

## **ASCENSION**

After the third Roosma, the Paten and the Chalice that contain the Divine Secrets is lifted up and celebrated. This reminds us of the ascension of our Lord. At this time the Lay Leader calls out, "We must participate in this service with reverence and fear, ..... look carefully...." He reminds us again. Why? It is so as to subject it to our spiritual eyes. *"After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? ...." (Acts 1:9-11)*

Following the resurrection and ascension, the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit are joined together in heaven as it was in the beginning. That is why we respond to the praise "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit" by saying "They are one from the beginning and for ever and ever" about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who have become one. The two Lay Leaders standing with a lighted candle on the either sides of the priest when he lifts up the Divine Secrets in celebration reminds of the two Messengers of God who were seen on Mount Olive when our Lord ascended into heaven.

### **The granting of the Holy Spirit**

After this we hear, "The Father who created the world in His mercy is with us; The Son who saved it by His precious passion is with us; The Holy Spirit who makes perfect and fulfils all that is and that has been and will be is with us." This reminds of the Awarding of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost "Jesus replied, '... My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them'." (John 14:23). "...he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth." (John 14:16) What is greater than this for a believer to wish for and receive? Therefore, with this the main intent of the Holy Qurbana is obtained and the Holy Qurbana has to be concluded.

Following this, the priest steps down from the raised platform. The Holy Qurbana which started after the priest stepped on to the raised platform after the Declaration of Faith with the

Nicene Creed can be considered complete now when he steps down from it. That may be the reason why the sermon is conducted at this time. There is also a practice of giving the sermon after the Evangelion.

### QUESTIONS

1. How can it be understood that the priest who celebrates the Holy Qurbana needs cleanliness of body, purity of heart and the prayers of the congregated people?
2. Who gave form to the first Holy Qurbana taksa?
3. What is the significance of the priest climbing on to the raised platform after the Creed?
4. Instead of the 'kayyasoori' what was the tradition in the early church? Why was it removed?
5. Establish from the New Testament that the Holy Qurbana should start with the prayer for peace and exchange of Kayyasoori.
6. Where in the service of the Holy Qurbana does it say that the Holy Qurbana is a sacrifice? Why offer a sacrifice (Whom)?
7. What are the various things that the veil (Shoshappa) is compared to?
8. Why is the first Roosma called the 'Apostolic Roosma'?
9. Based on which incident in the Old Testament does the priest say, "Answer unto me O Lord" three times? What is the need for such a prayer in the Holy Qurbana?
10. This time is such a marvellous time (Ee samayam ethra bhramikkathakkathakunhu). Which is this time?
11. What is the meaning of the word 'Thubden'? How did it get this name?
12. Why is the curtain drawn shut when the song. 'Anpudayoney' ... or 'Srapikalley kandeshaya...'?
13. Which is the Scripture passage on which the song 'Srapikalley kandeshaya...' is based on?
14. Why is the Holy Body and Holy Blood called Divine Secrets? Which are the three instances in the Holy Qurbana where this name is mentioned?
15. Which is the occasion that symbolises the Ascension and the Pentecost of the Messiah?
16. Which are the two occasions in the Holy Qurbana when the Lay Leader calls out to 'look carefully' or be careful?

17. When the Divine Secrets are lifted up and celebrated, why do we say, “Parishudhanaya Eka Pithaavum.....parishudhan ila. And ‘Onhaayirikunha pithaavinum...’?
18. Whom do the two Lay leaders who stand with lighted candles on either side of the priest remind of?

## **BLESSINGS (Roossma)**

After the Holy Qurbana service has started, we see that the priest turns to the west and blesses the congregation three times. (1) After removing the veil; (2) Before closing the curtain; (3) Before raising the Holy Body and Holy Blood in celebration. Before these three blessings we also hear the priest say, "Peace be upon you". Why is this? It is not possible for those who do not have peace to avail the blessings. This is a logic that even the psychologists agree to. We can never properly comprehend anything that we read or anything that is said to us when we are in fear. What is read or heard does not remain in our memory. So it is beneficial only if we read or hear something when we are at peace. This is the precondition necessary to receive blessings also.

We see this truth displayed all throughout the Bible. Angel Gabriel who had come to announce the blessed incarnation of the Messiah to Mary on seeing her scared says. "Fear not Mary." It is only after setting Mary at peace does he inform her about the great fortune that God was going to give her. When Zachariah the priest was gripped with fear on seeing the angel of the Lord who had appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense, the angel said, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah" and comforted him before informing him about the birth of John. When the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Only after that does he grant them the priestly commissioning. In the same way, the priest turns to the west and blesses us those who have come to the church burdened with various matters after comforting us with peace. The source of blessing is our Lord who is enthroned on the thronos. Notice that is why the priest when saying the blessing in order to maintain the connection with the thronos places one hand on the thronos. The blessings flow from the thronos which is the Table of Life through the weak priest to the worshippers.

### **Shoshappa or the Veil**

This symbolises the glory of God. This is referred to in our Qurbana taksa as the flint-stone rock which allowed the waters

of river to flow for the twelve tribes of Israel and the blazing rock that was kept at the sepulchre of our Saviour. The Greek Church envisages it as the bright cloud that covered Father God and the others who were there on the Mount of Transfiguration. As the veil is lifted and celebrated the Lay Leader calls out, "Brothers and sisters, we must participate in this Holy Qurbana which is now offered to us with orderliness, awe, humility, purity of heart, love, true faith and devotion." Why? This living sacrifice is offered unto God the Father in peace and reconciliation. This is to be seen directly. The glory that had covered the Trinity - shoshappa or the veil has been removed. Hence, from this time onwards we are standing face to face with the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. With this we are entering into another main part of the Holy Qurbana.

### **First Roosma or Blessing**

As soon as this vision is perceived the blessing of the Three Persons (The love of God the Father, the grace of the only begotten Son and the communion and abiding presence of the Holy Spirit.....) flows down to us from heaven. This is known as the Apostolic blessing. We find the same words used by St. Paul the Apostle in 2 Cor. 13:14 *"May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."* When the priest turns to the west and says this Roosma, the congregation has to stand with their heads bowed down.

### **Humans in heaven**

The priest tells us to lift our hearts and minds to heaven. At that time what we see in our spirit is not the madbaha or thronos or the priest. We see the Heavenly Father and Lord the Messiah who is the chief priest. Not the people who have gathered in that church, but the host of angels who sing praises in heaven. That is why with the angels we declare, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty, heaven and earth are full of His glory. Hosanna in the Highest! Blessed is He who has come and is to come in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the Highest!" The statement "Blessed is He who has come and is to come in the name of the Lord" in this prayer which is from Psalms 118:26 is unique to the Malankara Church taksa.

### **Institution of the Holy Mysteries**

### **Institution of the Holy Qurbana**

After having visualised the lofty and noble and glorious seating we come back to this earth and reminiscence the institution of the Holy Qurbana that was established by giving His Holy Body and Holy Blood to his disciples during the Passover meal at the upper room of Mark. The Christian Church has been observing this from that day to this day.

## Prayer for the Holy Spirit

### Epiklesis

This prayer is something that is unique to the Eastern Churches. Said after saying the Words of Institution (He took bread in His Holy hands. He gave thanks blessed....) this is a prayer to the Holy Spirit to come and dwell in the Bread and Wine and transform it into the Holy Body and Holy Blood of the Lord. The western churches believe that when the Words of Institution are said the purification takes place completely. The Eastern churches, however, believe that after the Words of Institution only with the prayer to the Holy Spirit (Epiclesis) does the sanctification become complete.

At this time it is not just the priest but the congregation also has to pray to the Holy Spirit to transform the bread and wine into the Holy Body and Holy Blood. The Lay Leader calls out, "Barekumor, My dear ones, let us stand in order and awe and pray that the living Holy Spirit from Heaven which is the Jerusalem on high....." As Elijah prayed for fire to come down from heaven and burn the oblation when challenging the priests of Baal (1 Kings 18:36-37 - "*Answer me, LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.*") The priest cries out, "Answer unto me O Lord" three times and the congregation responds with "*Kurieleison*" three times. Thus with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the Bread and Wine become the Holy Body and Holy Blood.

Some people may question how this happens. When Angel Gabriel gave the news to the Virgin Mary, she asked the angel, "How will this be?" And the angel replied to her, "The Holy Spirit will come on you..."

Regarding this, the famous Bishop Pakenham-Walsh has written, "The Eastern Church has never tried to explain how the Bread and Wine evolves into our Lord's Body and Blood. Our Lord never gave an answer to the problem 'how'. "How can someone be born when they are old?" "How can this be?" "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Jesus did not provide an

answer for all these 'hows'. Yet he spoke with authority about the necessity and reality of supreme spirituality."

It is interesting at this point to also note what another theologian named Richard Hooker had to say about this, "It would have been much better if people prepared to calmly ponder about the blessings received through this act, instead of asking 'how'." Adding to this below is an important statement from Rev. Fr. K.K. Mathew's book '*Krupanayudey dhyana padanathil*' ... "Instead of trying to prove theologically that the presence of the Lord is in the Bread and Wine, it is necessary that others believe the spiritual strength received through accepting the Holy Body and Holy Blood."

Since it is beyond man's understanding or reasoning as to how the bread and wine received through the Holy Qurbana becomes the Body and Blood of the Lord; that is the reason why the Holy Body and Holy Blood are called 'secrets'. We see this terminology regularly in the Holy Qurbana liturgy.

1. Before the Lord who blesses ..... And before these divine and heavenly secrets ..... incense is placed.
2. We bow our heads ..... before these secrets that have been offered.
3. We bow our heads ..... Having received the holy secrets.

You would remember the Lay Leader saying these prayers. The Holy Qurbana is also known as 'secrets' and 'mysteries'. 'Divine secrets' is a name given to most sacraments in general.

However, do not consider that the Holy Spirit's presence was not prevalent in this Holy Qurbana service before the prayer for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. From the beginning of the service itself we hear prayers requesting the Holy Spirit to dwell in the bread and wine and evolve them into the Holy Body and Holy Blood. You may remember the priest saying even before the Faith Declaration (Nicene Creed), "Send the Holy Spirit and sanctify the bread and wine kept before us."



## **Evangelion - Good News**

This would be from any one of the four gospels. The portion for the *sleeha* or epistle reading of the Lay Leader and the *Evangelion* or gospel portion by the priest are selected in such a way that they complement each other in matters of scriptural truths. We enter into the Holy Qurbana that is based on the sufferings, death and resurrection of the Messiah in the light and background of the above readings. On the *Madbaha* we see the proclaimed Word on the *Evangelion* table and on the *Thronos* which is the Table of Life, the incarnated Word.

The word '*Thronos*' means throne. As the presence of the Heavenly Father who is the King of kings is on it, *thronos* is a heavenly throne itself. It is also known as Table of Life as the presence of the Messiah who is the Bread of Life is there.

### **Promeon (Preface) and Sedra (Series of prayers)**

There is *Promeon* and *Sedra* in all our services. *Promeon* prayers are relatively small and *Sedra* prayers larger. There are many *Promeon* and *Sedra* prayers to be used in the Holy Qurbana service. The priest has the freedom to select from among these the *Promeon* and *Sedra* that is suitable for the occasion. However, between the *Promeons* and the *Sedras* of the Holy Qurbana there is a prayer that starts as: "One who makes holy..."

The *Promeon* states the salvation that God the Father gifted to us through the His Son, the Messiah.

*Sedra* consists of worship, meditation, prayer for forgiveness of sins, intercessory prayers for the church and self-dedication.

### **Divine Wisdom Cries Aloud**

After the blessing of the chain censer, the Lay Leader calls out "Divine wisdom cries aloud..." This pronouncement is from Prov. 9:2-5, "*She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine; she has also set her table. She has sent out her servants, and she calls from the highest point of the city, 'Let all who are simple come to my house!' To those who have no sense she says, 'Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed'.*" Since Holy Qurbana is a sacrifice and the offering on the altar of sacrifice (table) is bread and wine the above said verses are

most appropriate for this occasion. Therefore, we can consider this call as an invitation to participate in the Holy Qurbana.

### **The Creed or Faith Declaration**

The Lay Leader says the Creed and goes down into the midst of the people. In the early years, even people who had not been baptised would attend the worship service. However, after the worship service, only by true believing Christians were allowed to attend the Holy Qurbana service. So the Lay Leader used to go out into the midst of the people to find out if there were any people inside the church who did not believe in Christ. For these reasons, the service before the recital of the Creed is said to be for the 'Catechumens' (those worthy of being baptised) and the following part which is the main part of the Holy Qurbana known as 'Anaphora' is understandably for the believers.

The Creed which we recite got its form during the various synods. However, as a major portion of it was formulated at the Nicaea Synod it is known as the Nicene Creed. Two ways of narrating the Creed is seen: one, when it is said by all the people who attend the service and, at other times when it is said only by the priest with the people affirming by saying, 'I believe' at the end. Though the second way of affirming at the end may sound more orderly, the first way of everyone saying it is more canonical and has been practised since the very first church.

## **Thozhiyoor Grade X**

### Heavenly Temple and Worship

We see that all our churches are built in more or less the same design and shape. Of course, there is no denying that some of them are bigger in size and more beautiful to perception than some others. Yet, we also see that when churches are constructed, certain parameters are observed in general.

Every church building is divided into three - 1. The place where the ordinary people stand and pray; 2. Adjacent to it a place that has been separated either by railings or as a raised platform - this is where the lamp and table is found; 3. Next to that at the extreme eastern end, the Madhbaha. In the same way, we find similarities in the utilities used in a church. We find *thronos*, screen or curtain, lamp and table in every church. So why is there such a similarity in constructing a church and the appliances in a church?

We read in the Bible that in the Temple built by Solomon in Jerusalem there was the courtyard, the Holy Place, the Holy of Holies, altar or sacrificial place, curtain, lamp and table. So we can assume that the churches we see today are built in the lines of the Jerusalem Temple.

Then the question may arise as to where did the model for the Jerusalem Temple come from. Remember the Tabernacle or Tent of Meeting or Sacred Tent that Moses had built for the people of Israel to worship God during their journey to Canaan? There was only one main difference between this Tabernacle and the Jerusalem Temple. The Tabernacle was made of cloth so that it could be used on the way during the journey. The Jerusalem Temple was built of stone, wood and other things. Then again, there could be a question as to who gave the model to Moses to build the Tabernacle. The answer to this can be found in Exodus 25:40 and Hebrews 8:5 - *"They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: 'See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain'."* (NIV) From this it is clear that the Tabernacle was built as per the plan God gave to Moses and that the

Jerusalem Temple was built in accordance to that and the churches today follow the same pattern. So we understand that churches are built according to the wishes of God and that they are a copy of what is in heaven.

Let us read a witnessing recount of heavenly worship from the vision that Isaiah had in Is. 6:1-9 *“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.’ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. ‘Woe to me!’ I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.’ Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, ‘See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.’ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’ He said, ‘Go and tell this people...”*

Isn't that what we see in the Holy Qurbana service?

1. The priest proclaims, “In order that we too may get the vision of our Lord, seated high and exalted, on a throne, may the mind, thoughts and hearts of all of us, at this time, be on high at the right hand side of Father God where the Lord Messiah is exalted and seated.
2. Isaiah sees the Seraphim (angels) who stand around the LORD and praise Him. In the same, every true believer who attends the Holy Qurbana acclaims with the angels. “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty, heaven and earth are full of His glory...”
3. The afore-said heavenly vision leads Isaiah, the visionary, to repentance. He says with great pain “...*I am a man of unclean lips...*” In the same way, those who prepare to participate in the Holy Qurbana confess their sins before the priest. That is partake in the sacrament of Confession.

4. Isaiah who had confessed his sinful condition was touched on his lips “...with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, ‘See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.’” Likewise, after Confession a true believer is touched by ‘live coal’ in the form of the Holy Body and Holy Blood in remission of his sins.
5. After having received his pardon, God sends Isaiah with a new mission, “Go and tell this people...” The true believer who has partaken in the Holy Qurbana is also send out with a mission, “Depart in peace..... pray for me and for others.”

Thus, Holy Qurbana is celebrated in our churches based on a Scriptural background.

## **PART ONE QUESTIONS**

1. What are the specialties of the Holy Qurbana that make it a very beautiful worship?
2. Which is the Biblical passage on which the construction of a church is based?
3. Prove quoting example from the Old Testament that the Holy Qurbana is a reflection of the Heavenly Worship?
4. What are the names that other churches have given for Holy Qurbana?
5. Whom does the Lay Leader represent when he walks with a lighted candle before the priest as the priest circumbulates the thronos?
6. What is the need for 'dhoopam' or incense? What or which are the Biblical references that validate this?
7. Who are the people, of whom we hear as praying for us, as soon as the curtain is drawn apart the first time?
8. In the kauma, which part is called 'Trissagion' or 'Triple Praise'? What was its first form?
9. For whom are each of the two portions from the New Testament that the Lay Leader reads before the Evangelion?
10. Which is the Proclaimed Word and which is the Incarnated Word? Where do we find them in the church?
11. Where did the Creed get its final form? Which are the two other synods that we remember in the Holy Qurbana?
12. Based on what tradition does the Lay Leader come out of the Madbaha when reciting the Creed?
13. How can you explain 'Divine Wisdom cries aloud' as an invitation for the Holy Qurbana?
14. What are the reasons by which the table in the Madbaha on which the Holy Qurbana is performed came to be called Thronos, Table of Life and Altar of Sacrifice?

### **The relevant Bible references for the below mentioned songs**

1. Vellivu niranjoreesho.....John 3:5
2. Mullmaram aeriyathey..... Exodus 3:2
3. Mochanam athinaai..... Luke 11:9
4. Dhanyan chol kaettae..... Gal. 1:8-9
5. Yajamaanan varum.....Luke 12:37

## **PART ONE**

The Holy Qurbana begins when the priest enters into the Holy Place after the Creed or Declaration of Faith. It could be said that the prayers till then were preparations for this holy service. Until the screen is moved the priest by himself, and after that the priest and the worshippers are preparing themselves. The Holy Qurbana is organised in such a manner that all that has been completed in Jesus Christ for us can be realised in our minds, spirits and eyes. They are as listed below:

1. Birth and baptism
2. Public service or Ordinary Service
3. Institution of the Holy Qurbana
4. Priestly prayers
5. Passion, Death and Resurrection
6. Ascension and Coming of the Holy Spirit
7. Finally, Commemoration of the second coming of Christ.

### **BIRTH AND BAPTISM**

As soon as the curtain is moved we hear the prayer "*Mariam dheelathokku...*" It means "Mary who gave birth to you and John who baptised you, plead to you for us." Holy Virgin Mary and John the Baptist remind us of His birth and baptism respectively. Weren't it the Holy Virgin Mary and John the Baptist who revealed the Messiah to the world? Remember how John the Baptist pointed at the Messiah and showed him to his disciples saying, "*Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" Is there another person who is so connected to His birth and baptism? How joyful and encouraging it is to hear that they are praying for us - is it just them? Read what the writer of Epistle to the Hebrews has written (12:1), "*As for us, we have this large crowd of witnesses around us. So then, let us rid ourselves of everything that gets in the way, and of the sin which holds on to us so tightly, and let us run with determination the race that lies before us.*"

Dhoopam or incense burning: We need to understand the inner meaning of this prayer. The priest circumbulates the *thronos* enveloped by the smoke that arises from the incense burner in his hand. It should be understood that just as the smoke from the incense rises up so do our prayers rise to the presence of

God. *“Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all God’s people, on the golden altar in front of the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God’s people, went up before God from the angel’s hand.”* (Rev. 8:3, 4) Such examples help us to understand the deep spiritual truths. When the priest circumbulates the thronos, the lay leader with the lit candle who goes before him, represents John the Baptist.



## **PART TWO**

### **Institution of the Holy Qurbana**

Upon entering into the Holy Place, before the commencing of the Holy Qurbana, the priest washes his hands and turns towards the congregation of people and bowing before them with open palms says, "My brothers and sisters, pray for me that this qurbana may be acceptable to the Lord." Then he kneels before the *thronos* and pleads for himself and for whom this qurbana is being offered. In the same way the priest kneels and prays after arranging the paten and the chalice on the *thronos* and then before participating in the Holy Qurbana.

From here onwards, all the prayers are said by the priest standing on the step. This symbolises going up to the upper room of Mark's house for the Passover meal and the institution of the Holy Qurbana. Also '*Anaphora*' the name that denotes the Holy Qurbana is suitable to this occasion. The Greek word '*Anaphora*' means 'lifting up to the heights'. After all, the aim of the Holy Qurbana is to raise up the descendants of Adam who had fallen in sin to the heavenly rejoicing.

The priest stands on the step and starts the Holy Qurbana service. The Lay Leader, then calls out, "*Stoumen kaalos*" which means 'everyone should stand properly'. Then the people in response say, "*kurielayisson*" meaning "have mercy upon us". This call of the Lay Leader signifies the importance of the Holy Qurbana that the priest is about to begin.

Taksa or Liturgy: The Lord's brother, and the first chief preceptor of Jerusalem, disciple and martyr James was the person who first gave form to the Taksa of the Holy Qurbana. Later, based on this, many Church Fathers have written the Holy Qurbana taksa. It is said that there in all 88 taksas. Stated below are a few among them:

1. Taksa of Mar Dionysius bar Salibi
2. Taksa of the golden-tongued Mar Ivanios
3. Taksa of Mar Xystus
4. Taksa of Mar Mattai's the Bishop
5. Taksa of Mar John the Evangelist
6. Taksa of Mar Julius of Rome

7. Taksa of Mar Peter the Disciple
8. Taksa of Mar Isaac
9. Taksa of Mar Abraham Nahasirthono
10. Taksa of Mar John the Patriarch

The differences between them are only in a few words or verses and the length of prayers and not in their intent and general form. They all start with the prayer that follows the Creed. Therefore, from this we can understand that the Holy Qurbana service starts following the Creed and the service before that as the preparation for the Holy Qurbana.

After stepping on to the raised platform, before the priest celebrates by lifting the veil over the paten and the chalice, there are three prayers. The first is for peace, the second for surrender and the third for purification. The longing for these are seen in every man. "The three experiences that completely satiate man's religious pursuit at all times and in all cultures is fulfilled in the Holy Eucharist (Holy Qurbana) - reconciliation, surrender and purification." *Kristheeya Kudhaashakall* page 113, by Rev. C.V. John.

#### 1. Peace

The word 'Qurbana' means 'Korban' or 'offering'.

*"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift."* Matthew 5:23-24. If we are to receive the Holy Qurbana, it is an essential fact that we grow in peace and unity with one another. That is why the first prayer is for peace. *Kayyasoori* is a symbolic gesture of this.

In St. Peter's and St. Paul's epistles we read that in their days they greeted one another in peace with a kiss (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 1 Peter 5:14). This custom was prevalent even when our Lord's brother and the first supremo of Jerusalem, Jacob offered the Holy Qurbana. The very order of the Holy Qurbana is an example for this - "In the love of our Lord God, let us greet one another in peace with a pure and divine kiss." Then when this kiss began to lead to indecency, it was decided that the priests would kiss one another, the men among men and women

among women. As time passed, even that practice was dropped and the present custom came into use. In the Coptic Church (The Eastern Church of Egypt) they bow their heads to one another at this time. Instead of this there was also a practice of taking the cross and kissing it and passing it on to the next person.

Some South Indian churches and western churches have now incorporated the rite of giving each other the *kayyasoori* or Kiss of Peace.

## 2. Surrender

“O Lord and our God, we bow our heads before you.”

In the Holy Qurbana, we say this three times, bowing our head. Do not consider this just as a superficial expression. When we say this, in reality we not only bow our head but also surrender our hearts and minds before His Holy presence. This is the great act of submitting ourselves to His holy will. It can also be called dedication. *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship”* (Romans 12:1). We who believe that the Holy Qurbana is a sacrifice, should offer ourselves with our Lord as a sacrifice. Another statement of Paul is relevant here, *“I have been crucified with Christ”* (Gal. 2:20). The priest while praying for the blessing of all the worshippers who are standing humbly bowing their heads then places us before the divine presence with the following prayer taken from the taksa of Mar Dionysius bar Salibi, “O Lord, bless us all with Your eternal blessings. Make us worthy to do Your will and the will of Your only Son, and Your Holy Spirit, now and forever.”

“O Lord and our God” signifies the faith proclamation of St. Thomas when the Lord appeared to him after our Lord had resurrected. Till that time he had not believed the words of the other disciples. With these words he had totally surrendered himself to the divine will. Is there any better way to proclaim our submission than this?

### 3. Purification

After this we pray for the purification of our body and soul. After all, it is not possible for those who have not been purified to lift up their heart's eyes and see the Lord sitting on the right hand of the Father above when the veil is removed. "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*" (Matthew 5:8)

## **QUESTIONS**

1. What does the closing of curtains before the circumambulation with the Divine Secrets signify?
2. Which incident concerning the Messiah does this circumambulation denote?
3. Is it right to dispense the Holy Qurbana to the participants from either the Paten or the Chalice? If so, why?
4. What is the under-lying thought in the terminology 'Thanneer kudi...' ('Vazhiyaahaaram' or 'Provision for Travellers') that we hear in' the Farewell in the Holy Qurbana?
5. In whose care are those who participated in the Holy Qurbana entrusted as heard in the Farewell?
6. Why do some people leave contented and some discontented after participating in the Holy Qurbana?
7. During the Holy Qurbana, what is the great gift that the priest requests of the worshippers by turning to the west and bowing his head?

## **The Greatness of the Holy Qurbana**

Holy Qurbana is the most important part of Christian worship. All Christian sects celebrate Holy Qurbana even today perhaps with some slight changes in their order of ritual.

Of the seven Sacraments that the church has included, two are specifically commanded by Jesus Christ. One is Holy Qurbana, the other is Holy Baptism. "And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." (Luke 22:19) "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Mt. 28:19) So Jesus commanded His disciples to celebrate Holy Qurbana and perform Holy Baptism.

It is the Holy Qurbana which marks the beginning of the week. (Early on the first day of the week...). This worship is imperative for the young as it is for the aged. That is why Holy Qurbana is served to children soon after the Holy Baptism. Moreover, Sacraments like Holy Baptism, Marriage and Ordination are not performed unless the Holy Qurbana is celebrated. That is why Moses Bar-Kepha has called Holy Qurbana 'Perfection of Perfections'. A worship so great has been made enticing to the heart by its decorative attires and music, the responses from the worshippers, by the candles and incense used in the service and by the sanctity of the place set aside for it. Each part of the Holy Qurbana is arranged in such a manner that it will encapture our hearts and minds before the presence of God in order to meditate with absolute concentration.

The thoughts of a believer progresses from holiness to holiness in the Holy Qurbana. The prayers in the beginning are individualistic in nature. For example, when on entering the church we say: "O Lord I have come into your house...please forgive me all the sins I have committed against you". Then only do we pray for others; for example, "Be both our and their liberation and liberator." When the Holy Qurbana service reaches its highest point we pray for our enemies like Christ did; for example, "If anyone has done us any harm, be the cure for them and for us."

In such a manner, a believer's soul slowly gets to be like the soul of Christ.

The Holy Qurbana service has the qualities of a true worship with the praise, thanksgiving, dedication, supplication and fellowship in it.

Praise: Heaven and earth are full of His glory.... Hosanna in the highest

Thanksgiving: It is truly worthy and right to thank the Lord in awe.

Dedication: Gracious Lord and God we bow our heads before You.

Supplication: O Lord who is the source of all blessings, help us and bless us.

Fellowship: "And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf." (1 Cor. 10:16-17). Thus when we partake in the Holy Qurbana we experience fellowship not only with Christ but also with fellow believers. In the offerings of the Old Testament times and gentile offerings, the sacrifice is completed only when the priest and the person for whom the offering is made takes part in it.

Is there any other worship that includes all these qualities? Isn't it necessary that we get to know such a beautiful and sacred worship?

### Names of Holy Qurbana

Different churches have given different names to this worship

1. Breaking of Bread - This is a traditional name found in the Holy Bible. Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7
2. The Lord's Supper - This name is also found in the Word of God. 1 Cor. 11:20
3. Holy Communion - This name is used in the Anglican churches
4. The Mass - The Roman Catholic Church commonly uses this name.
5. Holy Qurbana - This is the name acknowledged by the Syrian churches. It also means offering or sacrifice.
6. Eucharist - is another name used in the Syrian churches. It means service of thanksgiving.

Though there are many names to this great worship, Qurbana which means offering or sacrifice is the most appropriate and meaningful one, opines Bible Theologian and Bishop, Rt. Rev. Pakenham Walsh.



## **The role of the congregation in the Holy Qurbana**

1. Holy Qurbana is a worship that is conducted by the priests, people in the congregation and lay leaders. Every prayer in it though said by the priest or lay leader, when the congregation says 'Amen' (so be it) they confirm before the Divine Presence that it is their prayer too.
2. The congregation does not just say the responses and sing the chants, but like the sacrifice of the Messiah they offer themselves as a living sacrifice in the Holy Qurbana. You would remember St. Paul's exhortation in his epistle to the Romans 12:1 which says "*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.*"
3. When one says participating in the Holy Qurbana, it means partaking in the Holy Qurbana. It should be understood that the Holy Qurbana is a worship celebrated for those who partake in it.
  - a. Before receiving this Holy Mysteries which was hidden...
  - b. After having received this Holy mystery.....
  - c. .... As we have been satisfied at this Spiritual Table....  
(From the prayer of acknowledgement).  
All prayers clearly indicate that the Holy Qurbana is for the people who participate in it.
4. Just as the priest prays for the people, the people also should pray for the priest. The priest starts each part of the three parts of the Holy Qurbana by turning towards the people, and with open palms and bowed head requesting the people to pray for him. Even in *Thooyaba* (Preparation for the Holy Qurbana) as soon as the priest enters the Madbaha, he says, "Pray for me that I may be made worthy to offer the sacrifice". Entering into the Holy Place, before offering the Holy Qurbana just as the Creed is said the priest says, "My dear brothers and sisters and leaders, pray for me that my service may be acceptable to the Lord." Denoting the second coming of the Lord, the priest bearing the Holy Body and Blood says before the reverential display, "My beloved brothers and sisters and dear ones, pray for me."

Moreover, when the priest says “Peace be with you all”, the congregation in response says, “And with your (priest’s) spirit too.” This is also the prayer of the people for the priest.

Remember how the priest bids his farewell when finally at the end he says, “Depart in peace and pray for me also.” So it should be understood that the role of the people in the Holy Qurbana service is not small.

As the Holy Qurbana is to be conducted by both the priests and the people together, how is it justifiable to go home and relax in one’s own home after paying for a Holy Qurbana service?

## **The Lord's Chief Priestly Prayer Thubden**

In Mark Ch. 17 we read that soon after the Passover meal and the institution of the Holy Qurbana, the Lord prays an intercessory prayer to the Father. '*Thubden*' is also such intercessory prayers conducted during the Holy Qurbana. '*Thubden*' is Syriac meaning 'and again'. Since in Syriac each of these prayers started with this word '*thubden* - and again' it got its name *Thubden*. Among these the first three are for people who are living and the rest three for those who are no more alive. The first prayer is for the Church leaders, the second for all true believers and the third for the rulers of the nation. The fourth prayer remembers the Holy Mother, John the Baptist, Stephen the first martyr, St. Peter who was the chief among the disciples and the noble St. Paul. In the fifth *thubden* the departed spiritual fathers and the 23 teachers and the three united synods (1<sup>st</sup> in AD 325 that was called in Nicaea; 2<sup>nd</sup> in AD 381 that gathered in Constantinople; 3<sup>rd</sup> in AD 431 that assembled in Ephesus). In the sixth *thubden* the deceased believers are remembered and prayed for. According to the exhortation that was given to us, "In order to become God's children, in our worship and qurbanas we should remember our fathers who taught us when they were alive"; at this time, we remember both the living and the deceased true believers in the Holy Qurbana and pray for them. This way, when we intercede for others we become one with our Lord who sits at the right hand of the Father and intercedes for us.

### **The Suffering, Death and Resurrection**

After the second roosma, the curtain is closed. That time the remembrance of Christ's passion, death and resurrection is carried out in the Madbaha. The priest breaks the bread and arranges it in a particular way in the paten. Then the bread and wine are mixed and a part of the bread is put in the chalice. Therefore, from then on, it is not just the Holy Body seen in the paten, but also the Holy Blood. In the same way, it is not just the Holy Blood seen in the chalice but also the Holy Body. That is the reason why it has been decided that the Holy Qurbana can be served to the participants from either the paten or the chalice. However, we see it being served from the paten since it's easier to do so. When the Lord proclaims, "I am the living

bread that came down from heaven,” he has both flesh and blood. They were not separate. When the flesh and blood are present together, there is life. Therefore, when the bread which is the Holy Body and the wine which is the Holy Blood is joined together we receive the Lord who is the Living Bread.

The sufferings, death and resurrection of the Lord happened when the light of the sun was not present. The curtain is drawn closed at this time in order to create this impression of darkness. No one is allowed to sit inside the church at this time because of the importance of this particular part of the service. Not only that, one should not walk out of the church either at this time thinking that the priest is now to his own and the congregation has no part in it.

### **The Lord’s Prayer**

After the curtain is drawn open we all together say the Lord’s Prayer, “Our Father in Heaven”. Normally all services are begun by reciting the ‘*kauma*’. In that, how many Trisaggions and Lord’s prayers are included! However, in the Holy Qurbana, the Lord’s Prayer is said only after the Sufferings and the Death.

This prayer starts by calling out to ‘Our Father’. We who have lost our son-ship because of sin gets it back through the death of our Lord. The Son through His death reconciled us with God. That is why we are able to sincerely call out and pray, ‘Our Father’ after the curtain is drawn open. Therefore, it is apt to say the Lord’s Prayer at this time.

At the beginning of the Holy Qurbana, the people reconcile amongst themselves and give ‘*kayyasoori*’. Those of us who have reconciled with one another, the Messiah through his death reconciles us with God the Father. This is evident in the prayer that the priest says while the curtain is closed: “O True Father, as your son died for me as a sacrifice that reconciles you, please accept him and let me be atoned because of him.” In such a way, we who have redeemed our son-ship call out and pray, ‘Our Father in Heaven’. This is the same reason why after the Lord’s prayer the priest prays,” O gracious and merciful Father, who made us worthy to be called Your children.....” (from the taksa of the golden-tongued Mar Ivaneos).

## **TRISAGGION or Triple Praise**

“Holy art Thou O God...”, this prayer because it is said three times is called ‘Trisaggion’ or ‘*Thraishudha keerthanam*’. It is said that of these, only the first three was supposed to have been in use in the early church and “O Thou that was crucified for us...” was added in later years. It is said that Mar Ignatius of Antioch had a revelation that when Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus buried the body of Jesus, the angels came down and sang, “ Holy art Thou O God, Holy art Thou Almighty God, Holy art Thou Immortal Lord.” Then Joseph and Nicodemus sang, “O Thou that was crucified for us, have mercy on us”; and it was later unanimously decided that this should be the beginning of all prayers.

## WORSHIP SERVICE

Sleeha or Apostolic writings: From the Holy Bible the portion that is read first by the Lay Leader and then by the Priest recollects the public ministry of our Lord. The Lay leader reads a passage allotted for the day from either the Acts of the Apostles or any of the epistles written by the Apostles.

There are two readings of 'Sleeha'. According to tradition this was for the two types of people who attended the service. The Jews who had become Christians would stand inside the church to the north of it and the gentiles who had become Christians would stand to the south of the church. So for the Jewish Christians standing to the north the epistle read would be from the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, or letters of the Holy Apostles like James, Peter or John. Then for the other Christians a letter from any of St. Paul's epistles is read.

This we understand so from the way the worshippers are greeted at the beginning of the reading of the epistles. When the Jewish Christians are being addressed as St. John says, they are called "*Habeebai*" (my dear ones) - 1 John 2:7; 4:1; 4:7; 3 John 2. When addressing the gentile Christians, it is like St. Paul's greetings, "*Ahai*" (my brothers and sisters) - 2 Thess. 1:3; 2:1; 3:1. Moreover, the priest when greeting the worshippers is heard saying "*Ahai*" and "*Habeebai*". For ex: Before the curtain is closed for the second time, turning to the west and with open palms says, "My brothers and dear ones pray for me also..." Again while bidding farewell says, "Our brothers and sisters and dear ones.. Depart in peace with the gifts and blessings that you have received from the atoning sacrifice of the Lord." Thus the custom of the priest to address the people of the two groups separately gives credence to this opinion.

(Though this isn't an authoritative explanation for the reading of the two epistles, it has been added with permission that it can be so considered too.)