

“Bless Master”: The Celebrants of the Divine Liturgy

Theme

Christ is the true celebrant of the Divine Liturgy. When we gather together for worship, we gather as a holy assembly joining with the saints and angels in their worship in heaven.

Outline

‘Bless Master’

Christ the Master

The Servants of the Lord

The Holy Ones

Concelebration

Scripture References

Psalm 50.17 (51.15)¹

Matthew 18.20

1 Corinthians 1.2

1 Corinthians 3.9

Ephesians 5.20–21

Hebrews 8.1–2

Hebrews 12

Glossary

Concelebration: The celebration of the Divine Liturgy by the whole assembly of the Lord. (Often used in a more limited sense to describe multiple priests celebrating.)

Quote

Wherever the bishop appears, there let the people be; even as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.

—St Ignatius *Epistle to the Smyrnæans*

Resources

The Heavenly Banquet: Understanding the Divine Liturgy; Fr Emmanuel Hatzidakis

The Divine Liturgy: A Commentary in Light of the Fathers; Priestmonk Gregorios

¹ References from the Greek Bible; differing Hebrew Bible references are noted in parentheses.

The Opening Proclamation

Lifting his orarion [stole] with the three fingers of his right hand, the deacon says aloud:

Deacon: Bless, Master.

The priest kisses the Gospel Book, lifts it with both hands, and lowers it, making with it the sign of the cross over the antiminsion [altar cloth] and saying with the fear of God:

Priest: Blessed is the kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,
now and ever and unto ages of ages.

People: Amen.

The priest replaces the Gospel Book on the antiminsion.

Extended Edition E-mail

Scriptures References

*Psalm 50.17–19 (51.15–17) NETS*²

O Lord, my lips you will open,³

and my mouth will declare your praise,

because if you had wanted sacrifice, I would have given it;

with whole burnt offerings you will not be pleased.

Sacrifice to God is a broken spirit;

a broken and humbled heart God will not despise.

Hosea 1 NETS

I am including this for background to the 1 Peter passage below.

A word of the Lord that came to Hosea the son of Beeri in the days of Kings Uzziah and Jotham and Ahaz and Hezekiah of Judah and in the days of King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel.

The beginning of the word of the Lord in Hosea. And the Lord said to Hosea, “Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and children of whoredom, for the land in committing whoredom will commit whoredom⁴ from behind the Lord.” And he went and took Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him⁵ a son.

And the Lord said to him, “Call his name Jezreel, for in yet a little while I will also avenge the blood of Jezreel on the house of Jehu, and I will turn away the kingdom of the house of Israel. And it shall be on that day, I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Iezrael.”

And she conceived again and bore a⁶ daughter. And he said to him, “Call her name Not Pitied, for I will not any longer have pity on the house of Israel, but setting myself in opposition, I will oppose them. But I will have pity on the sons of Judah, and I will save them by the Lord, their God, and I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by chariots or by horses or by horsemen.”

² New English Translation of the Septuagint (proper names standardized.)

³ Other versions read “open my lips” as a petition instead of a statement.

⁴ Semitic languages repeat the same word for emphasis.

⁵ Note this word.

⁶ Note the text does not say she bore *him* a son.

And she weaned Not Pitied and conceived again and bore a⁷ son. And he said, “Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people and I am not your ‘I am.’⁸”

And the number of the sons of Israel was like the sand of the sea, which shall not be measured nor numbered, and it shall be, in the place where it was said to them, “You are not my people,” they too shall be called, “sons of a living god.” And the sons of Judah and the sons of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall set up for themselves one realm, and they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

There’s quite a bit more I want to include from Hosea, but this isn’t a study on Hosea. We won’t be meeting next week. If you like, finish this story in chapters 2 and 3 and read the rest of the book while consulting cross references.

Daniel 7.9–10 NETS (Theodotion⁹)

I [Daniel] kept watching
until thrones were set,
 and an Ancient of Days sat,
and his clothing was white like snow,
 and the hair of his head was like pure wool;
his throne was a flame of fire;
 its wheels¹⁰ were burning fire.
A stream of fire drew in before him.¹¹
A thousand thousands were serving him,
 and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him.
A court sat in judgment,
 and books were opened.

Matthew 18.20 ESV¹²

For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.

⁷ Let the reader understand.

⁸ Woah, I hadn’t noticed this before. From Hebrew this is usually translated “I am not yours” (ESV footnote), but the Greek translation here is quite strong. I AM is the covenant name of God as revealed in Exodus 3.

⁹ NETS includes two textual traditions for the Prophecy of Daniel. Theodotion’s version is the one used by the Church on Great and Holy Saturday.

¹⁰ In Christian tradition the ‘wheels’ are associated with the choir of heavenly powers known as ‘thrones’. See also Ezekiel 1.

¹¹ Or “issued from him” in other versions.

¹² English Standard Version

Romans 1:7 ESV

To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:
Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:2–3 ESV

To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:
Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 3.9 ESV

For we are God's fellow workers¹³. You are God's field, God's building.

Ephesians 2.1–10 ESV

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

Ephesians 5.15–21 ESV

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

¹³ We get the word 'synergy' (working together) from this Greek word.

1 Thessalonians 3.1–3 ESV

Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, and we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s coworker¹⁴ in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this.

1 Thessalonians 3.11–13 ESV

Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

2 Thessalonians 1.5–12 ESV

This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

There’s a lot of judgment language here, but in the talk I reference these passages as describing worship in the Divine Liturgy. Why? Well, as Metropolitan Anthony Bloom says of prayer, specifically our experience of the absence of God in prayer,

[An important thing to remember] is that a meeting face to face with God is always a moment of judgment for us. We cannot meet God in prayer or in meditation or in contemplation [or, I would add, in the Divine Liturgy] and not be either saved or condemned. I do not mean this in major terms of eternal damnation or eternal salvation already given and received, but it is always a critical moment, a crisis. “Crisis” comes from the Greek and means ‘judgment’. To meet God face to face in prayer is a critical moment in our lives, and thanks be to Him that He does not always present Himself to us when we wish to meet Him, because we might not be able to endure such a meeting.... God is

¹⁴ See the note in the NET (New English Translation) for a discussion of textual variants.

merciful; He does not come in an untimely way. He gives us a chance to judge ourselves, to understand, and not to come into his presence at a moment when it would mean condemnation.

Remember, justification and judgment are setting things in the right or correct order. The same principle is true in the Mystery of Repentance, we judge ourselves, we correct our errors, and set ourselves in order now with God's grace, so as not to be judged on that final day.

Hebrews 8.1–2 ESV

Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister¹⁵ in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man.

Hebrews 12.1–2 ESV

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12.22–24 ESV

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the church¹⁶ of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

1 Peter 2.9–10

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Look up the cross-references for this verse on the [ESV website](#)¹⁷; were I to include them all, this handout would be twice as long. I included the Hosea passage above though as God's story in Hosea is not well-enough known. The prophets frequently showed spiritual realities in quite dramatic ways.

¹⁵ The Greek word here is λειτουργός, liturgist.

¹⁶ Footnote reading of ESV. Main text uses 'assembly'. Both translate Greek ἐκκλησία.

¹⁷ Also available wherever fine cross-references are collected.

Jude 14 ESV

It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones...”

More Quotes

When Thou didst fulfill Thy dispensation for our sakes, uniting the terrestrials with the celestials, Thou didst ascend in glory, O Christ our God, inseparable in space, but constant without separation¹⁸, and crying unto Thy beloved, I am with you, and no one shall be against you.

—Kontakion of the Ascension

O God-beloved faithful, do not stand as a stranger in the celebration this dreaded Mystery, taking place for you!

—Protopresbyter Konstantinos Kallinicos (as quoted in *The Heavenly Banquet: Understanding the Divine Liturgy*)

More Resources

Beginning to Pray; Metropolitan Anthony Bloom

¹⁸ Note the correspondence with the exclamation “Christ is in our midst!” “He is and ever shall be!” which we begin to use at the Feast of the Ascension.