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Theorizing Carpatho-Rusyn Chant Between Textual History, Embodied Performance and Digital Media

Example 1- The Anaphora (1969)

The Anaphora is the lengthy prayer by which the priest consecrates bread (leavened, in Byzantine tradition) and wine as the Body and Blood of Christ. The Rusyn church believes in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, as demonstrated by this excerpt from the prayer before receiving Holy Communion: “O Lord, I also believe and profess that this which I am about to receive is truly Your Most Precious Body and Life-giving Blood, which, I pray, make me worthy to receive for the remission of all my sins and life everlasting.” The Anaphora comes in the second half of the Divine Liturgy after the recitation of the Nicene Creed and begins with the Introductory Preface, which resembles the beginning of the Great Thanksgiving from the Book of Common Prayer, as follows:

Deacon: Let us stand aright, let us stand in awe, let us be attentive to offer the holy oblation in peace.

People: Mercy, peace, the sacrifice of praise.

Priest [as he turns around to face and bless the people]: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

People: And with your spirit.

Priest: Let us lift up our hearts.

People: We lift them up to the Lord.

Priest: Let us give thanks to the Lord.

People: It is proper and just to worship the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Trinity one in essence and undivided.

As the people sing the last response, the priest continues reciting the beginning of the prayer silently to himself and ends with an invocation of the heavenly hosts of angels: “We thank You also for this liturgy, which You have willed to accept from our hands, even though there stand before You thousands of archangels, tens of thousands of angels Cherubim and Seraphim, six-winged, many-eyed, soaring aloft on their wings, [**aloud to the people**] singing, shouting, crying out, and saying the triumphal hymn.”

The people sing the **Sanctus**, and the Anaphora proceeds with the Words of Institution, the Anamnesis, and the Epiclesis as in the West.

Example 2- Resurrection Matins (2005)

Resurrection Matins is the culmination of Holy Week and stands as one of the first main services of Pascha (Easter). To fully grasp its significance in the Rusyn church, we need to understand what happens on Great and Holy Friday. In the East, this event is marked, in part, by “burying” Christ in the middle of the Church during Vespers. Jesus is represented in a large woven icon or shroud known as the *plaschanitsa*. Towards the end of the service, the priest, wearing black vestments, takes the shroud on his back and with altar servers and the congregation, processes around outside of the church before placing it in a “tomb,” a wooden platform in the middle of the church decorated with flowers and white linen. This act recalls Christ’s burial by Joseph of Arimathea in the Gospels. The people then venerate the shroud until Easter Sunday.



Source: Carpatho-Rusyns of Pennsylvania (Facebook)

Early in the morning on Easter Sunday, Resurrection Matins begins. The priest moves the shroud from the tomb to the main altar of the church, which is darkened. Another procession forms, this time in emulation of the Myrrh-Bearing Women of the Gospel who went to anoint Christ’s body after the Sabbath was over (Mark 16:1; Matthew 28:1; Luke 23:55–24:3; John 20:1). The clergy and altar servers are now wearing white, and the people sing a hymn: “Thy Resurrection, O Christ our Savior, the angels in heaven praise with hymns; make us, on earth, also worthy with a pure heart to extol and give glory to You.” Stopping at the doors of the church, the priest chants one of the gospel narratives of the Resurrection and proclaims the Paschal season with its main *troparion* (equivalent to the Collect in the West): “Christ is risen from the dead. By death He trampled death, and to those in the tombs He granted life.” The people repeat the hymn in between topical verses from the Psalms before the priest knocks on the door in the sign of the Cross to symbolize the earthquake at the moment of Resurrection. The doors to the church, now fully lit up, open from the inside and the people process in to see, like the Myrrh-Bearing Women, an empty tomb. The rest of Matins takes place, followed by a festal Divine Liturgy.

Example 3- *Parastas* (2011)

The *parastas* is a memorial service for the dead celebrated the night before burial after the body of the departed has been brought to the church and on select anniversaries of the deceased's passing. Its structure closely follows that of Matins for Great and Holy Saturday (Jerusalem Matins or Lamentations at the Tomb), which is, appropriately, the memorial service at Christ's death. It includes special *troparia* for the dead and a hymn sung at the end called Eternal Memory:

Eternal memory, eternal memory, blessed repose [to him/her/them], eternal memory.

Vičnaja pamjat, vičnaja pamjat, blazennyj pokoj, vičnaja jemu/jej/jim [depending on the gender and number of the deceased being commemorated] pamjat.

This hymn is not a prayer to God that the deceased will be “remembered” forever on Earth, but that, in reference to the Wise Thief on the cross next to Christ (Luke 23:42), God will remember the deceased in His kingdom (i.e., eternity).

Open-casket funerals are typical in the Byzantine rite and, as these examples show, can be very poignant moments of embodied practice.