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# The Presence of the Mother of God Beside the Lord Christ in the Divine Liturgy

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## Abstract

The Mother of God, through accepting to give birth to the Son of God, entered into the service of the Lord Christ of the salvation of the human race, participating closely not only in His earthly activity, but being always present in the extension of this saving work eternalized and permanently actualized through the Divine Liturgy. Thus the Mother of God becomes a Divine Liturgy dedicated to her Son, she is present in the Divine Liturgy with Christ the Lord, and she receives us as her sons in the Divine Liturgy celebrated in her church.

## Keywords

Divine Liturgy, Son of God, Mother of God, Theotokos, Virgin Mary, Eucharist, Prothesis

## I. Mother of God as a Divine Liturgy

The apostolic passage from Hebrews 9,1-7, which is sung at the The Feast of the Entrance into the Temple of Our Most Holy Lady the Theotokos and at the service of the Paraklesis of the Holy Virgin Mary, describes the "first covenant" celebrated in the Tabernacle. By the term "covenant" is meant the worship or ordinance that took place in the Tabernacle, as well as the holy objects that decorated the place. The description of the Tabernacle and its covenant is placed for reading on these feasts of the Mother of God

because they are identified with the Virgin Mary, she being the tabernacle from which the Savior was incarnate and the “ordinance” that formed her to receive the Second Person of the Holy Trinity in her womb.

Paraklesis, akathists and canons of the Mother of God dedicate to her various attributes borrowed from the composition of the Tabernacle or the Temple in Jerusalem, these receiving life and work in the body of the Mother of God. Elements such as “altar”, “tabernacle”, “lampstand”, “table”, “bread”, “gold-covered ark”, “manna”, “staff”, “table of the law”, “Holy”, “Holy of Holies”, which are found in the description of the Apostle Paul in Hebrews, we encounter them as attributes of the Virgin Mary in the hymnographic creations mentioned. Thus, taking as an example only the last sticheron and the idiomelon of the first Paraklesis of the Mother of God<sup>1</sup>, we find these elements found in the sanctuary of the Old Covenant as attributes assumed by the Mother of God in her life. Here, the Virgin Mary is called “scepter”, “door”, “pyre”, “light”, “house”, “shady mountain”, “golden lampstand”, “heaven”, “table”, “church”, “golden candlestick”<sup>2</sup>. Thus, the Mother of God becomes a Holy Liturgy by taking into her own life these adornments which embellish the place of worship, being truly the Church of God and a sacrifice of Christ’s sacrifice. Only she who stood in the Holy of Holies, the place into which the Old Testament Archpriest entered once a year “and not without blood”, was able to fully assume and identify herself with the sacrifice of her Son, becoming a permanent Divine Liturgy dedicated to the Holy Trinity and poured out over the whole world.

Proceeding from these elements of the Temple as attributes of the Mother of God, the “church” in which the Great Archpriest was born, I would like through this study to create the image of the Mother of God in the Divine Liturgy, whose life is like a Divine Liturgy, by highlighting and analyzing the moments that refer to the honouring of the Virgin Mary. Through this we will see, on the one hand, how Christology is inseparable from Mariology in the Divine Liturgy, and, on the other hand, an example of how we can transform our lives into a Divine Liturgy offered to God through the example and intercession of the Mother of God.

<sup>1</sup> †CALINIC, Arhiepiscop al Sucevei și Rădăuților, *Paraclisul Maicii Domnului. O scrisoare de pocăință a sufletului (comentariu)*, 2nd edition, Editura Crimca, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Ceaslov, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2001, p. 410.

## II. The Mother of God between “fullness the time” and “taking the time”

The Diataxis or rule of Philotheos Kokkinos, Patriarch of Constantinople, dating from the 14th century, spread rapidly throughout the Christian world, especially in the Slavic Churches, and formed the basis of the first printed Missal of Macarius in 1508. This was published by Dimitrievskij<sup>3</sup> and by Trempeles<sup>4</sup>, but neither of them consulted two manuscripts from the Monastery of Vatoped which contain the Diataxis, namely, Mss. V.480 and Εὐλητάριο (Parchment, scroll, roll) EI.22. In the latter we find the prayer translated for the first time as below:

### Εὐλητάριο EI.22

στὸ περιθώριον  
“Ἐξαπόστειλόν μοι,  
Παρθένε, δύναμιν  
ἐκ τῆς ἐνοικησάσης  
σοι τοῦ Θεοῦ χάριτος  
καὶ τοῦ ὕψους τῆς  
σῆς καθαρότητος,  
καὶ ἐνίσχυσόν με εἰς  
τὴν τοῦ Υἱοῦ σου  
προκειμένην διακονίαν,  
ἵνα ἀκατακρίτως τῷ  
αὐτοῦ βήματι παραστῶ  
καὶ ὡς αὐτῷ φίλον τὴν  
ἀναίμακτον ἱερουργίαν  
ἐπιτελέσω ὅτι καὶ ἐν  
σοὶ ἐκ τῆς πρὸς αὐτὸν  
παρρησίας ἐξουσία  
καὶ δύναμις καὶ δόξα  
εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν  
αἰώνων. Ἀμήν<sup>5</sup>”

“Trimite mie, Fecioară,  
putere din harul lui  
Dumnezeu cel sălășluit  
în tine și din curăția  
înălțimii tale, și mă  
întărește pe mine spre  
slujba Fiului tău ce-  
mi este pusă înainte,  
ca neosândit să stau  
înaintea altarului Lui  
și ca prieten al Lui să  
săvârșesc slujba cea fără  
de sânge, că și în tine  
din îndrăznirea către  
El este stăpânirea și  
puterea și slava în veci  
vecilor. Amin”

On the footnotes:

“Send me, O Virgin,  
strength from the grace  
of God who dwells in  
you, and from the purity  
of your high majesty, and  
strengthen me for the  
service of your Son which  
is set before me, that I  
may stand before his altar  
unashamed, and as his  
friend, to do his bloodless  
service, that in you also,  
in your boldness toward  
him is the kingdom and  
the power and the glory  
forever and ever. Amen”

<sup>3</sup> A. DMITRIYEVSKIY, *Opisanie*, Tom II, *Eὐχολόγια*, Kiev, 1901.

<sup>4</sup> *Ἱερεῖς Λειτουργίαι κατὰ τοὺς ἐν Ἀθήναις κωδικάς*, υπο Παν. Ν. ΤΡΕΜΠΕΛΑ, Ἐκδόσιν τῶν Λειτουργικῶν Βιβλίων, Ἀθήναι, 1935.

<sup>5</sup> “Διατάξης τῆς Θείας Λειτουργίας τοῦ Ἁγίου Φιλοθέου τοῦ Κοκκινοῦ”, in: *Διατάξης τῆς Θείας Λειτουργίας κατὰ τα βατοπαιδινὰ χειρόγραφα τοῦ ἰδ' αἰῶνα*, Τόμος Α Κείμενα, Ἱερά Μέγιστη Μονή Βατοπαιδίου, Ἅγιον Ὅρος, 2019, p. 57.

The parchment EI.22 places this prayer within the rite of veneration preceding the beginning of the Divine Liturgy, before the vesting of the clergy and the start of the Service of the Proskomedia. This prayer addressed to the Mother of God is an addition to the classic prayer *Κύριε, ἐξαπόστειλον τὴν χειρὰ μου...* (“*Lord, send forth Your hand...*”) at the end of the rite. Interestingly, it appears only in this parchment as a note to the main prayer, and is not found in any other manuscript that reproduces the Diataxis of Philotheos. It is likely a local composition or a marginal note by an anonymous author in the manuscript, considering that such a practice of recording specific rites of a given region was common.

However, the prayer helps us to offer a symbolism for this moment of preparation for the service of the Divine Liturgy. The Holy Apostle Paul tells us in the well-known verses from Galatians 4, 4-5, “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman...”. In liturgical terms, the moment of the priest’s preparation through veneration for the service of the Divine Liturgy is called “the taking of the time”. Through this rite of veneration and the deacon’s expression “it is time to serve the Lord”<sup>6</sup>, from the dialogue preceding the beginning of the Divine Liturgy, the clergy and the entire congregation enter into the dimension of the time of eternal life, into the heaven where the Lord has ascended. In this regard, Father Stăniloae says that “through Christ, eternity enters into liturgical time. He [the priest] is open to the personal eternity of God, and paradoxically, eternity pours into time, and through Him, we advance into eternity, thanks to God made man”<sup>7</sup> through the incarnation from the Virgin Mary.

Thus, the “fullness of time”, the moment when the time of eternal life (καῖρος) floods the passing time of this life (χρόνος), works continuously, extends, and becomes eternal in the time of the Divine Liturgy through the moments of “taking the time” or “the time is to work”. The same beginning of the salvation of the human race from the incarnation is concentrated in miniature in the time of the Divine Liturgy, which becomes the time in

<sup>6</sup> *Liturghier*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2012, p. 132.

<sup>7</sup> Preotul Profesor Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în Liturghia Ortodoxă*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2004, pp. 301-302.

which the Lord works His salvation now. But the Lord does not work alone in the Divine Liturgy, but is supported by His Mother and by all the faithful who take an active part in this relationship of love created in the time of the Liturgy through the sharing of the Eucharistic Word, dwelling in the womb of the Virgin at the “fullness of the time” and in the Church at the “taking of the time”.

Therefore, the doubling of the main prayer in the ritual of “taking the time” with a prayer addressed to the Mother of God is very inspired because, as the same Holy Father Dumitru Stăniloae tells us, “where Christ is present, His Most Holy Mother cannot but be present as well”<sup>8</sup>. If the Divine Liturgy concentrates the entire earthly activity of the Savior Christ and is a journey of the Cross and Resurrection, the Mother of God is the one who cannot be absent from this ascent, from the Liturgy in general, being always beside or at the right hand of her Son. We notice this also at the end of the prayer above, where the doxology addressed to the Holy Trinity, specific to the endings of prayers, here takes on a Mariological character. The same attributes of divinity — dominion, power, and glory — are boldly shared by the Mother of God.

Father Professor Petre Vintilescu, speaking in the *Liturgy explained* about the priest’s ritual of veneration, mentions hymns dedicated to the Mother of God, such as “The Door of Mercy...” and “She who is the Source of Mercy...”<sup>9</sup>, tells us, regarding the hymns intoned in front of the icons of the Savior and the Mother of God on the Iconostasis, that: “the form of religious greeting, with which both prayers end, already signals the entrance of the clergy into the atmosphere of a pious intimacy, in which the souls feel filled with the certainty of God’s goodness”<sup>10</sup>. This intimacy with God is felt by the clergy as soon as they enter the Sanctuary and prepare through vesting for the first part of the Divine Liturgy, the Proskomedia, in which the offerings are consecrated<sup>11</sup>, and the Infant Jesus is born of the Virgin Mary.

<sup>8</sup> Preotul Profesor Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în Liturgia Ortodoxă*, p. 114.

<sup>9</sup> *Liturghier*, pp. 111-112.

<sup>10</sup> Preot Profesor Dr. Petre VINTILESCU, *Liturghierul explicat*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1998, p. 94.

<sup>11</sup> Sfântul Nicolae CABASILĂ, *Tâlcuirea Dumnezeieștii Liturghii*, translated from Greek by Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene Braniște, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2011, pp. 20-22.

### **III. The Mother of God in the order of Proskomedias – *The Prospora* and its mariological meaning**

At the beginning of the order of Proskomedias, a 1892 edition of the Greek Missal and the one edited by the Romanian hermitage of Lacu from Mount Athos place the troparion *Ἐτιμάζου Βηθλεέμ...*<sup>12</sup> [*Prepare, Bethlehem...*]<sup>13</sup>, before *Ἐξηγόρασας ἡμᾶς...* [*Thou hast redeemed us...*]<sup>14</sup>, at the time of the elevation of the Bread, highlighting the symbolism offered by the place of Proskomedias, which recalls both the Cave of the Nativity in Bethlehem and the place of the Crucifixion, through the liturgical gestures performed by the priest during the preparation of the Holy Bread<sup>15</sup>.

Thus, Saint Germanus of Constantinople, in his Explanation of the Divine Liturgy, tells us that the main *prospora* from which the Body of the Lord is taken is called:

“*Artos, blessing and first fruits... is taken as a symbol of the Ever-Virgin and Mother of God, she who... bore the perfect God and perfect Man... The Body of the Lord, as if from a certain womb and the flesh of a virgin body (the entire bread, blessing, and prospora) is cut... and taken from its center... by cutting the Holy Body from the prospora, the priest imitates the angel who said to the Virgin: ‘Rejoice’... The Holy Body is placed at the Prothesis, as in Bethlehem, where Christ was born*”<sup>16</sup>.

In addition to this symbolism of the place of the Nativity, of life in Capernaum, and of the first 30 years of the Savior’s life, which is offered

<sup>12</sup> *Η ΘΕΙΑ ΛΕΙΤΟΥΡΓΙΑ*, ΕΝ ΤΡΙΠΟΛΕΙ, ΤΥΠΟΓΡΑΦΕΙΟΝ ΚΑΙ ΒΙΒΛΙΟ ΠΩΛΕΙΟ ΝΙΩΑΝΝΟΥΑ. ΑΣΗΜΑΚΟΠΟΥΛΟΥΚΕΙ ΙΩΑΝΝΟΥΠ. ΣΑΛΑΠΑΤΑ, 1892, p. 26.

<sup>13</sup> *Dumnezeiasca Liturghie a celui între Sfinți părintelui nostru Ioan Gură de Aur*, Chilia Buna-Vestire, Schitul Sfântul Dimitrie – Lacu, Sfântul Munte Athos, 2015, p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> *Liturghier*, 2012, p. 117.

<sup>15</sup> Preot Prof. Univ. Dr. Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica specială*, Editura Basilica, București, 2016, p. 392.

<sup>16</sup> Sfântul GHERMAN I, Arhiepiscopul Constantinopolului, *Tâlcuirea Sfintei Liturghii*, translation and notes by Pr. Prof. Nic. Petrescu, Editura Mitropoliei Olteniei, Craiova, 2005, pp. 50-51.

to the space of the Proskomedion and the prosphora from which the Bread is taken, Saint Germanus tells us that it “also represents the place of the Skull”<sup>17</sup>. These symbols are in accordance with the two troparia mentioned above.

In the same terms, the mystagogue Theodore of Andida describes it in the chapter titled The Prosphora and its Mariological Meaning from his liturgical commentary, saying:

“The spiritual word places at the beginning of the most mysterious words and the most divine symbols the very one whom our human nature offered to the Lord our God as an offering from all human kneading, and whom the prophetic grace of the Spirit of God revealed through many and varied names, giving her titles corresponding to the service of the mystery first contemplated in prefigurations and symbols. The God-proclaiming Apostles and the holy Fathers also preserved the appropriate and natural names in the economy of bringing into words the symbols that celebrate the mystery, calling it bread, blessing, offering, first fruits: ‘bread’ [artos] as the one who makes bread from the very Heavenly Bread, that is, from Christ, Who became more bodily from the very blood of the pure Mother of God; ‘blessing’ [eulogia] as the undoing of the curse upon the first-created; ‘offering’ [prosphora] as an honor given from all human kneading to God the Creator in the Holy of Holies; and ‘first fruits’ [aparche] as more sacred and holy than all the first fruits offered to God. Therefore, this blessing and offering, also called by other names [prosphora], brought into the honored temples and placed on the so-called table of the Prothesis, we receive and venerate with faith as the type/figure [eistyon] of the highly praised Mother of God”<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> Sfântul GHERMAN I, Arhiepiscopul Constantinopolului, *Tâlcuirea Sfintei Liturghii*, p. 47.

<sup>18</sup> NICOLAE al Andidei, “Considerație preliminară despre simbolurile și misterele Liturghiei”, in: diac. Ioan I. ICA JR. *De la Dionisie Areopagitul la Simeon al Tesalonicului. Integrala comentariilor liturgice bizantine*, Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 2011, p. 289.



Father Professor Petre Vintilescu goes along the same line and, commenting on the ideas of the mystagogues above, says that

“humiliation through incarnation being another form of sacrifice and the beginning of the Lord’s kenosis, at the Proskomidia also those of His birth are imagined, namely first of all by the fact that the prosphora that served for the removal of the Bread is seen as a symbol of the Blessed Virgin, from whom the Savior was incarnate”<sup>19</sup>.

Thus, the Mother of God represents, at once, both the maternal womb and the Cross of the Crucifixion, both symbolized by the first prosphora and the space of the Proskomedia, the most intimate places where God showed His humility and His love for mankind. The pain that the Virgin Mary did not experience at the Nativity, she lived at the foot of the Cross, when the fulfillment of the rebirth of the world took place through the Sacrifice and Resurrection of the Lord, foretold already at the Incarnation and Baptism.

The formula “For the remembrance of the Lord...”, said when the Holy Bread is taken out, is supplemented for the Mother of God and the saints with the expression “for the honor and remembrance...”<sup>20</sup>. This shows the intimacy of the relationship between Christ, the Mother of God, and the saints, expressing through this formula, according to Nicholas Cabasilas, on the one hand, our thanksgiving to God, and on the other hand, the prayer or petition raised to Him, through His Mother and the saints. We give thanks for the gifts we have received and express hope for the gifts we will receive from now on. We offer our gratitude for the intercession of the Mother of God and the saints, we thank God for those who have reached perfection, and we pray, also through the portions of the prosphora, for those who are on their way<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> Preot Profesor Dr. Petre VINTILESCU, *Liturghierul explicat*, p. 129.

<sup>20</sup> *Liturghier*, pp. 118-120.

<sup>21</sup> Sfântul NICOLAE CABASILAS, *Tâlcuirea Dumnezeieştii Liturghii*, translated from Greek by Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene Branişte, Editura Institutului Biblic şi de Misiune Ortodoxă, Bucureşti, 2011, pp. 26-27.



Continuing along the same line, in the 14th and 15th centuries, the order of the Proskomedia began to take shape, in the sense that, in addition to the Holy Bread, the portions dedicated to the Mother of God and the saints took on a different form, namely, the triangular one, referring to the ascent to the knowledge of God that, especially, the Virgin Mary and the saints achieved. The Byzantine rules suggested this evolution, and the first printed Missals recorded it, providing us with both the arrangement schema and the model for removing them from the prosphora.

The Diataxis called “πρόφιλοθεϊκή” [“before Philotheos”] presents a form of the prayer at the removal of the Portion of the Mother of God, a shortened version of the one given to us by the Diataxis of Philotheos<sup>22</sup> and printed Missals: *Πρόσδεξαι, Κύριε, τὴν θυσίαν ταύτην διὰ πρεσβειῶν τῆς ὑπερευλογημένης δεσποίνης ἡμῶν Θεοτόκου καὶ ἀειπαρθένου Μαρίας*<sup>23</sup> [Receive, O Lord, this offering for the prayers of our Most Blessed Lady, the Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary]. The verse from Psalm 44, 11, *Παρέστη ἡ βασίλισσα...* [The queen stood...], spoken during the placement of the portion to the left of the Holy Bread, as we see, is not included in the Diataxis. However, it appears in the printed Missals. Only the latest edition of the VatopediMissal places the verse as a note, indicating that it was usually recited<sup>24</sup>.

The editions of the first Romanian Missals indicate both formulations for the portion dedicated to the Mother of God, placing it to the right of the Holy Bread (on the left as we look at it). Until 1713, alongside the portion for the Virgin Mary in the same position, there was also the one dedicated to the saints, which had not yet been standardized in terms of the categories of saints<sup>25</sup>. The Missal of Antim Ivireanul of 1713 moves the two portions to the left of Holy Bread, right as we see it, but the portion of saints is divided into 9 groups<sup>26</sup>. From the 1759 Iași edition we begin to

<sup>22</sup> “Διατάξης τῆς Θείας Λειτουργίας τοῦ Ἁγίου Φιλοθέου τοῦ Κοκκινού”, p. 60.

<sup>23</sup> “Διατάξης τῆς Θείας Λειτουργίας «πρόφιλοθεϊκή»”, in: *Διατάξης τῆς Θείας Λειτουργίας κατὰ τα βατοπαιδινὰ χειρόγραφα τοῦ 18 αἰῶνα*, p. 28.

<sup>24</sup> ΘΕΙΑ ΛΕΙΤΟΥΡΓΙΑ ΚΑΤΑ ΤΗΝ ΤΑΞΙΝ ΤΗΣ ΕΝ ΑΘΩ ΜΟΝΗΣ ΒΑΤΟΠΑΙΔΙΟΥ, ΙΕΡΑΤΙΚΟΝ ΣΥΛΛΕΙΟΥΡΓΟΝ, ΙΕΡΑ ΜΕΓΙΣΤΗ ΜΟΝΗ ΒΑΤΟΠΑΙΔΙΟΥ, ΑΓΙΟΝ ΟΡΟΣ, 2020, p. 14.

<sup>25</sup> *Slujebnik*, Târgoviște, 1508.

<sup>26</sup> *Litughierul (Sf. Antim Ivireanul)*, București, 1713, p. 30.

have an arrangement of the portions as we know it today<sup>27</sup>. Interpreting the particle for the Mother of God, St. Simeon of Thessalonica says:

“And the priest himself, taking another prosphora [prosphoran], removes with the lance a particle from the middle of the seal and brings it for the honor and remembrance of the Mother of God and places it on the holy disk to the right of the bread. For the bread itself is a reproduction [antitypos] of the body of Christ, and that particle is in place of the one who gave birth to Him in a virginal manner. Thus, preserving in this figure [typos] the reality/truth, the Queen stands as in the psalm on the right of her Son and King [Ps 44, 10] Christ, receiving, as a mother, the first honors, for the place on the right is the first”<sup>28</sup>.

Compared to the other mystagogues, we observe in St. Simeon a more developed ritual of the Proskomedia, as he also offers the particle for the Mother of God, who stands to the right of the Holy Bread, with the meaning of typos and probably influencing the printed Missals which incorporated verse 11 from Psalm 44 into the ritual.

Father Petre Vintilescu says that through the removal of the particle dedicated to the Mother of God, “there is in this arrangement an act of hyperdulia, as a recognition of the superior degree of closeness in which the Holy Virgin stands, compared to the other saints, in relation to her Son, born of virginity”<sup>29</sup>. On the Holy Disk, we see the image of the Mother of God placed at the right of her Son, beside the throne of divinity, above the choirs of angels and saints, at the height where no one has ever reached, and where no creature will ever be able to reach. The place where the Mother of God stands is expressed by the larger dimension of the triangle of the particle dedicated to her, and by its peak, which is higher than the other particles, but smaller than the Holy Bread. If the base of the Holy

<sup>27</sup> *Liturghier*, Iași, 1759.

<sup>28</sup> SIMEON al Tesalonicului, “Despre Sfânta Liturghie”, in: diac. Ioan I. ICĂ JR. *De la Dionisie Areopagitul la Simeon al Tesalonicului. Integrarea comentariilor liturgice bizantine*, pp. 417-418.

<sup>29</sup> Preot Profesor Dr. Petre VINTILESCU, *Liturghierul explicat*, p. 132.

Bread represents the womb of the Mother of God from which the Son of God came, the base of the particle dedicated to the Mother of God and the saints represents the Divine Liturgy, that is, the life of the Savior, the center of their life, and the sides represent paths of ascent to God in a continuous climb throughout the Divine Liturgy.

In this regard, Father Dumitru Stăniloae says:

“The priest takes, after the actions performed for the Holy Bread, a larger piece, in the shape of a triangle, for the Mother of God, then smaller pieces, also in the shape of a triangle, for the saints. Conscious beings, having a foundation in the general creation, raise themselves with the mind, with the pointed tip of their person, towards God”<sup>30</sup>.

Father Stăniloae, explaining the prayer used at the removal of the particle dedicated to the Mother of God, says that Christ’s sacrifice is also for the honor and glory of His Mother, a notion suggested by the expressions “in honor and in remembrance”. Through this, we ask that the sacrifice be accepted in the altar that is above the heavens, showing both the sacrificial state of the Mother of God and that of the entire community, because the offerings that are being prepared are consecrated for sacrifice.

“Therefore, the priest prays that, through the intercessions of the Mother of God, Christ will receive the community’s sacrifice in the altar that is above the heavens, in order to transform it into the sacrifice of His Body, thus including in it the sacrifice of the community as well”<sup>31</sup>.

The Mother of God, through the particle that represents her, stands in a state of sacrifice beside the Holy Bread, which symbolizes Christ in a state of sacrifice, praying and interceding so that the community may be

<sup>30</sup> Preotul Profesor Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în Liturghia Ortodoxă*, p. 200.

<sup>31</sup> Preotul Profesor Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în Liturghia Ortodoxă*, p. 201.

integrated into this sacrifice when the Holy Bread is transformed through the sacrifice into the Body and Blood of the Lord.

“Just as Christ did not incarnate separately from humanity, but interceding between it and God, neither did the Mother of God break this bond, nor did she break the connection to the Eucharistic transformation of the bread into His sacrificed Body. She prays to Him so that her sacrifice, represented by her particle, and that of the Holy Bread, which symbolizes the body taken from Her as His real, sacrificed Body, may be accepted and received in the altar that is above the heavens”<sup>32</sup>.

Thus, the Mother of God, both through the prosphora from which the Lamb of God is sacrificed and through the particle dedicated to her, shows her quality as the Mother of God, chosen among mankind. Through her personal preparation and the purity of the Holy Spirit upon her, she was exalted to the point that she became the Mother of the Son of God, and through Him and from Him, our Mother, all of us. She is the *bread* from whose womb Christ was born, the *first fruits*, as a sacrifice of humanity offered to God, and the *offering*, through whose prayers and intercessions we are presented before God in a state of sacrifice. If the order of the Proskomedia reactivates this mystical union between Christ and His Mother, the Divine Liturgy is a path for the faithful to advance together with Christ and His Mother, a journey in which Christology and Mariology perfectly intertwine<sup>33</sup>. This image in the Proskomedia of the particle of the Mother of God standing at the right hand of her Son is seen both at the Nativity and at Golgotha, while her permanent seating in the glory of the Kingdom of Heaven at the right hand of the Throne of the Godhead, in a state of sacrifice from the sacrifice of Christ, can be contemplated throughout the Divine Liturgy.

<sup>32</sup> Preotul Profesor Dumitru STĂNILAOE, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în Liturgia Ortodoxă*, pp. 202-203.

<sup>33</sup> See also Mitropolitul Kallistos WARE, *Sfințirea omului credincios. Reflecții teologice, liturgice și filocalice*, translated from English by Ștefan Voronca, Editura Trinitas, București, 2024, pp. 11-16; 31-33.

#### IV. The Virgin Mary in the Divine Liturgy – Her Sacrifice united with His Sacrifice

Following the thread of the proposed analysis, without claiming to be exhaustive and acknowledging the fact that much has already been written about the expressions of the Virgin Mary in the Divine Liturgy, I try to bring my own contribution to these writings.

First of all, when we speak of the discreet yet profoundly rich presence of the Virgin Mary in the Divine Liturgy, we think of the petitions that the Great Litany, the Little Litany, and the first Litany of the Supplication dedicate to the Virgin Mary. We know that the Romanian Missals, starting with the 1902 edition, separate the two litanies “O Most Holy, Pure One...” and “Let us commit ourselves...”, intercalating the response “Most Holy Theotokos, have mercy on us/save us”<sup>34</sup>. However, the greek Missals unite these petitions into one, without the interposition of the refrain dedicated to the Virgin Mary. This union, not only of the two litanies but of the entire Litany in the form of a flowing prayer-petition, is also found in Philothei’s Diataxis, following the primitive model of a Litany in the form of a prayer, without the intervention of a refrain or response, as seen in the Apostolic Constitutions<sup>35</sup>.

If we were to analyze the original united form of the two petitions, as we find it in the interpretation of the mystagogues of the Divine Liturgy, we discover that the term *μνημονεύσαντες* (remembering) serves to link the prayer addressed to the Virgin Mary and, along with her, to all the saints, with the thanksgiving and gratitude through which “ourselves and each another” we are reminded by this remembrance, their intercession, integrating ourselves together in this service and sacrifice. We entrust ourselves through the prayers of the Virgin Mary, the saints, and our own to God’s mercy, with the intercessions of the Virgin Mary and the saints being a guarantee of our prayers made together<sup>36</sup>. We remember the Virgin

<sup>34</sup> *Liturghier*, p. 137.

<sup>35</sup> “Canonul Apostolic al Bisericii”, Cartea VIII, XXXVIII, in: diacon Ioan I. ICĂ JR., *Canonul Ortodoxiei, Canonul apostolic al primelor secole*, vol. 1, Editura Deisis/Stavropoleos, Sibiu, 2008, p. 764.

<sup>36</sup> Preot Profesor Dr. Petre VINTILESCU, *Liturghierul explicat*, p. 168.

Mary and the saints in the sense that we ask and request them to give our entire life to Christ together<sup>37</sup>. And what greater example could we have than that of the Virgin Mary, who completely entrusted herself to the will of God? The beginning of the Liturgy calls us to embrace this attitude, reminding us of it several times throughout, so that we may become ever more “receptive” for receiving Christ within us:

“If our person grows in the measure that we empty ourselves more in order to offer more fully the space of our love, then the Virgin Mary received the Son of God within her in the most perfect way, since she gave herself to Him in the most perfect way... Realizing in herself the supreme gift to her Son, she is completely united with Him, but her gift also extends to us, because, filled with her impulse of giving toward Him and toward us, we also give ourselves to both Him and to her. Thus, she gives us to Him, since she gives herself to us. And from this, we receive strength to give ourselves to one another and, therefore, to give each other to Christ”<sup>38</sup>.

Therefore, the separation of the two litanies emphasizes even more the intercessory role of the Virgin Mary, and here we find a difference, this time of a translational nature. After the Romanian Missals separated them, the term *save us* was used for the response in the petition of the Theotokos, which comes from the verb σῶζω (to save, to deliver). Given that throughout the Great Litany we have asked for mercy (ἐλεος) from God, the attainment of which is equivalent to inheriting eternal life (Matthew 25, 34), we consider it more appropriate to ask the Virgin Mary *to save us*, with the meaning of deliverance, salvation, liberation, since the verb *to have mercy* means more than to save. Nevertheless, the Virgin Mary can indeed be merciful, because especially through her comes the mercy of God<sup>39</sup>. The Virgin Mary has a special role in our salvation through her

<sup>37</sup> Sfântul NICOLAE CABASILĂ, *Tâlcuirea Dumnezeieștii Liturghii*, p. 37.

<sup>38</sup> Preotul Profesor Dumitru STĂNILĂ, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în Liturghia Ortodoxă*, pp. 277-278.

<sup>39</sup> Arhim. Teofil PĂRĂIAN, *Bucuriile credinței*, Editura Mitropoliei Olteniei, Craiova, 2006, p. 93.

intercession and her closest intimacy with the Savior Christ, considering that through her, directly, grace and gifts come to us.

Without delving into the historical analysis of the evolution of the antiphons in the Divine Liturgy, a topic that liturgical scholars have explored<sup>40</sup>, I would like to note the presence of the Virgin Mary at this beginning, especially since *Enarxa* represents the Nativity of the Lord and the childhood of the Savior. First of all, we observe the doxological formulas *Glory...* addressed to the Holy Trinity and *Both now...* dedicated to the Virgin Mary, understanding by this that the Virgin Mary, too, is worthy of glory due to her deepest proximity to the Throne of God.

Psalm 92 of the second antiphon has the refrain *For the prayers of the Theotokos...* and the troparion at *Glory...* and *Both now...* the hymn *Only-begotten...*, which was once the entrance troparion of the Church alongside the Trisagion hymn. Through these, we sing praise to the Virgin Mary at the moment of the Divine Liturgy, which symbolizes the time when Jesus “was subject to them, and His mother kept all these words in her heart” (Luke 2, 51). The refrain *For the prayers of the Theotokos...* “confirms that she herself made the beginning of the service itself and of the true economy”<sup>41</sup>. The troparion *Only-begotten*, which in ancient times was placed before the Trisagion, highlights the divine nature of the Savior as One of the Trinity, but also His human nature as the One born of the Virgin Mary, two natures inseparable, for through His incarnation there was no change or separation from the “parental bosom”<sup>42</sup>. This troparion, in addition to expressing the divinity of the Son, who was crucified for us as a Man, “fits very well with the symbols of the birth of Christ... who chose to be incarnate from the Holy Theotokos”<sup>43</sup>.

Once, the Divine Liturgy began with the procession or entrance troparion *Only-begotten* and ended with the chanting of the Ambo Prayer, whose ancestor is the Apolis Prayer. The hymn and prayer are similar in

<sup>40</sup> Vezi Preot Profesor Dr. Petre VINTILESCU, *Liturghierul explicat*, pp. 169-173 și Juan MATEOS, *Celebrarea Cuvântului în Liturghia bizantină*, translation and notes by Cezar Login, Editura Renașterea, Cluj-Napoca, 2007, pp. 68-80.

<sup>41</sup> Sfântul GHERMAN I, Arhiepiscopul Constantinopolului, *Tâlcuirea Sfintei Liturghii*, p. 62.

<sup>42</sup> Sfântul GHERMAN I, Arhiepiscopul Constantinopolului, *Tâlcuirea Sfintei Liturghii*, p. 64

<sup>43</sup> TEODOR, Episcop de Andida, *Comentariu Liturgic*, translation and presentation by Pr. Prof. Nic. Petrescu, Editura Mitropolia Olteniei, Craiova, 2006, p. 62.



terms of their theme, serving as a summary of the entire Liturgy. Thus, if we consider the Divine Liturgy as an anamnesis of the entire work of salvation, the Theotokos appears as the beginning and end of the salvation journey accomplished by Christ in the world, as the one who stood by Him throughout this entire process.

Another not at all accidental place of the presence of the Theotokos in the Holy Liturgy is in the dialogue after the Great Entrance, when the deacon, using the verse from Luke 1, 35, says to the priest: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you”<sup>44</sup>. Through this, the priest is strengthened for the most important part of the Divine Liturgy, when the Lord will work through him the transformation of the Gifts. Just as the Theotokos became the vessel of the Incarnation through the explanation given by the angel, so the priest receives the empowerment to invoke the Holy Spirit over the gifts at the moment of the Epiclesis and to also realize that *Let it be* of the Theotokos, which caused the Incarnation. The expression is not a blessing of the lesser toward the greater, but an explanation of how the Incarnation will be accomplished in a wondrous way. Similarly, in the Liturgy, the deacon addresses the priest not as if blessing him, but as one who, representing the service of the angels, tells the one greater than himself how to prepare for the Anaphora. The moment of the overshadowing of the Virgin’s womb and the moment of the transformation of the Gifts, when both in the womb and on the Disk or in the Chalice Christ appears, remain overwhelming and unthinkable Mysteries, before which we can only respond with *Let it be* or *May the same Spirit work with us all the days of our lives*, entrusting ourselves to these Mysteries.

And how is this mystery realized? Through the same *reasonable worship*. In full connection with the moment of preparation highlighted above, we have the common expression *reasonable worship* (λογική λατρεία) in the context of the Epiclesis and the formula in the intercessions: “Again, we offer You this *reasonable worship*... Especially for our Most Holy”<sup>45</sup>. The descent of the Holy Spirit upon the gifts of bread and wine and their transformation into the Body and Blood of the Savior can be equated

<sup>44</sup> *Liturghier*, p. 166.

<sup>45</sup> *Liturghier*, pp. 176-178.

with the descent of the Holy Spirit into the womb of the Virgin Mary and the placing of the Son of God in her following her consent, both being works of the Holy Trinity in collaboration with the Theotokos. Through the same reasonable worship, the Theotokos is not just a simple presence in the Divine Liturgy, but she stands at the very heart of the Anaphora, in the Epiclesis, contributing to the work of the Holy Trinity. Likewise, the most fitting attribute for her is that of intercessor, because the Virgin Mary is present in the unity of the Anaphora, called the intercessions, bringing the same reasonable worship. For this reason, graces and gifts come to us directly through the Theotokos, and we can address her with the request save us.

Staying with the expression *Especially for...*, during which the diptychs for the departed are sung, the Theotokos appears here as a “brilliant light of truth, contemplating the lifeless faces and the past shadows of the Logos”<sup>46</sup>, emphasizing the role of the Theotokos as intercessor not only for the living but especially for the departed. This moment of the Divine Liturgy forms the basis for the so-called service of the “raising of the Panagia” during the commemoration of the departed. Father Dumitru Stăniloae explains the meaning of each attribute of the Theotokos in this litany, saying that:

“That is why we call her: *Most Holy* (or rather, All-Holy – Panagia), which we do not call any other saint; *Most Pure*, both in her spiritual and physical feelings; *Most Blessed* by God in a unique way among women; *Glorified*, as no other creature is; *Our Lady*, which again we do not call any other saint, for the Mother of the Lord is also a Lady, having, in the sense mentioned above, the Lord Christ as the central self in her own self. And all these things, because she is the *Mother of God* and *Ever-Virgin Mary*”<sup>47</sup>.

This union of her self with His self is realized when the Panagia or the portion of the Theotokos is placed in the Holy Chalice after communion, as the hymn of the Paschal Megalynarion, *Shine...*, is intoned, through

<sup>46</sup> Sfântul GHERMAN I, Arhiepiscopul Constantinopolului, *Tâlcuirea Sfintei Liturghii*, p. 111.

<sup>47</sup> Preotul Profesor Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în Liturghia Ortodoxă*, p. 279.

which the hope of salvation for both the living and the departed is revealed, along with the completion of the path of the Theotokos, a moment when her sacrifice is united with the sacrifice of her Son in His Precious Blood, sacrifices in which we are also carried. This unity in offering is requested in the fifth prayer of thanksgiving for the Holy Communion, when we say that the Theotokos “may make us worthy, until the end of our lives... to receive the sanctification of Your Most Pure Mysteries”<sup>48</sup>.

Thus, in the Divine Liturgy and in the home liturgy, our Savior Christ is inseparably united with His Mother, on this path of salvation realized with each individual believer, in order to merge into the state of continuous sacrifice and resurrection. The Apolis suggests this reality to us, because “Christ, our true God” is always followed by “the prayers of His Most Pure Mother”<sup>49</sup>. Saint Nicholas Cabasilas says that we remember the Theotokos in the Apolis because through her “we have obtained the beginning of mercy”<sup>50</sup>.

As mentioned above, the prosphora from which the Holy Bread is taken represents the Theotokos, the *antidoron* or the gift offered in place of the Holy Gifts to the faithful. Although this prosphora is already consecrated and sanctified through the prayers and formulas made over it during the Proskomedia, at the moment of the Hymn dedicated to the Theotokos, it is blessed again, together with the loaves that were not used in the Proskomedia, through their proximity to the Holy Gifts transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, and it is distributed to the faithful at the end of the Divine Liturgy. Therefore, the blessing formula of the anaphora in the new edition of the Missal, “Through the prayers of the Theotokos, bless, O Lord, this bread...” is the correct one, considering that the anaphora is the gift of sanctification from the Theotokos, for through her, we directly receive gifts and graces. The anaphora distributed at the end is none other than this mercy of the Theotokos with which the faithful return home. Through the Gift of Communion and the anaphora, we carry in our whole being the Lord Jesus Christ and the help and protection of the Theotokos and the saints, through whom we also acquire holiness.

<sup>48</sup> *Liturghier*, p. 371.

<sup>49</sup> *Liturghier*, p. 200.

<sup>50</sup> Sfântul NICOLAE CABASILAS, *Tâlcuirea Dumnezeieștii Liturghii*, p. 114.