

When therefore you see the priest delivering [the supper] unto you, account not that it is the priest that does so, but that it is Christ's hand that is stretched out ... Believe, therefore, that even now it is that supper at which he himself sat down. For this is in no respect different from that.⁴²⁰

- 607 The main icon of the third row is the Deisis icon (Greek for supplication). It depicts Christ in the centre with the Mother of God and John the Baptist on either side. Sometimes the Archangels Michael and Gabriel are also included. To the right and left of the Deisis icon are icons of the apostles. The whole Deisis composition represents the Church in prayer before Christ: the heavenly Church and the Church on earth are united in a single intercession before the throne of the Lord. This signifies the calling of the Church to incessantly keep vigil and offer prayers for the whole world.
- 608 In the fourth row of the iconostasis are icons of the Old Testament prophets who in their writings announced the coming of the Messiah. This row indicates the unity of the two Testaments in the Revelation of the Word of God. Images of the prophets may also be seen in the upper levels of the nave or sanctuary. In the centre of this row of prophets is the icon of Our Lady of the Sign. On her breast is a round medallion depicting the Christ-Child, Emmanuel. This icon represents the fulfilment of the Old Testament expectation of the coming of Christ the Saviour: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive" (*Is 7:14, KSV-CE*). The iconostasis is topped by the Cross, the image of "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (*1 Cor 1:24*).
- 609 The iconostasis thus presents to us all the stages of salvation history: the past (events of the Old and New Testaments), the present (Christ and the saints present among us) and the future (Christ in glory). The iconostasis symbolically manifests the fact that the Church community assembles and remains in the presence of Christ, and at the same time—by the power of the Holy Spirit—advances toward the place God has prepared for those who love him: towards "what no eye has seen, nor ear heard" (*1 Cor 2:9*).

e. The Iconographic Program of the Church Building

- 610 After visiting the church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, the envoys of the Kyivan Prince Volodymyr described the majestic beauty they witnessed:

⁴²⁰ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew*, 50, 3: PG 58, 507.

They led us to the place where they worship their God, and we did not know whether we were in heaven or on earth. Because there does not exist on earth such a sight and such beauty—we cannot describe it. This we know: that their God surely remains among the people and their worship is the best of all the lands. We cannot ever forget that beauty, for everyone who first tastes of the sweet cannot thereupon take of the bitter.⁴²¹

- 611 Contemporary people realize that in the beauty of the church's iconography they see before them the embodiment of the eternal in the temporal, of the heavenly in the earthly. According to the words of Saint Maximus the Confessor, the Christian church is an icon, that is, an image, of the entire universe, both the visible and the invisible.⁴²²
- 612 The entire church may be covered with frescoes or mosaics of images of the events of salvation history. The central dome is the place for the image of Christ the Almighty Ruler (in Greek, Pantocrator). Placing this image in the centre of the church proclaims that the Ruler of heaven and earth is at the same time the Head of his Body, the Church. In his left hand he sometimes holds a globe—the symbol of the universe—and with his right he blesses. Angels are also depicted in the dome. The four pendentives that unite the dome to the nave carry the images of the four evangelists who proclaimed to the world the Good News of Christ.
- 613 Scenes and persons of salvation history are depicted on the walls of the nave. On the northern and southern walls are icons of the Lord's feasts or Marian feasts, or icons of the Passion of Christ or episodes from the lives of the saints. Below these are icons of martyrs, confessors, venerable monks and nuns, and unmercenary healers. The images of these saints show that the earthly Church and the heavenly Church are united in a single liturgical prayer. The saints and the faithful in the church stand together before the face of the Most High.
- 614 In the eastern end of the church, in the sanctuary, is sometimes located the church's patronal icon, but also the icon of the Communion of the Apostles: two rows of apostles reverently approaching a Holy Table to receive Communion while Christ on one side of the Holy Table offering the Holy Bread, his Body, and on the other, the cup of his Blood. This icon of the Eucharist is a liturgical image of the Church. Indeed, the Church is born of the Eucharist and grows at the Lord's Table with the apostles and all the saints. On both sides of the sanctuary wall we also

⁴²¹ Tale of Bygone Years (*The Primary Chronicle*), Years 6495 [987] to 6521 [1013]: The Tale of the Choice of Faith.

⁴²² MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, *Mystagogy*, 2: PG 91, 668D.