

SUNDAY THEOSIS #3-57

Liturgical Services of the Eastern Church

By Patriarch Emeritus Gregorios III

Introduction (continued)

Liturgical literary genres

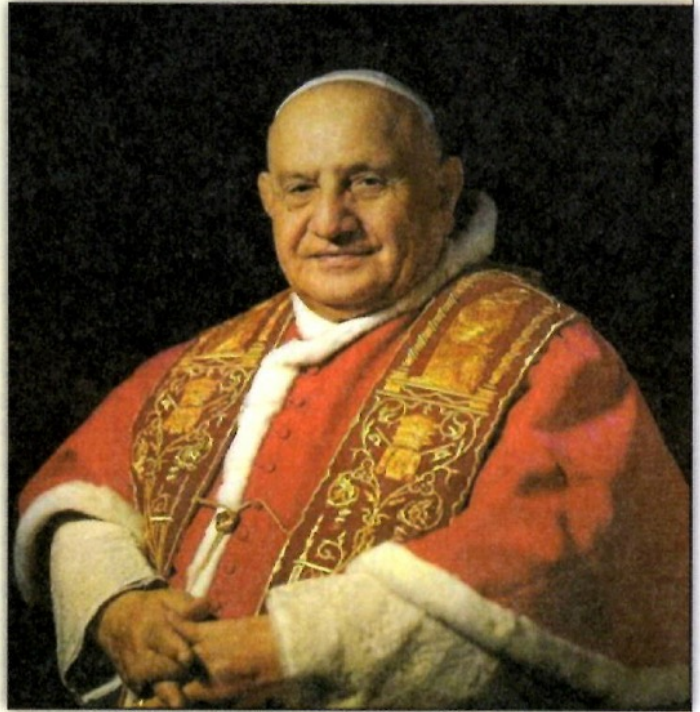
Why are there so many Eastern rites when the faith is one, with its geographical starting point, Jerusalem, its capital?

There are many profound affinities between a great number of liturgical texts. What distinguishes them is the language and other cultural characteristics which form a kind of 'literary genre'. These rites express Christian dogma which is one in substance, spread across their literary, linguistic and cultural genres.

The application of this literary genre theory to the liturgy is of major importance for reconnecting the diverse rites of East and West, and discovering that which unites and distinguishes them. As Saint Pope John XXIII said on the subject of the Christian churches, 'What unites us is much more than what separates us.' The same applies very well to the different rites and liturgies, which are differentiated in literary art, cultural genius, civilizing aspects, though broadly similar in

their principal aspects. In fact, they are all from the same source, and are one in their substance and across their 'transfigurations' or diverse 'epiphanies.'

Fr. Alfonse Raes S.J. in his book '*Introductio ad Liturgiam Orientalem*' established synoptic tables for different parts



of the eastern sacraments and liturgies. These tables demonstrate the profound kinship between the rites, not to say their unity. All our liturgies are indeed cultural 'epiphanies' of the same Christian dogma: they proceed directly or indirectly, in one manner or another, from one unique liturgical source, Jerusalem. All express in different ways (chants,

melodies, poems, icons, symbols, ceremonies, rites, processions, gestures, liturgical instruments and ornaments) that which St. Paul calls the 'great mystery of faith' and which the Fathers, especially the Greek Fathers, have put so well in their expression dear to the Eastern Christian, 'the divine economy of salvation.'

This appears especially in the *anaphora* of the Divine Liturgy, which is the great prayer of thanksgiving and which is the central part of the Divine Liturgy or Mass. One finds there very clear common elements, especially in the anamnesis and epiclesis. This is obvious in the different eastern anaphora: they are so similar, not to say 'one' and share a basic content and central core founded on the Trinitarian economy of salvation.

One could also mention other common elements, such as the Psalms, (which are the same, of course) which are very similar in their selection and deployment among the different Eastern feasts and offices, being distributed among the events of salvation in the holy places of Jerusalem and the rest of the Holy Land. Then there are the saints common to all churches and rites and in the same manner, the liturgical cycle; Easter, all the Feasts of the Lord Jesus and of Mary (Our Lady); and of course the sacraments too: Fr. Raes gives the synoptic tables of the sacraments in all the eastern rites in his work already cited.

Jerusalem: The Origin

All rites were born and developed in the Middle East. They are eastern constructs and not imports. The East (from Jeru-

salem) is the point of departure for all the rites, including the Roman and other Latin rites. This is what the famous theologian and hymn writer St. John Damascene sang, 'Rejoice, Zion, Jerusalem, Holy One, mother of churches, dwelling-place of God, because you have received first the remission of sins, through the resurrection.' And the Psalmist says, "And of Zion it shall be said, 'This and that man was born in her' and 'all my springs are in thee'" (Psalm 87:5, 7).

One knows very well that the Spanish pilgrim Egeria and other western pilgrims transported to the West the prayers and customs, processions and rites which they had experienced around the holy places, especially in Bethlehem and Jerusalem. Thus Jerusalem is truly not only the mother of churches, but also the mother of all rites. We can justifiably call all the rites '*Hierosolymitan*,' because the liturgy of the mass and all the prayers are the celebration of the mystery of Christ, the mystery of the divine economy of salvation, accomplished in Jerusalem.

It is interesting to raise the point that the majority of hymns are the work of hymnographers, of saints, holy Melkite monks, in the Orthodox and Catholic meaning both Chalcedonian and Syrian, of the eighth and ninth centuries. The majority of them were monks of the monastery of St. Saba in Palestine, the most renowned being St. John Damascene (+749), Andrew of Crete (+767), Cosmas Damascene the Hymn Writer (+749), Joseph the Hymn Writer (+ 883), Theophanos the Hymnographer of Jordan (+845), and their master Romanos



Manger Square on Christmas, Bethlehem

the Melodist, son of Homs, deacon and cantor at Beirut, Tyre, Baalbek.

Antioch: One Church in two languages, Greek and Syriac

Antioch is the first heir of the Jerusalem tradition. The second is Alexandria, the third Asia Minor with Constantinople: hence the importance of the study of the history of Antioch in the first millennium. The geographical, historical, theological, national, ethnic and linguistic structures of this church are the reason and cause of the diversity of these rites. It is in Antioch, this ancient Eastern Diocese of the Roman Empire, in Syria of Greek tradition, that we find the most beautiful marriage between Roman and Greek cultures and the Melkite tradition, both Orthodox and Catholic, is arguably the most successful example of such a marriage in the history of the whole Ro-

man Empire and in the civilization of the Middle East. It is through this universal character that we can discover unity between the Antiochian rites and their Antiochian origins and in the same way discover the unity of the Church of Antioch itself.

Indeed, we, the Greek Catholics and Greek

Orthodox of Antioch (and of Jerusalem and Alexandria) are called by two names: Greeks in the West, and Roum or Roman in Arabic and in Muslim and Arab literature up to the present! Thus we carry the double character of Roman and Greek. Through our double name, we discover the history and civilization of the Middle East, which formed part of the immense Roman Empire, Western and Eastern, including Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, as far as the Arabian Peninsula, Mesopotamia up to its frontier with Persia (Iran) and this is where Greek language and culture reigned, side by side with Syriac. We are indeed both Greek and Roman!

We rediscover this historical, cultural and geographic reality in the titles of the diptychs of the Orthodox Patriarchs of



Synod of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church

Antioch, Jerusalem and of Alexandria. These are to be found all together in the Phymie (praise) of the Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarch who carries the triple title of Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem and where we read, 'the Patriarch (so and so), our Lord and Pastor (shepherd) Patriarch of the Great Cities of Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem, of Cilicia, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Georgia, Arabia, Mesopotamia, Libya, Pentapolis, Ethiopia, Egypt, Father of Fathers, chief of chiefs, shepherd of shepherds, the thirteenth apostle, may he live many years! Eis polla eti...' These titles show the vastness of the territory of the patriarchates of Antioch and of Alexandria and of Jerusalem, where the eastern rites of which we speak are to be found. One discovers through this

the geographical, cultural, ecclesiastical, spiritual, monastic, theological and liturgical bonds which unite them.

The expansion of the Greek language in all these regions created between them common denominators and a very rich and diverse facility for theological, intellectual and ecclesial osmosis. It is this richness which characterizes Antioch from the point of view of historical culture and civilization.

To be continued...

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