

17. GOD SPEAKS TO US (continued)

After we hear the reading from the letters of the Apostles, we prepare to hear God's Word in the Holy Gospel. First the reader



announces the coming of God to us by singing "**Alleluia.**" The **Alleluia** is a joyful song of praise to God. The word "**Alleluia**" is also used as a sign of the presence of God. Whenever we sing "Alleluia," we announce that **God** is here with us. Where else in the Divine Liturgy do you find "Alleluia" used? What important act is happening when "Alleluia" is sung later on, near the end of the Eucharist?

The priest also censures the Church at this time. The censuring of the Church is performed before or after important acts. It is a sign for us to **prepare for the things that will follow** or the things which have been **transformed (changed)** by God. List here some of the important moments when censuring is performed.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

The Prayer before the Gospel

Just before the deacon or priest reads the Gospel lesson, he says a short prayer, asking God to open our minds and hearts to His Word. Here is the beginning of that prayer:

"Illumine our hearts, O Master who lovest mankind, with the pure light of Thy divine knowledge.

Open the eyes of our mind to the understanding of Thy Gospel teachings . . ."

The Gospel Reading

The priest comes out with the **Holy Gospel**. We will now hear the words of Jesus Christ, and we sing to Him: "**Glory to Thee, O Lord, glory to Thee.**"

There is a special Gospel lesson for every Sunday and every feast day. You may already have studied many of these. Write here the passage for this Sunday's Gospel reading: _____ Now, look up the passage in your Bible, and in a few words, tell what it is about:

After the Gospel reading, we again sing "Glory to Thee, O Lord . . ." and prepare to hear the sermon.

The Sermon

The **sermon** is a very important part of the Liturgy of the Word. During the sermon, the

priest or bishop (or someone to whom he gives permission) explains to us the meaning of the lessons we have just heard. The words of the Epistle or Gospel are explained to us. The sermon tells us what we must do to put these words of the Scripture into practice in our daily lives. The priest tells us how we can live as good children of God by following God's Word.

The **Liturgy of the Word** is now completed. The whole Church has taken part in this section of the Divine Liturgy. A layman has read the Epistle lesson. A deacon (or priest) has read the Gospel lesson. And a priest or bishop has preached the sermon, telling us what these lessons mean to us today.

The first half of the Divine Liturgy is now nearing its completion. The first part is called the **Liturgy of the Catechumens**, because it was the time when the catechumens of the Early Church were allowed to come and learn about the teachings of Jesus Christ in the worship service. But now at this moment, the catechumens were asked to leave. Only the faithful — the baptized members — could be present for the Eucharist and receive Holy Communion. So a prayer was said by the whole Church for the catechumens and then they were asked to depart. Find these prayers, or this call to the catechumens to depart, in your prayer book. In some churches, other special prayers or litanies for the living or for the departed are also said at this time before the departure of the catechumens. Today, these prayers for the catechumens are still said to remind us of what an important privilege it is to be a member of God's Church and to receive Jesus Christ, who gives us His life, in Holy Communion.