



CATECHETICAL SERMON ON THE DIVINE LITURGY #13 –THE WATER FROM THE SIDE OF CHRIST

Adding water to wine was a widespread habit in the Greco-Roman world, even among Jews. The first mention of adding hot water to the Cup in the Liturgy is very old, coming in sixth century Byzantium. Needless to say, adding hot water to the chalice was not necessitated by the chalice freezing—not something likely in a Mediterranean climate--it was simply a matter of taste, like putting sugar and cream in coffee, until the liturgical commentators latched onto it in the eleventh century when they saw it as an image of the side of Christ being opened by a spear with blood and water coming out. After the pouring of the *zeon/teplota*, the clergy at the Holy Table receive a portion of the Holy Bread and recited a prayer for personal preparation before consuming the Gift. After consuming the Bread they return to drink from the Cup.

From this point to the end of the service there is a very wide variety in all the prayers that accompany these actions between the various recensions (local editions of the text) in the Byzantine Church. And since the time between the elevation of the Bread and the actual distribution to the congregation is now noticeably longer than it used to be (due in part, as said above) to the addition of Scriptural verses and prayers as the various tasks of breaking the Bread, mixing the Cup--both with the hot water and then the Bread itself--setting aside the dish and replacing the cover(s) on the Cup, as well as reciting votive prayers, a second invitation to Communion was needed. The lead priest hands the mixed Cup to the deacon who takes it to the center of the royal doors and exclaims, “With fear of God and with faith, approach!” And since the original communion psalm has been drastically reduced, other chants were incorporated during the distribution to the people, usually popular hymns today.

The question arises, why does the deacon invite the people to Communion this second time, and not the presiding priest who gave the first invitation with his exclamation, “Holy Things for the holy”? At this point the deacon (or the priest if there is no deacon) is technically not inviting people to Communion, but simply signaling the beginning of the distribution to the laity (notice that the clergy have already received Communion), in line with the deacon’s responsibility to keep order as reflected in his lines, “Let us pray to the Lord,” or “Stand aright;” or as here, “Approach!” The deacon is probably holding the Cup because, in an earlier era, before the present practice of mixing the Holy Bread into the Cup of Wine came about, the people received Holy Communion under both forms separately--the bishop or presiding priest handing out the Bread and the deacon offering the Cup to the people for their participation.