

The Proskomidé and the Baking of Prósfora

The Proskomidé

The Proskomidé is a preparation service that takes place prior to the Divine Liturgy. The priest normally serves the Proskomidé alone, either during or immediately prior to Matins which immediately precedes the Liturgy.

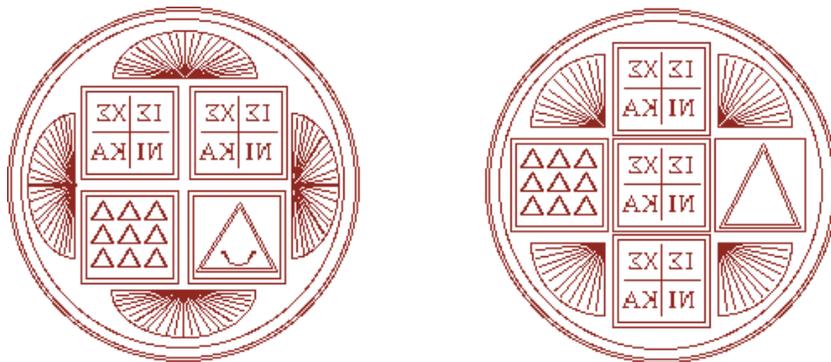
After the priest recites the Entrance Prayers and puts on his vestments, he goes to the small table on the north – or left – side of the sanctuary to prepare the gifts of bread and wine that will be used in the Divine Liturgy. The table is referred to as the Holy Próthesis, the Preparation Table, or the Oblation Table.

The word “proskomidé” means “bringing” and harkens back to the ancient times when the first Christians went to church bringing with them the bread and wine, as well as other necessary items, such as candles, incense, etc. This, of course, is still our practice today, as the faithful provide these items to their local parish priest for the divine services.

The Prósfora

The bread used in the Proskomidé is baked by the parishioners, and is brought to the church in advance of the Divine Liturgy. The bread is made in the shape of a round loaf called a “prósforon” (singular) or “prósfora” (plural). The priest needs at least one prósforon from which he will “offer” the Liturgy as a gift to God from the believers. Generally the priest will use two loaves on a Sunday, although strictly speaking the rubrics call for the use of five loaves. Those baking the prósfora should consult with the priest in advance to determine how many loaves he will need.

The Prósfora must be made exclusively of pure wheat flour (bleached, unbleached, or even whole wheat flour may be used). The Prósfora is leavened with yeast, and must not contain any sugar or shortening or oil in it or on it. On the upper side, the Prósfora is sealed with a round, wooden stamp (or seal). There are several patterns that may be used, two of which appear as illustrated:



Baking the Bread

Baking Prósfora is not just another kitchen task. It is a sacred and holy work, in fact it is itself a liturgical act, and should be done in an atmosphere of prayer and piety. Throughout the process, remember that this bread which your hands are fashioning will truly become the Body of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ.