



The Sacrament of Holy Qurbana

MATHEWS MAR BARNABAS
METROPOLITAN

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THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY QURBANA

“Present your bodies as a living sacrifice,
holy and acceptable to God
which is your spiritual Worship”

(Romans 12:1)

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THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY QURBANA

I. What is Holy Qurbana?

The word *Qurbana* means "gift" or "offering". This Syriac word is applied to the Holy Eucharist of the Christian Church, which is the divine service of the Lord's supper. In this service we call to memory and participate in the redemptive dispensation of our Lord who lived on earth. As we do this we receive His strength to serve Him in a life of commitment.

II. How do we celebrate Holy Qurbana and remember the important incidents in the life of our Lord?

We remember the birth and baptism of our Lord at the beginning of the public part of the service. At that time, the Madbaha or Sanctuary is opened by drawing aside the veil and the priest says "Mary who bore Thee; John who baptised Thee; May they be to Thee; supplicants for us; Have mercy on us". The priest then goes around the Thronos or altar, kissing its corners and waving the censer set with incense. The deacon or

the assistant who goes in front of the priest with a lighted candle, represents John the Baptist, the fore-runner of our Lord. The shaking of the Marvahsa reminds us of the presence of angels.

We remember the preaching and healing ministry of our Lord as the epistles are read by the readers and the gospel is read by the priest. The priest may deliver the sermon after the gospel or as usual at a later stage in the service, for the sake of convenience, say after "BasMalka" and "Sadica" or at the end of the service.

The Institution of our Lord's supper is celebrated as follows. After the "Kiss of peace" (This is explained later) the priest lifts up and waves the Sosappa of the white veil covering the paten and the chalice (vessels containing bread and wine). Then the priest pronounces the apostolic benediction saying "May the love of God the Father ...". The priest then raises his hands and looks up to heaven, calling the people to lift up their minds, thoughts and hearts to Jesus Christ, who sits at the right hand of God the Father. The people do accordingly with appropriate response. This is followed by the call of the priest to thank God. "Let us praise the Lord with reverence." To this the people respond saying "It is meet and right to praise the Lord with reverence." Meanwhile the priest says a silent prayer and waves his hands upon the bread and

wine. Then the priest begins a prayer of praise to which the people join saying "Holy, holy; holy...". At this time also the priest waves his hands upon the bread and wine, saying a silent prayer in which the priest thanks God the Father for our creation, our preservation and our salvation through His son.

Then the priest narrates what our Lord did and said when He blessed the bread and wine at the Last Supper. The priest says "When He, the sinless one...". When he says "He took bread", the priest takes the bread in his hand and when he says "He blessed and sanctioned", the priest blesses it by making the sign of the cross three times upon it. When he says "He broke", the priest breaks the bread, when the priest completes the narration of what our Lord did and said, the people respond saying "Amen"(So be it). Similarly the priest narrates what our Lord did and said when He blessed the wine. The priest takes the chalice in his hand and blesses it by saying "He blessed and sanctified". Here also, at the end of the narration of what our Lord did and said, the people respond by saying "Amen".

The blessing of the bread and wine does not stop here. In our service we have what is called "The invocation of the Holy Spirit". It is the prayer for the coming down of the Holy Spirit upon the bread and wine. The priest waves his

hands upon the bread and wine, symbolising the coming down of the Holy Spirit, and the deacon cautions the congregation about His coming saying “Barekmore (Permit me Lord) (here Lord refers to the chief celebrant). How solemn is this occasion, how awful this time...” To this the people respond saying “Peace be with us and good-will be to us all”. This implies the working of the Holy Spirit who fills us with love. In continuation to this the priest says three times “Answer unto me, O Lord”. The people join with him saying “Kurielaison” (Lord have mercy) thrice. This is a prayer to God the Father that He might send down the Holy Spirit in His mercy.

This is followed by the conclusion of the invocation of the Holy Spirit spoken aloud by the priest. The priest waves his right hand upon the bread and makes the sign of the cross three times saying “May He perfect this ..”. Then the people respond saying “Amen”. Similarly the priest waves his right hand upon the wine and makes the sign of the cross three times saying “May He perfect this....”. To this also the congregation responds saying “Amen”.

Thus we see that the whole congregation has full participation in the invocation of the Holy Spirit also.

Like the great intercession of our Lord (St. Jn. 17) six prayers of intercession follow. In each

of these, the deacon says a prayer, to which the people respond saying "kurielaison" (This means that God might hear this prayer in His mercy). This is followed by a prayer said by the priest to which the people respond saying "Amen" (So be it). These prayers are made to God as shown under. (1) prayers for the patriarchs and bishops who are the rulers of the Church (2) for the succour of those who suffer temptations and trials and for the virtuous life of the whole church (3) for the rulers of the country (4) for the remembrance of St. Mary and other saints (5) for the remembrance of the bishops and priests who are departed and (6) for the departed lay people.

The passion, death, burial and resurrection of our Lord are remembered as we sing the hymn "Anpudayone Nin Vathil ..." or "Srapikale Kandesaya...". Meanwhile the priest breaks the Body into two pieces and mixes it with blood and does symbolic acts connected with the death of our Lord. Then finally putting together the two pieces, the priest lifts them up signifying the resurrection of our Lord. The sanctuary is then opened by drawing aside the veil.

The Lord's prayer is said as a preparation for receiving Holy Qurbana.

The ascension of our Lord is remembered as the paten with the Body, and the chalice with

Blood are elevated. The Marvahas are shaken at this time signifying the presence of angels. This is also a time of adoration of the risen Lord. The priest elevates the Body saying "Holy mysteries for the holy and undefiled". Then the priest and the people together say "None is holy, save the one holy Father, the one Holy Son and the one Holy Spirit Amen". This is a confession that we are not worthy of communion. As the Blood is elevated the priest and the people say Glory be to the Father and to the Son and the living Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever, Amen". Then the priest bearing the Holy Elements in his hands says "With us is the one Holy Father who fashioned the world by His merch", "With us is the one Holy Son who redeemed it by the precious passions of His own self" and "with us is the one Holy Spirit ..".

Here we have the hymns referring to the communion of saints.

As the veil is drawn and the priest comes down with the Body and Blood to communicate the people, we are participating in the Second Coming of our Lord, in anticipation. The ringing of the great bell symbolises the trumpet. The Marvahsas represent the angels, And the lighted candles remind us of the wise virgins who received the bridegroom.

After giving Qurbana to the people, and thanksgiving, the people are dismissed with the benediction.

III. How do we offer ourselves to God in the Holy Qurbana ?

The blessing of the bread and wine is a time when our Lord blesses us and it is a time to offer ourselves as instruments in our Lord's hands, for the extension of of His Kingdom.

At the time of the "Invocation of the Holy Spirit" the Holy Spirit comes down not only upon the bread and wine, but also upon our hearts. Therefore that is a time for emptying ourselves so that we may be filled by the Holy Spirit and transformed and perfected in the image of our Lord.

The memorial of our Lord's death and resurrection is a time of identifying ourselves with our Lord and offering ourselves. We offer ourselves to Him so that we might say with St. Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ .. Christ liveth in me". (Gal. 2:20).

"The Lord's prayer" said after the memorial of our Lord's death and resurrection, also helps us to offer ourselves to God. We may say that through our self-offering and reception of divine grace and consequent fruit-bearing, the Father's

name may be hallwoed or glorified. (St. John 15:8) "Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit" (St. Mathew 5:16) "Even so let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your father which is in heaven". The rest of "the Lord's prayer" contains petitions which are meant to help us to glorify God. We pray that in order that the Father's name be hallowed. His Kingdom may come. His will be done on earth as it is in heaven, etc.

When we commemorate the ascension, we offer ourselves to the father through our Lord Jesus Christ. The ascension of our Lord was to intercede for us before the Father, offering His own blood. So we should offer ourselves to God the Father identifying ourselves with our Lord.

When we receive the Body and Blood of our Lord, we are receiving our Lord Himself in His fulness. The other side of the same picture is that we offer ourselves to Him in our fulness. Thus our Lord's words "Abide in me and I in you" (St. John 15:4) become fulfilled in us.

IV. Why do we say that the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of our Lord?

When the bread and wine are blessed by the priest, they become the Body and Blood of our Lord. Because, our Lord Himself blessed the

bread and said "This is my body which is broken for you". So also He blessed the wine and said "This cup is the new covenant in my blood". Our Lord has given the command to do the same, "Do this in remembrance of me". (1 Cor. 11:24, 25). Hence when the priest blesses the bread and wine, obeying our Lord's command, they become the Body and Blood of our Lord. Also our Lord said "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, abideth in me and I in him" (St John 6:56). For eating His flesh and drinking his blood, our Lord has not given us any other means than blessing the bread and wine.

V. How does the bread become the Body and the wine the Blood of our Lord?

The bread becomes the Body, and the wine the Blood, of our Lord through the working of the Holy Spirit. The priest is the symbol of our Lord's presence. He represents our Lord and does everything in His behalf. Hence when the priest blesses, our Lord Himself blesses in the inward sphere and the Holy Spirit effects the change.

VI. Where is Holy Qurbana celebrated?

It should normally be celebrated in a church consecrated by a bishop with Holy Mooron (Holy Oil). But for want of such a place, it may be

celebrated in any place temporarily blessed by a bishop or by a priest who is permitted to do so by the bishop. The Tableetha consecrated by the bishop with Holy Mooron, is to be used always.

VII. What are the meanings associated with the things used in the sanctuary?

(1) "Thronos" is the name given to the table used in the sanctuary for celebrating the Holy Qurbana. The word Thronos means throne. It is the throne of God. Thronos is also called altar as the Body and Blood of Our Lord are offered as a sacrifice upon it.

(2) Cross adorned with Oorara (Red Stole) placed on the Thronos represents the resurrected and ascended Lord.

(3) The candle light is symbolic of the presence of God. "God is light" (1 John 1:5) Candles represent the angels and saints also (Matt. 5:14). This is a call to a life following the guidance of God and also to our duty to guide others.

(4) "Sosappa" is the white cloth covering the paten and chalice. This has various symbolic meanings. In one sense it represents the heavenly cloud, marking the presence of God.

(5) "Tableetha" is the small rectangular wooden board or stone consecrated by a bishop

with Holy Mooron and placed upon the Thronos. The paten and the chalice are placed upon the Tableetha. It is a portable altar.

(6) Censer is the vessel suspended on chains, giving sweet-smelling smoke or incense, as frankincense is put in the glowing coal set in it. It reminds us of our Lord's sacrifice, which is "a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:2). The incense represents also the prayer of the saints who are always present with us (Rev. 8:4). It is a call to a life pleasing to God and men.

(7) The book of the gospels is placed upon a small lectern and the gospel represents the spoken word of our Lord.

(8) "Marvahsa" is symbolic of the presence of angels.

(9) Hand bell is used to mark the important occasions in the service.

(10) The big bell is used to call the people for the services.

VIII. What is "Kiss of Peace"

Originally there was the actual kiss before "the institution of the Lord's Supper". Later on, it was replaced in our Church, by the symbolic action of both hands exchanged between persons. To give the kiss of peace the priest first and then the deacon, kiss the Thronos. Then the

priest kisses the chains of the censer held between the hands of the deacon. The priest then makes the deacon kiss the hand of the priest while still holding the chains of the censer. Then the deacon passes on the kiss to the people and the people in turn pass it on until the last person receives it with the action of both hands. The kiss of peace reminds us that the whole community has to be reconciled with each other by the peace of Christ and filled with love before offering the Holy Qurbana.

IX. What are the respective duties of the priest, deacon and the laity in the Holy Qurbana?

The priest acts as the mediator between God and the people as he represents our Lord who is the only mediator between God and man. The priest offers the prayers of the people to God and then in return, the priest bestows God's blessings on the people. The priest also acts as the representative of God and the people, and as the leader in worship.

The deacon assists the priest in the service and often leads the people in worship serving as a connecting link between the priest and the people.

The laymen have a vital part in almost every part of the service either directly or indirectly.

The laity have a good number of responses to be said even in important parts like “The institution of the Lord’s Supper”, and “The invocation of the Holy Spirit”. Also the priest asks the people four times to pray for him. They are also expected to receive Holy Qurbana.

X. What is the importance of Holy Qurbana in Christian life ?

Our Lord Himself has said that Holy Qurbana is essential for spiritual life. “Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day” (St. John 6:53, 54). Again our Lord says “Abide in me and I in you...He that abideth in me and I in him, the same beareth much fruit. For apart from me, ye can do nothing” (St. John 15:4-6). For the experience of our Lord’s indwelling in us and strengthening us, Holy Qurbana, or the sacrament of His Body and Blood, is the way given by our Lord. “He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, abideth in me and I in him”. (St. John 6:56). Hence Holy Qurbana is of supreme importance in Christian life.

XI. How should we prepare for Holy Qurbana ?

As Holy Qurbana is to renew our Lord's indwelling in us we must be cleansed of our sins and reconciled to God and our Brethren (St. Matt. 5:23-24 and I Cor 11:27-30). Thus Holy Confession is taken as a preparation for Holy Qurbana. Also we have to pray for the Holy Spirit by way of preparation for the Holy Qurbana, as it is the Holy Spirit who helps us in our prayers (Rom. 8:26). Silence, fasting and abstinence, help us to prepare ourselves better and they are to be observed to show our reverence to the Holy Qurbana.

XIII. Conclusion

Holy Qurbana is not an end in itself. It is to offer ourselves and to renew the working of the Holy Spirit and our Lord's indwelling in us, so that we may bear much fruit: (St. John 15:4-8 and Gal. 5:22,23) "Love, joy, peace, long suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control". If we don't bear fruit, we will be cast away like the unfruitful branch of the vine (St. John 15:2).

As Isaiah was commissioned to do God's work, after being purified by the live-coal from the altar, so also we must be doing God's work after receiving Holy Qurbana (Isaiah 6:8).

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