

**19a: Liturgical Miscellany<sup>1</sup>**

**Marriage – Funeral & Burial / Memorial – Typica – Molioben / Akathist / Paraklesis – Consecrations and Blessings – Musical Chant**

**Marriage**

Marriage in the Orthodox Church unlike marriage anywhere else in other Christian traditions is exclusively a sacramental service of the Church, marriage itself being conferred by the Church. In the Latin West, marriage is, in the first place, construed by the couple in legally binding vows, subsequently blessed by the Church sacramentally or non-sacramentally in Catholic and Protestant traditions respectively. In the west, the couple are held to confect the marriage as a legal entity before God by the exchange of vows, but in Orthodoxy the vows are absent and Christian marriage is exclusively sacramental, albeit received by the state as a legal contract. The Orthodox marriage service is a combination of two formerly separate rites, that of Betrothal in which rings are blessed and exchanged by the couple and the Crowning in which the couple are crowned in marriage itself. A notable element in this part of the service is the active participation of the Best Man or Bridesmaid as the Marriage Sponsor in the Crowning, who can (but does not have to be) the godfather or godmother in baptism of each partner. This person must be Orthodox and in good standing with the Church. After the Crowning and the readings the couple partake of the Common Cup and then process around the marriage table or icon whilst the choir sing hymns themed on the Martyrs and the Incarnation. The Common Cup reflects a time when the couple would have received Holy Communion after the marriage. Nuptial Liturgies, in some places, are now being restored in the Church. The Crowns are removed on the eighth day but in modern use this usually happens at the end of the marriage itself. A striking difference between Orthodox marriage practice and theology as contrasted with other sacramental traditions concerns the tolerance of divorce and remarriage (up to three marriages) but such subsequent marriages have a shorter penitential preface prior to the Crowning.

**Funerals and Burial / Memorials**

Cremation is not allowed in the Orthodox Church. This reflects the ancient Christian practice of burial based on the belief that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and that to burn it on death is disrespectful. Moreover, cremation destroys any possibility of the sanctification of relics which constitutes an essential aspect of the glorification of saints. The core funeral service has a simple and sober format consisting of psalmody, hymns, canticles, readings and the final absolution and Last Kiss in which the mourners pay their final respects to the reposed before the (open) coffin. The rite is augmented in various ways

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<sup>1</sup> Baptism: see Lecture 12; Eucharist: see Lecture 13; The Horologion: see Lecture 20

for clergy or by the inclusion of memorials before and after the funeral itself and perhaps a funeral Liturgy. In the paschal period, the services are augmented with resurrectional material. The burial after the funeral is a simple act of committal with prayer. Customs such as the inclusion of a cross, a band with the Trisagion hymn on the forehead of the deceased, an icon in the coffin and anointing of the body with holy oil and ashes from the censer and the coffin with holy water and finally burial with kolyva all add to the dignity of the service. Memorial services follow on from the funeral the third day after death, the ninth, the fortieth and the first or third anniversaries. Such memorials or panikhidas are offered with kolyva which consists of boiled wheat, raisins and other fruits by which is signified the resurrection motif of John 12:24 ... *"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain."*

### Typica (Slavic use: Obednitsa)

The Typika is a brief service that is appointed by the Typikon<sup>2</sup> for certain occasions but may also be conducted when a priest or bishop is not present. There are various modifications that are made to this service to incorporate elements from the Divine Liturgy, some of which are designed to be led by laymen; and in some jurisdictions, it can also be a service led by a deacon which includes the distribution of Holy Communion from the Pre-Sanctified Gifts although this form is, as yet, not universally accepted in Orthodoxy. When held in a church, the doors of the iconostasis remain closed and the service is conducted in the nave. According to the Typikon, the Typika is appointed on those days when either there is no Liturgy at all, or there is only a Vespereal Liturgy. The Typika follows the Ninth Hour and contains the Typical Psalms (Psalms 102 and 145) and the Beatitudes that would otherwise have been done as part of the three antiphons of the Liturgy of the Catechumens. The Typika service therefore mirrors the Divine Liturgy before the Anaphora. It is used when a priest is not available or when a worshipper cannot get to a church. It is led by a deacon, subdeacon, reader, chanter, or the eldest experienced layperson present, in that order, unless a bishop or priest determines another leader. There are other Reader services which may be offered in the absence of a priest by a Reader or some other duly authorised person.

### Akathist / Paraklesis / Molieben

An **Akathist** (Greek, akathistos) is a hymn dedicated to a saint, holy event, or one of the persons of the Holy Trinity. The word Akathist itself means "not sitting." The Akathist par excellence is that written in the 6th century to the Theotokos. In its use as part of the Salutations to the Theotokos service (used in the Byzantine tradition during Great Lent), it is often known by its Greek or Arabic names, Chairetismoi and Madayeh, respectively. The

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<sup>2</sup> The Typikon governs the conduct of the services in every respect, both content and manner of serving. A history of developments in the Typikon may be found in Lecture 20 and there are summaries of its application to the Hours and other services of the Church in an Appendix to this E-Quip section of lectures on liturgical theology. A useful springboard for further research may be found here: <http://orthodoxwiki.org/Typikon>

writing of Akathists continues today especially in the Slavic tradition, although not all are widely known nor translated beyond the original language.

A **Paraklesis** is a service of supplication specifically for the living (as opposed to a Memorial Service, which is a supplication for the departed). This service is most often addressed to the Theotokos, but may be used to seek the intercessions of any saint. The distinguishing feature of a Paraklesis is the inclusion of a supplicatory canon to the saint whose intercessions are being sought. A Paraklesis can be served as a stand-alone service or, in a slightly abbreviated form, in conjunction with Vespers. It is appropriate to be served at any time of need.

A **Molieben** (also called a Moleben, service of intercession, or service of supplication) is a supplication prayer service in honour of either our Lord Jesus Christ, the Mother of God, or a particular saint or martyr. It is a Slavic service, but closely related to the Paraklesis service. A Molieben is usually served by an ordained priest, but a layman can also do a Molieben, although in a modified form. It is the custom to celebrate a Molieben service only in honour of a glorified saint.

### Consecrations and Blessings

Within the Euchologion (Greek, Trebnik – Slav – “Book of Needs”) which is used for the occasional services of the Church one may find a vast collection of prayers to consecrate and bless liturgical objects, persons and activities. These assume diverse forms and are continually being written.<sup>3</sup>

### Musical Chant

Surviving **Byzantine chant** manuscripts date from the ninth century, while lectionaries of biblical readings in Ekphonic Notation (a primitive graphic system designed to indicate the manner of reciting lessons from Scripture) begin about a century earlier and continued in use until the twelfth or thirteenth century. Our knowledge of the older period is derived from Church service books, liturgical manuals, patristic writings and medieval histories. Scattered examples of hymn texts from the early centuries of Greek Christianity still exist. Some of these employ the metrical schemes of classical Greek poetry; but the change of pronunciation has rendered those meters largely meaningless, and, except when classical forms were imitated, Byzantine hymns of the following centuries are prose-poetry, unrhymed verses of irregular length and accentual patterns.

Byzantine chant, unlike later Slav chant, is sung in unison with an ison base line note to impart depth. In Orthodox chant universally the basic unit reflecting the theme of the celebration is a poetic hymn in a shorter or longer form. The common term for a short hymn

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<sup>3</sup> Full liturgical glossaries and an index of the liturgical books may be found in the Appendix to this E-Quip section on liturgical theology.

of one stanza, or one of a series of stanzas, is troparion (this may carry the further connotation of a hymn interpolated between Psalm verses). A famous example, whose existence is attested as early as the fourth century, is the Vespers hymn, "Phos Hilaron" ("O Gladsome Light"); another early troparion of note, "O Monogenes Yios" ("Only Begotten Son"), ascribed to Emperor St. Justinian the Great (6<sup>th</sup> C.), figures in the introductory portion of the Divine Liturgy. Perhaps the earliest set of troparia of known authorship are those of the monk Auxentios (first half of the fifth century), attested to in his biography but not preserved in any later Byzantine order of service.

Longer hymns or kontakia (sing. Kontakion) have in practice, and over the centuries, been shortened in parish usage to the equivalent format of the troparion, although the longer original versions of the kontakia, many written by St. Romanos the Melodist, are still published<sup>4</sup> if not extensively used. The Antiochian Church uses a variant of Byzantine Chant.

**Russian Chant** refers to a group of chant traditions used by the Church of Russia and some of its daughter churches, both monophonic and polyphonic, representing influences from multiple sources, both traditionally Orthodox as well as Western. Russian chant is used not only in the Church of Russia, but also in the Churches of Ukraine, Finland, Japan, the OCA and elsewhere. Probably the earliest distinctive variety of chant in use in the regions that came to be known as Russia is Znamenny Chant, a traditionally monophonic (i.e., melodic, non-harmonized) chant derived ultimately from the Byzantine Chant brought to the Rus' by Greek missionaries sent from Constantinople, principally Sts. Cyril and Methodios. Western-style harmonisations eventually came into use in the Russian church via Lvov and Kiev due to the influence of the Roman Catholic Church from Poland, and polyphony became more prevalent in Slav usage. In the Russian church today, these various traditions all remain in use throughout the church as well as in its daughter churches, some in more primitive form than others. There is currently a revival underway in some monasteries and parishes of use of the more ancient forms of chant, particularly Znamenny.

## **Conclusion: Be Blessed**

Each of these liturgical ceremonies—marriage, funerals and burial services, memorials, Akathists, Typica, Moliébens, Parakleses, Consecrations and Blessings and the associated musical chants—has evolved over the centuries to bless many peoples in many different cultures. The presence of God brings blessings to us in all of these significant events in our lives. Thus this "Liturgical Miscellany" has a single theme: Be blessed by the Lord through the Church and throughout your life.

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<sup>4</sup> Archimandrite Ephrem Lash (trans.), *Kontakia: On the Life of Christ* (New York: Harper Collins).

## Homiletics 9

### 19b: Composition and Process

This lecture is a very personal statement of how I, myself, put together either a lecture or a sermon. Whilst recognising important genre differences between the two, the composition and process aspects of arriving at the ‘final product’ is much the same in each case. Where there are differences in approach, these will be specified. I am well aware that assembling and delivering materials is and must be a very personal matter for each teacher and preacher. Although all of us can avoid the same pitfalls, the shape and lineaments of the process are less cleanly defined. For example, divine inspiration for some may come directly and immediately from prayer. For me, this is rarely the case. I pray, then I ruminate (usually overnight in my sleep) and God then seals the final product in the bath or the shower the following morning! I think this process configures to my temperament, that shape of the divine image in me. It cannot be the same for everyone, God forbid! Anyway, there are many other stages before I get to the bathroom!

First, it is necessary to have the topic or the title. It is helpful for this to be within a certain time frame, even if the piece does not form part of a syllabus or thematic programme. As far as is practical, the teacher and preacher needs to have some awareness of where his hearers have been beforehand and where they may be likely to end up afterward. If I am preparing a sermon, the lectionary controls the shape of this process and saves me from idiosyncratic selectivity. Nonetheless, from time to time, each congregation is different both in composition and disposition. Before I jump into the river, I try to look upstream and downstream and gauge the speed and characteristics of the current.

If I am preaching from a text, which is usually the case, unlike a lecture which proceeds from a title or brief, then I will read the text, slowly, carefully and prayerfully two or three times. If I am teaching from a title, I will prayerfully make a list of 5 to 10 key words or phrases that might be associated with this heading—again, prayerfully. However, in each case, once this stage is complete (it may only take 10 – 15 minutes) I set the homiletic task aside and do something else. It may be the next day before I return to the composition, although the process is, I believe, on-going with God in my subconscious. This is a most important point. Much of our most effective preaching and teaching germinates below the waterline of our conscious thinking; or at least that is certainly the case with me. I will often return to the task after a break with a number of ideas floating around in my head. At this point I will list them, not in any particular order and come back to them later.

It must be emphasised that although various things are now taking shape in my mind, I often don't have a clue what will survive the discernment process and what will not. Then, through study and prayer, I wrestle with and expand the most interesting ideas that I think will join the dots between God, myself and the people. I always try and earth this more detailed engagement in something practical, a pearl that my hearers may actually find

useful, challenging and inspiring—not just something to admire. I am not yet at the stage of writing everything down to achieve a finished article. Once the research and wrestling has been done, I wait. I wait for that (hopefully) divinely inspired: “That’s it!” Eureka moment when the writing can actually begin.

Sometimes there may be false start when I think I have something up my sleeve, but it is clearly not what God wants me to say. If I proceed down this false path, then then the composition process becomes increasingly irksome; it just doesn’t feel right. Even if the project is quite well advanced, albeit in an unsatisfactory way, then I will simply stop and erase the file or tear the piece up and shred all its remnants in my mind. Unless and until I get that divine “green light,” I will not start to put pen to paper or characters to hard disk in any final sense. Often, this is the stage when I have to prayerfully “sleep on it” and get in that bath the next morning. I have as yet to be disappointed in this final stage over 33 years of ministry, 20 of those as an Orthodox priest. Of course, if I ever find myself in a waterless desert, there may be a problem! Of course, I could always gaze at a star-filled night sky—my other favourite aid to meditation.

When I get that divine stamp of approval, (and it is very difficult expressing in words the interior state experienced when this happens), then I will begin to write the final product. If I am preaching, then it must be written as a spoken word. If I am teaching, this must always be in view during the composition, but I can afford in that case to be a little more formal, without hopefully being boring!

Writing as one speaks is a very difficult art. Some people have a second stage process during which they rewrite a pre-prepared text, consciously adapting it to the genre of the spoken word. I prefer a different single-stage technique using an old but now very much improved and accurate technology—voice recognition software. As I speak into the microphone headset, I often close my eyes briefly from time to time and prayerfully imagine I am actually delivering the address in front of the congregation or assembly. By this time, I find that the words are flowing quite fluidly, even urgently from my heart and mind and through my fingers. Sometimes I can’t keep up; and that’s a good sign. I would not call myself a prophet, for I most definitely am not that—more of a plodder really, but we should remember that the prophets often experienced God’s Word as an uncontainable, explosive, fiery utterance within them that just had to be let out. Listen to the Prophet Jeremiah:

Then I said, “I will not make mention of Him,  
Nor speak anymore in His name.”  
But His word was in my heart like a burning fire  
Shut up in my bones;  
I was weary of holding it back,  
And I could not. (Jeremiah 20:9)

If we can attain to that experience of openness to God during composition, then it will indeed be God's word that we share with the people, and not our own. Then we shall see fruitfulness. Again and this time, to quote from the prophecy of Isaiah:

For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven,  
And do not return there,  
But water the earth,  
And make it bring forth and bud,  
That it may give seed to the sower  
And bread to the eater,  
So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;  
It shall not return to Me void,  
But it shall accomplish what I please,  
And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10-11)

That is what we want from any teaching or preaching: fruitfulness in God, by God and from God. He will do that when we do our bit as well.

In the final lecture on homiletics next week I shall offer a practical worked example of a sermon prepared and preached by myself highlighting the stages of the process and cross-referenced to these talks.