



## **THE BYZANTINE ORTHODOX LITURGY AT SPIRIT OF CHRIST**

**The "Byzantine Liturgy" is currently celebrated on the third Sunday of the month at Spirit of Christ Mission in Lolo at 6:00 pm.** Father Bill O'Brien, who serves as Pastor of Saints Cyril and Methodius Byzantine Catholic Church in the Spokane Valley, is developing this "**Montana Byzantine Outreach Ministry**" in Missoula/Ravalli County for the Byzantine Catholics in the area. Byzantine Catholics are Orthodox Christians who embrace full communion with the Roman Catholic Church and the Pope. Father Hislop (following a requested consultation with parishioners, Missoula Deanery) and then Bishop George Thomas approved the celebration of the Byzantine Liturgy at Spirit of Christ Mission in Lolo. **During COVID the liturgy was suspended. Fr. O'Brien began the liturgy again in January 2023, usually celebrating on the THIRD SUNDAY of each month at 6:00 pm.**

**WELCOME, AGAIN Father Bill O'Brien and the developing Byzantine Outreach Ministry!**

### **About Byzantine Catholics**

**Byzantine Catholics are followers of Jesus Christ.**

Jesus asked his disciples: "Who do people say that the Son of man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptizer, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "And you," he said to them, "who do you say that I am?" "You are the Messiah," Simon Peter answered, "the Son of the living God!" (Mathew 16:13-16)

Byzantine Catholics are followers of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of the Living God, who in His great mercy came into the world and assumed our human nature by becoming a man so that He could save us from our sins by His passion, death, resurrection and glorious ascension to Heaven. We are the witnesses to God's saving action in human history, and the bearers of the Good News of Christ to the ends of the earth.

**The Byzantine Catholic Church traces its foundation to the 12 Apostles of Christ** who were the companions of Jesus as he walked on this earth some 2000 years ago. After the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), the Apostles began to proclaim the Gospel, first to Jerusalem, then to the Gentiles. The first mission of the New Testament Church to the Greek-speaking Gentiles of the Levant was to Antioch, in the Roman province of Syria, where "the disciples were first called Christians" (Acts 11:26). Antioch became the staging area for the great missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul, which resulted in the foundation of a string of Greek-speaking Christian communities in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey) and Greece. Similar missionary journeys were undertaken by other Apostles throughout the Hellenized Eastern Mediterranean, as well as deep into the heart of the Latin West, to Rome itself, the capital of the Empire.

As the Christian Church grew, each nation and culture who received the Gospel in turn influenced the growth of the Church. Even at a relatively early stage in the history of the Church, two major heritages developed and remain with us today: the Eastern or "Greek" tradition, and the Western or "Latin" tradition. The Church in the West had its principal center at the Imperial capital of Rome, and is known in our present-day as the Roman Catholic Church. The Church in the East grew and developed

from the Churches in Jerusalem, Antioch and Alexandria. These three Eastern centers shared a common language, Greek, and similar mode of discourse which formed the basis for the subsequent development of the Eastern Christian tradition. The Byzantine Catholic Church shares in the inheritance of the first Greek-speaking Christian communities of the Eastern Mediterranean world, founded by the Apostles of Jesus Christ.

**A landmark event in the history of the Church**, and particularly the Eastern Church, was the decision in 325 by the Roman Emperor Constantine to move the Imperial capital from Rome to Byzantium, a small town on the Bosphorus strait which he renamed Constantinople (and which is presently Istanbul, Turkey). This shift in the secular political balance had a dramatic impact on the Eastern Church, for a new secular and religious center – Constantinople – was created in the heart of the Christian East. The Eastern Roman, or "Byzantine," Empire centered on Constantinople was a Christian Empire that flourished for over 1,000 years, and which engendered a new and unique culture infused with Christianity. Naturally, the Church based in the capital city of Constantinople gradually came to have a pre-eminent influence in the Christian East, spreading a religious culture that was both a synthesis and dynamic restatement of the existing strands of Eastern Christian culture that had been cultivated in the Greek-speaking world – the "Byzantine" religious culture. Byzantine Catholics in America are the spiritual descendants of Christians in Central and Eastern Europe and the Middle East who are the heirs of this Byzantine religious culture, and who therefore trace their spiritual heritage to the Great Church of Constantinople, known as Hagia Sophia (The Church of Holy Wisdom).

**The spiritual heritage of the Byzantine Catholic Church is the same given to us by the Apostles** and which matured in the Christian East, during the period of the Byzantine Empire. This heritage includes the doctrines, liturgical practices and underlying theology and spirituality which come to us from the Christian Church of the Byzantine Empire. This heritage is shared among all of the Christian peoples, regardless of ethnicity or nationality, who trace their spiritual roots to the Great Church of Constantinople, and the Byzantine religious culture which grew from that Church. From the First Millennium, Christians of the Byzantine tradition have referred to themselves as "Orthodox Christians".



*Photo: Pope Benedict XVI and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople greet the Christian faithful after the celebration of the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom at the patriarchal cathedral.*

**Byzantine Catholics are Orthodox Christians who embrace full communion with the Church of Rome and its primate, the Pope,** the successor of St. Peter, the first among the Apostles. Sadly, however, the break in communion between the Orthodox East and the Catholic West of 1054 still affects us today, as our communion with Rome means we are not in full communion with our mother Orthodox Church. We pray for the day when the Churches will again be one.

**BYZANTINE CHRISTIAN WORSHIP: GOD WITH US.** Byzantine Catholic worship joyfully celebrates the presence of the Kingdom of God on Earth in and through its divine services and liturgical life. Byzantine Catholics are witnesses to the reality of the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ, and follow Christ, in and with Him, to His heavenly Kingdom in the Divine Liturgy, the principal liturgical service of the Byzantine Church. In the Divine Liturgy, we begin worship by assembling together as the Body of Christ and celebrating the presence of Christ among us with psalms and hymns. Standing attentively in His presence, we are taught by His Words in the Epistle and Gospel and learn how to apply the Gospel to our lives in the sermon. We then respond to God by freely offering the sacrifice of our own lives to Him in the form of bread and wine, and, uniting our sacrifice with Christ's own eternal sacrifice, we ascend with and in Christ to His table in His heavenly Kingdom, where He feeds us with the gift of His Body and Blood, transforming us into His Body, making us bearers of Christ and partakers in His nature, and uniting us with Him in His Kingdom. Following the Divine Liturgy, we return to the world as "witnesses to what we have seen" in the unfolding of the Kingdom of God before our eyes, and as missionaries to the world, sanctifying it with the presence of Christ.

Byzantine Catholic worship also celebrates the time of salvation in which we live, sanctifying the time of the world with the presence of Christ at regular periods each day. For Byzantine Christians, following the Jewish tradition of reckoning time, the day begins at Vespers, the ancient service of evening prayer which makes present the finality of the present world and the dawn of the eternal new day in Christ, celebrating the birth of the Kingdom of God which itself begins with the end of this world, with the 'evening' of this world. At Vespers, we chant psalms and hymns that celebrate the creation and fall of this world, and its redemption, renewal and transfiguration inaugurated by Christ's Death and Resurrection. At Dawn, the Byzantine Church runs to greet the Risen Lord in the prayer service of Matins (Greek: Orthros), where the dawn of new life made possible through the Resurrection of Christ is made present in psalms, chants, and hymns. At Matins, we praise the dawn of the 'day without evening,' and glorify God who has fulfilled all things in Himself. During the course of the day, the Byzantine Church remembers the saving presence of God, and in particular the events of Christ's suffering passion for us, in a series of brief services known as the Divine Hours.

**Byzantine Christians, in celebrating the divine presence among them at worship, recognize this presence in all senses and forms of expression,** realizing that with the advent of His Kingdom, Christ has filled all things with Himself, and made all things sacred and beautiful in His sight. Byzantine Christian worship is therefore holistic in content and expresses and manifests this beauty in various forms -- ancient sacred religious poetry and hymns, moving chanting styles, bright, brocaded vestments, the burning of incense, the use of candles, the veneration of icons. The Byzantine Christian worships God with his whole person, and recognizes the presence of God in all of his senses, bearing witness to the fact that, in Christ, there is no distinction between 'sacred' and 'profane', but that in the Kingdom of God, which is manifested in this world by the Church, all things are fulfilled in Christ to be what they were created to be -- namely, a means of communion with Him.

*Article submitted by Father Bill O'Brien, Pastor of the developing Montana Byzantine Outreach Ministry in the Missoula/Lolo Area*

**The Byzantine liturgical year** starts on September 1 and ends on August 31. The movable feasts are determined by the date of Pascha / Easter (the feast of the Resurrection). There are two systems currently in use to calculate Easter - Gregorian (Western) and Julian (Eastern). Roman Catholics, most Byzantine Catholics in America (including the community gathering at Spirit of Christ) and some Orthodox follow the Gregorian date. Some Byzantines in America and most Byzantines and Orthodox in Canada and elsewhere follow the Julian date. In the year AD 2013 the Gregorian date for Easter is March 31 and the Julian date for Easter is May 5 (five weeks apart).

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE BYZANTINE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN AMERICA GO TO:** <http://www.byzcath.org/>



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