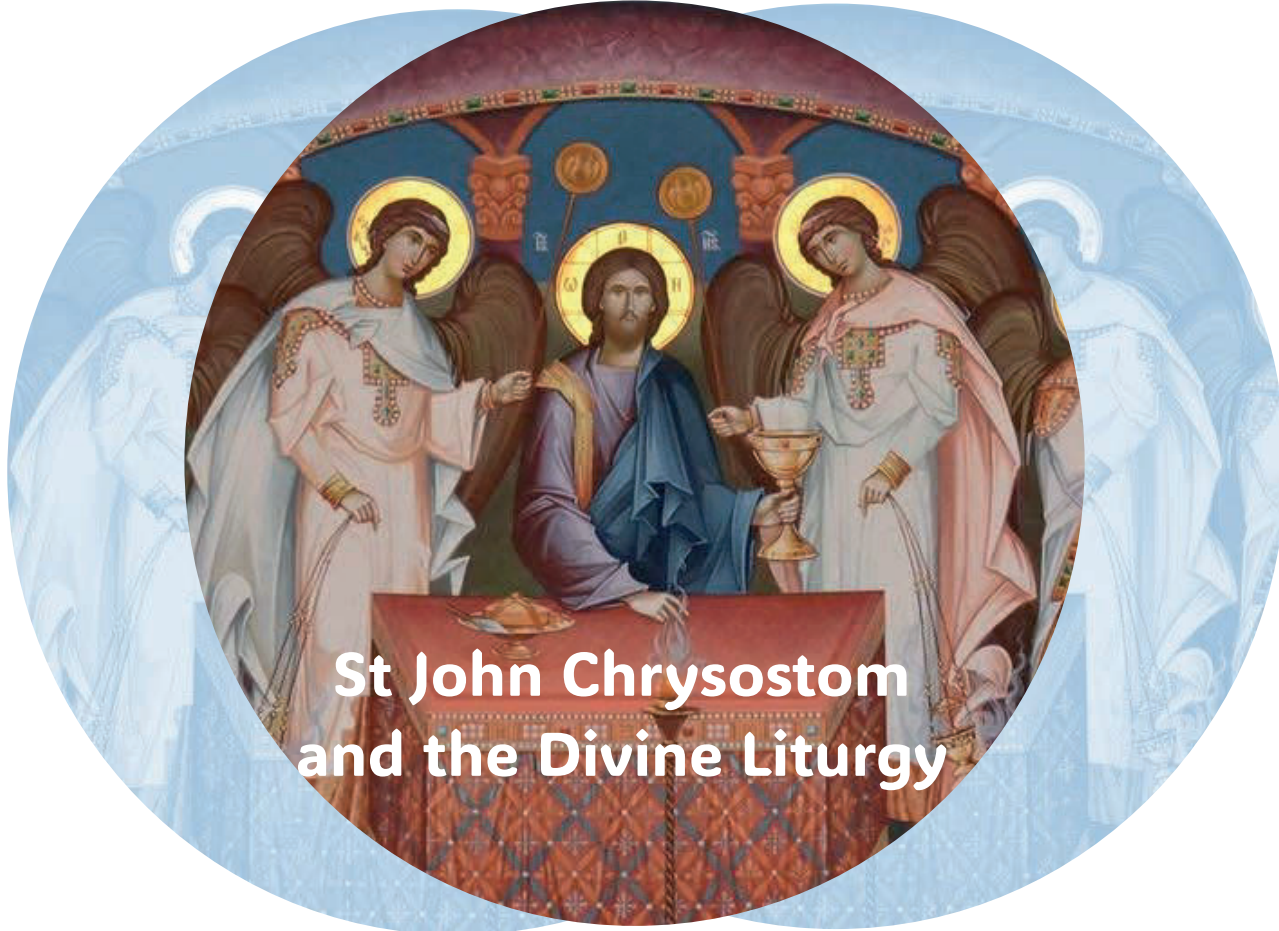


KNOW YOUR FAITH

By Lynne Wardach



St John Chrysostom and the Divine Liturgy

After the Lord rose from the dead, He stayed with His disciples for forty days, walking, talking, and preparing them for the day He would ascend to Heaven. Once He left them, Jesus expected them to go out and preach so that they would bring all people to worship the One True God, but He didn't want them to feel as if He was abandoning them. He told them...

Matt 28:20 “...And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

What did Jesus mean by this? How could He be “with them” when ascending out of the disciples’ sight? And what did Jesus mean by “to the end of the age”? Is He with us now?

The truth is, the Lord IS with us always, even today! We are in his presence every time we attend the Divine Liturgy. The Liturgy is where all souls, whether human or angelic, on earth or in heaven, are present

with the Holy Trinity. It is the only place we can partake of Christ's Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity and become unified in the Holy Eucharist. It is where earth and heaven merge and become a blessed Kingdom! Let's examine the Divine Liturgy and learn what makes it very important.

The Greek word “Litourgeia” means the “work of the people.”

The Liturgy isn't supposed to be a performance, although it is spectacular. The clergy and servers wear elaborate vestments and carry intricate props of gold and jewels. There's choreography and singing, and each movement is intended to remind you of something extraordinary about your relationship with your Creator.

We hear the bells, reminding us of the magnificent

voices of the angels calling us to worship as we approach the temple.

We see the priest at the side altar, performing the **Proskomedia**, preparing the bread and wine that will become the Body and Blood of Christ. The Diskos (plate) that will hold the bread has a cover with a little star called an asterisk dangling above it, just like the star of Bethlehem! When we see this, we are to remember the feast of the Nativity when Christ is born!

We see the Deacon **incense** the interior of the Church, all the icons, and the people present. This cloud of incense signifies that a great event is about to occur. Although we can't usually see it, the fragrance indicates that it is present, reminding us of the invisible presence of the Holy Spirit. When the Deacon incenses you, bow your head and allow the cloud of smoke to carry your prayers to God.

"Blessed is the Kingdom..." With these words, the priest sets the stage for the unfolding of the story of Christ's life, and we realize that the kingdom consists of all of God's creation; the angels are present, the saints and souls of the just are present with us, from all times and places! There is no sense of time in the Kingdom, but all of us are mystically together all at once, so it is the perfect time to acknowledge the angels and the souls of the saints and even your loved ones because they are all truly there with us!

We begin to call to mind those in most need as we start the **litany** and sing "Lord, have mercy!" after each petition. With each petition, you can call to mind those you know who are sick, suffering, in despair, traveling, or in need.

When we sing the **Antiphons**, we remember the Psalms of the Old Testament and how the Christ child was brought into the world through those who also proclaimed these same songs. Then we sing the **Incarnation Hymn** to remind us of the purpose of the coming of Jesus into the world.

Next, we see the **Little Entrance** when the priest processes with the Gospel, reminding us of the entrance of Christ into the world as a preacher. Years ago, people gathered outside the church and waited for the priest to lead them into the church in procession behind the Gospel book. Now we gather indoors instead. This Little Entrance is a remnant of that event.

We sing the **Troparia and Kontakia** to engage everyone in the commemoration of the day and the Trisagion Hymn (Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy and Immortal, have mercy on us!) as we praise the Holy Trinity and

ask for mercy.

Next come the **Epistle and Gospel Readings**, symbolizing Christ's preaching. As we listen, we remember the Sermon on the Mount, where He first taught the people about the Kingdom of God.

Great Entrance with the gifts during the singing of the **Cherubic Hymn** represents the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. We prepare our hearts by laying aside our cares to be fully present when Christ comes to us at the consecration.

This is also when we can offer prayers for our loved ones, family, and friends. When the priest walks through the Royal Doors saying, "May the Lord, Our God remember in His kingdom..." you can mentally offer your own prayers, placing your cares upon the diskos with the bread offering, and ask God to remember your family, friends, and all your concerns specifically in His Kingdom!

Next, we say the **Creed**, a declaration of our allegiance to the teachings of the true faith, together with all true Christians everywhere, so we are worthy to witness the consecration.

When we hear the hymn, **"Holy, Holy, Holy..."** we recognize the presence of the angelic hosts among us who are also preparing themselves for the coming of Christ in the Eucharist. We sing with them, Hosannah! Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord!

Now that we've sung with the angels, we sing the **Lord's Prayer**, asking God for our daily bread physically (asking to meet our needs) and spiritually (asking for worthiness to receive the Eucharistic bread).

With all the mental and spiritual preparation done, it is time to commemorate the Last Supper when the priest repeats the same words of **Consecration** that Jesus used. When we hear Father say, "Take, Eat, this is my Body..." we mystically become present alongside the apostles in the upper room at the last Passover Supper.

Here is the answer to our original question. There is no time in heaven and no space, so we all are present, past, present, and future with the Lord at once. He can be with us always, even to the end of the age, in this way. We can receive Him in the Eucharist and enter into communion with Him. We also enter into communion with everyone who receives Him then, past, present, or future. It is in this mystical way that we are all ONE in Him!