

Day 22 | LITURGICAL RITE

PILGRIMAGE OF GRACE

HOLY ORDERS



The Melkite Rite Catholic Church

The Melkite Church is one of the Eastern Catholic churches which celebrates the Byzantine Rite using the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, one of the early Church Fathers...

The 1990 Code of Canons of Oriental Churches allows various rites to exist. Rites are the "liturgical, theological, spiritual, and disciplinary patrimony of a distinct people, by which its own manner of living the faith manifested in each Church *sui iuris*." The practice of the Byzantine Rite in the Melkite Church is reflective of the fact that we are a "voice for the East in the Western Church."

The term Melkite comes from the Aramaic word *melek*, meaning "king." Tradition holds that at the Council of Chalcedon, the Byzantine Emperor Marcian accepted the teaching established there. Everyone who agreed with him (all of the non-Arian Christians) were called "King's men," or Melkites. In a certain sense, insofar as all Catholics accept the doctrine of Chalcedon, we are all Melkites!

The Crusades were a sticking point between the Melkite Church and Rome as the crusaders did not recognize the liturgical practices of the East, and would either install Western church leaders or, in some cases, even ransacked Orthodox and Eastern Catholic churches. The Melkite Church, despite these frustrations, maintained relations with Rome.

In 1709, Patriarch Cyril V officially recognized the Roman Catholic Church as the head of the Church which caused a rift in the Melkite community. In 1724, some Melkites broke off, forming the Antiochian Orthodox Church. Since then, the Melkite Church has led the way as a representative of Eastern customs and traditions in the Western Church.

The spirituality of the Melkite Church is Eastern: focusing on healing, re-creation, and theosis (becoming like God). We tend to focus on the idea of mystery within the Catholic faith; one might mark this as a contrast with the Western intellectual tradition which has a long history of seeking out answers about the nature of God, the Trinity, and Real Presence, among other things.

There are some interesting differences in practice between the Melkite Church and the Roman Church. Melkite priests are allowed to marry, as was the common practice amongst early priests in the Church. Infants are baptized and also celebrate the sacraments of First Holy Communion and Confirmation at that same time. At every Liturgy, the priest and deacons all process around the church twice, once with the Gospel, and once with the Eucharist.

When performing the Sign of the Cross, instead of the open palm moving from left to right when saying "Holy Spirit," we put together the thumb, index, and middle finger, representing the Holy Trinity, and place the ring and pinky fingers together, with the tips placed at the center, representing Christ's dual nature as fully human and fully divine. Instead of going left to right, we start from the right in recognition that Christ is "enthroned at the right hand of the Father." The West goes from left to right to recognize that Christ descended into Hell before rising again.

The above case shows that both ways are right, and both convey the Truth and Beauty about God. The differences reflect the different paths that lead to Christ, and celebrate the rich heritage of union with Rome, while also maintaining practices in keeping with our traditions. Finally, the Melkite Church acts as a bridge between the East and West, in the hopes that both traditions will come into closer relationship and communion. Alleluia!

The Great Incensation of the Melkites

- Before the Divine Liturgy starts the deacon or priest incenses the entire church beginning at the altar. Since the altar represents Christ he says a prayer to Christ while censuring it: Being God You were present in the tomb with your body, in Hades with your soul, in Paradise with the Thief, on the throne with the Father and the Spirit filling all things but encompassed by none. Thus the censuring of the altar honors both the Holy Table and Jesus Christ. The deacon then continues censuring the Prothesis Table where the bread and wine are prepared, the Iconostasis and the congregation while saying the penitential Psalm 50. This shows that the incensation is also seen as purification to begin the service.
- In the Latin Rite this purification is accomplished on Sundays by sprinkling the church with Holy Water. We desire that we be purified of all evil that we may praise and worship with clean hearts focused on God. Incense is mentioned in the Old Testament and has several meanings. Psalm 140:2 mentions that it represents our prayers rising to God. The Magi offered incense to the Christ Child because the burning of incense was a way to honor gods and kings and Jesus is indeed our King and God (Matthew 2:11).

- Incense is also a purification and sacrifice to God and was commanded to be offered in the Old Testament Temple every morning and evening. In Exodus God appeared to Moses in the Burning Bush and led the people out of Egypt by a pillar of cloud (Exodus 3:2 & 13:21-22). When the Tabernacle in the wilderness was dedicated God came to it and filled it with smoke and the same happened when Solomon dedicated the First Temple (Exodus 40:34 & 1 Kings 8: 10-11).
- So a cloud reminds us that God is present with us and the incense creates a kind of cloud in the church. The smell of the incense cannot be seen yet is present. So too God cannot be seen but is present.



 **MAGDALA**



Experience Magdala



Magdala



experiencemagdala

