

At the same time, we cannot worship God if we focus our attention exclusively on the vestments, the rubrics, or the altar servers. The externals of our worship are designed to help us focus on God; they are not objects of attention, nor should they distract or pre-occupy us.

At every Liturgy we are invited to “lift up our hearts.” Do what the Liturgy asks. Lift up your heart. Listen to the Liturgy. Recognise yourself as an important part in making the Liturgy “work.” Then begin - and continue - to *live it* every day.

Worship is not an “option” for Christians. We were created to worship our Creator. That is why Jesus Christ so often emphasised the importance of *gathering* as the faith community: “Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, I am there, in their midst.”

From time to time, the following comment is heard: “The Liturgy is boring.” It’s been suggested that *formal* worship “puts people to sleep” and that the “services are repetitious and lacking in variety and excitement.” And, of course, the classic line - “the Liturgy is too long” - surfaces with remarkable frequency.

There are those who would suggest that the Liturgy be “reformed.” This, of course, betrays a basic understanding of the Liturgy itself. The Liturgy is designed to reform us, to impart an attitude of awe, to offer a glimpse of God’s Kingdom here and now, and to create a bond or *common union* with God and those with whom we worship.

For God’s grace to come during the Liturgy you must be concentrated and untroubled.

- Elder Amphilochios Makris

What grandeur is the Divine Liturgy! When God looks upon His humble minister, how much does he feel the majesty of the Liturgy; how much do those who are commemorated profit! How much does God honour man, to descend with the angelic orders in every Liturgy and to nourish man with His all-holy Body and Blood!

With fear and with reverence may you stand in church, for our Christ is present invisibly with the holy angels. The attentive and reverent He fills to the full with grace and blessing; the heedless He censures as unworthy.

- Elder Ephraim of Philotheou Mt Athos

**Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese
of Australia and New Zealand**

2 Bampton Avenue
Illawong NSW 2234
ph: 02 9534 6939
www.antiochian.org.au

DIVINE RITES



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Just what is the purpose of worship? This is an important question which must be answered before one can take the usual complaints seriously. Before saying what worship is we need to consider what worship is *not*.

Misconception #1: “*The Liturgy is supposed to teach us about God.*”

The word *liturgy* means “common work” or “action”. What is this common work? It is the worship of God. The word *worship* means “to give reverence to God.” So Christian worship, educational as it may be, is primarily designed to offer us an opportunity to give something to God - to give our praise, our reverence, and our thanksgiving for all He has given us in our daily lives.

While there is an educational aspect to worship, education is secondary to the offering of praise and thanksgiving.

Misconception #2: “*We’re supposed to ‘get something’ out of the Liturgy.*”

Notice that the focus in this statement is on *us*, rather than on God. It’s as if we, rather than God, were the object of worship. It’s as if we were the reason for gathering together for the Liturgy. But we aren’t; *God* is. In worship, our attention should be on Him. If we don’t “get anything” out of the Liturgy, it may very well be that we failed to “bring something” to it.

Misconception #3: “*I don’t like the way the Liturgy is performed.*”

First of all, the Liturgy is not something to be *performed*. It is a celebration of God’s love and an experience of His Kingdom; the Liturgy is not - nor was it ever designed to be - a performance of Christ’s life, colourful and mystical rites, or ancient rituals. The Liturgy is nothing less than our ascent to God’s presence and our response to His invitation: “Come, let us worship.” This fact makes our attitude of vital importance. If one’s goal is to “enjoy” the service, to “learn” more about Jesus, or to “get something” other than a glimpse of eternal life, one will surely be disappointed. Such persons are focusing on themselves rather than on God.

FOCUS ON GOD

God is the object of our worship. We gather together to praise and thank Him, and to render service to Him so that we might be better equipped to render service to one another. We come before Him in awe, knowing that we are unworthy to be in His presence, but at the same time, recognising that His all-consuming love unites us with Him and with those with whom we worship. We are called to praise God and to give Him glory for the mighty things He has done. We are, above all, to thank God for the salvation He brings us, as well as for those gifts He shares with us in our daily lives.

SUBMIT TO GOD

Worship is a *public*, not a *private* affair. By submitting to God and focusing on Him in worship we also submit to one another. Many are the parishes which wrongly segregate children in a sound proof booth because the adults can’t concentrate on their “private prayers” when babies cry or children act like children are supposed to act. If we have difficulty accepting our relationship with others during our corporate worship, we will never be able to submit to a God who demands so much more than patience with crying infants. *Communion* with God requires a *common union* with the Christian *community*.

The Liturgy is not a time for private prayer or devotions, much less for quiet “reflection.” In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Himself suggests that quiet, private prayer be accomplished in a quiet, private place - a closet if need be. Public worship, however, is the “work” of *all* God’s People who gather “with one mind and one heart and one voice” in praising God.

LAY ASIDE ALL EARTHLY CARES

During the Liturgy we need to keep our minds and hearts on God’s presence. The Liturgy offers renewed hope and vision, not “solutions.” Hence, we do not “bring” our professional, personal or domestic problems to the Liturgy. In fact, the *Cherubic Hymn*, sung at every Divine Liturgy, tells us to do the exact opposite: “Let us now lay aside all earthly cares so that we may receive the King of All...”