

Spirituality of Our Church Rituals V:

The Meaning of the Use of Light within the Church

The Lord commanded Moses to have a Golden Lamp in The Tabernacle and Solomon the King had the same in The Temple as the Lord commanded him *“the lampstands and the lamp of fine gold that were to burn in the front of the Most Holy Place as prescribed.”* (II Chronicles 4:20)

“Command the people of Israel to bring you the best olive oil for the lamp so that it can be lit each evening.” (Exodus 27:20) *“Make a lampstand of pure gold.”* (Exodus 5:31) Light would not be a symbolic representation which would become obsolete such as the sacrifices which no longer continued after the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Use of light became an apostolic tradition in the primitive Church as documented in the Holy Book of Acts, *“On Sunday evening we gathered together for the fellowship. Paul spoke to the people and kept on speaking until midnight, since he was going to leave the next day. Many lamps were burning in the high room where they were gathered.”* (Acts 20:7-8)

The Apostles set forth in their law, *“The church should be lit with many lamps as the Kingdom of Heaven has especially during reading of the Holy Gospel.”* Also, they instructed the lamps should be lit specifically using pure olive oil. St. Gregory the Theologian stated, *“Use of lamps and candles was one of the holy rituals in the Church during liturgy and different mysteries.”* Irinomos who lived in the 4th century wrote that candles and lamps were being used in all the churches during his time. It can be concluded that use of candles and lamps was apostolic tradition in all apostolic churches in the East and the West.

Candles and light, both are a symbol of the glory and Transfiguration of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Church (Matthew 8:28; Revelation 1:12-13 and 2:1) and so candles should be lit for honoring the Lord. Candles and light illuminate the Church as the earthly Kingdom of Heaven with its great glory (Revelation 21:22-23). One of the Church Fathers' mentioned the Church is the earthly Heaven and so should be lit with lamps and candles as the Heaven is illuminated with the angels. Candles and light remind the congregation they are the light of the world and should behave in the light with righteous deeds (Philippians 2:15) as saints who are like stars in the Kingdom of Heaven (Revelation 1:12, and 4:5).

Candles should be lit during the liturgy as commanded by the Lord (Exodus 40:24-25). The Christian faith obtained through the Lord's sacrifice during the Divine Liturgy is the extension of the Cross' sacrifice (II Corinthians 4:4-5, I Peter 2:9). The Lord Jesus Christ serves the liturgical mysteries as He was the sacrifice and the priest in offering the Cross' sacrifice with the Divine glory (Psalm 93:1, 104:1, John 1:9). The congregation is required to leave evil deeds and to have righteous deeds (Romans 12:12-13). Everyone should repent before partaking of the Holy Communion. Lighting of candles and lamps during the Divine Liturgy symbolizes the honor and glory of the New Testament's priesthood and is more honorable than Aaron's priesthood (Hebrews 7:8-9, II Corinthians 3:7-11).

Candles should be lit during the Holy Gospel Reading signifying that the Holy Gospel's light truly shines everywhere (II Corinthians 4:4). God's Word is the True Light of Light (Proverbs 6:36). God's Word is a lamp to guide us and a light for our path (Psalm 119:105). St. Irinomos mentioned that the Church uses the lamps and candles to portray her joy of the Holy Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ's salvation. The candle which is lit before the Holy Gospel is a symbol of St. John the Baptist who was

like a lamp brightly burning and shining (John 5:35) and preaching to the world about the Lord Jesus Christ the Savior as the Morning Star which declares the effervescent shining of the sun of healing, *"But for you who obey me, my saving power will rise on you like the sun and bring healing like the sun's rays"* (Malachi 4:2) and testified for the Lord Jesus Christ the True Light (John 1:7-9).

Candles should be lit on the Cross during the Blessing of the Congregation as a symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ who was crucified on the Holy Cross as the True Light of the world (John 8:12) and through His Holy Cross's sacrifice He elevated us from evil's darkness to His wonderful light (I Peter 2:9).

The lamp which is lit at the "Bosom of The Father" at the most east of the sanctuary is a symbol of the star which shone from the east unto the wise-men and led them to the manger in the city of Bethlehem where the infant Lord Jesus Christ lay (Matthew 2:9).

Candles should be lit before the icons of the Mother of God St. Mary, the heavenly angels, the holy Apostles, righteous martyrs, and honored saints giving tribute as they were the light of the world (Matthew 5:15) and they are like stars in the Church through their virtues and teachings and they shine in the heavenly kingdom as stars (Matthew 13:43).

Only olive oil and bees wax are used for lighting. The Lord Himself commanded Moses to use only olive oil for lighting of the lamp in the Tabernacle (Exodus 27:20) and therefore the Apostles too commanded no other oils but olive should be used in the Church. Olive oil is a symbol of good deeds with them the faith's lamp shines as the Lord mentioned in His parable of the Wise Virgins (Matthew 25:3-4), is a symbol of spiritual joy (Psalm 45:7, Hosea 14:6, Judges 9:9) and finally is a symbol of God's grace that shines in our hearts. The vessel which contains the oil is a symbol of the spirit and her consciousness which is lit by God's grace and ready for her Master's coming. Also, the Church uses bees wax because it doesn't contain animal fats which must not be used in the New Testament service and it's fragrant scent is a symbol of good and righteous deeds that the believers should have (II Peter 1:5-6, Luke 1:75).