

prayer the deacon reads the Supplicatory Litany, **"Let us complete our evening prayer unto the Lord..."**

Litia

On great feasts after the Augmented and Supplicatory Litanies the Litia, or Blessing of Bread and Wine, is celebrated.

"Litia" is a Greek word meaning **"common prayer."** The Litia, a series of verses chanted by the choir followed by an enumeration of many saints whose prayers are besought, is celebrated in the western end of the church, near the main entrance doors, or in the Narthex, if the church is so arranged. This part of the service was intended for those who were standing in the Narthex, the catechumens and penitents, so they might be able to take part in the common service on the occasions of the major festivals.

At the end of the Litia is the blessing and sanctification of five loaves of bread, wheat, wine and oil to recall the ancient custom of providing food for those assembled who had come some distance, in order to give them strength during the long divine services. The five loaves are blessed to recall the feeding of the five thousand with five loaves of bread. Later, during the main part of Matins, [if an all night Vigil] the priest anoints the faithful with the sanctified oil, after they have venerated the festal icon.

After the Litia, or if it is not served, after the Supplicatory Litany, the Aposticha (Verses with hymns) are chanted. These are a few verses which are specially written in memory of the occasion.

Vespers ends with the reading of the prayer of St. Simeon the God-Receiver, **"Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, O Master, according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples; a light of revelation for the gentiles and the glory of Thy people Israel."** This prayer is followed by the reading of the Trisagion and the Lord's Prayer, and the singing of the salutation of the Theotokos, **"O Theotokos and Virgin, Rejoice!...."** or the troparion of the feast, and finally the thrice-chanted prayer of the Psalmist: **"Blessed be the**

name of the Lord from henceforth and for evermore." The **33rd Psalm** is then read or chanted until the verse, **"But they that seek the Lord shall not be deprived of any good thing."** Then follows the priestly blessing, **"The blessing of the Lord be upon you, through His grace and love for mankind, always, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages."**

The conclusion of Vespers with the prayer of St. Simeon and the angelic salutation of the Theotokos indicates the fulfillment of the divine promise of a Saviour. Immediately after the conclusion of Vespers during an All-Night Vigil, Matins begins with the reading of the Six Psalms. [see: Matins Brochure]

The All-night Vigil

The **All-night Vigil** is the divine service which is served on the evening prior to the days of specially celebrated feasts. It consists of the combination of Vespers, Matins and First Hour, during which both services are conducted with greater solemnity and with more illumination of the church than on other days.

This service is given the name *"All-night,"* because in ancient times, it began in the later evening and it continued through the entire night until dawn. Later, in condescension to the weakness of the faithful, this service was begun earlier, and certain contractions were made in the readings and chanting, and therefore it now does not last so long as it did. However, the former term *"All-night"* is preserved.

(from: *The Law of God* by Fr. Seraphim Slobodskoy)

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<http://ChurchMotherOfGod.org>
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http://nynjoca.org/about_orthodoxy.html

Vespers

Vespers recalls and represents events of the Old Testament: the creation of the world, the fall into sin of the first human beings, their expulsion from Paradise, their repentance and prayer for salvation, the hope of mankind in accordance with the promise of God for a Saviour and finally, the fulfillment of that promise.

The Vespers of an All-night Vigil begins with the opening of the Royal Gates. The priest and deacon silently cense the Altar Table and the entire sanctuary so that clouds of incense fill the depths of the sanctuary. This silent censuring represents the beginning of the creation of the world. In the beginning God created heaven and earth. And the earth was without form and void, and the Spirit of God hovered over the original material earth, breathing upon it a life-creating power, but the creating word of God had not yet begun to resound.

Then the priest stands before the Altar and intones the first exclamation to the glory of the Creator and Founder of the world, the Most-holy Trinity, **"Glory to the Holy, Consubstantial, Life-creating, and Indivisible Trinity, always, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages."**

Then he four times summons the faithful, **"O come, let us worship God our King. O come let us worship and fall down before Christ, our King and our God. O come let us worship and fall down before Christ Himself, our King and our God. O come let us worship and fall down before Him."** For All things were made by Him; and without him was not anything made that was made ^(John 1:3)

In response to this summons, the choir solemnly chants the **103rd Psalm**, which describes the creation of the world and glorifies the wisdom of God: **Bless the Lord, O my soul. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, O Lord my God, Thou hast been magnified exceedingly... In wisdom hast Thou made them all... Wondrous are Thy works, O Lord... Glory to Thee, O Lord, Who hast made them all.**

During the chanting of this psalm the priest goes forth from the sanctuary and completes the censuring of the entire

church and the faithful therein, while a deacon precedes him bearing a lit candle in his hand.

This sacred action not only reminds those praying of the creation of the world, but primarily of the blessed life in Paradise of the first human beings, when the Lord God Himself walked among them. The open Royal Gates signify that at that time the gates of Paradise were open for all people.

Then man was deceived by the Devil and transgressed against the will of God and fell into sin. Because of their fall, mankind was deprived of blessed life in Paradise. They were driven out of Paradise and the gates were closed to them. To symbolize this expulsion, following the censuring of the church and the conclusion of the chanting of the psalm, the Royal Gates are closed.

Then the deacon comes out from the sanctuary and stands before the closed Royal Gates, as Adam did before the sealed entrance into Paradise, and intones the Great Litany:

In peace let us pray to the Lord. Let us pray to the Lord when we have been reconciled with all our neighbors, so that we feel no anger or hostility towards them. For the peace from above, and for the salvation of our souls, let us pray to the Lord. Let us pray that the Lord send down upon us "from on high" the peace of Heaven and that He save our souls.

After the Great Litany and the exclamation of the priest, certain selected verses are usually sung from the first three psalms of the Psalter:

Blessed is the man that hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, that is, he who has not lived or acted on the advice of those who are irreverent and impious. For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, and the way of the ungodly shall perish. For the Lord knows the life of the righteous and the life of the impious leads to ruin. The deacon then intones the Little Litany, "**Again and again, in peace let us pray to the Lord...**" After this litany the choir chants the verses of certain psalms that express the longing of man for salvation and Paradise: **Lord, I have cried unto Thee, hearken unto me. Harken unto me, O Lord... Attend to the voice of my**

supplication, when I cry unto Thee... Let my prayer be set forth as incense before Thee, the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice. Harken unto me, O Lord. During the chanting of these verses the deacon censes the church once more.

This entire period of the divine service, beginning with the opening of the Royal Gates, through the petitions of the Great Ectenia and the chanting of the psalms, represents the miserable state of mankind to which it was subjected by the fall of our forefathers into sin. With the fall all the deprivations, pains and sufferings we experience came into our lives. We cry out to God, "**Lord, have mercy**" and request peace and salvation for our souls. We feel contrition that we heeded the ungodly counsel of the Devil. We ask God for the forgiveness of our sins and deliverance from troubles, and we place all our hope in the mercy of God. The censuring by the deacon at this time signifies the sacrifices of the Old Testament and our own prayers as well, which we offer to God.

Alternating with the chanting of the Old Testament verses of these psalms of "**Lord, I have cried**" are New Testament hymns composed in honor of the saint or feast of the day.

The last verse is called the Theotokion, or Dogmatikon, since it is sung in honor of the Mother of God, and in it is set forth the dogma on the incarnation of the Son of God from the Virgin Mary. On the twelve great feasts, instead of the Theotokion a special verse is chanted in honor of the feast.

During the chanting of the Theotokion the Royal Gates are opened, and the Vespers Entry is made; a candle bearer comes through the north door of the Sanctuary, followed by the deacon with the censer and finally the priest. The priest stops on the ambo facing the Royal Gates and after blessing the entry with the sign of the Cross, and the deacon's intoning of the words "**Wisdom, let us attend!**" the priest reenters the Altar together with the deacon through the Royal Gates and goes to stand next to the High Place behind the Holy Table.

At this time the choir chants a hymn to the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ: "**O Gentle Light of the holy glory of**

the immortal, heavenly, holy blessed Father, O Jesus Christ: having come to the setting of the sun, having beheld the evening light, we praise the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: God. Meet it is for Thee at all times to be hymned with reverent voices, O Son of God, Giver of Life. Wherefore, the world doth glorify Thee."

In this hymn the Son of God is called the Gentle Light that comes from the Heavenly Father, because He came to this earth not in the fullness of divine glory but in the gentle radiance of this glory. This hymn also says that only with reverent voices, and not our sinful mouths, can He be exalted worthily and the necessary glorification be accomplished.

The entry during Vespers reminds the faithful how the Old Testament righteous, in harmony with the promise of God that was manifest in prototypes and prophecies, expected the coming of the Saviour, and how He appeared in the world for the salvation of the human race.

The censer with incense used at the entry signifies that our prayers, by the intercession of our Lord the Saviour, are offered to God like incense. It also signifies the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church.

The blessing with the sign of the Cross shows that by means of the Cross of the Lord the doors into Paradise are opened again for us. Following the chanting of the hymn "**O Gentle Light...**" we sing the prokeimenon, short verses taken from the Holy Scriptures. On Saturday evening, for the Vespers for Sunday, we chant, "**The Lord is King; He is clothed with majesty.**"

After the chanting of the prokeimenon, on the more important feasts there are readings. These are selections from the Scriptures in which there is a prophecy or a prototype which relates to the event being celebrated, or in which edifying teachings are set forth, which relate to the saint commemorated that day.

Following the prokeimenon and readings the deacon intones the Augmented Litany, "Let us all say with our whole soul and with our whole mind, let us say." The prayer, "Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this evening without sin..." follows, and at the conclusion of this