

## The Address of Bishop Kallistos (Ware) to the 12th All-American Council

## With all our heart, in thanksgiving, let us offer the world back to God

**T**hine own of Thine own, we offer unto Thee, on behalf of all and for all." That is the theme of this Council. The words, as you recall, are spoken by the celebrant when the deacon elevates the gifts of bread and wine immediately following Epiklesis invoking the Holy Spirit. "We offer You," says the celebrant, "Your own gifts from that which is Your own in union with all things and for the sake of all things."

Now there is a complex sentence. Let us unpack it together, looking at the different words of this phrase. First, the word "we." Secondly, the word "offer." Thirdly, the phrase, "Thine own of Thine own." And fourthly, the words "on behalf of all and for all."

**W**e notice first that the text of the Liturgy says, not "I offer" but "we offer." In the supreme offering which we as humans make during the Liturgy, we offer not as isolated individuals, but as persons in relationship. All true offering is interpersonal, dialogic, and corporate. As human persons we are made in the image of God, and that means in the image of God the Holy Trinity, in the image of God Who is not only one, but one in three. We are made in the image of God Who is mutual love. So, there is no true person after the image of the Trinity unless there are at least two persons – or better, three – communicating with each other. That is the basis of the doctrine of the Trinity so far as human personhood is concerned. I need you in order to be myself. And if this is true of all human life, it is true supremely of the Eucharistic offering that we make to God. The Eucharist is, essentially, social. A meal, in a civilized society, is an expression of sharing and solidarity. We break bread with others and we offer them a drink as a way of affirming our openness and affection toward the other. It is worth reflecting in this context on the little known meaning of the word "companion." It comes from the Latin, "com," meaning "with," and "panis," meaning "bread." The one I break bread with is my companion, my comrade, my friend.

The Divine Liturgy takes this natural and spontaneous action of expressing love through eating together, raising it to the level of supernatural grace. The Eucharist is a meal. A meal is social. We humans are in the image of the Trinity; therefore "we" offer, not "I." "We" is the characteristic liturgical word. Scarcely ever in the Divine Liturgy do we use the word "I." Very significantly, the high point of the Liturgy is the Epiklesis, the invocation of the Holy Spirit, in which we say, "we offer, we ask, we pray, we implore." Our model in the Liturgy is the Lord's Prayer. In the Lord's Prayer the word "us" is used five times. The word "our" is used three times. The word "we" is used once. But never in the Lord's Prayer do we find the words, "me," "mine," or "I."

We will recall in this connection a story, I'm sure well known to many of you, told by Dostoevsky in *The Brothers Karamazov*. It is a folk story he had heard of an old woman and an onion. The old woman died, and much to her surprise, for she thought of herself as a respectable old lady, she found herself in a lake of fire. Calling out to her guardian angel she said, "There has been some mistake. I am a very respectable old lady. I should not be here in this lake of fire."

"Ah," said the angel. "Do you ever remember an occasion when you helped someone else?"

She thought for a time. "Yes," she said, "once I was gardening and a beggar came by and I gave him an onion."

"Excellent," said the guardian angel. "I happen to have the onion with me now." So he reached into his vestments and produced it. He began to pull her out of the lake of fire.

But she was not the only person there. When she saw what was happening, she realized the others were crowding around her, hanging on in the hope of being pulled out as well. This alarmed her very much.

"Let go," she said, "let go! It's not you who's being pulled out, it's me. It's not your onion, it's mine."

And when she said, "it's mine," the onion snapped in two and she fell back into the lake of fire and there, so I am told, she still is. Now that is the story. If only she had said, "it's *our* onion," might it not have been strong enough to pull them all out? But in saying "my," she denied her true personhood, she repudiated the basic spirit of the Liturgy.

And what is exactly the meaning of the word *leitourgia* – "liturgy?" Sometimes the word 'liturgy' is explained as meaning "the work of the people." That, so I understand, is dubious etymology. But it is solid theology. A liturgy is a *shared* action, something done by *many* persons *in common*, something that we can only do *together*. So the Eucharist is termed "liturgy." This means that at the service there are no passive spectators, only active participants. We are, all of us, offerers together: priest and people in unity, the total congregation.

There are two moments in the Liturgy when this solidarity is underlined for me in a particular way.

First, there are three occasions when the celebrant turns towards the people and bows, and they bow back.

The first time comes after the priest and the deacon have said together the prayers of preparation in front of the icons on the screen. The second time comes just before the Great Entrance when the celebrant, during the singing of the Hymn of the Cherubim, bows to the people, and they bow back. And then there is a third time, just before receiving Communion, the celebrant again bows to the people and they should bow back again.

Now, what is going on with these bows? Is it just an exchange of mutual courtesy? No, it is something far more profound. When the celebrant bows to the people and they bow back, what the celebrant says is his heart or aloud is, "brothers and sisters, forgive me." And when they bow back, they too are asking for forgiveness. And this – mutual forgiveness – is essential to the action of the Liturgy. We come towards the altar, not cut off or alienated from others, but reconciled with our companions, with those who share God's bread with us. There is no true liturgy without mutual forgiveness and mutual love. In the words of that great prophet of the 18th century, William Blake, "And throughout all eternity, I forgive you, you forgive me." As our dear Redeemer said, "This – the wine, and this – the bread."

A second moment in the Liturgy when I find this solidarity distinctively underlined is in the dialogue just before the Anaphora, the great prayer of offering. The celebrant says, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit shall be with all of you." The people respond, "And with your spirit." "Let us lift up our hearts," says the celebrant. "We lift them up unto the Lord," say the people. "Let us give thanks unto the Lord," says the celebrant. And the people respond, "It is meet and right." [That's where we should stop. Nowadays choirs usually add, "to worship Father, Son and Holy Spirit," but this is a later addition that distorts the true meaning of the service.]

"It is meet and right" is an answer to the invitation, "Let us give thanks." "It is meet and right to give thanks" – that

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is the meaning of the response.

Now how are we to understand this dialogue? Here is the explanation given by Saint John Chrysostom. "As we begin the actual celebration of the dread mysteries, the priest prays for the people and the people pray for the priest, for the words, "and with your spirit" mean precisely that this. Everything in the Eucharist is shared in common, for the priest does not offer thanksgiving alone, but the entire people give thanks with him. For after he has replied to their greeting, they then give their consent by answering, "it is meet and right." And only then does the priest begin the Eucharistic thanksgiving."

"Everything in the Eucharist is shared in common," says Saint John Chrysostom. The priest does not offer thanksgiving alone without the people. He can not act by himself. He needs them. And so, before beginning the Anaphora, he asks for their consent, for their involvement. "Let us give thanks," he says. And only after their consent is given, only after the people have said, "it is meet and right," only then does he commence the Anaphora.

So there we see the first point in the phrase which we are looking at. We offer – not I, but we. We are, all of us, offerers together in dynamic solidarity.

Now let us turn to the word "offer." Offering, sacrifice, is an essential distinctive mark of human personhood. Without offering, without sacrifice, there is no truly-human being. The characteristic human gesture is surely not the clenched fist – defiant, confrontational, exclusive. Surely the characteristic human gesture in Christ is the open hands – the open hands making oblation – yielding, releasing, presenting, sharing.

Let me appeal to the words of an "anonymous Orthodox" to whom I used to listen as a student in Oxford, C. S. Lewis. "Nothing that you have not given away will ever be truly yours. Until you have given yourself to Christ you will not have a real self. Nothing that you have not given away will ever be totally yours." If we quote another figure, the present Pope John Paul II, "the human person," he says, "cannot fully find itself except through a sincere gift of itself."

Personhood means gift. Let me develop the point by asking three questions.

- What is the first thing that we do in the daily cycle of prayer?
- What did the Holy Mother God and Saint Joseph, the foster father, do on the 40th day after the birth of the Savior?
- What did Saint Paul say shortly before his death?

In answer to the first question, the daily cycle of prayer begins with Vespers, for the new day starts at sunset. In the account of creation, in the opening chapter of Genesis, it is said, "the evening and morning were the first day." The evening comes before the morning. So then, we begin this first service in the daily cycle of prayer, Vespers, by singing or reading Psalm 103 [104], "Bless the Lord of my soul! O Lord my God thou art become exceedingly glorious! Thou art clothed with majesty and honor. O Lord, how manifold are Thy works, in wisdom hast Thou made them all!"

Here are some words of Father Alexander Schmemmann. "Vespers begins at the beginning and this means in the re-discovery in adoration and thanksgiving of the world as God's creation. The Church takes us, as it were, to that first evening, on which man, called by God to life, opened his eyes and saw what God in His love was giving him. He saw all the beauty and all the glory of the temple in which he was standing and rendered thanks to God. And in this thanksgiving he became himself. If the Church is in Christ, its initial act is always this act of thanksgiving, of returning the world to God."

"In this thanksgiving he became himself," says Father Alexander. Adam, the first created man, becomes genuinely human when he offers the world back to God in thanksgiving, in Eucharist. And the first thing that we do in the daily cycle of prayer is to put ourselves in Adam's place, to make his act of offering our own. And in this offering we become ourselves. So that is the first thing we do in the daily cycle of prayer: we offer the world back to God.

Question two: What did Saint Mary, the Holy Mother of God, and Saint Joseph do on the 40th day? On the 40th day they brought the newborn child Jesus to the temple,

and they offered him to God. The child that was given to the Holy Virgin, she now offers back to God. And through this offering she becomes herself, truly Theotokos, truly Birthgiver of God.

"Nothing that you have not given away will ever be truly yours," says C. S. Lewis. And we see the truth of that illustrated when the Mother of God presents her child in the temple. He becomes truly hers at the moment when she offers him back to God. The love is shown in the letting go. This is something that the Blessed Virgin Mary understood, something that every mother and father has to learn.

Question three: What did St. Paul say shortly before his death? In 2 Timothy 4-6, we read, "I am now ready to be offered." In the Greek it says literally, "I am now being poured out as a libation." Only if we pour ourselves out, only if we make of our whole life a gift offering to God, as Saint Paul did, do we become truly human.

Saint Paul's words offer clear insights into the meaning of "offering." The true offering is the offering of ourselves; offering means self-offering. We are to offer to God not

Sometimes I have seen in the windows of funeral directors the notice, "Crosses or crowns to order." But in fact there is no alternative; you cannot have the one without the other. We offer "Thine own of Thine own, Yours from Your own gifts."

Here we see two points. All is from God; all is gift, free gift. We can only offer to God because He gives. I appeal again to the words of David the Prophet and King: "But who am I and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from Thee, and of Thy own have we given Thee" [1 Chronicles 29:14]. This is the scriptural source of the phrase in the Liturgy.

All is from God, and we can only offer in and through Christ. At the Divine Liturgy we offer the world back to God in thanksgiving. That is indeed correct. At the Diving Liturgy we offer ourselves, most certainly. But fundamentally, what we offer to God is Christ. Our offering is Christ's self-offering. If Christ our Savior did not offer Himself in love, we could make no offering at all. We offer up the one unique priest, Jesus Christ Himself, invisibly present with us. He is the celebrant; the priest and people together are concelebrants with Him.

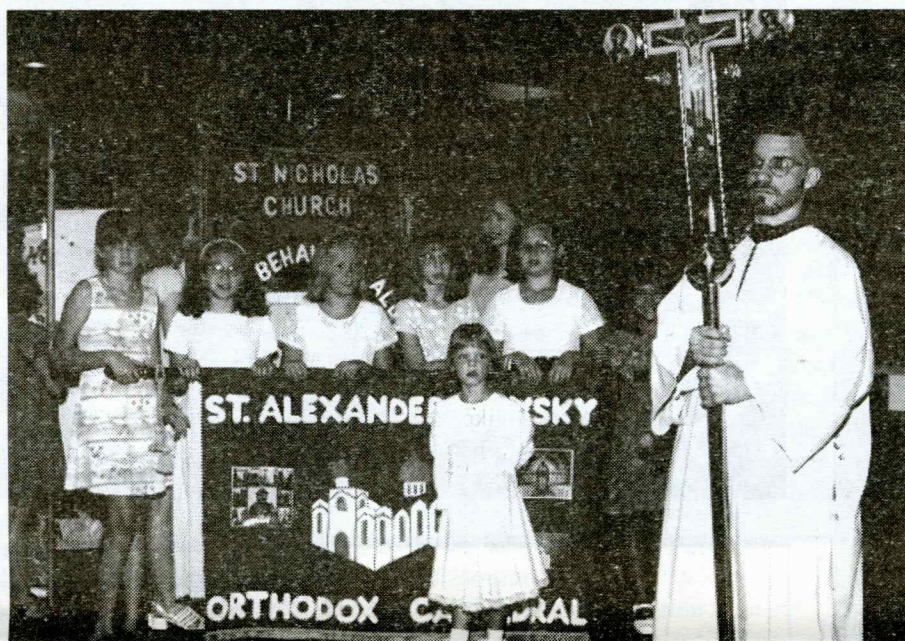
Liturgy, as we have seen, signifies shared action. Let us give to this idea its profound meaning: the action is not only shared by us humans with each other, it is shared by us with Christ. The Liturgy is His action in which we participate. The operation of the Eucharist is, in reality, cooperation. This is underlined in the Liturgy in the words of the deacon to the priest before the initial blessing, before the words "Blessed is the Kingdom." The deacon says to the priest, "It is time to begin the service to the Lord," as it appears in the official translation of the Orthodox Church in America. While this is grammatically a possible translation, this quote from Psalm 118:126 could also be translated, "It is time for the Lord to act," as it is rendered in almost all translations of the Old Testament that are based on the Hebrew or the Septuagint. "It is time for the Lord to act." The Liturgy is not just words but an action. Christ commands us not to "say" this, but "do" this.

And secondly, the action of the Liturgy is not just our action; it is the action of the Lord. "It is time for the Lord to act." This is reemphasized in the priest's prayer before the Great Entrance, during the singing of the Hymn to the Cherubim: "Thou art He Who offers, and He Who is offered." That is a phrase first found in the text of the Liturgy around the year 800. But the phrase itself is more ancient. It comes in a sermon for Holy Thursday attributed to Saint Cyril of Alexandria, but in fact delivered by his predecessor, Theophilus of Alexandria, on the 29th of March in the year 400. It is not often that we can fix a phrase so exactly by the calendar. "Thou art He Who offers, and He Who is offered." Christ is both priest and sacrifice, both offerer and offering. As Saint Augustine says, "He is the priest, Himself the One that offers, Himself also the offering." And this truth is underlined at the exchange of the Kiss of Peace during the Creed. "Christ is in our midst," says one priest. And the other replies, "He is and ever shall be." Christ is in our midst as the invisible priest, the unique offerer. Would it not be helpful to revive the exchange of the Kiss of Peace with that phrase by the whole congregation in our parishes?

"Christ is present," says Saint John Chrysostom. "He Who prepares the first table is He Who now also prepares this one. For before the human being who makes the gifts become Christ's Body and Blood but Christ Himself, Who was crucified for us." And Saint John Chrysostom continues, "The priest does no more than loan his tongue and provide his hand. When therefore you see the priest giving the Sacrament to you, do not think that it is the priest who is doing this, but that it is Christ's hand that is stretched out." In the words of Father Georges Florovsky, "Christ is still acting as the high priest in His Church. The mystery is all the same: the sacrifice is one, the table is one, the priest is the same." Such is the meaning hidden in the phrase, "Thine own of Thine own, we offer...." But, in reality, Christ offers.

The words of Chrysostom, that the priest only loans his tongue and provides his hand, reminds me of a recent occasion when I had to go outside Oxford to another city to celebrate the Liturgy. I had fallen just before and broken by hand, and you cannot celebrate the Liturgy or give Communion with one hand only. When I arrived in the parish I found that the priest there was very distressed because he had completely lost his voice. So at this particular Liturgy

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## More AAC candid

Children lead Sunday Liturgy procession (top); Bishop Kallistos with Metropolitan Theodosius and Archbishop Herman (above); Metropolitan Theodosius delivers banquet address.

just what we have but what we are. In the Divine Liturgy we do not offer only bread and wine; we offer ourselves as a living sacrifice.

But Saint Paul's words, being before us, also illustrate a further point about offering, calling for us to die a martyr's death. "I am now ready to be offered;" self-offering means sacrifice. An offering, if it is to have true value, is costly. As David the Prophet and King says, "I will not offer to the Lord my God that which costs me nothing." Let us remember in this context Symeon's words to the Mother of God when she presented her child at the temple. He warns her, "A sword will pierce your own soul, too." That is fulfilled when she stands at the foot of the cross. There is no self offering without cross-bearing.

At Sunday Matins, we sing, "Through the Cross, joy has come into all the world." Through the Cross, there is no other way. Think of the movement in the great blessing of the waters at Theophany. We begin with a prayer in praise of the created water, a prayer which offers the world back to God in thanksgiving. But then there comes the decisive moment in the Theophany blessing: the Cross is plunged in the water.

Self-offering is the joyful, willing expression of our true humanness. But living as we do in a sinful world, sharing as we do in its sinfulness, self-offering also involves suffering. As Saint Seraphim of Sarov said, "Where there is no sorrow there is no salvation."

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one of us lended his tongue and the other provided his hand.

**A**nd now to the fourth point: "On behalf of all and for all." That is a phrase that can be and has been translated in many different ways, and that is not necessarily a bad thing, because perhaps all the different translations embody part of the truth. "On behalf of all" is a possible rendering, but a more exact translation would be "according to all, in accordance with all, in harmony with all, in union with all." So the phrase means "involving all, encompassing all." If you want a brief rendering, I would say the best rendering would be to say "in all." Turning to "and for all," this a good translation. It means also "on account of all." All what? In the Greek, it does not say, "on behalf of all humans and for all humans." Rather, here the Greek word for "all" is neuter, meaning "in all *things* and for all *things*." And of course we humans are included in the word "things." But the Liturgy is offered not just in the human race; in it, we are offering *all things* back to God. The offering of the Liturgy is a cosmic offering, an ecological offering, all-embracing and all-inclusive.

Let me quote some words from a monk of the Eastern Church, Father Lev Gillet. Commenting on the phrase from the Great Litany, "for the peace of the whole world." "We pray," he says, "for the peace of the universe, not only for mankind but for every creature, for animals and plants, for the stars and all nature. Thereby we enter into a cosmic piety. We find ourselves in harmony with everything that God has called into being." [This quote comes from the little book, *Serve the Lord with Gladness*, published by Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, and I strongly recommend it to you. I think its one of the last things written about the relationship in a simple and personal way.]

As we celebrate the Liturgy, and when leave church to engage in the liturgy after the Liturgy, let us keep in mind that we are not saved *from* the world, but *with* the world. We are not as humans *outside* nature, nor set up *over* it; we are *in* nature, and nature is *in us*. So this phrase, the motto of our present Council, "in all things and for all things," reminds us of our responsibility for the environment. As concelebrants with Christ in the Divine Liturgy we are acting in Him and through Him as priests of the universe. We are interstellar offerers. Nothing that God has made is excluded from our offering. All is rendered back to Him. During the Liturgy, then, let us reflect on its environmental implications. Let us not forget the somber warning of Robert Frost: It does not take long to destroy a continent – or even, we may add, a whole planet. Personally, when I serve at the Liturgy, I sometimes recall what used to be said by Father Amphilochios of Patmos, spiritual father of the island when I was professed at the Monastery of Saint John the Theologian. "Do you know," he used to say, "God gave us one more commandment which is not recorded in scripture. It is the commandment, 'love the trees.'" Father Amphilochios was convinced that whoever does not love trees does not love Christ. When the Fathers came to him for confession he would give to them a penance to plant a tree. And he would go around from time to time to see how they were observing their penance, whether they were keeping the trees properly watered and protecting them from the goats. "Love the trees." As Dostoevsky's Staretz Zossima says, "Love all creation, the whole of it and every grain of sand in it. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light. Love the animals, love the plants. Love everything." To love everything means, above all but not exclusively, to love every human person. Such is the true sense of the phrase, "on behalf of all and for all."

Yet, all these words about cosmic offering become purely sentimental if they are not carried into effect in a specific, practical way. Let us not forget the words of Mother Maria Skobtsova, who died in 1945 as a martyr in the gas chambers of Ravensbrook. "At the last judgement," she said, "I shall not be asked if I was successful in my ascetic exercises or how many prostrations I made. I shall be asked, did I feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and the prisoners. That is all I shall be asked."

**T**he Eucharist is a continuing miracle. You might ask, "how can we become part of this continuing miracle? How can we experience more vitally its grandeur and its power?" There is but one answer: with all our heart, in thanksgiving, let us offer the world back to God. Let us offer ourselves with the world. Let us unite our self-offering with the self-offering of Christ. Let us make this offering in all things and for all things. Then all our life will be transfigured into miracle. ■