

# Understanding the Service of the Consecration

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On August 6, 2016, His Eminence Metropolitan Isaiah will consecrate Transfiguration Greek Orthodox Church in Austin, Texas. In anticipation of this great event, we offer here a description of the Consecration Service itself and a peek into the significance behind it.

## The Night Before: The Vigil before the Consecration

Before the service begins, the altar is cleared. Everything is removed, including the covering, so that the altar stands bare and ready.

The Metropolitan enters the Church, carrying the relics of three Holy Martyrs (St. Panteleimon, St. Kyrikos, and the Fathers Martyred at Daou Pentelis) in a little box called a '*reliquary*'. The *Reliquary* is placed on a *Paten*, which is the gold *diskos* or round plate that holds the bread for Holy Communion, and there they will sit on the Altar Table overnight, accompanied by a Vigil Light that burns through the night.



The people will gather for the Festal Vespers Service, which will include a short Prayer Service honoring the memory of the Holy Martyrs.

## The Day Itself: The Service of the Consecration

The next morning, we gather in the Church, and the Metropolitan will enter and go to the altar, where the Vigil Light remains lit in front of the relics of the three Holy Martyrs. His Eminence begins the service: "Blessed is our God, always now and forever, and unto the ages of ages."

The Metropolitan will say a prayer about the Holy Martyrs, asking them to pray for us and for God to give us grace, so that we might become more like them:

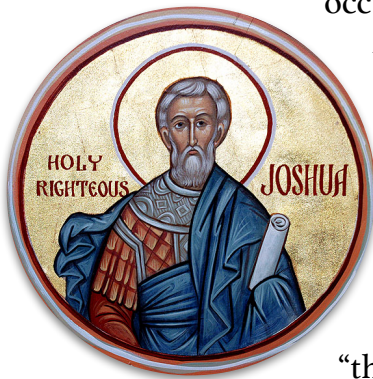
"Lord our God, who are faithful in Your words and truthful in your promises, who gave your holy Martyrs the grace to fight the good fight, to finish the course of true religion and to keep the faith of the true confession, be entreated, all-holy Master, by their intercessions and give to us, your unworthy servants,

the grace of a part and inheritance with them, so that, becoming imitators of them, we may be found worthy of the good things laid up for them.”

The Metropolitan will cense the relics, and then raise them up.

We will then process out of the Church building: first the acolytes (altar boys), then the Chanters, the Icon of the church, the Priests in order of seniority with the most senior carrying the Holy Gospel, the Metropolitan carrying the Holy Relics upon the Paten, and followed by all of the people.

Following the path of our Church’s beautiful new walk-around, we will process with the Metropolitan and the Holy Relics three times around the church. By circling the Church three times, we are delineating a border around the building, and declaring that this Church is set apart for God. This tradition is as ancient as Joshua’s Battle of Jericho. God promised the city of Jericho to His people, though it was currently



occupied by another people. The chief captain of the host of the Lord, a great angel, came to Joshua and instructed him to create a procession: his people were to process in a specific order, carrying the Ark of the Covenant and circling around and around the city walls, stopping periodically to blow their trumpets. Finally, when the circling was complete, Joshua gave the signal to shout, and “the priests sounded the trumpets, and when the people heard

the sounds of the trumpets, all the people shouted together with a great and mighty shout. Then the entire wall fell round about, and all the people went into the city.” (Joshua 6:19) Though God created this world and placed man in dominion over it, the forces of evil rule over this world. In order to take back this territory, consecrating it to our Lord, we will process as Joshua and His people did, circling its walls to declare the land for God.

On our first walk around the Church, we chant:

**“Be renewed, be dedicated, O new Jerusalem; for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For the Father built this house; the Son established this house; the Spirit which enlightens and strengthens and sanctifies our souls.**

In the days of old when Solomon dedicated the temple he offered you, Lord, sacrifices of irrational beasts and whole burnt offerings, but when you were well-pleased, O Savior, to put an end to forms in order to make known the truth, the whole world began to offer bloodless sacrifices to Your glory; for you are Master of all things and by the Holy Spirit You make all things holy.”

At the end of the first circling, the Metropolitan stops at the front doors of the Church. He places the relics on a table, and we hear an Epistle reading & a reading from the Holy Gospel. This is the Gospel reading the Church gives us at the conclusion of the first circling of the Church:

“At that time, Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do men say that the Son of man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16:13-19)



These verses are the foundation of the Church, for the authority given by Christ to the His Holy Apostles (the keys of the kingdom of heaven) will pass down from bishop to bishop in Apostolic Succession; because of Christ's promise, whatever our priests bind on earth is bound in heaven (such as baptism and marriage and all of the holy sacraments) and whatever they loose on earth is loosed in heaven (such as the sins

you confess in Holy Confession). The powers of death cannot prevail against Christ's Church, for His victory is ours.

The Metropolitan will then pick up the relics (for the Holy Martyrs walk with us!) and we will walk around the Church a second time. Then the Metropolitan stops at the doors, places the relics on a table, and we hear an Epistle reading & a Gospel reading. This is the second Gospel reading:



“At that time, Jesus entered a village; and a woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving; and she went to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the

Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her." As he said this, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked!" But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Luke 10:38-42; 11:27-28)

Jesus reminds us to attend to the one thing needful; we are called to consecrate part of our lives, to step away from the business of life to sit at the feet of our Lord, just as this holy Church is to be set apart from this busy world and become a house of God, a place for worship and prayer and peace.

The Metropolitan picks up the relics (for the Holy Martyrs walk with us!) and we walk around the Church a final time. Then the Metropolitan stops for the last time at the Church doors.



“Make it [this Church] firm until the consummation of the age, unshaken and glorified by You, and count us worthy to worship You, your only-begotten Son and your Holy Spirit, with hymns of praise and glory and with full knowledge and awe, and to be found worthy of your divine mercy, so that our prayers, which we offer to your ineffable compassion on behalf of all your People, may be acceptable to your goodness.”

The Metropolitan prays that angels accompany us as we enter:

“Master and Lord our God, You have established in heaven the orders and hosts of angels and archangels to minister to Your glory. Grant that the holy angels may enter with us that together we may serve and glorify Your goodness.”

Now the Metropolitan will pound on the doors of the Church, so “that the King of Glory may enter in.” This dialogue is taken from Psalm 24, and is sometimes read on Pascha though it is most especially reserved for use in the Consecration Service. His Eminence, raising His Hierarchical staff (Ravdos), knocks on the doors of the Church and says: “Lift up your gates you rulers; and be lifted up you eternal gates, and the king of glory will enter. “ From inside the Church and behind the closed doors a voice answers, “Who is this king of glory?” The Metropolitan replies, “The Lord mighty and powerful, the Lord powerful in war. Lift up your gates you rulers; and be lifted up you eternal gates, and the king of glory will enter.” Again, the voice asks, “Who is this king of glory?” and the Metropolitan answers, “The Lord mighty and powerful, the Lord powerful in war. Lift up your gates you rulers; and be lifted up you eternal gates, and the king of glory will enter.” A third time the voice asks, “Who is this king of glory?” and the Metropolitan replies, “The Lord of powers, he is the king of glory.” At the third answer the Metropolitan once again lifts



the Holy Relics from the table and makes the sign of the Cross with them three times on the closed doors. The doors are unlocked, and everyone processes into the Church.

Everyone enters the Church, and the Metropolitan carries the Holy Relics to the Altar, where they are carefully placed in a hole in the Holy Altar Table. The first Altars in the Early Church were the tombs of the Holy Martyrs, for the early Christians secretly celebrated the liturgy over their bones. It is appropriate that we continue this tradition, and place the bones of martyrs in our altars. These Saints will be our parish's personal patrons and protectors, interceding on our behalf before the Lord.



Together with the Saints' Holy Relics, a Scroll listing the names of all those who pledged as Consecration Godparents and their loved ones will be sealed with them, to reside in this Holy Altar forever. These names will include the names of our community's founding fathers and mothers, and any names offered in memory of loved ones.

His Eminence will pour Holy Chrism over the Relics & Scroll to symbolize the union between our Lord and His Martyrs. Over the Holy Relics, he will pour a wax/mastic which contains the sweet-smelling spices used by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus to anoint the Body of Christ for His burial. He will then apply a marble lid covering, and seal them permanently. The Holy Altar table thus represents the entombed Body of our Lord.

In Romans 6:8 we read: "Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him...." This reading from the epistle to the Romans is read in the Baptism service, because when we are baptized, we die with Christ so that we may rise with Him. The Holy Relics of Martyred Saints remind us of, and connect us to, this great truth, and to Christ Himself. A Consecration is the "Baptism" of a Church, and in it each of us reaffirms our own Baptism, our own dying and living with Christ. Therefore, on the day of Consecration, the Church allows us to be "entombed" with our Lord

through the interment of the names of our loved ones, past and present, living (Church Militant) and dead (Church Triumphant). Thus, together with the reliquary containing the Holy Relics of the three martyred saints, His Eminence will place a scroll with the names of our loved ones, both those who are living and those who have fallen asleep. In this way, we and our loved ones are forever connected to the Saints, and to Christ, Who is “wondrous” among His Saints.

The Metropolitan’s robes are now covered with a white sheet, and he prepares to clean the Altar. He is given three bars of soap and a basin of water, which he blesses to make it Holy Water (much like the blessing of waters in Baptism.) As he cleans, he will chant, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be



clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Fill me with joy and gladness; let the bones which thou hast broken rejoice.” three times — we recognize these opening words of Psalm 50, the great Psalm of repentance. (The chanters will finish the Psalm as he continues to work.)

After it is clean, he will make the sign of the cross in water over the Altar three times (as when a person is dunked into the water three times in Baptism). He will then make the sign of the cross with oil over the Altar three times, calling out, “Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!” each time (as when a person is Chrismated.) We will read from Psalm 132, which reminds us that when Aaron was chosen by the Lord and anointed, the oil flowed over him and into his beard!

**Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down upon the beard, upon the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life for evermore. (Psalm 132)**

Oil was used to heal wounds and to make dry skin supple, to make food delicious and also burned for light — so to have an abundance of oil is to be blessed with many good things, from God's good pleasure (the reason He's anointing you in the first place) to health and plenteous food and to the very light of Christ.)

A cloth with the icons of the four evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) in each corner is sealed into the Holy Altar with wax. They are in each of the four corners, just as they are in the four corners of our dome, as their Holy Gospels have gone out to all the ends of the universe.

The Holy Altar is now covered with a new white cloth — like the new white garment which is worn by the newly illumined (freshly Baptized & Chrismated person), and then with an outer cloth as well. As the Altar is enrobed, we read Psalm 92:

**The LORD reigns; he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed, he is girded with strength. Yea, the world is established; it shall never be moved; thy throne is established from of old; thou art from everlasting. The floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice, the floods lift up their roaring. Mightier than the thunders of many waters, mightier than the waves of the sea, the LORD on high is mighty! Thy decrees are very sure; holiness befits thy house, O LORD, for evermore. (Psalm 92)**

The Metropolitan censes the Holy Altar and the Church. He will now chrismate the icons and the building; carrying a reed to the tip of which has been bound a sponge dipped in holy Chrism, he draws the monogram of Christ in the apse of the Sanctuary, on the four columns and on the lintel of the door of the Church on the inside.

Finally, at the conclusion of the service, His Eminence Metropolitan Isaiah will bring to all the faithful the Vigil Light, an oil lamp or kandyli, from the Holy Altar. This light reminds us of the unfailing light of our Transfigured Christ in His Holy Resurrection (and of the candle that a newly Baptised & Chrismated person carries!)

After we have all offered our oil to the holy vigil lamp, we will begin the celebration of the Divine Liturgy.

For more information on Transfiguration's upcoming Consecration on August 6, 2016, please visit [transfiguration.org](http://transfiguration.org) and select the 'Consecration' menu.