

Acts 3-4). This is why the Lord's Supper was also called the Supper of Love (in Greek, meaning *agape*; see 1 Cor 11).

- 349 The basic action of the Proskomide is preparation of the bread and wine, as these are the things used by Christ at the Mystical Supper. Bread and wine are God's gifts and also the result of the work of human hands. In the Old Testament, bread signified that which was most indispensable for the maintenance of life, while wine signified festivity, the rejoicing of the soul before God. Bread and wine were the basis of the *banquet* at which Divine Wisdom offered herself as food to the faithful (*see Prv 9:5; Sir 24*). In the New Testament at the Mystical Supper, Christ offered bread and wine as the gift of himself for the life of the world. In response, we bring bread and wine as a sign of the gift of our life to Christ.
- 350 The Proskomide is performed with loaves specially prepared for the Eucharist, the *prosphora* (from the Greek, meaning *offering*). From the first prosphoron the priest cuts out the Lamb and places it on the diskos. The cutting out of the Lamb is accompanied by the words from the prophecy of Isaiah concerning the lamb led to slaughter (*see Is 53:7*). Christ is the Paschal Lamb who takes upon himself the sin of the world (*see Jn 1:29*). On the Lamb cut from the prosphoron there is an impressed seal with the words *Ic Xc Nika* (Greek for 'Jesus Christ conquers'). These words foreshadow the fullness of the "age to come," about which Saint Paul wrote: "When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28). The wine and water poured into the chalice symbolize the blood and water that issued from the side of Christ when it was pierced with a lance (*see Jn 19:34*). Saint John Chrysostom teaches: "...there was a symbol of baptism and the [Eucharistic] mysteries in that blood and water. It is from both of these that the Church is sprung ... It is from his side, therefore, that Christ formed his Church, just as he formed Eve from the side of Adam."²⁸⁹
- 351 The priest places the Lamb in the centre of the *diskos* to signify that the incarnate, crucified, and risen Christ is the centre of the universe and of history. To the right of the Lamb he places a triangular particle cut out of a prosphoron in honour of the most holy Mother of God, and to the left, nine particles in honour of the angelic hosts and saints. Below the Lamb he places a row of particles as he commemorates various living persons, and lower still, a row for the deceased being commemorated.

²⁸⁹ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Baptismal Instructions*, 3, 17: SCh 50,161.

In other words, the priest mentions by name those for whom the faithful have requested prayer. The placing of the particles around the Lamb on the diskos shows that Christ gathers to himself the whole Church.

352 During the covering and censuring of the gifts at the close of the Proskomide, the priest recalls the participation of all creation in Christ's salvation and in the Liturgy: he mentions the incense, the star, the universe, the rivers and the waves of the sea, the heavens, all the earth, and God's world. All this is an expression of God's beauty and power, it receives God's blessing, it all sings his praise.

b. The Participation of the Faithful in the Proskomide

353 The priest serves the Proskomide in the sanctuary behind the do Royal Doors. Nevertheless, each member of the faithful also participates in it in a direct way. The faithful take part in the Proskomide by presenting requests for prayers for themselves and for others, and by bringing offerings. Placing of the named particles side by side on the dis shows that all the faithful belong to the one Body of Christ. Their communion with God and with one another is thus expressed. Each of faithful is a unique person, whom God knows by name, and at the same time no one is sufficient unto themselves. When we bring and offer God "all the cares of our life," we transcend our private lives and enter into a new and ecclesial, comprehensive and universal communion. Now the faithful are ready for the *communal work*—the Liturgy.

354 Blessing the incense during the Proskomide, the priest says: "Chris our God, we offer you incense as a pleasing spiritual fragrance. Having received it upon your heavenly altar, send us in return the grace of your most holy Spirit." As it rises to heaven, the smoke of the incense signifies our prayers rising to God, and as it fills the church building it is a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit. This is why at the beginning of the Liturgy of the Word, the deacon censes the Holy Table and the icons—as well as the faithful, who are the living bearers of God's image (in Greek, eikon).

2. The Liturgy of the Word (Liturgy of the Catechumens)

355 After his baptism by John in the Jordan, Jesus began his preaching, crying out: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news" (Mk 1:15). He preaches the kingdom for three years and brings it to fruition in the Paschal Mystery.