

- 585 The division of the church building into narthex, nave (or `temple of the faithful'), and sanctuary shows us that the Church is oriented to the fullness of the kingdom. We enter the church through the narthex, which symbolizes the passage from everyday cares to "the one thing necessary" (see Lk 10:42)—the kingdom of God. The narthex is the place where the catechumens and the penitents remained during the Liturgy of the Faithful; the initial Rites of both Baptism and Crowning are performed in the narthex, as are several other services.
- 586 The nave ("temple of the faithful") is the image of the fullness of the Church: the community gathers around Christ, her Head, whose image is in the centre of the dome. On the walls of the church are many icons of the saints, manifesting the communion of the Church on earth and the Church in heaven. In the centre of the nave, on a table called the tetrapod (Greek for four-legged table), along with a cross and candles, are placed the patronal icon of the church or of the current feast. Bowing from the waist, the faithful venerate the icon and cross with a kiss as they enter or exit the church. In the temple of the faithful the community raises its prayers to God and is joined to him in these ways: the Word of God is proclaimed and preached before the iconostasis; the faithful receive Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ; the Rites of Baptism, Chrismation, and Crowning are celebrated before the tetrapod; and the Rite of Repentance takes place before the icon of the Saviour.
- 587 The sanctuary, to which the entire liturgical assembly is oriented, is a symbol of heaven. There we find the throne of the Heavenly King, and of his kingdom. In the centre of the sanctuary stands the Holy Table (Altar), a symbol of the throne of God before which the assembly of believers is gathered. The Holy Table is also the table of the Mystical Supper, to which the Lord invites his Church. This is why the Book of the Gospels is placed on the Holy Table and the Eucharistic Gifts are consecrated there. The Holy Table is consecrated by a bishop because only with his blessing may the Eucharist be celebrated on any Holy Table. During the consecration the bishop anoints the Holy Table with holy Chrism, because every consecration is effected by the Holy Spirit. Relics of holy martyrs are also mounted into the Holy Table in honour of the fact that they followed Christ to the end. At the Holy Table the bishop performs the Rite of the Laying on of Hands (Ordination). On the north side of the Holy Table is found the Proskomide Table (or Table of Offering), on which the precious gifts are prepared. Behind the Holy Table is the High Place, designated for the bishop who presides at the Liturgy. It is a sign of the presence of Christ, the great High Priest (see Heb 4:14).

588 The nave and sanctuary are united by the iconostasis. This is because the icons on the iconostasis manifest the invisible presence of Christ and the saints. The raised area before the iconostasis is called the solea, in the centre of which is a semicircular protrusion, the ambo. From the ambo the priest proclaims Christ's victory over death, as did the angel from the stone of Christ's tomb, and here he communicates the faithful. On both sides of the solea are the cantors' stalls (krylosy), the place assigned to the readers and singers.

1. Icons

a. The Veneration of Holy Icons

589 In the Incarnation of the Son of God, people "saw the one inaccessible as God become a man accessible to all."⁴¹² the Old Covenant forbade the making of an idol or even the representation of God, in order to protect the people from idolatry: "You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth" (Ex 20:4) In the New Covenant, the incarnate God, Jesus Christ, became accessible to our sight, hearing, and touch (see 1 Jn 1:1). Therefore, it became possible to depict him.

590 According to Christian tradition, the oldest icons are the *Saviour Not Made-by-Hands*—the face of Christ miraculously copied to a cloth—and the icon of the Mother of God, which, according to tradition, was written by the apostle and evangelist Luke. Such a tradition witnesses to the conviction that icons and icon veneration accord with the apostolic faith.

591 One of the first Fathers who elaborated a theological foundation for icon veneration was Saint John of Damascus. He teaches: "I venerate the icon of Christ the incarnate God ... because the honour that we render unto the image belongs to the Prototype."⁴¹³ In the icon, we venerate not the image but the imaged person, whom we prayerfully contemplate. This is because the icon raises our mind from the image to the Prototype. The Seventh Ecumenical Council of 787 condemned Iconoclasm and confirmed the veneration of icons of the Lord Jesus Christ, the most holy Mother of God, and the angels and saints. Along with this, the Council distinguished between adoration, which is due exclusively to God (in Greek, *latreia*), and veneration (in Greek, *proskynesis*), which we

⁴¹² Akathist Hymn to the Mother of God, Kontakion 9.

⁴¹³ JOHN OF DAMASCUS, First Homily for the Defense of the Holy Icons, 21: PG 94, 1252.