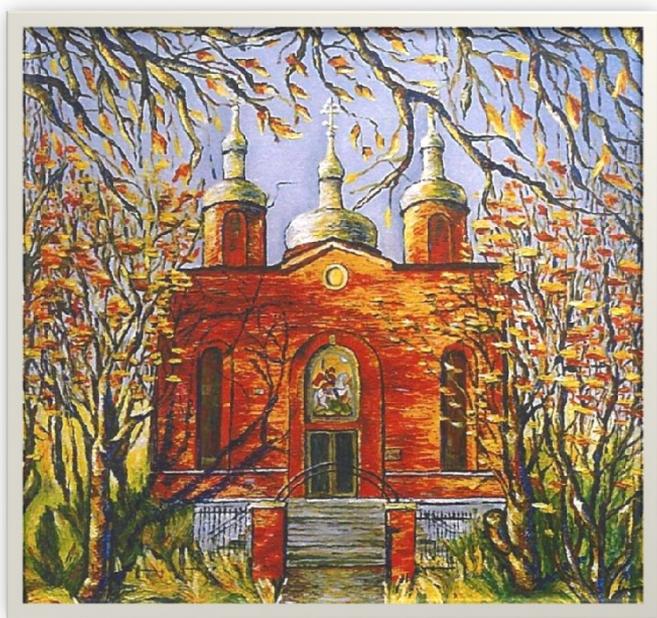
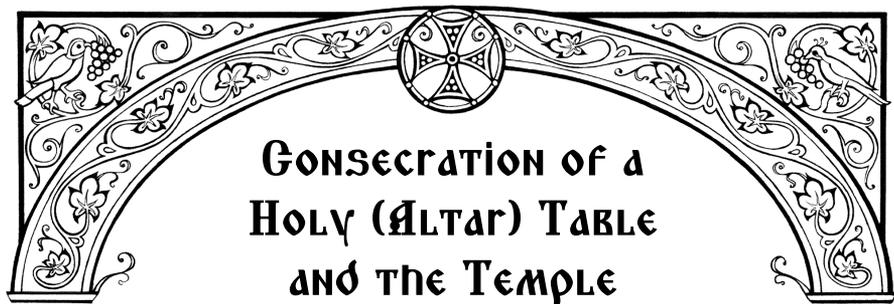


**CONSECRATION
of a
HOLY (ALTAR) TABLE
AND
THE TEMPLE**





CONSECRATION OF A HOLY (ALTAR) TABLE AND THE TEMPLE

In the life of any community, the day upon which the Holy Table is consecrated along with the temple is a momentous and joy filled day for all. It signifies permanence, an unwavering stability in a community which was once transient as individual believers but is now a family in Christ Jesus. The foundation, the bricks, and the roof over a community's head are a physical manifestation of their desire to unite themselves in prayer, praise and worship of the Triune God. The consecration of a Holy Table; the place where the Eucharist is to be celebrated, the focal point and center of the Christian life; the walls which radiate the sweet smelling incense, adorned with images of holy men and women of the Church glorified as saints, is the spiritual manifestation of love for God and one another. It is consecrated to God and God alone. How does the consecration of the Orthodox altar, commonly referred to as the Holy Table, happen and what can we get from this?

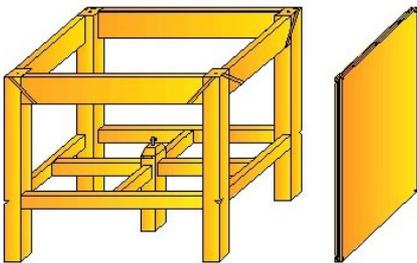
According to tradition, when a new temple is built and completed, a Great Consecration takes place, in which the church building, the altar table, iconography and all the articles within the church are blessed for the Glory of God. For many reasons the various consecrations might take place at different times within the community's life.

Consecration is the invoking of the Holy Spirit to dwell within a sacred place or article, setting it aside for a single purpose.

Consecration of a temple or holy table is done by the Eparchial Bishop or with his blessing by a senior cleric.

It helps to think of the consecration in terms of baptism, much like our own baptisms.

Preparations



In preparation for the consecration, a new altar table is built according to the canons of the church. It must be made out of new clear wood (no knots, rot, etc.); built without the use of nails, screws, or other mechanical fasteners. In the center of the cross braces is

fashioned a cross where the relics of saints are sealed. It is also customary that the table is square, equal length on all sides. The altar table is placed in the sanctuary the day before the consecration is to take place.

Other items are also gathered for the Consecration: Ingredients to make the wax-mastic, rocks, natural sponges, towels, aprons, rose water, wine, etc.



On the Eve of the consecration, Vespers or an All-Night Vigil is served, followed by the Lesser blessing of Water (which is used for the consecration the following day). It is also customary that the relics to be placed in the holy table be brought this evening to the temple also and placed on a diskos (paten) which stands before the icon of Christ with a lit candle which

burns until the consecration.

The morning, in which the consecration is to take place, the parish gathers in the church with great joy and anticipation. The Bishop arrives, and is greeted by the community and clergy, and the customary rite of entrance and vesting of the Bishop takes place. Following the bishop blesses with the Dikiri and Trikiri candles, all clergy enter the altar area and prepare for the great consecration.

Placing of the Wax-mastic on the Columns of the Holy Table

The bishop and priests, having vested in aprons and coverlets over the arms, begin the consecration. The bishop taking the Holy Water sprinkles the four columns (corners) of the altar table. Then the bishop pours a boiling composition called wax mastic on the corners of the pillars crosswise into previously prepared holes. Wax mastic is a special mixture consisting of beeswax, incense, aloe, marble dust and other fragrant substances. During this time Psalm 144 is chanted. This psalm describes the Church's blessing and exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Church blesses and exalts the Son of God for all His works in the incarnation and the power of

His deeds. We fear and love Him for all His works on our behalf. We bless His name every day and will bless and exalt Him into the world to come. During the reading of the psalm the clergy cool the mastic using their breath.



The lid or top of the table is brought forth next; having being sprinkled with holy water is placed upon the columns. Immediately, four wooden dowels are brought forth along with four (4) rocks and blessing with holy water. The dowels are placed into prepared holes in the top of the table and with the rocks are driven down into the columns binding the top with the base and covered with the wax mastic. Symbolically, wax mastic means fragrances with which the Body of the Saviour was anointed before His burial. The nailing of the dowels symbolizes His

Crucifixion. During this step psalm 22 is chanted; “The Lord is my Shepherd...” The Church identifies Jesus Christ as ‘my shepherd’ and thus indicated a close relationship with Him. In this relationship of Shepherd and sheep, the Church lacks nothing, for example, the ‘green pastures’ symbolize the Kingdom; the ‘still waters’ – Baptism; ‘restores my soul’ – repentance/Eucharist; etc.



The Royal Doors are opened for the first time during the consecration and the Bishop, having exited the Altar kneels along with all those gathered kneeling, reads a prayer. In this prayer the Bishop, as King Solomon, asks the Holy Spirit to come down from above to bless and consecrate the altar and the whole church. At the conclusion of this prayer the Bishop enters the altar and the Royal Doors are closed

and the Great Litany is intoned. Much of the chanting of the psalms and the liturgical responses by tradition is sung by the clergy themselves.

Cleansing and Washing of the Table

The next section of the consecration takes place with the ablution (cleansing) of the holy table. Warm water is brought forth and poured three times on the altar, the bishop along with the priests using their hands cleanse every surface of the table, removing excess water with white towels. During this step psalm 83 is chanted. This psalm directly reflects the covenant formed in Baptism. Those who keep their baptism ‘walk in innocence’ and long to see God and the world to come. For one day in this new world and its life is better than a lifetime (a thousand) in this present fallen world (the tent of sinners).



Following the cleansing, the table is washed with “radostamna”, a mixture of red wine and rose water. The bishop combines the two liquids together in a vessel and pours them on the table three times, the clergy again spread it with their hands, top, bottoms, sides, every surface. The remainder, which has not been absorbed by the table, is removed using natural sponges. Psalm 50 is chanted which teaches us the true nature of repentance which is the reason it is used so often in the services of the Church. We see in these steps the clear symbolism of Crucifixion of Christ and Baptism.



And finally, the bishop anoints the altar with the Holy Myrrh (Chrism) in the center, as well as in the place where the diskos and the Chalice will

stand during the performance of the Eucharist, and on all sides of the pillars. The bishop proclaims “Alleluia” and the clergy sing Alleluia three times after every anointment. Psalm 132 “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity...” is chanted, the psalm speaks about unity between God and His anointing people. After the anointing of the altar, the bishop proclaims: “Glory to You, Holy Trinity, Our God, forever and ever!”

The Bringing Forth of the Holy Relics to the Holy Table

The bishop and clergy exiting the altar signify the third part of the consecration rite. The Bishop censes the relics which still stand before the iconostas, raises the covered Paten on which the Holy Relics were placed, and prepares to leave the Church. The procession is led by a cross, followed by the Choir and Cantors, the Priests, the Bishop carrying the Relics, and the Faithful, leaving the Church empty. The procession around the church represents the setting aside of the building as a separate and sacred space only for the worship of God. During the procession a priest taking holy water sprinkles the building many times. The choir

sings the hymns of betrothal; “O Holy Martyrs...” and “Glory to you O Christ our God...” These same hymns are sung both at the marriage service and at ordinations.



When the procession reaches the main doors of the church, the Bishop places the Holy Relics on a table that has been placed before the doors. After a small litany and prayer the Bishop still standing in front of the closed doors of the church begins a short dialogue. The words of this dialogue are taken from Psalm 23. The Bishop intones: “Lift up your gates, O you princes, and be lifted up, O eternal gates; and the King of Glory shall enter in.” And the choir responds, “Who is this King of Glory?”. This represents Christ the King entering and proving His

authority in and over His Church.

The doors to the church are opened and the Bishop brings forth the relics to the altar table, with great reverence removes them from the diskos, anoints them with Holy Myrrh, and places them into the cross which stands on the cross braces on the table sealing it with wax-mastic.



Vesting the Holy Table and Girding it with Cord

The fourth part of the rite, during which the altar is covered with the holy vestments. Firstly, they put on to the altar an undergarment called a katasarka (literally means which is close to the body) . This white linen cloth represents the Lord's burial shroud. Before it is placed on, like with everything else with the consecration, it is

sprinkled with holy water. The katasarka is girded (tied) with a rope in such a manner that there is a cross on all sides represents the rope with which our Lord's hands were bound as He stood before the High Priests. The Katasarkion will never be removed and will remain on the Altar for as long as the Church remains standing.



All this is done while psalm 131 is chanted. This psalm is part of a group of psalms called the “odes of ascents”. In her services of worship, the Church ascends by degrees to the heavenly holy of holies, for worship is an ascent of the heart and mind to the Holy Trinity in adoration, praise and thanksgiving. The climax of the services is when the priest exclaims in the Divine Liturgy, “Let us give thanks unto the Lord,” In offering up

the body and blood of Christ. Psalm 131 speaks specifically about the Church and how ‘it satisfies the poor with bread’, where the ‘saints rejoice exceedingly’ and where people find comfort.

The table is then adorned with the “inditia” (richly decorated robe). This adornment can be made from many different materials. From richly decorated fabrics woven or embroidered with golden threads, to precious metals embossed with decoration or carved from wood or marble. The Bishop sprinkles this cover with Holy Water and the priests place the covers over the altar table.



Immediately after the table has been adorned with the “inditia” all the objects are placed on the altar table, each being sprinkled with holy water; the tabernacle (the small church

which holds the reserved sacraments – the body and blood of Christ) the physical presence of Christ in the Church, the blessing/hand crosses which the clergy use to bless the faithful, an oil lamp which burns eternally before the tabernacle, candles, processional cross and fans, the Antimins (cloth with which is the bishops blessing that puts that community under his spiritual care, and gives authority to that community to serve the Eucharist) and the book of the gospels.

During the vesting of the table and placing of the liturgical objects upon it Psalm 92 is chanted. “The Lord reigns; He clothed Himself with majesty...”

The entire consecration up to this point, by tradition has been done in darkness. The entire church stood in darkness, no candles or lamps have been lit. Although it has become customary that only the altar area itself sits in darkness. The bishop at this point lights the first candle and proceeds with the help of the priests to fill the temple with light, lighting candles and oil lamps.

After the altar consecration is completed, the interior of the temple is now consecrated (remembering the outside was blessed during

the procession). The Bishop taking the censer offers incense, the bishop blesses a priest to anoint the walls with the holy myrrh and another priest to sprinkle the walls with holy water. All this is done in procession around the inside of the church, each wall is censed, anointed and blessed as Psalm 25 is read many times. “...I will go about Your altar, O Lord, that I may proclaim with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all Your wondrous works. Lord, I have loved the habitation of Your house, and the place where Your glory dwells...”



As the consecration draws to a close, what remains are the final petitions and prayers to our Heavenly Father, followed by the dismissal. The Divine Liturgy immediately begins where the first Eucharist will be celebrated on the newly

consecrated altar table.

The rite of an altar's consecration is quite complex, and colourful in Byzantine style. It is not easy to understand the symbolism of this rite, if you do not pay attention to its similarity with the sacrament of the Holy Baptism. By remembering Apostle Paul's words, "your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you" (1 Corinthians 6:19), we can understand the point of the consecration of the altar, as the main part of church. Mastic compound is our anointing with the oil of joy, hammering is our desire to be crucified with Christ, which leads us to Holy Baptism. Ablution with water is a sign of our Baptism, which leads us closer to the Eucharist – the ablution of the altar with rodostamna. All this is due and for our life to be filled with the Holy Spirit – the consecration of the Lord's Table by the Holy myrrh. The vestments of the altar are our baptismal vestments, testifying of our coming back to the merciful Father. So, the knowledge of how the altar is sanctified in the Church is intended to teach us responsibility for our life, consecrated by baptism, is intended to show how reverently we should treat our bodies, the temples of the Holy Spirit, because the consecration of church occurs solely for the sake

of the Holy Eucharist, which will be performed on our altars for the sanctification of our souls and bodies, for our salvation.



CONSECRATION OF THE HOLY TABLE

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2021

6:00 p.m.

+ VESPERS

+ THE LESSER BLESSING OF WATER

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2021

9:00 a.m.

+ GREETING OF HIS GRACE BISHOP ANDRIY

+ CONSECRATION OF HOLY TABLE

+ CROSS PROCESSION

+ CONSECRATION OF THE TEMPLE

+ HIERARCHICAL DIVINE LITURGY



St. George Ukrainian Orthodox Church
8 Augusta Ave, St. Catharines ON L2M 5R2