

About the Proskomidé

What does the priest do with the bread you bake so that it may be used at the Divine Liturgy?

The Proskomidé is a Service performed by the priest in a quiet voice at the Próthesis (the Table of Preparation or “side altar”) while the Holy of Holies is closed just prior to the Divine Liturgy. It is also called the Service of Preparation since the bread and wine are prepared to become the Body and Blood of Christ.

First, the priest prays before the closed Beautiful Gate, enters the Holy of Holies, and puts on the priestly vestments. After washing his hands and arranging everything on the próthesis, he is ready to begin the Proskomidé.

Following a blessing, the priest takes the prósforon and with a small “spear” (a wedge-shaped knife) makes the sign of the Cross over it three times, saying the words, “In remembrance of our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”

Next, the priest cuts a cube-shaped portion out of the center of the prósforon, containing the letters ΙΣ-ΧΣ-NI-KA. This portion of the prósforo represents Christ, and is called the “Lamb.” It is placed on the holy dískos (the paten, a metal plate).

Turning the Lamb over, the priest cuts a cross in the bottom almost all the way to the top crust. Placing it right-side up again, he then pierces the right side of the Lamb (ΙΣ) with the spear, saying the words of the Evangelist John, “One of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately there came forth blood and water. And he that saw it bore record, and his record is true.” As these words are spoken, wine and water are poured into the chalice (cup).

Following this preparation of the Lamb, the priest cuts out the triangular portion of the prósforon at the left side of the seal in honor of the Theotokos, and places it at the right side of the Lamb (on the left side of the dískos).

At the right side of the seal is a pattern of nine small triangles, arranged in three rows with three columns. These nine portions represent the nine ranks, or categories, of the beings in heaven: the Angels, the Prophets and the Apostles; the hierarchs, the martyrs, and the monastic saints; and the unmercenary physicians, Joachim and Anna and the patron saint of the church along with the saints commemorated, and finally the saint who composed the liturgy being celebrated (Saint John Chrysostom or Saint Basil the Great).

These nine portions are placed at the left side the Lamb (on the right side of the dískos).

Finally, the priest removes small portions from the prósforon for our hierarch, as well as for the living and those fallen asleep. The very last small portion is removed for himself, saying “Remember also, Lord, my unworthiness; and forgive me of all my offenses, both voluntary and involuntary.” All these portions are placed on the diskos below the Lamb.

The remainder of the prósforon used for the Proskomidé, as well as any other Prósfora brought for that Liturgy, are then cut into small cubes and placed in a basket to be blessed and distributed as antídoron. A portion from one of the loaves, with the letters ΙΣ-ΧΣ-NI-KA, is customarily set aside and wrapped. This portion, the ípsoma, is taken by, or given to, the one who baked the prósfora, as well as any particular individual for whom the prósfora might have been offered.

At the conclusion of the Proskomidé, the priest covers the dískos with a metal ásterisk (star), covers the dískos and the chalice with small veils, and places the aéra (large veil) over the covered Holy Gifts. He censes the gifts and prays that the Lord bless them and remember those who have offered them and those for whom they are offered.

The sacred instruments used and actions performed in the Proskomidé have symbolic meanings. The dískos represents the caves in Bethlehem and at Golgotha. The ásterisk signifies the star of Bethlehem as well as the Cross. The veils symbolize the swaddling clothes and the winding sheet at the tomb of the Savior. The chalice is the cup in which Jesus Christ sanctified the wine. The Lamb indicates the judgment, passion, and death of Jesus Christ and its piercing by the spear is the piercing of Christ's body by one of the soldiers. The censuring signifies the overshadowing grace and power of the Holy Spirit upon the Gifts and upon those who share in the Mystery of Holy Communion.

The arrangement of all the portions in a certain order on the dískos represents the Body of Christ, the entire Kingdom of God, whose members consist of the Theotokos, the angels, all saints in heaven, all the faithful Orthodox Christians living on earth, and all the faithful who have fallen asleep in the hope of the resurrection. At the center of the dískos is the Lord Himself, our Savior.



Bringing the Prósfora to the Church

The Prósforon/Proósfora is/are needed at the church in advance of the scheduled Liturgy. The evening before is a good guideline to follow.



An Important Note

Use a toothpick to poke holes in the dough, all around the seal, going all the way down to the pan.

This is a critical step, required to allow steam to escape from the loaf while it is baking.

On the one hand, this procedure will help the prósfora bread rise evenly.

More importantly, it will prevent the buildup of steam under the upper crust that creates a “bubble” just under the seal. If that were to happen, the seal will be destroyed; it will collapse and crumble – perhaps during the cooling process, and certainly when the priest attempts to make the first cut when preparing the Lamb.



The bread you bake with your hands becomes the Body of Christ. What a great privilege! What a beautiful gift you present to the Lord!