

# HOLY TRANSFIGURATION GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

## Consecration Service Overview

In the early years of Christianity, Christians were persecuted and killed for their faith in Christ. In those days, the Christians met in underground burial places and celebrated the Eucharist on the graves of the martyred Saints. When the persecutions ended, and the Church was allowed to exist, the custom of celebrating the Eucharist over the graves of Martyrs continued by placing Holy Relics in the Altar at the time of the Consecration of the new houses of worship. ***In this manner, every Christian Church is built on the Blood of the Martyrs and founded on their faith in the Lord for Whom they died.***

We celebrated the opening of the doors of our new sanctuary in January of 2004. In these past eight years since then we have been abundantly blessed and have made wonderful strides towards the beautification of our Church both in iconography and furnishings. Unlike the “Opening of the Doors” ceremony, however, which focused on the Great Doors of the Church, the Consecration Service on April 27, 2013 will be centered around the Holy Altar Table. The Holy Altar Table is the center of the celebration of all the Sacraments and divine services of the Church, most especially the Holy Eucharist which takes place every Sunday (the Lord's Day) and on other Feast-days of the Church.

The Bishop will consecrate the Holy Table and the walls of the church by anointing them with Holy Myrrh and asking for God's Grace to come upon the structure as well as the people to renew and sanctify us.

Once a building is consecrated and dedicated to God it becomes ***holy ground*** and ***holy space*** where God dwells and meets with His people. Hence, a consecrated church building cannot be used for any other purpose except for the worship of God.

### What exactly takes place during the ancient rite of the Consecration of an Orthodox Church?

The Service of the Consecration of a house of worship is one of the major Sacraments of the Orthodox Church. Prayers are offered to bring God's Grace to the people. Certain actions are also taken.

#### The following sanctifying actions take place:

- 1.** The Three Processions around the Church Building with prayers offered at every side of the building thus establishing the grounds of the church as ***sacred***.
- 2.** The Placing of, and Sealing of, the Holy Relics in the Altar Table.
- 3.** The Washing and Anointing of the Altar Table with the Holy Myrrh.
- 4.** The placing of the four Icons of the Evangelists at the four corners of the Holy Table, from where the proclamation of the Gospel begins.
- 5.** The covering of the Holy Altar with the savano (katasarkion) (a white cloth symbolizing the shroud with which the body of Christ was wrapped before placed in the tomb).
- 6.** The Placing of the new Altar Coverings and other Holy Articles on the Holy Table.
- 7.** The Lighting of the Unwaning Light (the oil lamb that burns on the Holy Altar all the time).
- 8.** The anointing of the walls of the church with Holy Myrrh.

Once these actions have taken place, the holy sanctuary of the Holy Transfiguration Greek Orthodox Church will be Baptized, Chrismated, Sanctified, Consecrated, and dedicated to God for eternal use as an Orthodox Christian House of Worship.

## The Consecration as Baptism

The Consecration of our Sanctuary can be a reminder of our own baptism and an encouragement to truly live out our lives in the light of God's Kingdom. The fact is that any consecration, whether it is the consecration of our church or the consecration of our persons, is an end and a beginning, a death and a re-birth; we die to the world and are raised up again with Christ; we are born again through the Holy Spirit to a new life with God.

Our baptism was a renewal and initiation into the Church. It was a participation in Christ's death and resurrection in a mystical way. We died to sin and were buried with Christ as we descended into the water and then were risen again with Him to eternal life. We were renewed through this process and transformed through water and the Spirit to a new life.

Following our immersion in water, we were consecrated to God as we were anointed with the Holy Chrism (holy Myrrh). We received "*the Seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit*" and became Temples of God sanctified by Him, just as the Lord Jesus requested from the Father:

*"I do not pray that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth. (John 17: 15-19).*

The Greek term for the consecration of a church building is "**εγκαίνια ναού**", which literally means "**renewal of the temple**". The church building is anointed with the Holy Myrrh during this service and thus renewed and dedicated to God as a Sacred Temple, a sacred space that can only be used for the worship of God.

Through the relics of the martyrs buried into the Holy Table and the anointing of the Holy Spirit through the hands of the bishop, the building will be sanctified and the community of Holy Transfiguration will be girded forever with spiritual armor so that it may resist the ways of the world. It will also provide a sacred haven for worship in which the heavenly banquet can be truly experienced in the here and now as we gather together to celebrate God's mystical and Holy Liturgy.



**"Be renewed, be renewed, O New Jerusalem, because your light has shown, and the glory of the Lord has come upon you. This house has been founded by the Father, this house has been made firm by the Son, this house has been renewed by the Holy Spirit, which illumines and supports, and sanctifies our souls."**

**"In early times, while the temple was consecrated, Solomon offered to the Lord sacrifices of animals and holocausts. When you were pleased in us O Savior, to forgo the formalities and let the Truth be known, the whole world offers to You the bloodless sacrifices to Your glory, because You are the Lord of all things and make everything holy through Your Holy Spirit."**

(From the Service of the Consecration)