

18. WE BRING OUR GIFTS TO GOD

Have you ever had the problem of trying to buy a gift for someone who really seemed to have everything? Sometimes we have such a problem when we try to think of a nice gift to give to our mother or dad. Not only do they seem to have most things they need, but they even give us everything we have — perhaps even the money which we were going to use to buy their gift. Sometimes, the only solution is to give them something we can make ourselves, something that has required our time and energy and love. Most importantly, we want them to know that we are giving this gift because we want to show our real love for them.

We have even a greater problem when we want to show our love for God. The easiest way seems to be to give Him a gift. But what kind of gift could we ever give to God? God Himself has given us everything we have, even our lives and our ability to love! No matter what we want to offer to God, we know that it has already been given to us by Him in the first place.

But God does not want anything from us, except our love. The best gift we can offer to God is ourselves. We can give God our complete obedience and love; we can give Him the best of all of our thoughts and work by using our minds and hands in a good way.

Now, in the Holy Eucharist, we come to bring this offering of ourselves to God. We come to thank God for all that He has given to us and we come to offer our lives back to

Him in love. But what can we use as a sign of our offering? Sometimes the most simple things are the best, so we use something that is very ordinary — bread, wine, and water.

You perhaps might think that these gifts are really quite meaningless, but they are not. On the contrary, there is a very important reason why bread and wine are chosen to be the signs of our offering to God. Do you know how bread and wine are made? Let's take bread as an example.

Before we can make bread, we need many ingredients: flour, salt, yeast, shortening, eggs, etc., depending on the kind of bread we want. First the flour is made by taking grains of wheat and crushing them very fine. Then the other ingredients are mixed together and yeast is added to change all of these ingredients into dough which will rise and become bread when it is baked. We don't know exactly how it happens, except that a chemical reaction turns our flour mixture into a dough that becomes bread. Much the same thing happens when sugar in the juice of grapes causes it to ferment until it becomes wine. In both cases, a mysterious change took place which we can only partially explain.

Now, when we eat or drink bread and wine, another kind of change takes place. The food that we eat is taken into our bodies and is changed into our own flesh and blood. Without this kind of change, we could not grow and would not live very long.



Perhaps now, you can begin to see why food, and particularly bread and wine, are used as signs of our offering to God and which later become the food of new life that is given to us by Jesus Christ. Food is a sign of life. When we offer food, we offer life — our own lives to God. This simple food, which can become our own flesh and blood, is changed by the Holy Spirit into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. When we receive Holy Communion, we receive a new kind of food. We receive Jesus Christ and become part of His Body — the Church. We receive in Jesus Christ the food of eternal life.

The Preparation

As we prepare to bring our offering to God, we first pray to Him to make us worthy to offer our thanks to Him. We ask God to make our souls clean from sin so that our offering of ourselves may be a good one. We confess our sins before God so that we may be prepared to receive His Son Jesus Christ in Holy Communion.

The priest now says three prayers silently, in which he confesses our unworthiness before God. Then he censes the sanctuary and

the people as we prepare to bring our gifts to God's Holy Throne. He censes our gifts and prepares them for the procession of our offering. During this time, we are singing the **Hymn of the Cherubim**. We pray to God that we may put aside all our cares of this world, so that we may be prepared to receive Christ our only Lord into our souls and bodies. Look for the Hymn of the Cherubim in your Divine Liturgy books and write it here:



May the Lord God remember all of you Orthodox Christians in His Kingdom always, now and ever and unto ages of ages.

The Offertory Procession and Remembrance

Our **Offering Procession** begins. The priest takes our gifts — the signs of our lives — from the Table of Preparation. He goes out of the deacon's door and makes a procession through the Church and back to the Royal Doors. As he makes this procession, he prays that **God will remember** all of us in His Kingdom. List here the people or groups of people that are remembered as we bring our offering to God's Throne.

This remembrance is very important, for if we want to bring an offering of love to God, we will want to include all men in this gift of love. We will want all men to share in God's love and life in His Kingdom.