

Why do we call it this?

The reason behind this was that once, a very long time ago, when paganism was still wide-spread in Egypt in the early centuries of Christianity, the Church instituted a special rite for those pagans who wished to become Christians. Those who wished to convert were called "Catechumens", and the rite was called the Liturgy of the Catechumens.

The Catechumens were not baptized yet, but they were present in this part of the rite that preceded the Liturgy of the Believers (which begins with reciting the Orthodox Creed and through the Prayer of Reconciliation and the Anaphora). In the Liturgy of the Catechumens, the Catechumens as well as believers got a word out of Scripture, followed by a sermon. After the litanies, the Catechumens HAD to leave. Then, the deacon would stand with a cross in his hand, and shout out: "the doors! The doors! In the Wisdom of God, let us attend. Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy. In truth..."

By saying "the doors! The doors!", he was informing the Catechumens to exit the church, and was asking the deacons to close the doors shut, so that no one else may enter, and no one may be present except the believers once the Divine Liturgy commences. And then the deacon begins the Orthodox Creed for the congregation, by saying the words "In truth...", so that all the hustle-and-bustle that happened while the Catechumens left may be forgotten, and the believers begin to pay attention while they pray.

Today, the Divine Liturgy has both of them somewhat joined, and since nearly everyone in the Church is a believer, the readings from the lectionary are now concentrated on a life with Scripture for the believers themselves. So, yes, now the intention of the Liturgy of the Word (not Catechumens any more, unless the system begins once again) is to listen attentively to the readings of the lectionary, and hear a sermon on the Gospel (if any).

Why don't we do it anymore?

There was a time when it was basically assumed that if you were present for the Holy Sacrifice (the "liturgy of the faithful" or "liturgy of the Eucharist"), you **would** be receiving Holy Communion. In fact there is still a canon "on the books" (though not enforced, as should be obvious) that if you go without receiving Holy Communion after "x" number of Sundays, you were to be excommunicated and may only return to the communion of the faithful via certain penances (I forget the number of Sundays, but it was really brief...two or three I think...after that, excommunicated.) Holy Communion ought to be part of the "normal" participation of the faithful in the Eucharist. **However**, that also assumes as a necessary condition that one is living and struggling in such a way as to be **able** to receive Holy Communion every Sunday. As you can see, there was not much "nominalism" in the early Church, and discipline tended to be pretty strict, and the level of spiritual guidance very thorough. With the mass conversion of entire nations, the Church had to adjust to situations where you were going to have lots of pretty "sickly" people in the Churches, and make a choice - tolerate these people in the hope of saving them, or keep up the high level of rigor as far as ascetical struggle was concerned. The Church chose the former, and basically ceased to enforce certain rules.

Thus, since people who are basically not prepared to receive Holy Communion are present in the Churches Sunday after Sunday after Sunday and are not being canonically disciplined, catechumens are not expected to leave either - since their presence during the Holy Oblation does not imply some typical expectation that they will be given

Communion. Also, there was also the expectation that if the catechumen departed, they would not simply go off to do as they please, but would have been taken by someone from the Church to be catechized; rarely outside of monasteries (which as far as I know are the only places now days where the dismissal of the catechumen is enforced) is there anything set up to accommodate this.

The same is true with other parts of the Liturgy which lie "dormant" - such as the call to bar the doors; a memory of when the Church had to assemble clandestinely, so as to avoid the persecution of the devil in his civil servants during the (pagan) Roman persecutions. May it please God to spare us of the need to make hit measure "active" again.

Types of Liturgies

The Coptic Church uses three liturgies:

St Basil (330-379):

He reposed two years before the ecumenical council in Constantinople and had a great role in defeating Arianism. He studied philosophy in different countries including Egypt. He is one of the Cappadocian Fathers, along with his brother Gregory of Nyssa and his lifetime friend Gregory Nazianzus. In Egypt, he was introduced to the Coptic monasticism and borrowed much from it as evidenced in his canons. Moreover, he added to the Coptic prayers and wrote his liturgy. That is why the Coptic liturgy of Basil is different than that of the Greeks (Caesarean liturgy) for he also borrowed their prayers and added to them. St Basil's liturgy is the most common used liturgy in the Coptic Church around the year.

St Gregory of Nazianzen (329 -389):

Born in Nazianzus, near Nazianzus, in southwest Cappadocia and loved the life of seclusion and contemplation as evidenced from his writings. St Basil ordained him a bishop over a small town Sasima. Because of confusion over which Episcopate Sasima belonged to, St Gregory refused to be enthroned and went back to his father's house where he spent two years writing. In 379 A.D, the Church asked him to go to Constantinople to fight Arianism and was successful in expelling the Arians and winning back the city to Orthodoxy to the extent that the 2nd ecumenical council was held in Constantinople two years later in the year 381.

St Mark/Cyril (the one we use in our church):

The first and the oldest Coptic liturgy that was written by St Mark the evangelist. He is one of the 72 apostles, and the founder of Christianity in Egypt. He is the first Patriarch with unceasing succession to the 117th Patriarch (Pope Shenouda the 3rd). He was martyred in Alexandria in the year 68 A.D. 30 Barmouda (Coptic), May 8th (Julian). (Gregorian), April 25

His liturgy used to be passed down orally till the time of Pope Cyril the 24th, the pillar of faith who fought the Nestorians and presided over the 3rd ecumenical council in the year 431 A.D. in Ephesus. He used to pray with St Mark's liturgy in Greek - as Greek was the spoken language in Alexandria.

During St Cyril's time, Christianity spread all over Egypt and the need arose to have the liturgy translated into Coptic. He translated it into Coptic adding other prayers to it and leaving the deacon's responses in Greek. The reason for this was to make sure that any visitors could understand the deacon's commands and could follow along. ***For this reason, the liturgy is called after St Cyril.***

The Church prays this liturgy during Great Lent because of its lengthy service and the Gregorian during the feasts because of its tune. However, this is only from a practical standpoint and any liturgy could be prayed with at any time. The Church celebrates St Cyril's departure on 3 Abib (Coptic), July 10th (Gregorian), April 25th (Julian).