

Live the Liturgy. Teach the Liturgy

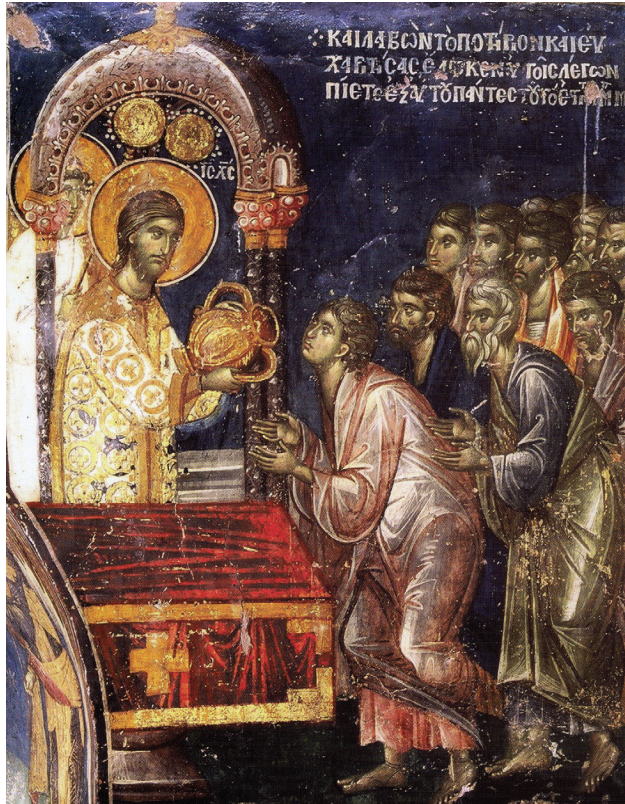
For nearly four decades, Orthodox Christian religious educators have emphasized that Sunday Church school should not be held during the Divine Liturgy. In his classic book, *Liturgy and Life*, Fr. Alexander Schmemmann writes, “It seems self-evident to me that to organize a so-called ‘Sunday School’ during the Divine Liturgy deeply contradicts the spirit of Orthodoxy...Sunday is primarily a liturgical day, and it should be church-centered and liturgy centered.” In agreement with Fr. Schmemmann, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese since the 1970s has emphasized that children should attend as much of the Divine Liturgy as possible and practical for the parish.

We spend the bulk of our adult lives as Orthodox Christians in various worship settings—not in classes or other parish activities. The habit of attendance and participation in worship begins very early in life. A recent study from the Pew Forum on American Religious Life reported that adults who had not formed the habit of regular attendance in worship as children and teenagers (i.e., acquiring it from their parents) were more likely to drift away from the religion of their family later in life.

Teachers play a large role in helping children understand the Divine Liturgy, the actions, the rituals, the words and, importantly, how to participate in the service. Classroom time should be set aside for questions and answers about that day’s

worship. To answer the questions, teachers should continue to learn as much as they can about the development, nature and meaning of Orthodox Byzantine worship.

There are practical steps you can take right now. Use the following checklist as a guide to begin incorporating the Divine Liturgy in each of your classroom sessions:



- Do you encourage your students to attend the Divine Liturgy with their families?
- Do you emphasize the importance of attending the Divine Liturgy from the time it starts, with “Blessed is the Kingdom . . .”?
- Do you emphasize participation in the Divine Liturgy?
- Do your students see you attending the Divine Liturgy and participating in the service?
- Do you discuss the Sunday Epistle and Gospel lessons in your classes?
- Do you encourage families to read the lessons together before the Liturgy and discuss them on the way home, especially in light of that day’s sermon?
- Do your opening and closing prayers (or hymns) in class reflect the liturgical season, such as Great Lent or the feast day closest to the day of the class session?
- Do you remember students’ name days in class and study those saints’ lives?