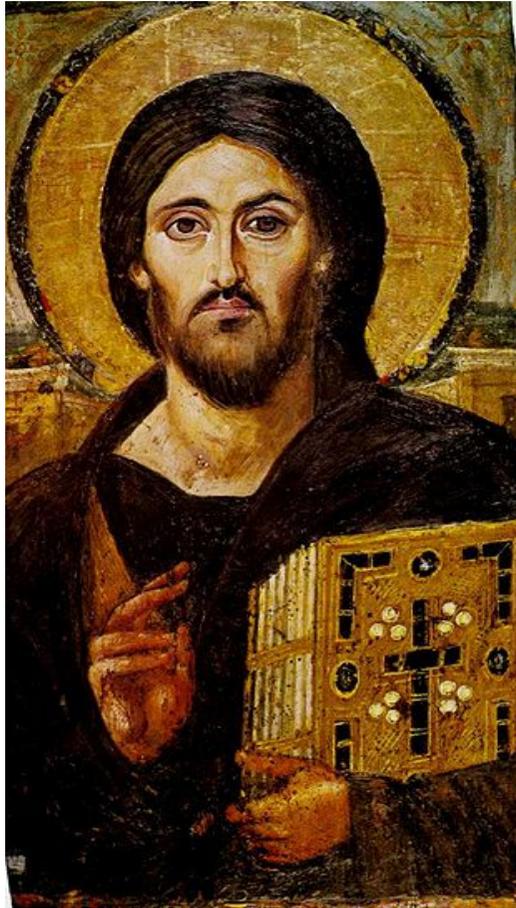


# Our Heavenly Father Requests the Honor



## of Your Presence At the Wedding Feast of His Divine Son

*Imprimatur:* Archbishop Cyril S. Bustros, Eparch of Newton, 25 January 2011.

Have you ever wondered what the saints do in Heaven?

The Bible tells us that the saints in heaven worship God. When they look upon the glory of God who is the Source of all beauty, all goodness, all truth, and all love, they are perfectly happy worshipping Him. They love and adore Him, and they love all creatures in Him.

When St. John the Evangelist was taken up into Heaven, he saw all of the Holy Angels and Saints, worshipping before the throne of God:

And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the living creatures, and the ancients; and the number of them was thousands of thousands, Saying with a loud voice: The Lamb that was slain is worthy to receive power, and divinity, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and benediction. And every creature, which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them: I heard all saying: To him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb, benediction, and honour, and glory, and power, for ever and ever. (Revelation 5:12-13)

Jesus Christ stands at the center of heavenly worship because He is both God and Man. He is the One who makes it possible for all human beings to share in eternal life with God. He is the One who offers Himself as a pure offering, in atonement for our sins and for the sins of the whole world. He is the One who makes it possible for us, in union with Him, to give God our Father perfect praise in the Holy Spirit. Jesus called Himself the “Heavenly Bridegroom” because He is the One who unites God and Man, Heaven and Earth, His Heart and the hearts of His disciples, in a marriage that brings forth the fruit of happy, holy lives. The Bible calls the worship of God “liturgy”; and the divine worship that Jesus presides over in Heaven is rightly called “Divine Liturgy”— because it is not of human origin: it is inspired and empowered by God.

Jesus taught us to pray that God's Will be done "on earth as it is in Heaven." And there is no better way to do God's Will "on earth as in Heaven" than to join in the wedding feast of the lamb, the heavenly wedding banquet of the Lord Jesus, which He instituted on earth and continues in Heaven, to the praise and glory of God, our Almighty Father.

### **The Wedding Feast of the Lamb Foretold**

It will be easier for you to appreciate the great honor that God is giving you by inviting you to His wedding feast if you understand how long and lovingly He prepared this feast for you. The wedding feast of the lamb was first foretold in the Garden of Eden, when God sacrificed animals and clothed our first parents Adam and Eve with their skins after they sinned (Gen. 3:15). In this way, God showed Adam and Eve that "the wages of sin is death" and that the blood of an innocent Victim would be required to cleanse men from their sins.

Righteous Abel offered animal sacrifice to God as did Noah after the Flood. The mysterious Melchizedek offered a sacrifice of bread and wine to God in Abraham's presence, foreshadowing the sacrifice of the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ under the appearance of bread and wine. Abraham prepared to offer his only son Isaac in sacrifice on Mt. Moriah when an angel stopped him and showed him a ram caught in a thicket. At God's command, Moses and the heads of all of the Hebrew families sacrificed a spotless lamb and placed the blood of the lamb in the form of a cross on their doorposts as a sign to the Holy Angels to pass over them when dispensing divine justice. For fifteen hundred years, from the time of Moses until the Incarnation, the Hebrews offered the Passover sacrifice, even as they prayed for the coming of the Messiah who would redeem them from their sins.

In the eighth century B.C., the Prophet Isaiah foretold that the Redeemer of Israel would come as a Suffering Servant who would suffer for the sins of the people, like a "lamb led to the slaughter." During the fifth century B.C., the Prophet Malachi foretold a day when a pure offering would be offered continually in every place on earth:

From the rising of the sun even to the going down, My Name is great among the Gentiles, and in every place there is sacrifice, and there is offered to My Name a clean oblation: for My Name is great among the Gentiles, saith the Lord of hosts (Malachi 1:11).

According to Malachi, there will be only one sacrifice, but it will be offered all over the world. Only the Catholic Church fulfills this prophecy in her Divine Liturgies, where the sacrifice of Christ is offered for our salvation. Our Lord Jesus Christ plainly identified His offering of Himself to the Father under the appearance of bread and wine at the Last Supper as a "new and everlasting covenant" in His Blood, so that the sins of all men, past, present and future, "might be forgiven."

### **Jesus Institutes the Holy Eucharist**

We have seen that for thousands of years after the Fall of our first parents God prepared mankind for a renewed relationship with Him, so that man could once again be united to God, and do God's Will on earth as "it is in Heaven." Jesus referred to this renewed relationship between God and man as a "covenant," a pact in which God and man pledge unconditional love for each other and become one in heart and mind, sharing one life together. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus indicates that this covenant is a marriage covenant between Him and His disciples, and He uses the symbolism of the Jewish ritual of betrothal and marriage to express the intimacy that He longs to have with His disciples.

In the Jewish betrothal ceremony, a prospective bridegroom paid a bride-price for his bride-to-be, after which she went down naked into a “mikvah,” or pool of water, symbolizing her death to her old identity; and she came up out of the water with a new identity, now belonging to her husband. According to Jewish tradition, the bride came out of the water with “dove’s eyes,” an allusion to the fact that doves do not have peripheral vision, and that the bride would henceforth have eyes only for her husband. The betrothed couple would also share a glass of wine from a common cup, symbolic of their intention to share one life, one bed, and one blood for the rest of their lives. When Jesus instituted the sacrament of baptism, He established a mikvah for His disciples, whereby they would go down naked into the waters of baptism, die to their sinful selves, and rise out of the waters a “new creation,” an immaculate bride of Christ, purchased with the “bride-price” of the Precious Blood of Jesus, with “dove’s eyes” for Christ alone.

Just as the engaged couple consummated their betrothal ceremony by the mutual gift of their bodies, so Jesus consummated the betrothal instituted by the Holy Mystery of Baptism by instituting the Holy Eucharist, so that He would be able to consummate His union with His disciples by the mutual gift of their body and blood in Holy Communion.

Jesus chose to institute this Sacred Mystery of Holy Communion between Him and His disciples during a Passover meal, which, as we have already seen, looked forward to a future fulfillment by Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. During this sacred meal at the Last Supper, Jesus made perfectly clear that He was giving His Body and Blood to His disciples, under the appearance of bread and wine. According to the evangelists Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus took bread and wine in His sacred hands and said “This IS my body and blood” (Matt. 26:26-28; Mark. 14:22,24; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:24-25).

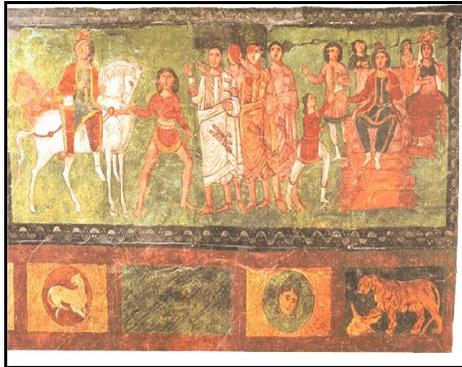
When Jesus established the New Covenant in His Blood at the Last Supper, He also gave His Apostles a command to “Do this in remembrance of Me.” With this command, Jesus gave His Apostles and their successors the power to make present the Sacrifice of Jesus’ Body and Blood on Calvary as a perfect offering of praise, thanksgiving, and atonement for sin to God the Father. With this command Jesus gave His Apostles and their successors the power to change bread and wine into the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of the Risen Jesus. In this way, His disciples could become one Body, one Spirit, with Him, through Holy Communion, receiving the power to live united to Jesus in thought, word, and deed.

### **Come and See!**

The Holy Eucharist stood at the center of the life of the Church from the very beginning. The Melkite Greek Catholic Church is one of a number of churches that trace their origin to the ancient city of Antioch, where the disciples of Jesus were first called “Christians.” It is also one of a number of churches within the Catholic Church which preserve the Byzantine liturgical tradition, a form of worship that was developed in Byzantium, the ancient Eastern capital of the Roman Empire, and which preserved the essential elements of Jewish Temple worship while giving them a new meaning in the light of the Gospel.

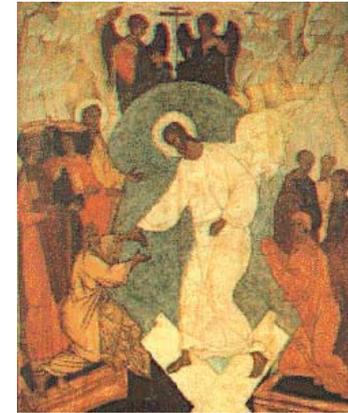
In the time of Jesus most Jews worshipped God every Saturday and Holy Day in synagogues. Many of these synagogues were decorated with paintings or mosaics of scenes from salvation history, like the Red Sea Crossing or Abraham’s Sacrifice of Isaac. Below you can see a beautiful wall painting of the story of Esther in the Old Testament from the famous Dura-Europos Synagogue where Jews worshipped in the time of Jesus. Just as Queen Esther interceded for her people and

obtained salvation for her people from the King of the Persians, so Christians have always regarded Mary, the Mother of Jesus, as their true spiritual Mother. From the time of the Resurrection, Christians also regarded Mary as their most powerful intercessor, through whose prayers Jesus continues to work miracles—just as He did at the Wedding of Cana when He changed water into wine at His Mother’s request.



<http://www.scribd.com/doc/9169347/THE-DURA-EUROPOS-SYNAGOGUE-THEOLOGY-OF-ART-AS-TEXT>

The Jews of Doura Europos did not look upon these paintings as decorations. In their eyes, the synagogue paintings “made present” the realities they represented—the Red Sea Crossing, the Sacrifice of Isaac, the intercession of Esther. In the same way, Christians of the first millennium made holy icons, or images, of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of Mary His Mother, of the Holy Angels and Saints, and of the great events in salvation history and in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. And like the Jews of the time of Jesus, they believed that these sacred icons “made present” the spiritual reality of the person or scene it represented. This is why, when you enter a Melkite Greek Catholic church or other Byzantine church, you will find yourself surrounded by the real presences of Our Lord, and of His Blessed Mother, of the Holy Angels, and of the Saints; and of the real mysteries of salvation history and of the life of Jesus.



The Jews of the time of Jesus worshipped God mainly with their voices; and the Christians of the first millennium did the same. In Revelation, St. John describes the saints and angels in Heaven worshipping God with their voices. Similarly, when you enter a Melkite Greek Catholic Church or other Byzantine Church, you will hear the congregation chanting the prayers of the liturgy together, alternating their voices with the voice of the priest at the altar.

Before offering a brief description of the order of worship in a Melkite chapel, a brief description of the layout of the chapel may be helpful. The physical structure of the Melkite chapel is essentially the same as that of the chapels of the early Church. The first Christian worship services were held in people’s homes and in synagogues, but also reflected the understanding that Jesus had fulfilled the purpose of the Jerusalem Temple. Prior to the Passion, death and Resurrection of Jesus, the Temple had been the one place of lawful sacrifice for the Jewish people—the place where the Passover lambs were sacrificed and hung up to be drained of their blood at the very time of Our Lord’s crucifixion and death on the Cross.

According to the directions given by God Himself, the Jewish Temple was built on the same plan as the Tabernacle, which had been

constructed under the direction of Moses in the wilderness. It had a sanctuary where Jewish men could stand and worship God, a sacred area where priests and Levites could preside over rituals and sacrifices prescribed in the Torah of Moses, and the Holy of Holies, where only the High Priest could enter once a year on the High Holy Day of Yom Kippur, the “Day of Atonement.” The Holy of Holies contained the Ark of the Covenant, a wooden box, plated with gold, which originally contained manna from the desert, the tables of the Law of Moses, and Aaron’s rod, which had miraculously blossomed as a confirmation of God’s election of Aaron and his sons to serve Israel as a holy priesthood. On opposite sides of the Ark of the Covenant, the statues of two Cherubim stood in adoration before the Divine Presence which was believed to abide in a special way upon the Mercy Seat in the center of the Ark.

The Holy of Holies was separated from the rest of the interior of the Temple by a huge curtain. According to the Gospel of St. John, this curtain was torn in two from top to bottom at the moment of the Lord Jesus’ death, signifying that the purpose of the Temple had been fulfilled and that reconciliation between God and man had been achieved through the Passion, death and Resurrection of Jesus. The Hebrew prophets had predicted that the Messiah, the Redeemer of Israel, would show Himself in the Temple in Jerusalem, as Jesus did on numerous occasions. But after Jesus had fulfilled the purpose of the Temple through His Sacrifice on Calvary and His Holy Resurrection, and had instituted the Holy Eucharist so that people of all times, places, and nations could worship God in Spirit and in Truth, the Temple was no longer necessary. In 70 A.D. when Jewish rebels—men who had not recognized Jesus as the promised Messiah of Israel—attempted to overthrow the Roman government in Judea, Roman armies totally destroyed the Temple, thus fulfilling the prophesy that Jesus had made 40 years before, that “not one stone” of the Temple would be left standing upon another.

The destruction of the Temple confirmed the fact that Jesus had fulfilled and brought to perfection in Himself all of the sacrifices and rituals of the Old Law, making the Temple sacrifices unnecessary. Nevertheless, when it became possible to build Christian churches, they were still constructed on the pattern of the Jerusalem Temple, with a sanctuary where men and women could worship together, an inner sanctum containing the altar of sacrifice, where the priests and deacons served, and a Holy of Holies, or Tabernacle, where the Blessed Sacrament of the Body of Christ was reserved. You will find all of these elements in the Byzantine churches in your area.

Many early Christian churches contained a row of columns between the sanctuary where the congregation stood and worshipped and the altar where the priests and deacons offered the Holy Sacrifice. Over time, the row of columns began to be decorated with images of Our Lord, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, of the Holy Angels and Saints, of the Mysteries of the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus and of salvation history. This became the “iconostasis,” or icon-screen, which is such a striking feature of Byzantine churches all over the world.

One other feature of Byzantine church architecture deserves mention—a feature that makes a Byzantine chapel both a continuation and a fulfillment of the Jerusalem Temple. When God created the heavens and the earth in the beginning, He made the universe to be the Temple of His glory and the place of His covenant with mankind. He furnished the Temple of the universe with an astonishing variety of creatures, and then set Adam and Eve over them all as the king and queen of a perfectly harmonious creation.

God made Adam to be the spiritual head of his wife and of the whole human family, and, with them, to offer back to God, on behalf of all creatures, the same love with which God had created them for man. When Adam disobeyed God and lost His friendship, his sin brought death, decay and deformity into the world. Thus, the primary purpose

of the Incarnation was to restore all things in Christ, things in Heaven and things on earth (Ephesians 1:10), so that men and women sanctified in Christ could in turn sanctify the whole universe and every creature, offering them back to God with the same love with which He had created them for mankind in the beginning. The blue ceiling of the Byzantine chapel adorned with stars makes the church a microcosm of the created universe. It is a sign that, in and through Christ and His Church, the whole universe is being restored to God—transformed into a “Temple of His glory.”

### **The Order of Service**

Like the architecture and interior design of the church, the order of service in Byzantine churches closely follows the order of service in use since the time of the Holy Apostles. Before taking part in the Divine Liturgy, the people must “examine themselves,” as St. Paul exhorted the Corinthians to do, to make sure that they have repented of all of their sins and made peace with their neighbors to the fullest extent possible. Prayers for mercy punctuate the liturgy from beginning to end, as the people unite the offering of their lives to the offering of Jesus on the altar—and beg God to receive them as one offering on His altar in Heaven.

At the beginning of the Divine Liturgy, the congregation chants the psalms. Then the Word of God, the Holy Bible, is carried in procession from the Holy of Holies around the sanctuary and back to the altar. Next, a deacon or other lector chants the Word of God, usually from a New Testament Epistle; after which, the children of the congregation and their parents come forward and gather around the priest or deacon who chants the Holy Gospel. When the Gospel has been proclaimed, the faithful kiss the book of the Gospels and return to their places, so that the presiding priest can teach them how to understand and apply the readings for the day.

After the priest’s homily, the faithful make an offering for the needs of the church, and the priest celebrant goes behind the iconostasis to prepare the gifts of bread and wine for the Holy Eucharist. The people stand and sing their intention to “set aside all earthly cares” and to “mystically represent the Cherubim and Seraphim before the Throne of God.” Then the presiding priest and his altar servers make a procession, bearing the gifts of bread and wine from the inner sanctum around the sanctuary through the Holy Doors of the Iconostasis to the altar to begin the Liturgy of the Holy Eucharist.

Now priest and people face to the East—“ad orientem”—in the direction of Paradise and of the Lord’s Second Coming. The priest exhorts the people to “lift up their hearts to the Lord,” and together they join the Heavenly Host in singing the thrice holy hymn:

Holy, Holy, Holy Lord,  
God of Power and Might,  
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
Hosannah in the highest!  
Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord.  
Hosannah in the highest!

Now the presiding priest unites Himself with Jesus at the Last Supper and pronounces the words of Consecration over the gifts of bread and wine. “This is My Body, which will be given up for you” and “This is My Blood, the Blood of the New and Everlasting Covenant; it will be shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins.” Now the faithful unite themselves with Jesus and the priest in offering their thoughts, words, and actions, their bodies and their souls, to God the Father together with Jesus. As they do this, they beg the prayers of the Holy Theotokos, the Virgin Mother of God, who brought forth God the Word. They rely on her prayers, just as the Holy Apostles relied on her prayers and motherly presence in the upper room in Jerusalem, where they received the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

After chanting the Lord's Prayer and begging the Lord for their daily bread—in Greek epiousios, or “supersubstantial,” bread—the congregation prays special prayers of preparation for Holy Communion. Everything culminates in this. If we have participated well in the Divine Liturgy, we offer our bodies as a “living sacrifice” to God in, with, and through Our Risen Lord Jesus Christ. He then enters into us, fills us with His Holy Spirit, and empowers us to live a divine life with Him—loving all creatures as He loves them, with His own divine love.

As Jesus at the Last Supper instituted a “New Covenant” and used bread (arton, in Greek) rather than the unleavened azymes of the normal Passover meal, so the Byzantine priest dips the Sacred Host under the appearance of bread into a chalice containing the Precious Blood and “feeds” his “lambs.” In keeping with the practice of the Apostolic Church, even little babies receive the Body and Blood of Jesus, having received all of the Sacraments of initiation—Holy Baptism, Chrismation, and Holy Eucharist—at the time of their Baptism into the Family of God.

Strengthened by the Body and Blood of the Risen Lord Jesus, the faithful sing:

May our mouths be filled with Your praise O Lord, so that we may sing of Your glory. For You have deemed us worthy to partake of Your holy, divine, immortal and life-creating Mysteries. Keep us in Your holiness so that all the day long, we may live according to Your Truth. Alleluia!

Having received the life-giving mysteries of the Lord Jesus Christ, the faithful receive a final blessing from the priest and depart to spread the kingdom of God wherever they go and to everyone they meet. As the faithful depart, in most Byzantine churches they see an icon of the Final

Judgment above the doors as they exit the church. It is a solemn reminder of the unmerited Divine Mercy that Christians receive in Christ, and of the terrible Judgment that awaits those who refuse to repent and believe in the Gospel.

### **You Have a Standing Invitation**

Now that you have learned about the Wedding Feast of the Lamb, you know why Our Lord Jesus Christ has invited you to His Heavenly Banquet. You know that He longs to share His life with you in the Holy Eucharist; and He longs for you to share your life with Him, so that you can become one body, one Spirit with Him.

If you are a Catholic who has been away from the Church, come and be reconciled to the Lord. If you are a non-Catholic who would like to become a full member of God's Family, we are ready to welcome you and to help you to do everything that you need to do to become a full member of Christ's one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church.

### **Witnesses for Christ**

**[info@witnessesforchrist.org](mailto:info@witnessesforchrist.org)**

**[www.witnessesforchrist.org](http://www.witnessesforchrist.org) – +44 (0)20 8857 9950**

May the Lord Jesus Christ bless you and give you peace!



“Come to Me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).