

Patriarchal Catechetical Commission of the UGCC (Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church)  
 Catechetical-Pedagogical Institute of UCU (Ukrainian Catholic University)  
 Materials of the Scholarly-Practical Catechetical Conference for the Entire Church  
 Lviv, June, 24-25 2011; Published in Lviv in 2012

**Presentation of the *Catechism of the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church*  
*Christ – Our Pascha***

**Introduction of Section Two of the *Catechism of the UGCC* –  
 “The Prayer of the Church” by Dr. Mykhajlo Petrovych<sup>1</sup>**

Your Beatitude, Most Reverend Bishops, Reverend Fathers, Brothers and Sisters in Religious and Monastic Orders, Dear Catechists and Guests of this celebration!

The essence of the second section of the *Catechism* of the UGCC, just as the essence of the whole *Catechism*, can be seen in its title: “Christ – Our Pascha.” This second and middle section, entitled “The Prayer of the Church,” is about our meeting and ontological<sup>2</sup> joining with the Risen Christ in communal and individual prayer, as He is the one who gives us the Holy Spirit and brings us to our Father.

Thus, the goal of the second section, which serves as a link between the first and third sections of the *Catechism*, between the “Faith of the Church” and the “Life of the Church”, is to show how the prayer of the Church is both an expression of our faith, and also forms it; how this prayerful meeting and joining of Christ with the Church is achieved; and how this meeting is to influence all aspects of our lives. In other words, everything that we confess in our faith, we experience in prayer, and all that we experience in prayer, we are to make real in our life.

**Diversity and Unity of the Church's Prayer**

The structure and content of the second section of the *Catechism* shows us two important truths about the Church's prayer. The first is this: the prayer of the Church is varied and multi-dimensional, and it is in this diversity that the multi-dimensional meeting of Christ with His Church takes place. In the *Catechism*, this diversity is expressed in a large variety of topics in the second section. The second truth states: in these many forms of prayer there is, nonetheless, a basic unity, and that is why at the beginning of this section, the *Catechism* introduces the fundamental characteristics which relate to all of the Church's prayer.

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<sup>1</sup> The original presentation and article appeared in Ukrainian. It was translated from the Ukrainian by Olenka Hanushevska Galadza and edited and annotated by Rev. Stephen Wojcichowsky.

<sup>2</sup> “Ontological” is the adjectival form of “ontology” which derives from the Greek for “the study of being.” It is formed from the Greek words *ōn* (meaning “being, existing, essence”) and the multidimensional term *lógos* (meaning “word, speech, statement, discourse, account; also “reason” or “rationality”). Christian ontology explores our creation by God and what it means to be a human person. Eastern Christianity places great emphasis on the fact that ours is not a static existence; rather it stresses the dynamic reality that we are in the process of becoming. And that process is expressed in the desire (placed within us by God) for relationship – with others, the world, and especially with God.

Without repeating the content of the *Catechism* itself, it is worth mentioning four attributes, selected to characterize all of the Church's prayer: it is Trinitarian and ecclesial<sup>3</sup>, while also having a cosmic<sup>4</sup> and eschatological<sup>5</sup> character. These are the major characteristics of the great universal liturgical drama. The Prayer of the Church is Trinitarian because, like all things in the history of salvation, it begins with the Father, Who sends his Son in order to gift us with the Holy Spirit, so that we, restored and enlivened in the Holy Spirit, could be returned to the embrace of the Father. It is ecclesial because the human person – as individual and as community – comes to know God's love, receives it with awe and gratitude, and empowered by the strength of the Holy Spirit, responds with love in return. The prayer of the Church has a radiant character because it does not take place in a vacuum, but in the midst of the created world, which has been given to humanity as a sacrament, as a reflection of God's strength, wisdom, and beauty. Finally, it has an eschatological character because although the path of a person's return to God can be wrought with great trials and requires courageous hope, it is precisely in the communal and individual prayer of the Church that the person is able to look forward and experience that fullness to which we aspire, in which God will be “all in all.”

In light of what has been said, we see that unity in the Church's prayer means that the meeting of the person with God and union with Him takes place in all of the Church's prayer, in all of its dimensions, in all of its circumstances: whether it be the Divine Liturgy, or the sacraments; whether in a blessing, or prayer before an icon; whether in a church, or in the family; whether in the Sign of the Holy Cross, or in keeping the fast, and so on.

Regarding diversity, the *Catechism* demonstrates that the prayer of the Church reflects the various dimensions in which it takes place. The first dimension is that of community, because we are called to community and it is in community, of family and parish that we live out our Christian life. That is why [this section] begins with a presentation on the Divine Liturgy as the highest point of communal prayer in the Church, where the nature of the Church as the Body of Christ and temple of the Holy Spirit is most clearly seen. This is followed by a presentation on all the other sacraments, through which the church community is built and grows: it gives birth to new members in a holy font through the Holy Mysteries of Baptism and Chrismation and nourishes them with the All-Holy Eucharist, the meal of the Body and Blood of Christ. The Church heals the spiritual and physical illnesses of its members and spiritually guides its children through the Holy Mysteries of Repentance and Anointing of the Sick, consecrates to the ministry of spiritual and physical fatherhood and motherhood, and to other ministries to the community through the Holy Mysteries of Marriage and Holy Orders, as well as other consecrations. Through a constellation of many different blessings and sanctifications, the Church teaches us to be open to God's life-giving presence and power in all instances and aspects of daily life.

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<sup>3</sup> “Ecclesial” which derives from the Greek word for “church” (*ekklesia*) means “of or relating to the Church as a whole.” As such, our prayer always has a communal dimension whether we pray by ourselves or not.

<sup>4</sup> “Cosmic” stems from the Greek term for “pertaining to the whole world of creation, that is, the universe.” The cosmic dimension of prayer means that the world which God created, and saw to be good, becomes a “means of our communication with God” (*Catechism*, par. 341).

<sup>5</sup> “Eschatological” is the adjectival form of “eschatology” which concerns the theology of the end times, or the completion of time which inaugurates the coming of the Kingdom of God in fullness. Literally, the term derives from the study of the “last things” (*ta eschata*). It includes teaching on death, judgment, the end of the world, the Second Coming of Christ, the afterlife (heaven and hell), resurrection and the nature of the resurrected body, and eternal life in light of the merciful love of God.

Another dimension of church prayer which the *Catechism* discusses arises from the embodiment of this church community in a concrete temporal, spatial, and cultural context. Through the prayer of the Church, which accompanies the times of day and the weekly and yearly cycles, these cycles are transformed into a time of grace which supports us on the path to salvation. Our Church adorns the seasons and feasts of the church year, as well as all of the spatial circumstances of church prayer, in the exquisite vestments of its rich spiritual cultural heritage, in order to glorify the Lord with all its talents and bring forth the fruits of His grace.

The *Catechism* does not neglect a third dimension of church prayer: personal prayer, that is, the prayer offered in particular by every Christian. For only that member of the Church who is nourished by daily and constant personal prayer, can be a living member of the church Body – a member who lives in Christ and Christ in him. The teaching on personal prayer also includes that which is written in the first section of the *Catechism* regarding frequent personal reading of Holy Scripture.

### **The Method of Explaining Liturgical Actions in the *Catechism***

In the second section of the *Catechism*, the authors were presented with greater challenges than in other sections, in choosing a way to explain various aspects and features of church prayer. Almost every liturgical reality can be explained on at least four levels: historical, dogmatic, symbolic, and moral. It would certainly be worth giving expression to all four of these dimensions in a manual on liturgics. However, the *Catechism* as a rule avoided purely historical or more subjective symbolic explanations; rather, it provided dogmatic or moral explanations. The dogmatic explanations demonstrate how individual prayers, songs, rituals and even entire services flow out of the faith of the Church, and express and simultaneously form it; the moral explanations show how these liturgical actions help us make our entire life more Christ-like. However, instead of formulating theories here, the method used in the *Catechism* of explaining Divine services can be demonstrated and commented on, in the concrete example of the explanation of the Divine Liturgy.

### **Explanation of the Divine Liturgy**

The presentation on the Divine Liturgy, as on all the other liturgical actions in the *Catechism*, could not, of course, be exhaustive. However, in its selection, whether it be about the subjects to be explained, or the explanations themselves, the *Catechism* gives examples of the theologically and spiritually rich content of various integral aspects of church prayer, without much repetition of the same or similar content that appears in various aspects of the Church's prayer life. For example, from all the prayers of the clergy said before the iconostasis at the beginning of the service, only the prayer imploring their purification and strengthening for the given service was selected, in order to emphasize that the Sacramental Mystery<sup>6</sup> is accomplished not by their own strength and holiness, but rather, by God's. In the same way, not all of the vesting prayers are mentioned, only the prayer while being clothed in the *sticharion*<sup>7</sup>, which indicates the minister to be the image both of Christ the Bridegroom of the Church, and of [the Church] the Bride of

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<sup>6</sup> The sacraments in the Eastern Churches are called "Holy Mysteries." To render the Ukrainian words *Тайнство* (*Tainstvo*) or *Тайна* (*Taina*) the term "Sacramental Mystery" is used here instead of the more frequently used term "Sacrament." Where the phrase is *Святі Тайни* (*Sviati Taiiny*) we use the term "Holy Mysteries."

<sup>7</sup> The *sticharion* (Greek) or *stichar* (Ukrainian *стухар*) is the first vestment put on by the clergy over their basic clerical robe. It is usually white or of a light colour, except during funerals and fast times when it could be dark red.

Christ<sup>8</sup>. In the explanations of some of the parts of the Liturgy (for example, the cutting out of the Lamb and particles [from the bread of offering]), it is difficult to omit the purely rubrical instructions, but even here, the *Catechism* attempts to enrich them with texts from the Bible and writings of the Holy Fathers.

The *Catechism* focuses particular attention on the texts that point to further explanation. For example, through the words: “The *Proskomidia*<sup>9</sup> leads the community of the faithful into the Divine Liturgy,” – the *Catechism* offers the basic view that the Prothesis is not a private matter for the priest alone, nor that it is simply a preparation of the gifts, but rather an opportunity for everyone present to prepare for the Eucharistic service. In the same way, the *Catechism* explains actions that are usually not explained; for example, the priest incenses not only the altar, all the icons, and the church, but also all the people because they bear the image of God.

Understanding the theological meaning of the Divine Liturgy is often made difficult with the large number and variety of prayers and rituals that comprise it. That is why the *Catechism* presents the basic concepts which reveal the unity of the whole Liturgy, and also the structure and dynamic of its separate parts. The unity of the Divine Liturgy unfolds in the relationship of its two basic parts: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. This relationship is based on the fact that the Word and the Sacramental Mystery complete each other: Christ makes Himself our nourishment in the form of the Word and in the form of His Eucharistic Body and Blood, because His Word gives direction and meaning to our life, and in the reception of Christ's Body and Blood we receive not only the strength to live according to His Word, but also to receive the fullness of God's life – the fullness of that to which we aspire, of that for which we were created.

The *Catechism* explains that these two parts of the Liturgy have a parallel structure: the Church comes together in wonderment of the fullness of the kingdom to which it aspires, leaving behind all that is superfluous in favour of this “only one thing that is necessary.”<sup>10</sup> But having caught up the whole world in its prayer, the Church proclaims its readiness to accept Christ both in Word and in the Sacramental Mystery, receives Him in Communion, and asks for God's blessing to bring forth life's fruits that are worthy of this Communion.

In explanations of separate prayers and rituals of the Liturgy, the *Catechism* illustrates: 1) how the Liturgy is the Teacher of prayer (for example, in the order and content of the petitions of the Litany of Peace<sup>11</sup>); 2) how the Liturgy teaches us to understand Holy Scripture (expressing in the

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<sup>8</sup> The bishop, priest and deacon all say the same prayer while putting on the sticharion. It includes the words: The Lord ... has placed on me a crown as a bridegroom, and has adorned me with jewels as a bride.”

<sup>9</sup> The *Proskomidia* (literally “offering”) occurs at the table of preparation (or *proskomidijnyk*) after the vesting of the clergy at the beginning of the Divine Liturgy. The table is located to the left (north) side of the altar. At this time the bread and wine are prepared by the clergy and servers in a specified manner with prescribed prayers – usually done quietly. They will be brought in procession to the altar later during the Divine Liturgy. NOTE: instead of *Proskomidia*, the official *liturgikon* (Clergy Service Book of the Divine Liturgy) of our Church uses the term *Prothesis* (literally “setting forth”) which is the preferred term of liturgical scholars because of its greater accuracy.

<sup>10</sup> See Luke 10:42.

<sup>11</sup> The first series of petitions of the Divine Liturgy (the word “litany” means “supplication”). In Ukrainian it is called the *Myrna Ektenia*. The word *myr* has a dual meaning: “peace” and “world.” Hence, we have the Litany of Peace for the World, or Litany of Universal Peace.

antiphons the faith that all the promises of the Old Testament have their fulfillment in Christ); and 3) [how the Liturgy] teaches us to see our life as a pilgrimage towards heavenly glory (in following the Holy Gospel during the Small Entrance under the direction of the priest<sup>12</sup>), where we have already been able to dwell in God's grace (which we then express in the hymn of praise before the face of God: "Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy and Immortal, have mercy on us"). The *Catechism* shows that the Liturgy teaches us to receive the Word, proclaimed in the Epistle, Gospel, and homily<sup>13</sup>, not as a word about God, but as the Word of the Living God [spoken to us], and having received the Word into our hearts, to ask God's help to be able to live it.

Speaking of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the *Catechism* emphasizes that the Christian community approaches the Eucharistic feast on the one hand, having put aside all earthly cares (as we sing in the Cherubic Hymn), in order to receive our one King and Lord; and on the other hand, emphasizing the community's unity of faith (communally proclaimed in the Symbol of Faith<sup>14</sup>), and love (with the Holy Kiss of Peace).

The *Catechism* examines and explains, in particular detail, the *Anaphora*<sup>15</sup>, the Eucharistic prayer. Although it is the core prayer of the entire service, most of the faithful hear only a few isolated phrases of it, since it is usually read quietly. The unity of the entire Eucharistic prayer shines through the theme of the Father who so loved the world who, for the salvation of the world, gave His Only-Begotten Son who, in turn, gave Himself, his Body and Blood, in the form of bread and wine during the Mystical Supper.<sup>16</sup> In response to this gift and because of the

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<sup>12</sup> In some parish communities the entire congregation takes part in the procession with the Holy Gospel Book.

<sup>13</sup> Since the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), the ancient term "homily" has been used in preference to "sermon." A homily is a specific teaching that expands the message of the Scripture readings. It relates the Scripture's message to "real life" and assists the listeners to incorporate the Gospel into their Christian living. Its style is more in the form of a "speaking with" (the literal meaning of the Greek word). A sermon, by contrast, is a talk on any aspect of Christian doctrine for the purpose of providing religious instruction or instilling moral behaviour. It may or may not relate to the readings, and is usually more in the form of a "speaking to" (its Latin root means "talk" or "discourse").

<sup>14</sup> As a prayer, the Creed is called the "Symbol of Faith." By using the word "symbol" we mean that the Creed not only expresses what we believe about God, it also leads us into the very mystery of divine reality....which is what a symbol does (it makes the divine reality present).

<sup>15</sup> *Anaphora* is the Greek word for "lifting up." This is the great prayer of thanksgiving at the heart of the Divine Liturgy. Structurally and thematically it can be traced to the prayer that our Lord pronounced at the Mystical ("Last") Supper. The *Anaphora* is preceded by an introductory dialogue after the Creed, beginning with "Let us stand well ... to offer in peace the holy oblation." The anaphora as such begins with the words, "It is right and just to sing of you, to bless you, to praise you..." Its conclusion is the final "Amen" after the priest's exclamation, "And grant that with one voice and one heart we may glorify and sing the praises..." For the full text of the *Anaphora* of St. Basil the Great, see pages 3 to 9 of the *Catechism*.

<sup>16</sup> Most Eastern Christians use the term "Mystical Supper" for what the Christian West calls the "Last Supper." The word "last" implies that something once happened is now over. "Mystical" reflects the inner meaning and presence of the immeasurable greatness of God's salvation. During the *Anaphora*, the priest prays: "Remembering, therefore, this salutary commandment [to eat and to drink], and all that was done for us: the cross, the tomb, the resurrection on the third day, the ascension into heaven, the sitting at the right hand, and the second and glorious coming ... We offer to You, Yours of Your own, in behalf of all and for all." To this we respond: "We sing of You, we bless You, we thank You, O Lord, and we pray to You, our God." Although these events occurred in time, they have eschatological [see note 5] significance because we mortals, who are bound by time and space, dare to enter into the eternal life given to us through Christ's saving actions. For this reason, before receiving the Holy Eucharist, we humbly say: "Accept me this day, O Son of God, as a partaker of Your Mystical Supper." Here "mystical" can also mean "hidden" or "secret." In the face of persecution, the early Christians likely used it in that sense – a remnant of which remains in the same prayer, "I will not tell the mystery to Your enemies."

commandment of Christ, the Church offers the gift of itself, also in the form of bread and wine, and asks, together with the Mother of God and all the saints, that through the descent of the Holy Spirit on those present and on the gifts, this meal of bread and wine become the meal of the Body and Blood of Christ, the renewal and continuation of the Mystical Supper.

The *Catechism* draws attention to two prayers of preparation for the Holy Meal. One is the “Our Father,” in which we confess our unity in Christ in which we have accepted our adoption by God as His sons and daughters. Also, we confess our unity with each other, because together we cry out to our common Father. Both of these unities are a gift without which we would not dare approach the Eucharist, and at the same time, a challenge, that our life be worthy of this gift. In the same way, we respond to the invitation “Holy Things for the Holy,” by saying: “One is Holy, one is Lord...,” – knowing that we can approach this Sacred Meal<sup>17</sup> only with the power of Christ’s holiness, bestowed upon us, and that we are also responsible for remaining in Christ’s holiness, which is a condition of Communion.

One of the basic ways in which the *Catechism* comments on liturgical action is by using quotations from the Holy Fathers, citations that typically can serve as starting points for further development of commentary. For example, commenting on Communion, the *Catechism* offers an uplifting, inspired text of St. Maximos the Confessor:

[Communion] transforms into itself those who worthily partake of it, making them similar to that good which is [their] source by means of grace and participation. They lack nothing of this good that is possible and can be attained by human beings. Therefore, they are and can be called gods by adoption through grace because all of God entirely fills them and leaves no part of them empty of his presence.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, the conclusion of the commentary on the Liturgy can serve as an example of “moral teaching.” The *Catechism* instructs:

Just as the apostles did on the day of Pentecost, so the faithful carry this gift of new life into the world. “In peace” the Church of Christ began her prayer, by his peace—his blessing—she was enriched, and with his peace she goes out into the world: “Let us go forth in peace.” ... The Divine Liturgy *today* has ended, but it continues in the everyday life of the faithful as their service in the world, as “the liturgy after the Liturgy.”<sup>19</sup>

It would appear that the *Catechism* has devoted very considerable attention to commenting on the Divine Liturgy: it comprises 50 of the *Catechism*’s 1000 entries, to which 15 more entries could be added about the Eucharist in the chapter on the Holy Mysteries. However, such an in-depth study of this topic is without doubt justified by the fact that this sacramental mystery occupies the central place in the life and thinking of our Church, and also by the fact that before us stands a weighty directive – that of rediscovering the authentic Eastern Christian theoretical and practical theological understanding of the place of this sacramental mystery in our lives.

To conclude this general overview of the second section of the *Catechism*, and the explanation of the Divine Liturgy in particular, I would like to express my conviction that, the *Catechism* is far

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<sup>17</sup> The word used in Ukrainian is *Tpaneza* (*Trapeza*) which has the double meaning of “meal” and “altar.”

<sup>18</sup> *Christ Our Pascha – The Catechism of the Ukrainian Catholic Church*, par. 388; Maximos the Confessor, *Mystagogy*, chap. 21.

<sup>19</sup> *Christ Our Pascha – The Catechism of the Ukrainian Catholic Church*, par. 391-392.

from exhaustive in its explanations (by nature of the genre itself). Nonetheless, for further catechetical and theological work in the UGCC, the *Catechism* in its entirety is undoubtedly a good foundation and positive guide. That the *Catechism* still has some undeveloped areas, that there are many questions that are left unanswered – this is the challenge for us: catechists, priests, theologians, liturgists, and for every Christian: that in 7-10 years, a second edition of the *Catechism* be published, completed and improved by our common experience of growth in the faith, in prayer, and in the grace-filled life of the Church.