church had received the rite of the Eucharist, the way of performing it with its first evangelization. This is important. It means that the living tradition of the Liturgy as the heart of its corporate life went back into the very roots of every apostolic church.”

Documentation of the liturgy:

+In the beginning, the Liturgy was passed from the Apostles to their successors, the bishops as an oral tradition. This is the same way in which the books of the Holy Bible were propagated. Oral tradition always preceded the written forms of both the Holy Bible and the liturgies.

+The Liturgy was commanded to writing only after heresies started to appear in the Church, and when heretics attempted to put their heretic teachings into the Liturgy.

+The fact that a manuscript of a liturgical text is dated to the fourth century, does not mean that the Liturgy was composed in the fourth century but merely that it was recorded in writing in the fourth century.

The Liturgy of Alexandria:

+Saint Mark, one of the seventy Apostles, who brought Christianity to Egypt around the middle of the first century A.D., also brought to Egypt the liturgy that bears his name; The liturgy of Saint Mark. This liturgy which was originally written in Greek is probably the oldest and most authentic liturgy in Christendom.

+Saint John Chrysostom tells us that St. Mark was the first Apostle to inscribe the Liturgy, in the form of a service or a regular church ritual which is strictly followed in the celebration of the Eucharist.

+The first Eucharist was held in the upper room, in St. Mark's house in Jerusalem. The man carrying the pitcher of water is believed to be no other than St. Mark himself (Mk 14:13-15).

+The disciples even after the resurrection of the Lord continued to meet and pray in his home. They also received the Holy Spirit there.

+According to tradition in all Apostolic churches, St. Mark's home is well known as the first church in the world.

+When Saint Athanasius, the 20th Patriarch of Alexandria, sent Fromentius to Ethiopia in 330 A.D. as the first Egyptian head of the Ethiopian Church, he gave him a copy of the liturgy of Saint Mark, which the Ethiopians started to use immediately.

+By the end of the fourth century another liturgy started to be used, that is the liturgy of Saint Basil the great.

The Liturgy of Rome:

- +The earliest liturgy that is known to exist in the Church of Rome is the liturgy of Hippolytus.
- +Most scholars agree now that this liturgy originated in Egypt and was exported to Rome.

The Liturgy of Jerusalem:

- +In Jerusalem, the city of our Lord, the liturgy of St. James was the dominant Eucharistic prayer by the fourth century. Not only in Jerusalem, but also in Syria, Arabia, Greece and Armenia.
- +The liturgy is attributed to St. James, the brother of the Lord (the Lord's cousin), who became the first bishop of Jerusalem.
- +There is a great similarity between this liturgy and the anaphoras of St. Mark and St. Basil.

The Liturgy of Antioch:

- +Antioch was the city in which Barnabas and Paul spent a whole year preaching and where the disciples were called Christians first. (Act 12:25, 26).
- +It was the first centre to be preached to outside Judea. In this important centre of Christianity, another liturgical tradition thrived by the fourth century: The liturgy of the Apostles, supposedly written by Clement, bishop of Rome, who in turn received it from the Apostles.
- +The liturgy is similar to St. Mark's liturgy. It seems to be a rearranged and expanded version of an earlier local liturgy that must have been very similar to the liturgy of Saint Mark.

+To sum up, of all the four early centres of Christianity, Alexandria used a liturgy that is considered to be the oldest of all liturgies that is the liturgy of St. Mark. Jerusalem and Antioch utilized liturgies that were very similar to St. Mark's, but probably modified in form. Rome used a very primitive liturgy, imported to Rome by an Alexandrian priest (Hyppolitus) who immigrated to Rome carrying with him the liturgy that bears his name.

THE LITURGY IN THE SIXTH CENTURY

The Church of Alexandria

+The Greek liturgy of Saint Mark has now been translated into Coptic. Since the translation is traditionally attributed to Saint Cyril, it became known as: The liturgy of Saint Cyril. There are basically no differences between the two.

+Another anaphora known as the anaphora of Saint Basil was by now established side by side with the anaphora of Saint Cyril. It was believed that Saint Basil brought this anaphora with him from Cappadocia during his visit to Egypt in A.D. 357.

+ There is no doubt that the anaphora of St. Basil has been derived from the anaphora of St. Mark. The similarity between the two is not coincidental. The institution narrative is the same in both. Both anaphoras start with "The Lord be with you all" rather than the Cappadocian Paulene formula, "The love of God the Father ..."

+The most probable explanation is that Saint Basil, during a visit to Egypt, edited an already existing anaphora that had evolved from the much older St. Mark's.

+Although similar in many respects, the anaphora of Saint Mark and that which bears the name of Saint Basil have some differences that we shall summarize;

(1) In the anaphora of Saint Mark all the intercessions are before the anaphora while in St. Basil's many intercessions were introduced into the anaphora while still retaining the pre anaphoral intercessions.

(2) The anaphora of St. Mark has no Christological (pertaining to the nature of Christ) or Soteriological (pertaining to the Theology of salvation) formulas, while St. Basil abounds with these.

(3) Another difference is the biblical insertions, while St. Mark's quotes the Old Testament; St. Basil's has many New Testament quotations so much so that some describe it as "nothing but a biblical patchwork."

+The explanation of these differences rests on the date of composition of these two anaphoras.

+The anaphora of St. Mark was introduced in the first century, before the definition of the canon of the New Testament, and probably before any of the books of the New Testament.

+Formulas of Christology and Soteriology were developed centuries later, this is the reason why the anaphora of St. Mark is devoid of theological formulas and New Testament insertions. As these developed, and certainly most of them developed in Egypt, by Origen, Athanasius and Cyril, they found their way into the Liturgy.

+The same applies to the intercessions, which in all liturgies, increased in number and scope with the passage of time. So, while the anaphora of St. Mark reflects the "raw" spirituality of the first century, that of St. Basil reflects the sophisticated theology of the third and fourth century.

+A third anaphora known as the anaphora of **St. Gregory the Theologian** started to make its appearance, first in the monasteries of Nitria, and later in the rest of Egypt. Like the anaphora of St. Basil, which it resembles in many aspects, it is based on the ancient St. Mark's but reflects more Cappadocian influence.

+ The anaphora of **St. Gregory the Theologian** starts with the Paulene grace formula, "**The love of God the Father ..**", so characteristic of the Cappadocian liturgy.

+It is believed to be written by St. Gregory during his visit to Egypt as a young monk around the middle of the fourth century.

+The anaphora is addressed to Christ rather than to the Father. It abounds with the mature Theology of the fourth century. The Christological and soteriological formulas are greatly expanded into what sounds like one of the sermons of **St. Gregory the Theologian**.

The Church of Rome

+In Rome, the liturgy attributed to Pope Gregory the great, made its appearance in the sixth century and replaced the liturgy of Hippolytus, which has been in use before it.

+The liturgy of Gregory the Great is quite different from that of Hippolytus both in structure and in the treatment of its subjects.

+The analogies of content, structure and even similarities of expression are manifold between the solidly attested forms of the Roman Eucharist and those of the Alexandrian liturgy (the liturgy of St. Mark).

The Church of Constantinople

+Constantinople, the city of Constantine, the second Rome and capital of the Eastern Empire, started to compete with Rome and Alexandria as an important see.

+Not only did it eclipse Jerusalem and Antioch, it eventually dominated all the churches of the East, except those who refused to subscribe to the Chalcedonian formula.

+Towards the end of the fourth century, the liturgy commonly used in Constantinople was an expanded version of the Egyptian St. Basil's, almost twice its size.

+St. Basil was the principal liturgy of Constantinople, until finally ousted by the liturgy attributed to St. John Chrysostom. The Byzantine St. Basil is still in use in the Eastern Orthodox churches but only ten times each year.

+The liturgy of St. John Chrysostom which gradually replaced the Byzantine St. Basil's, may well be the form used in Antioch during Chrysostom's episcopate.

+To sum up, by the end of the sixth century, Egypt had three liturgies, the old St. Mark which was now translated into Coptic, and two other anaphoras that were derived from the latter, St. Basil's and St. Gregory's.

+Rome abandoned its early liturgy, attributed to Hyppolitus, believed to be of Egyptian origin, to adopt another liturgy, bearing the name of Pope Gregory the great, which is largely an adaptation of the Egyptian St. Mark.

+Constantinople starts to use an expanded form of the Egyptian St. Basil and later adopts a much abbreviated liturgy attributed to St. John Chrysostom.

THE LITURGY IN THE MIDDLE AGES

+The middle ages saw a lot of dramatic changes, Rome broke up with Constantinople in the eleventh century and the Protestants broke up with Rome in the sixteenth.

+The Liturgy deteriorated in the west until it finally "died", while in Constantinople there were abuses that history recorded for us.

+The "Silent" Mass: Around the eighth century, in both Rome and Constantinople, it became fashionable to say most of the prayers of the Liturgy inaudibly. "It becomes certain that in the Frankish lands as at Rome, from the Sanctus on, the faithful could no longer hear what the priest was saying."

+In Constantinople, the Emperor had to intervene after receiving some complaints. The Emperor chastised the Bishops for violating the canons of the Church by ordaining men "who did not even know the prayers of the anaphora or of Baptism."

+The emperor then gave the following order, "Moreover, we order all bishops and priests to say the prayers used in the divine anaphora and holy baptism, not inaudibly, but in a voice that can be heard by the faithful, so that the mind of those listening can be aroused to a greater compunction." The emperor threatened those who refused to carry on his orders.

THE LITURGY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

+During this century, a large volume of research concerning worship in the early Church was accumulated.

+Historians and Theologians even among Protestants started to realize that the early Church had a liturgy, it had Sacraments, and that ministry of the early Church was deeply liturgical not simply a charismatic ministry as was once thought.

+One of the prominent Protestant writers had found out through research that the early Christian worship was both liturgical and Sacramental. This led to the "Liturgical Movement", a movement in western Christendom aimed at rediscovering the Liturgy.

+For several years, representatives of tens of Protestant denominations have been meeting in Lima, Peru, for the purpose of formulating a liturgy that can be used by all of their congregations, an ecumenical liturgy. The liturgy has been recently published. It resembles to a great extent our own St. Basil.

+In the Catholic Church, a movement for liturgical renewal has also been going on for years. The result; three new liturgies are now available for Catholic worship, two of these are based on the Coptic St. Basil.

+To sum it all up, we offer this quotation from the "COPTIC CHURCH REVIEW," The twentieth century has witnessed a 'liturgical movement' in most churches: Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant. Thanks to this movement, the churches have revised or completely changed their liturgies in order to conform to the liturgy of the early Church; also they changed their practices in favour of more participation of the faithful in the liturgy and more frequent communions. The Coptic Church does not need a movement in this sense, because she has kept the Liturgy as it was in the early Church.