



Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk celebrates the first in Lent Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts

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On 17 February 2010, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate Department for external church relations, celebrated the first in Lent Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts at the Church of the "Joy to All the Afflicted" Icon of the Mothers of God. After the Liturgy, he addressed the parishioners with his archpastoral homily:

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"Today we celebrated the first in Lent Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts. The Church instituted this liturgy at the epoch when people took Holy Communion very often, when the liturgy was celebrated every day and all people could partake of the Christ's Holy Gifts. But during Lent repentance was combined with a notion that people should abstain from Holy Communion.

"The Liturgy was cancelled during Lent so that people could concentrate on repentance. The Holy Church did not institute to deprive believers of Holy Communion during the whole week, from Sunday to Saturday, but instituted that they fortify themselves with partaking of Christ's Holy Gifts on Wednesdays and Fridays.

"The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is an evening liturgy. It is combined with Vespers and, according to the Ordo, should be celebrated in the evening. However, practice of the most parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church has brought about celebration of this liturgy in the morning. However, it is clear from prayers and stanzas of Vespers celebrated prior to the liturgy, as well as from prayers recited during the liturgy, that it should have been celebrated in the evening. Certainly, it was celebrated in the evening in old times. Therefore, people did not eat on Lenten Wednesdays and Fridays. Nowadays, people who work and have professional or family duties to fulfill cannot keep this regime physically. To make preparation for Holy Communion easier, celebration of the Liturgy of the Presanctified was transferred to the morning.

"A particular feature of this liturgy is that it lacks the Eucharist, the thanksgiving and prayer for the transubstantiation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. The Liturgy of the Presanctified is a kind of continuation of the Eucharist celebrated on Sunday. The lamb was sanctified for Communion during the liturgy on Sunday and kept on the altar till Wednesday or Friday so that when we come to church on these days we can partake of the Holy Gifts at the Liturgy of the Presanctified.

"Another particular feature of the Liturgy of the Presanctified is that it is focused on our worshipping

Christ. At the full Divine Liturgy all prayers are dedicated to the Eucharist, to the transubstantiation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, while at the Liturgy of the Presanctified prayers are dedicated to worshipping Christ Who has already come and is present in the Holy Gifts.

"The difference is the following. At the full liturgy, bread and wine are on the credence table and then on the altar, and are transubstantiated into the Body and Blood of Christ only towards the end of the liturgy, in the end of the Eucharistic Canon, while at the Liturgy of the Presanctified, the Holy Gifts are on the altar from the beginning. Christ Himself in His fullness is present in the Holy Gifts from the very beginning of the Liturgy of the Presanctified.

"The heart of the Liturgy of the Presanctified is fully expressed in the words of the hymn sung in place of the Cherubic Hymn: "Now the Powers of Heaven with us invisibly do minister. For lo! the King of Glory entereth now. Behold the Mystical Sacrifice, all accomplished, is ushered in. Let us with faith and love draw near, that we may become partakers of life everlasting."

"In this hymn the Church draws our attention first of all to that the heavenly angels pray with us during the liturgy and minister with us. Together with us they stand before God, Who is present among us in His Holy Gifts and Whom we worship.

'Behold the Mystical Sacrifice, all accomplished, is ushered in.' Why 'all accomplished'? Because this sacrifice has been accomplished and offered on the preceding Sunday, and we do not offer it now, but worship it with reverence and awe.

"Why 'ushered in'? It is rather difficult to understand this word. It is derived from the Greek language and refers to an ancient Roman custom according to which soldiers with spears in their hands surrounded the emperor when he appeared before people as bodyguards surround very important persons nowadays. The soldiers held spears and, in case of danger, they pointed them to the crowd, thus defending their patron. So, this hymn, like the Cherubic hymn, picturesquely tells us that Christ, Who 'is invisibly up-borne by the Angelic Hosts,' is God, Who is invisibly surrounded by the Cherubim and the Seraphim, who stand in front of Him like bodyguards. We, together with the angels, the Cherubim and the Seraphim, stand before God, worship Him and partake of the Holy Gifts of Christ.

"The Liturgy of the Presanctified is a very special liturgy imbued with Lenten mood. Even the prayers read by the priest that you, regrettably, do not hear, are dedicated first of all to the ascetic deed of Lent. In these prayers we ask God to help us overcome our passions, to repent of our sins and to vouchsafe that Lent be a time of true repentance and true improvement for us.

"The Holy Church calls us to begin Lenten time in light. During Lent, let us try to come to church as often

as possible, to listen attentively to the words of penitential prayers, to partake of Holy Communion on Wednesdays and Fridays during the Liturgy of the Presanctified so that Lent becomes a time when we unite with the Lord even closer and, through repentance, prepare ourselves to meet with Christ suffering on Holy Week, with Christ Who is risen on the day of Holy Pascha."

Source: <https://mospat.ru/en/news/57702/>