

Liturgy is Worship

Magazine page 1

MATERIALS

- Photos for the focusing activity (see below)
- *Heaven on Earth* zine for each student
- *Divine Liturgy* service book for each student or small group
- *Orthodox Study Bible* for each student or small group
- Paper and pens or pencils
- Blackboard, white board, or chart paper with writing utensils

PROCEDURES

I. Focusing activity

Pass around or display 5–6 photos or magazine clippings of popular people, events, entertainment, and consumer goods—anything that will make your students say, “That’s awesome.” To tie into the next step of the lesson, include at least one past or current *American Idol* contestant or winner.

Possibilities include impressive athletic feats, popular entertainers in concert or on TV, must-have gadgets, opulent mansions, and the latest blockbuster movies or stars. (If students aren’t

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- **Distinguish** among worship, veneration, and idolatry.
- **Develop** a working definition of worship.
- **Describe** the aspects of worship.

intrigued by your choices, prompt discussion by asking them who or what is in.) Finish the discussion after no more than 2–3 minutes by asking:

- How do we show awe, appreciation, respect, admiration, devotion?

Go to sporting events, concerts, and movies; download songs; take lessons or join teams; buy posters or other merchandise; play fantasy sports or dream about “If I were...” or “If I had...”

- How do we show our respect, gratitude, and love to people who are actually in our lives—such as older siblings we look up to, friends who stick by our side, youth leaders and teachers who take the time to listen, parents who make sacrifices to ensure our happiness?

We honor them in various ways.

Opening Prayer

Heavenly King, Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, present in all places and filling all things, the treasury of blessings and the giver of life: Come and abide in us, cleanse us from all impurity, and save our souls, gracious Lord. Amen.

What was the greatest event you ever attended in your life?

Was it a concert? Could it be a sporting event? Or maybe it was a family affair like a wedding? As you were searching to find an answer, did you think of the Divine Liturgy?

The first word itself—*divine*—tells us that something is different with this event. No one would call a sporting event or a concert *divine*. *Divine* means something from God. This is why the Divine Liturgy is set apart.

The word “*liturgy*” comes from two ancient Greek words, *leitō* (people) and *ergon* (work). It means “work of the people.” The ancient Greeks would use the word *liturgy* (leiturgia) to denote any service to the state undertaken by a citizen for the general welfare of the people or public. In other words, the Divine Liturgy is a “public work” that occurs for the benefit of the people, so that God’s people are cared for through the work of God. In these “services,” we serve God through our work at the Divine Liturgy.

God cares for all of creation and wants to be with the people He loves. He wants to instill in us hope and faith in Him, and we want to worship Him and thank Him for all that He has done and does for us. This happens in every worship service of the Church, but especially the Divine Liturgy.

“We knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth. For on earth there is no such splendor or such beauty, and we are at a loss how to describe it. We know only that God dwells there among men, and their service is fuller than the ceremonies of other nations. For we cannot forget that beauty.”

According to tradition, this quotation dates from 987 AD. Prince Vladimir of Kiev (a city in today’s Ukraine) wanted to choose the religion for his people. He sent teams to visit different cities and religions. One group visited Constantinople and witnessed the Divine Liturgy in the Great Church of Holy Wisdom, the Hagia Sophia. The team returned to Kiev and reported to the prince what they had experienced. (In the painting below, the prince listens to the report from Constantinople as the Pope’s Roman emissaries stand aside.) Because of this report, Prince Vladimir decided that his people would be Orthodox Christians.

Think about it, Vladimir had wealth and power. He lived a life of comfort—the type of life that allowed him to behold all human-made beauty and find all the pleasures in the world. Yet he had never experienced the type of beauty that his emissaries described to him.

Heaven on Earth

When we say that heaven meets earth, what do we mean? To answer this question we have to remember how God has acted through history. First, we believe that God created “everything visible and invisible.” Second, God loves us so much that “He gave His only Son” so that we would have life eternal (John 1:16). Third, God is always with us because He sends His Holy Spirit to us. The Bible is filled with many images of God. One image of Him is the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son. We believe that God wants to have a close relationship with His children, even though many of His children struggle to make time for Him.

Jesus says “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is present at the Divine Liturgy. How this happens—how heaven comes to earth—is what we call a mystery, something beyond our understanding. We believe that when we do our part during the Divine Liturgy, God surely does His part, and that even though Christ is unseen by humans during the Divine Liturgy, He is still present.

There are many other images of God in the Bible. Look up the following:
Exodus 24:6
Psalm 33
Psalm 24:6
Matthew 23:37
John 4:24

It is important to remember that the Divine Liturgy is not a production, a spectacle, or a theatrical performance. At its core, the Liturgy is about God and people. Creator and the created spending time together, with the faithful worshipping and thanking God and God offering Himself back through Holy Communion. Yes, you can spend time with God at home, but God wants His family together and this happens during the Divine Liturgy. And when we attend the Divine Liturgy, we are called to be actively involved. We are coworkers in “the work of the people.”

2. Name present praxis

Lead a short discussion:

- We can distinguish between honor, which we show to people (all of whom are created in God’s image), saints, and to holy icons—this is veneration. But adoration and worship are for God alone.

- For example, consider the show *American Idol*. Admittedly, the show does dig up talent and make stars. But what is an idol?

Like the golden calf (Exodus 32:4), an idol is anything—object or person—that is worshipped instead of God.

- Let’s make a list of how we worship in the Orthodox Church. When we say *worship*, what do we mean?

List all ideas and descriptions on the board, without judgment; save this raw list for later discussion and revision in step 5. Give students a few minutes to describe their experience of the Divine Liturgy, e.g., prayers, hymns, veneration of icons, sign of the cross, kneeling, Holy Communion.

3. Reflect on present praxis

Explain the following, writing the key terms *idolatry*, *veneration*, and *Orthodox* on the board:

- The word *idolatry* comes from the Greek for “worship” and “figure” or “image.” Idolatry is false worship.
- We *venerate* icons—we do not worship these objects of wood and paint, but see them as “windows to heaven.”
- *Orthodox* is a compound word meaning

“right” or “correct” (*orthos*) and “worship” or “glory” (*doxa*). The name we give ourselves as Christians is tied very closely to the way we worship God.

4. Access the Christian story and vision

This activity should take 5–10 minutes, using *Heaven and Earth* (abbreviated HE) and the following photocopied sections of the Divine Liturgy (can be printed from http://goarch.org/chapel/liturgical_texts/liturgy_hchc) for each student or small group. Depending on the number of students and time, each student or small group could be assigned one.

- Small Entrance (HE p. 8)
- The Trisagion (HE p. 9)
- The Epiklesis during the Anaphora (HE p. 16)
- The hymn during the preparation of Holy Communion, e.g., “Praise the Lord” (HE p. 18)
- Thanksgiving after Communion and the dismissal hymn, e.g., “We Have Seen the Light” and “Blessed be the Name of the Lord” (HE p. 20)

- You may also want to include the texts of the prayers said by the priest for these moments in the Liturgy as they also praise God.

Ask students examine these liturgical hymns and sections in the Divine Liturgy. Have them circle or highlight the words that indicate worship. Reflect on the following questions for each section:

- What are the words of worship and adoration used in each of these prayers or hymns?

Examples include praise, honor, glorify, and give thanks.

- Whom do we worship in each moment or hymn?

We worship the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We honor and venerate the Theotokos, the saints, and the cross. We may bow to the priest or during censuring to acknowledge and accept a blessing. We respect the chalice and other sacred objects that guide us during worship. [Sacred and sanctify mean “set apart.”]

- What specific actions during these moments show worship?

Examples include making the sign of the cross, kneeling, and “lifting up our hearts.”

5. Appropriate the story and vision

Say to students:

- Look back at the list we made earlier about worship. Is there is anything you want to revise, add, or subtract?

Give students 2–3 minutes to discuss and to bring the list in line with their findings in step 2.

- How does the Divine Liturgy guide us to worship God?

Be sure that you ask about the words of the Liturgy, the church building, and the items we use in worship.

On a white board, write the words “Orthodox worship is...” and the numbers 1–5 for a list. Ask the class to develop five sentences that describe Orthodox worship.

6. Decision for lived response

- Do we worship only in church?

We can worship God specifically and purposefully through our daily prayers. And, like the saints, we can live in a way that glorifies God—in our every thought, word, and action.

- Does worshipping God mean more than showing up in church on Sundays?

Help students solidify a definition of worship by helping them assess areas of worship they might improve on, such as praying, resisting temptations, participating parish activities (such as youth groups or Bible studies), baking prosphora, helping the poor (how many students have ever fed the homeless?), and supporting missions.

Closing Prayer

It is proper and right to sing to You, bless You, praise You, thank You, and worship You in all places of Your dominion. Amen.