**The All-night Vigil Service -- The Evening Sacrifice
Fr. Victor Potapov**

**[Part II – Matins](http://www.stjohndc.org/Russian/liturgy/e_00_matins.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22Matins)**

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**Matins**

THE SERVICES OF VESPERS AND MATINS define the day. In Genesis, the first book of the Bible, we read: "And there was evening and there was morning, the first day" (Genesis 1:5 [LXX]). For this reason, in ancient times the order of services called for Vespers, the first part of the All-night Vigil, to end late in the night; and for Matins, the second part, to finish at dawn. In contemporary practice, Matins (if conducted apart from Vespers) is usually moved to a later hour in the morning or back to the previous evening.

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**The Six Psalms**

Matins, if held as a part of the All-night Vigil, begins with the reading of the Six Psalms or Hexapsalmia, which consists of Psalms 3, 37, 62, 87, 102, and 142 ([LXX]), read in order as one liturgical whole. The reading of the Six Psalms is preceded by two Bible verses: the thrice repeated words of praise spoken by the angel at Bethlehem: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14), and the twice repeated words from the 50th Psalm: "O Lord, Thou shalt open my lips, and my mouth shall declare Thy praise" (Psalm 50:15 [LXX]).

The first of these verses, the angelic words of praise, clearly and eloquently point out three fundamentally related paths of struggle in pursuit of a Christian life. Upward, toward God in the words of praise, "Glory to God in the highest," outward toward your neighbor in the words, "and on earth peace," and downward into the depth of your heart in the words, "good will among men." Seen together, the thrust of these struggles, upward, outward and downward, form the symbol of the Cross, thereby manifesting the ideal of the Christian life: granting peace with God, peace among men, and peace in the soul.

The order of services calls for the candles in the church to be extinguished during the reading of the Six Psalms. The falling darkness symbolizes that dark night when Christ came to earth, as the angel sang the hymn of praise, "Glory to God in the highest." The semidarkness of the church helps us to pray more earnestly. The Six Psalms encompass the entire range of human experiences that enlighten New Testament Christian life, not only its overall joyousness, but also the sorrowful path that leads to that joy.

At the midpoint of the Six Psalms comes the fourth psalm, Psalm 87; the most sorrowful of the six, filled as it is with a dreadful bitterness. While this psalm is being read, the priest leaves the altar and stands before the Beautiful Gates and continues to read the twelve special morning prayers, which he has already begun to read in the altar before the Holy Table. At that moment the priest symbolizes Christ, Who, having heard the sorrow of fallen mankind, not only came down to man, but shared in his suffering to the end. The psalm, which is being read at that moment, speaks of this theme.

The priest's silent morning prayers contain prayers for the Christians standing in church; petitions that they be forgiven their sins, that they be given true faith and sincere love, that all their works be blessed, and that they might be made worthy of the Heavenly Kingdom.

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**The Great Litany**

Upon the conclusion of the Six Psalms and the morning prayers, the Great Litany is once again intoned, as it was during Vespers at the beginning of the All-night Vigil.  Its significance here at the beginning of Matins is that Christ, the Intercessor, who appeared on earth and Whose Nativity we praised at the beginning of the Six Psalms, will fulfill all the promises of spiritual and physical good of which the litany speaks.

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**Psalm 117 "God is the Lord"**

Immediately following the Litany of Peace, we hear the singing of the 117th Psalm, "God is the Lord," and the oft-repeated refrain, "God is the Lord and hath appeared unto us; blessed is he who cometh in the Name of the Lord." The order of divine services appoints that these words be sung at this specific point in Matins in order to direct our memory and attention to Christ's embarking on His public ministry. This verse expands upon the praise of the Savior that was heard at the beginning of Matins during the reading of the Six Psalms. These words also served as a greeting to Jesus Christ when He entered Jerusalem for the final time before His passion on the Cross. The doxology "God is the Lord and hath appeared unto us…" and three special verses that follow are chanted by either the deacon or by the priest before the main, or local, Icon of Christ in the iconostasis; this is the icon of Christ immediately to the right of the Beautiful Gates. The choir then repeats the first verse, "God is the Lord and hath appeared unto us."

The singing or chanting of these verses should reflect a joyous, festive mood. For this reason, the candles, which had been extinguished during the reading of the Six Psalms penitential, are lighted once again.

Immediately after the verses for "God is the Lord," the Resurrection Troparion is sung. The Feast is glorified in it and the essence of the words "God is the Lord and hath appeared unto us" is explained. The Resurrection Troparion heralds the sufferings of Christ and His Resurrection from the dead; events that will be illuminated in detail later in the service of Matins.

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**Kathismata**

At the All-night Vigil, the second and third kathismata (the Greek plural of kathisma) are read after the completion of the Great Litany, the verses of "God is the Lord," and the troparia. As we have already stated, the Greek word *καθισμα*-kathisma means "seat" or "stall," and according to the Church order of services, during the reading of the kathismata the faithful are allowed to sit.

The entire Psalter, composed of 150 psalms, is divided into 20 kathismata; that is, into 20 groups or chapters of psalms. Each kathisma is in turn divided into three "glories," that is, each section of the kathisma concludes with the words, "Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit," being chanted three times, and after each "glory" the choir sings "Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia. Glory to Thee, O God."

The kathismata contain expressions of a penitential, contemplative character. They call us to consider our sins; and they are included by the Orthodox Church in the Divine Services to call the faithful to look into their own lives and actions, and deepen their repentance before God.

The second and third kathismata, read during Sunday Resurrection Matins, are of a prophetic character. They describe the passion of Christ: the abuse He endured, the piercing of His hands and feet, the casting of lots and dividing of His garments, and His death and Resurrection from the dead.

The kathismata of the Resurrection during the All-night Vigil bring the faithful to the central and most festive portion of the services, to the polyeleos.

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**The Polyeleios**

"Praise ye the Name of the Lord. Alleluia." These and the following words are taken from the 134th and 135th Psalms and introduce the most festive portion of the Resurrection Vigil Service, the polyeleos, which celebrates the Resurrection of Christ. The word *πολυελεοσ* - polyeleos comes from two Greek words that mean "plenteous in mercy." The crux and fulcrum of the polyeleos rests in the chanting of "Praise ye the name of the Lord," with each verse of the Psalms followed by the refrain, "for His mercy endureth forever." In this refrain, the Lord is glorified for the abundant mercies He had shown toward man; the first and foremost of which is His salvation and redemption of man.

At the polyeleos, the Beautiful Gates open, the entire church is illuminated, and the clergy come out of the altar and cense the entire church. Through these liturgical actions, the faithful witness the events of the Resurrection. In the opening of the Beautiful Gates, they see how Christ rose from the tomb; and in the clergy procession from the altar to the center of the church, they see how He again appeared among His disciples. While this is taking place, the psalm, "Praise ye the Lord"(Psalm 134:3 [LXX]), continues to be chanted, together with the angelic refrain, "Alleluia" (Praise the Lord); it is as if the choir is acting on behalf of the angels, calling the faithful to praise the Risen Lord.

The chanting of "plenteous in mercy" during the polyeleos, a service typically done during the Vigil on the eves of Sundays and of great feasts days, especially demonstrates God's mercy. It is especially appropriate during this service to praise His Name and to thank Him for His mercy.

In preparation for Great Lent, the short 136th Psalm is added to the verses of Psalms 134 and 135 that constitute the polyeleos. Psalm 136 begins with the words "By the waters of Babylon" and tells of the suffering of the Hebrew people in the Babylonian captivity and of their grief over the loss of their homeland. It is sung during the several weeks prior to Great Lent, so that, like the Hebrews who strove to free themselves from Babylonian captivity and return to their Homeland, the Promised Land, Christians, who are the New Israel, might strive in repentance and abstinence toward their spiritual home, the Kingdom of God.

During feasts of the Lord and of the Theotokos, as well as on days commemorating especially venerated saints, the polyeleos is followed by a magnification, a short verse of praise for the feast or saint of the day. First the clergy, standing before the festal icon in the center of the church, sing the magnification. Then, while the entire church is censed, the choir repeats the same text several times.

The angels were the first to learn of the Resurrection of Christ and to tell people the Good News. Thus, the polyeleos begins with the angels bidding us, "Praise ye the Name of the Lord." The next to learn of the resurrection were the Myrrh-bearing Women, who, in accordance with ancient Hebrew custom, came to the Tomb of Christ to anoint His body with myrrh, an aromatic oil. So, the singing of the angelic Alleluia is followed by the resurrection troparia that tell of the Myrrh-bearers' visit to the tomb, and of the appearance of the angel who told them of the Savior's resurrection and directed that they tell this news to His apostles. Each troparion is preceded by the words, "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, teach me Thy statutes." The last of Jesus Christ's followers to learn of His resurrection from the dead were the apostles. This moment in Gospel history is commemorated with the reading of the Resurrection Gospel, the central part of the Vigil Service.

Several preliminary doxologies and prayers precede the Gospel reading. Thus, after the Resurrection troparion and the Small Ektenia that is an abridged form of the Great Ektenia, special verses known as the Hymns of Degrees are sung. These ancient verses come from 15 psalms known as Hymns of Degrees because in Old Testament times they were sung by two choirs, facing one another along the steps, here called degrees, of the Temple in Jerusalem. Usually, we hear the first part of the Hymns of Degrees in Tone IV, beginning with "From my youth many passions have warred against me."

As just related, the highlight of the All-night Vigil is the reading of a Gospel passage about Christ's resurrection from the dead. The order of divine services calls for a number of prayers to be read in preparation for this holy Gospel. The reason for the rather lengthy preparation of the faithful for the reading of the Gospel is that the Gospel remains a "sealed" book and a "stumbling block" for those among the faithful that the Church has not yet taught to understand and heed it. Furthermore, the Holy Fathers teach that a Christian must first pray in order to draw the maximum spiritual benefit from the reading of the Holy Writ. This prayerful introductory preparation for the reading of the Gospel at the All-night Vigil serves this purpose.

Our prayers in preparation for the reading of the Gospel include the following liturgical elements. First, the deacon chants, "Let us attend," then "Wisdom"; then comes the prokeimenon relevant to the Gospel reading. The prokeimenon, as we said earlier, is a short excerpt from Divine Scripture, ordinarily from one of the psalms, which is read together with other verses complementing the theme of the prokeimenon. The deacon chants the prokeimenon and its accompanying verse, and the choir responds after each of the deacon's chants.

The doxology, "For holy art Thou," and the chanting of "Let every breath praise the Lord," conclude the polyeleos with its festive words of praise introducing the Gospel. The gist of their meaning is: Let everything that has life praise the Lord, the giver of life. Afterward, the wisdom, holiness, and benevolence of the Lord, Creator and Redeemer of all creation is explained and preached through the holy Word of the Gospel.

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**The Holy Gospel**

"Wisdom. Upright. Let us hear the Holy Gospel." This is an invitation to stand up straight, with respect, piety, and spiritual uprightness, to hear the Word of God.

As we have said before, the central part of the All-night Vigil is the reading of the Gospel. In it we hear the voices of the apostles, heralding the Good News of the Resurrection of Christ.

Eleven differing Resurrection Gospel lessons, all of which tell of the Resurrection of the Savior and of His appearance to the Myrrh-bearing Women and to the disciples, are read in turn during the year at Saturday All-night Vigils.

The Resurrection Gospel lessons are read from within the altar, the most important part of the Orthodox temple, which here represents the Tomb of our Lord. On other feast days, the Gospel is read in the midst of the people. This is done because an icon is placed in the center of the Temple, representing the saint or event being celebrated whose meaning the Gospel proclaims.

After the Resurrection Gospel reading, the priest brings the Holy Bible out for veneration. He emerges from the altar as from the Tomb, and holding the Gospel, he emulates the angel as he shows us Christ, about Whom he had preached. Like the disciples, the parishioners bow down before the Holy Gospel, and like the Myrrh-bearing Women, they kiss it, and everyone sings, "Having beheld Thy Resurrection, O Christ."

Beginning with the polyeleos, our exultation and joy in encountering Christ increases. This part of the Vigil instills in the faithful recognition that in the person of Jesus Christ, Heaven has come down to earth. The Church also reminds its children that whenever we hear the chanting of the polyeleos, we must bear in mind the coming day and with it the Feast of Eternity, the Divine Liturgy, which is not simply a representation on earth of the Heavenly Kingdom, but is in fact its coming to pass, unchanged and in all its fullness, on earth.

We must greet the Heavenly Kingdom with a broken spirit and with repentance. For this reason, immediately after the joyous singing of "Having beheld Thy Resurrection, O Christ," the penitential 50th Psalm, beginning with the words "Have mercy on me, O Lord," is chanted. It is only during the night of Paskha and the entire week following it, when we are permitted to experience such ultimately joyous rapture, free of sorrow or penitence, that the reading of the 50th Psalm is omitted from divine services.

This penitential Psalm, "Have mercy on me, O Lord," is concluded with a prayer for the intercession of the apostles and the Mother of God. Then, the opening verse of the 50th Psalm is repeated: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy, and, according to the multitude of Thy compassions, blot out my transgression!"

Further on, it is with the mixture of both joy in the Resurrection and repentance that we hear the sticharion, "Jesus, having risen from the dead, as he foretold, hath given us life eternal and great mercy." The "great mercy," which Christ shows to those who repent, is the granting of "life eternal."

According to the Church, the Resurrection of Christ illumines the nature of anyone who unites himself with Christ. This enlightenment is demonstrated in the extremely important variable part of the All-night vigil known as the canons.

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**The Canon**

The miracle of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ enlightened human nature. In the canon, the portion of the Vigil that follows the reading of the Gospel, the Church shows the faithful this enlightenment. In contemporary practice, the canon consists of nine odes or songs. Each ode of the canon consists of a specific number of individual troparia.

Each individual canon has a specific subject of celebration: the Most Holy Trinity, an event from the Gospel or from the history of the Church, prayers to the Theotokos, or the magnification of a saint or saints of the day. The Sunday canons (read on Saturday evening in usual Russian practice) celebrate the Resurrection of Christ and the ensuing enlightenment of the world, the victory over sin and death. Festal canons illuminate in detail the meaning of the feast and the life of the saint, as a model of the transfiguration of the world already taking place. The Church in some measure celebrates Christ's victory over sin and death by contemplating the light of this transfiguration reflected in the canons.

The canons are read, but the initial verse of each individual ode is sung by the choir. These introductory verses are known as irmoi, from the plural form of the Greek verb eirmos, meaning "to tie." The irmos presents a pattern for all of the troparia that follow within a given ode.

An event from the Old Testament that embodies a transfiguring, that is, a prophetic and symbolic meaning relevant to the New Testament, serves as the pattern for each introductory irmos. For example, the irmos of the first ode commemorates, in Christian terms, the Hebrews' miraculous crossing of the Red Sea. In this irmos, the Lord is glorified as the all-powerful deliverer from evil and slavery.

The irmos of the second ode is taken from the song of denunciation spoken by Moses in the Sinai desert to awaken a spirit of repentance in the Hebrews fleeing from Egypt. The second ode is sung only during Great Lent.

The irmos of the third ode is based on the song of thanksgiving sung by Anna, mother of the prophet Samuel, for having been given a son. In the irmos of the fourth ode, we hear a Christian interpretation of the appearance to the prophet of the Lord God, Habakkuk, as seen in the brilliant sunlight streaming from behind the wooded mountain. In this vision, the Church perceives the glory of the coming Savior.

In the fifth ode, the theme of which comes from the book of the prophet Isaiah, Christ is glorified as the bringer of peace. It also contains the prophecy of the Resurrection from the dead.

The sixth irmos is taken from the story of the prophet Jonah, cast into the sea and swallowed up by a whale. In the eyes of the Church, this event serves to remind the Christian that he has sunk into the abyss of sin. The irmos also expresses the idea that there is no sorrow or misfortune in which the heartfelt prayer of the faithful cannot be heard.

The irmoi of the seventh and eighth odes of the canon are based on the song of the three Hebrew children who were cast into the fiery Babylonian furnace. This event is a prefiguring of Christian martyrdom.

Between the eighth and ninth odes, a hymn in honor of the Theotokos is chanted. The hymn begins with the words, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior." It is accompanied by the refrain, "More honorable than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim." The deacon chants the beginning of this glorification of the Mother of God. First he censes the altar and the right side of the iconostasis, and then he stops before the icon of the Theotokos on the iconostasis. Raising the censer, he chants: "The Theotokos and the Mother of the Light, let us magnify in song." The choir responds with the glorification of the Mother of God.

During the chanting of the glorification, the deacon censes the entire church. Then the troparia of the final ode of the canon are read and, for the last time in the Vigil, we hear the Small Litany, "Again and again, in peace let us pray to the Lord." During the Resurrectional All-night Vigil, and following the Small Litany and the priest's doxology, the deacon exclaims "Holy is Our God," and this phrase is then echoed thrice by the choir.

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**The Exapostilarion**

In monasteries that follow the order of service to the letter, and in churches in which the All-night Vigil actually does last all night, sunrise coincides with this point in the service. Special hymns celebrate its approach. The first hymn is known as the Hymn of Light, or Svetilen, in Russian, a term referring to the heralding of the approaching light. This type of hymn is also known by the Greek term exapostilarion, as typically spelled in English, which means "I send out," because a chanter is in fact "sent out" from the kliros (from where the choir sings) to the center of the church to chant the exapostilarion. The renowned hymns, "I see Thy Bridal Chamber adorned, O My Savior," and "The Wise Thief," heard during Passion Week, are examples of Exapostilaria or Svetilen. Among the best known of the Hymns of Light for the Mother of God is "The apostles, from the ends," sung during the Dormition of the Mother of God.

After the Hymn of Light, the verse, "Let every breath praise the Lord," is sung, and Psalms 148, 149, and 150 (LXX) are read. These three psalms are known as the Psalms of Praise, for in them the term "praise ye" is often repeated. Special stichera, known as the Aposticha for the Praises, are combined with these psalms. They are usually sung at the close of Psalm 149 and after each verse of the short 150th Psalm. As in the case of the other stichera during the Vigil, the Aposticha for the praises glorify a Gospel event, an event in the life of the Church, or a saint or saints being commemorated on that day.

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**The Great Doxology**

As we have already noted, in ancient times and even today in those monasteries where the All-night Vigil indeed lasts all night, the sun rises during the second half of the Vigil. At this point, the Lord, the Giver of Light, is praised in a special, ancient Christian hymn, the Great Doxology, which begins with the words, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace." But before this, we see the priest through the open doors of the altar as he stands before the Holy Table and exclaims, "Glory to Thee, Who hast shown us the light."

In the All-night Vigil, Matins concludes with the Augmented Litany and with the Litany of Supplication, the very same Litanies which were read earlier in the Vigil, during Vespers. They are followed by the priest's closing doxology and by the Dismissal. The priest addresses the Mother of God with the prayer: "O Most Holy Theotokos, save us!" The choir responds with a glorification of the Theotokos: "More honorable than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim." Thereafter, the priest again glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ with the doxology, "Glory to Thee, O Christ God, our hope, glory to Thee." The Choir responds with "Glory, both now and ever," showing thereby that the glory of Christ is as well the glory of the All-holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And thus ends the Vigil as it began, with a glorification of the Holy Trinity

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**The Hours**

After the priest's final blessing, the First Hour and final portion of the All-night Vigil is read.

As we have already noted, the primary idea expressed in Matins is the joyous realization by the faithful that all who unite themselves to Christ will be saved and will be resurrected together to be with Him. According to the Church, we can attain union with Christ only with an attitude of humility and recognition of our unworthiness. For this reason, the Vigil does not end with the festive and joyous service of Matins, but with the First Hour, a service expressing a humble, repentant striving toward God.

The daily cycle of services of the Orthodox Church includes three Hours in addition to the First Hour. The Third and Sixth Hours are read before the beginning of the Divine Liturgy, and the Ninth Hour is read before the beginning of Vespers. Formally, the Hours contain selections of texts pertinent to that particular time of day. However, each Hour also has a distinct mystical and spiritual significance, for each commemorates a stage of Christ's Passion. The services proceed with an air of serious concentration, and bear the stamp of Great Lent and of the Passion. A characteristic of the Hours that shows their kinship to the services of Great Lent is that reading takes precedence over singing.

The subject of the Third Hour is the handing over of the Savior to be insulted and flogged. A second New Testament theme is joined to the Third Hour: the Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles. In addition, in the Third Hour we find prayers for assistance and protection in our external and internal battle with evil, and we find prayers of repentance, such as that expressed in the 50th Psalm, which begins with "Have mercy on me, O God."

The Sixth Hour coincides with the hour when Christ was crucified and nailed to the Cross. During the Sixth Hour, we hear the reader express the bitterness brought on by militant evil rampant in the world, while at the same time we hear an expression of hope in God's help. This hope is especially strongly expressed in the third of the psalms read during the Sixth Hour, the 90th Psalm, which commences with "He that dwelleth in the help of the Most High shall abide in the shelter of the God of heaven."

The Ninth Hour is the hour when Christ, while on the Cross, granted paradise to the thief, and gave up His soul to God the Father until His Resurrection. In the psalms of the Ninth Hour we already hear thanks being expressed to Christ for His saving of the world.

Such, in brief, is the substance of the Third, Sixth, and Ninth Hours. Now let us return to the First Hour, the hour that concludes the All-night Vigil.

Overall, in addition to commemorating the events that transpired during the first stage of Jesus Christ's Passion, the First Hour expresses feelings of thanksgiving to God for the approaching light of day and for His setting us on a path during the coming day that is pleasing to Him. This is all expressed in the three psalms read during the First Hour, as well as in its other prayers, and especially in the prayer, "Thou Who at all times and at every hour," a prayer read during each of the Hours. In this prayer, the faithful ask for unity of Faith and for true knowledge of God. According to the Church, it is that knowledge that is the fountain from which will spring a Christian's future spiritual benefits, that is, salvation and life eternal. The Lord speaks of this in the Holy Gospel according to John, chapter 17: "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." The Orthodox Church teaches that it is possible to know God only through love and oneness of mind. This is why during the Liturgy, before the confession of faith in the Symbol of Faith, we proclaim, "Let us love one another, that with one mind we may confess - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, one in essence and undivided."

Following the prayer, "Thou, Who at all times…" the priest comes out of the altar. He is dressed humbly, wearing an epitrachelion but without his shining outer vestments. The temple is in semi-darkness. In such a setting, the priest concludes the First Hour, and with it the All-night Vigil, with a prayer wherein he glorifies Christ as the True Light, Who enlighteneth and sanctifieth every man that cometh into the world. Turning to the Icon of the Mother of God, he commemorates her at the conclusion of the prayer. The choir responds with a festive hymn taken from the Akathist for the Annunciation of the Theotokos, "To thee the Champion Leader."

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**[Conslusion](http://www.stjohndc.org/Russian/liturgy/e_00_matins.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22Conslusion)**

The All-night Vigil expresses with absolute clarity the spirit of Orthodoxy, something described in the teaching of the Holy Fathers of the Church as "the spirit of Resurrection, Transfiguration, and Deification of man." The All-night Vigil, as does Orthodox Christianity in general, contains the expression of two Passovers, the Passover of the Crucifixion and the Passover of the Resurrection. The All-night Vigil, especially as conducted on the eve of Sunday, the Day of Resurrection, takes its structure and subject matter from the services of Passion Week and the Week of Paskha. Vladimir Ilin writes the following in his book on the All-night Vigil, published in Paris in the 1920s: "The All-night Vigil and its soul, the Jerusalem Typicon, the Eye of the Church, grew and were completed at the Tomb of the Lord. Overall, it is the night services at the Tomb of the Lord that are the cradle from which grew a marvelous garden, the daily cycle of Orthodox services. Its finest flower is the All-night Vigil. If the source of the Orthodox Liturgy is the Mystical Supper of Christ, held in the home of Joseph of Arimathea, then the source of the All-night Vigil is at the Life-giving Tomb of the Lord, which opened the way for the world into the heavenly mansions and poured out onto men the blessedness of life eternal."

We live in a world of vanity, in which it is extremely difficult to find the time, even if only a few minutes, to enter into the interior cell of our soul and to enjoy silence and prayer; to gather one's thoughts, to consider one's spiritual fate, to heed the voice of one's conscience and to cleanse one's heart through the Mystery of Confession. The Church gives us such an opportunity during the hours in which the All-night Vigil is served.

How good it would be if we trained the members of our households and ourselves to come to love this Service! One could, at first, attend the All-night Vigil only once every two weeks, or once per month. It is necessary only to begin, and the Lord will reward us with a precious spiritual honor: The Lord will visit our hearts, will take up residence in it, and will open up to us the broad, spacious, and extremely rich world of Church prayer. Let us not deprive ourselves of this opportunity.