

# Some notes and a brief explanation of Proskomedias

## Guidelines for Commemoration Books and Prosporas.

***From the book Fundamentals of Orthodoxy:***

**PROSKOMEDIA** – the universal character of our Saviour's sacrifice is revealed symbolically during the Divine Liturgy when the preparation of offerings for Eucharist takes place. The tradition of bringing the appropriate offerings by the believers was firstly a convention of the Early Church. It is said that attending the Divine Liturgy, they would commune their own gifts, as a concrete symbol of their spiritual oblation. This offering represents an act of adoration, of gratefulness and of thanksgiving, a sign of repentance and faith in the union with Him, by means of receiving these gifts that later turned into Body and Blood of His Son, and therewith with the hope of embracing the divine blessings that they have asked for themselves and for those who have brought these gifts. The term "proskomedias" comes from this act of bringing the gifts.

Thus, the term "proskomedias" means offering and in actual language, the word proskomedias also marks the Altar of Oblation, mainly the place or the small table (also known as Table of Oblation) a place on the North (left side when looking into...) of the Table on which the preparations for the offerings take place. Thus, when our Saviour instituted the Holy Eucharist, he firstly had to offer the wine and the bread He brought on the supper table, in order to offer them as elements of bloodless sacrifice to His church. No matter the person who brings the "material" of the Sacred Mysteries, mainly the bread and the chalice, the Meaning of the Proskomedias is that we primary acknowledge Christ Himself within them, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ's love brought by us and for us. Within Him, the One who brings it to His Father, God Himself.

The fact that, we firstly know all these until the Liturgy that the "material" is brought in order to be destined: the bread is believed to become the genuine Body of Christ and the wine Christ's blood, making up the base and the main condition for the Eucharist.

The Greek word for altar bread is *prosphora* - which means an offering to God. Bread is used as an offering because it represents life. Once consumed, it becomes part of us, i.e., our flesh and bones.

Each of these small loaves is formed of two circular parts, one firmly affixed on top of the other, signifying Christ's two natures: human and divine. The top of the *prosphora* is stamped with a seal bearing the sign of the cross and the initials IC XC NI KA, meaning "Jesus Christ Conquers All."

The wine is made of grapes and is red in color, reminiscent of blood.

The priest takes the first *prosphora* and with a small spear makes the sign of the Cross over it three times, saying the words, "In remembrance of our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus Christ." The priest then cuts a cube out of the center of this *prosphora* with the spear (a small, wedge-shaped knife) and recites the words of the Prophet Isaiah: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter .....and as a blameless lamb before his shearer is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth..... In His lowliness His judgment was taken away; .....and who shall declare His generation? .....For His Life was taken away from the earth ..... (for the transgressions of My people was He stricken)" (Is. 53:7-8).

This cube-shaped portion of the *prosphora*, called the Lamb stands for Christ, the "Bread of life... which came down from heaven," the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (*Jn 3:24, 6:32-15*). is placed on the *diskos*, an elevated metal plate. Then the priest cuts a cross in the bottom of the Lamb while saying those same words, "Sacrificed is the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world, for the life and the salvation of the world" He then pierces the right side of the Lamb with the spear, saying the words of the Evangelist, "One of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and forthwith there came out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true, ....and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe." (John 19:34-35). In accordance with these words wine is poured into the chalice mixed with water.

From the second *prosphora*, the priest cuts out one portion in honor of the Mother of God and places it on the right side of the Lamb on the *diskos*. From the third *prosphora*, which is called "that of the nine ranks," are taken nine portions in honor of the saints, John the Forerunner and Baptist, the prophets, the Apostles, the hierarchs, the martyrs, the monastic

saints, the unmercenary physicians, the grandparents of Jesus, Joachim and Anna, the saint who is celebrated that day, the saint to whom the church is dedicated, and finally the saint who composed the liturgy being celebrated. These portions are placed on the left side the Lamb. From the fourth prosphora, portions are removed for the hierarchs, the priesthood, and all the living. From the fifth prosphora, portions are taken for those Orthodox Christians who have reposed. The prosphoras offered by the Faithful have particles taken out, and placed on the diskos. representing prayer requests for the living and the departed (churches and monasteries have Commemoration books with names of the living and departed commemorated at every Liturgy in addition to the prescribed commemorations in the liturgical books).

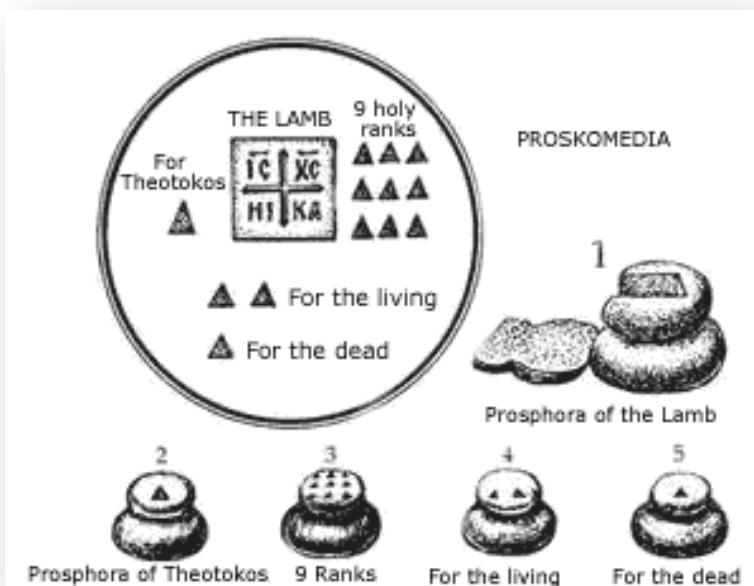
The particles offered for the saints, as also the living and the departed do not have the same sanctifying and cleansing effectiveness as has, exclusively, Christ's sacrifice. They are, therefore, not consecrated along with the Lamb, the Body of Christ, and is not given to the Faithful as Communion. **At the same time, they have a great significance for those on whose behalf they are offered in showing the prayerful care of the Church for them and in their lying next to the Lamb .....and then being infused with the Blood of Christ..... they share in the giving of Grace.**

*In conclusion the Priest recites the following prayer:*

"O God, our God, who didst send the Heavenly Bread, the Food of the whole world, our Lord and God Jesus Christ, to be our Saviour, Redeemer and Benefactor, blessing and sanctifying us; Bless this offering, and accept it upon Thy heavenly altar. Remember those who offer it and for whom it is offered, for Thou art good and lovest mankind. Preserve us blameless in the celebration of Thy divine mysteries. For sanctified and glorified is Thy most honorable and majestic name; of the Father and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen".

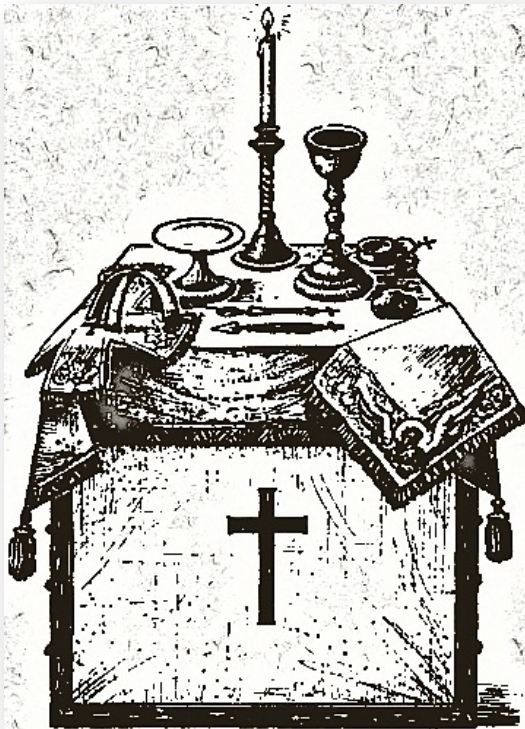
**The sacred instruments used and actions performed in the Proskomedia have symbolic meanings.**

- The diskos signifies the caves in Bethlehem and Golgotha;
- The star, the star of Bethlehem and the Cross;
- The veils, the swaddling clothes and the winding sheet at the tomb of the Savior;
- The chalice, the cup in which Jesus Christ sanctified the wine;
- The prepared Lamb, the judgment, passion, and death of Jesus Christ; and its piercing by the spear, the piercing of Christ's body by one of the soldiers.



---The arrangement of all the portions in a certain order on the diskos symbolizes the entire Kingdom of God, whose members consist of: The Most Holy Theotokos, all the holy men who have been pleasing to God, all the faithful Orthodox Christians, living and dead, and, in the center its head-- — the Lord Himself, our Savior.

---The censuring signifies the overshadowing by the Holy Spirit, whose grace is shared in the Mystery of Holy Communion.



Because the Proskomedie is a hidden, private, or "secret" service, usually unseen and unheard by the congregation (because it signifies the youthful "hidden years" before the Lord commenced His public ministry), some might think of it only in practical or utilitarian terms-- as simply the reverent preparation of the bread and wine, The Proskomedie, however, is an integral part of the Divine Liturgy which, taken as a whole, "is the most important service of our Holy Church. It is miraculous, a masterpiece of the Spirit. It is a magnificent building, erected by the wisest architects according to an inspired plan .... In the Liturgy, as in an architectural work, everything has its proper place. The architects of the Liturgy used, instead of stones, precious prayers and concepts. They mined their materials from the Old and New Testaments, arranged and connected them to achieve an architectural harmony. The hearts and minds of all those who enter this structure are lifted up to the heavens .... He who has good intentions, a mystical ear to hear, and a mystical eye to see, is dazzled by the spiritual beauty of the Divine Liturgy."

(Bishop Augoustinos N. Kantiotis, *On the Divine Liturgy: Orthodox Homilies*, Volume 1).

Even though out of sight and hearing, the faithful should remind themselves inwardly of the significance and importance of this service by which the priest enters into a holy and special relationship with bread and wine, preparing them to become the very Body and Blood of our Lord, God, and Saviour, Jesus Christ, in obedience to the Lord's commandment, "Do this in memory of Me." For "His passion is the very cause of our salvation, and without it mankind could not have been redeemed".

(Nicholas Cabasilas, *A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*).

The proskomedie signifies the gathering of the entire Church of God into one great assembly: Christ the Head, together with the Theotokos and all the members of his Body, those already glorified with him in the presence of the Father, together with all of the faithful disciples on earth. The proskomedie clearly shows that the eucharistic liturgy is always the action of the entire Church, with its head Jesus Christ, and is always offered "on behalf of all and for all."

**COMMEMORATION BOOKS:** So powerful is the Church's intercession that even the righteous have been known to appear in dreams to those still living to ask the Church's prayers. In view of the great spiritual benefit bestowed upon those commemorated during Divine Liturgy, we should be conscientious in giving the names of all those dear to us— and all those in special need of prayer— at the offering; the Proskomedie.

Commemoration books or Commemoration slips (usually located on the candle counter) are provided for this purpose.

For lists of names commemorated regularly, please use a book.

How should one write out commemoration books to be read at the Proskomedie?.....

**.....only members of the Orthodox Church are commemorated, since the particles placed on the diskos represent the Body of Christ; the Holy Church; the body of Orthodox believers. Separate books/lists should be kept of non-Orthodox to be commemorated with appropriate prayers.**

There are separate sections for the living and departed; Proper Orthodox names received at Baptism should be used, no nicknames or shortened forms: i.e., Theodore, not Ted; Margaret, not Peggy.

Bishops, Priests and other clergy are listed first, Clergy should be given their proper title: not simply "Vladyka" or "Father..." but Priest, Deacon, Hieromonk, Monk, Reader, etc.

Ecclesiastical titles may be abbreviated: Metropolitan — Metr.; Archbishop — ArchBp.;

Bishop — Bp.; Archimandrite — Archim... Deacon- Dcn. Andrew

ex: ArchBp Kyrill, Bp Theodosy, Prot. John, Protodcn George...

After listing bishops and priests, list your own name, and the names of your family, relatives and close acquaintances. The same applies to lists for the departed. Ex: Patr. Alexei, Metr Hilarion, ArchBp Anthony, Priest Vladimir, Dcn. Philip, Subdcn Peter. Rdr. Seraphim

-A child under 7 years of age is called an infant; -from 7 to 18 years of age, a youth.

-Do not include surnames, patronymics, titles, or professions of those commemorated, and do not indicate their relationship to you.

-It is permissible to include the words "warrior/soldier," "monk," "nun," "ill," "traveling," or "imprisoned."

-Conversely, do not use the terms "erring," "suffering," "embittered," "studying," "grieving," "virgin," "widow," or "pregnant."

-In commemorating the reposed, use the terms "newly-reposed", for one who has reposed within the past 40 days, "ever-memorable," or "murdered."

\*\* a common practice is to write the date of repose and their family (last name) next to the name of the departed, in parentheses. This also helps to remember the anniversaries of our departed loved ones.

*If written in Russian, names should be in the genitive case.*

Whether a book or even a Commemoration slip is used, care should be taken that it is clean and neat, reflecting a reverent attitude towards the holiness of the liturgical commemoration. There should not be crumpled pages or messy erasures. Books with loose pages or broken staples should be replaced. The writing should be legible; it should not be so small, or the names written so close, as to be difficult to read; those with poor handwriting should print or ask someone's assistance. The priest should be allowed to concentrate on prayer, not on retrieving loose pages or deciphering illegible script.

Books should be regularly updated, i.e., when someone dies or is ordained. It is best to designate "newly-departed" in pencil which can more easily be erased after the 40th day.

*Commemoration books and prosphoras should be arranged and paid for on a half yearly or yearly basis, and the Commemoration books kept in the Sanctuary. On Sundays and other days when Liturgy is celebrated, and for visitors, Commemoration slips should be handed in at the candle counter as early as possible, preferably at the preceding vigil service. Once the Liturgy has begun it is more difficult for the priest to read the commemorations, although strictly speaking he may do so up to the time of the Great Entrance.*

Lists of commemorations may also be offered for Molieben and Pannikhida services that are served at another time, or after the Liturgy. "Outside" of the Liturgy those Commemoration slips should be offered separately.

One parish newsletter explains:

The "prospora" small loaves of bread are brought into the Altar each Sunday with lists of names of those living and departed. The priest prays for each person by name, taking out particles bread from each loaf and placing it on the Diskos (plate holding the bread which will be the Eucharistic bread). The priest is praying for you and with you, not instead of you. After Holy Communion the priest places those particles—which represent each person—into the Chalice, immersing and mingled them with the Precious Body and Blood of the Lord, with the prayer: **"Wash away, O Lord, the sins of all those here commemorated, by Thy precious blood; through the prayers of Thy saints..... Most Holy Theotokos save us!"**

The proskomedia is not only an elegant and beautiful service but also has a poignant and precise relation to an active spiritual life. Who of us would not want to do more to remember our friends and relatives in time of need and at prayer?

### ***Gleanings from the Holy Fathers and Orthodox Christian Authors.***

#### **Proskomedia:**

1

In the Skete of little Saint Anne lived a certain Hieromonk Savvas, called the famous Papa-Savvas. Father Joachim Spetsieres had him as spiritual father. The Empress of Russia Catherine also had him as spiritual father. He served the Liturgy every day; he was God-

bearing, clairvoyant, a teacher of mental prayer. Sometimes some people asked him, what moves you to commemorate so many names in the Proskomedia? He answered, "When I was younger, we called the Bishop to consecrate the church above the Holy Monastery of Saint Dionysios" for it was there that he first practiced hesychasm, with his elder Papa-Illarion, himself also a famous spiritual father. "After the consecration the Bishop said to my Elder, May I give Papa-Savvas some names to commemorate for 40 days, since he will serve the liturgy every day? The Elder said to him, Give as many as you want. And he gave me 62 names. When I had finished 39 liturgies and was going to the 40th, I leaned against the analogion and waited for the Elder to come, to receive the time to serve the Liturgy. I fell asleep and saw in my sleep that I was wearing the priestly vestments and standing before the Holy Table. On the Holy Table was the holy Diskos of the Liturgy, and the holy Chalice full of the holy Blood of Christ. Then I saw Papa-Stephanos come, take the paper from the proskomedia and the communion spoon, draw near to the Holy Table and put the paper upon it, near the holy Diskos. Afterwards he dipped the spoon in the holy Blood of Christ and erased a name. Again he dipped and erased another, and so forth until all were done and the paper was clean.

"Then I awoke and in a little my Elder also came. Immediately I told him the above. The Elder said, Didn't I tell you not to believe in dreams? After the Liturgy he said to me again, You are not worthy that the sins of these people be forgiven: through faith they received the forgiveness of sins. So this is the reason why I commemorate the names of all."

*REF: Elder Ephraim of Philotheou Mount Athos, "Counsels from the Holy Mountain"*

2

Immense is the benefit of the Divine Liturgy, of commemorations, etc.; full of sure benefit for those who repented, who had a little yeast of the virtues, but who by reason of negligence, indolence, and occasional procrastination did not arrive on time to knead the bread of virtues; for these people, the prayers of the Church and their own prayers, charity, philanthropy, etc., fill up their lack, through the multitude of God's mercies! Saint Cyril of Jerusalem says, concerning all Liturgies, that all who are commemorated, for the sake of whom intercession is made, receive the greatest benefit.

*REF: Elder Ephraim of Philotheou Mount Athos, "Counsels from the Holy Mountain"*

3

The new venerable Photini, the one from Asia Minor, in one of her many ecstasies of soul saw a man of sacred appearance, like a priest, and he said to her, "My daughter, give your names to the priest; give him also the work of commemorating them, for the souls of those who have died receive great benefit! Be attentive that you not forget to give the names to the priest!" *REF: Elder Ephraim of Philotheou Mount Athos, "Counsels from the Holy Mountain"*

4

A renowned scholar, a medical man, became very sick. The invited doctors, his friends, found him in such a poor condition, that they saw there was little hope of recovery. The professor lived only with his sister, an elderly lady. He was not completely atheistic, but did not have much interest in religious questions and did not go to church, though he lived near a small one.

Upon hearing such a medical verdict, his sister became very sad, not knowing how to help her brother. Then she remembered that there was a church nearby, where she could go and ask for Proskomedia prayers for her critically ill brother.

Early in the morning, without a word to her brother, she got ready for the early service, told the priest about her sorrow, and asked him to take out a prosphora piece and pray for her brother's health. At the same time, her brother had a vision: as if the wall of his room disappeared, and in its place a church sanctuary appeared. He saw his sister talking to the priest about something. The priest approached the Altar, took out a prosphora piece, which fell down on the discos, ringing. In the same moment the sick professor felt, that some force entered his body. He stood up from the bed, which he had not been able to do for a long time. His sister came back, and her surprise was boundless. --Where have you been? — exclaimed the former sick man. — I saw everything; I saw how you were talking to the priest in the church, how he took out a particle for my health.

They both thanked God tearfully for the miraculous recovery.

The professor lived a long time after that incident, never again forgetting about the mercy of God, which He had shown to him, a sinner.

## **ST NICHOLAS RE: COMMEMORATION BOOKS/PROSPHORAS**

**On the Back outside cover** of the Commemoration Book:

- NAME (Family and First names)
- Telephone number
- Mailing Address
- Email address

(We will use the inside back cover for some admin stuff.)

Names of the living should be written in pencil. No2.  
Names of the Departed in pen, black or blue.  
Please no markers!

Whether a book or even a Commemoration slip is used, care should be taken that it is clean and neat, reflecting a reverent attitude towards the holiness of the liturgical commemoration. The writing should be legible; it should not be so small, or the names written so close, as to be difficult to read; those with poor handwriting should print or ask someone's assistance. The priest needs to concentrate on prayer.

These books will be used for Proskomedia only, so please do not include the names of any non-Orthodox ..... *only members of the Orthodox Church can be commemorated.*  
***Separate books/lists should be kept of non-Orthodox to be commemorated with appropriate prayers.***

Please use the guidelines printed and handed out to properly put together your Commemoration books.

If written in Russian, names should be in the genitive case.