

## Prosphora

The word *prosphora* denotes the bread which is brought to the Church as an offering for use in the preparation of the Holy Gifts for Holy Communion. Only the center part of the loaf is used for this purpose; the rest is distributed at the end of the Holy Liturgy to communicants and all worshipers in remembrance of the custom of the original Church, the custom of *Agape*, or Christian love.

The symbolic importance of bread in the life of the Church and its worship is great. In this regard we hear the words of our Lord saying:

I am the bread of life... I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever, and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I give for the life of the world. (John 6:51)

The role of the prosphora in the celebration of the Holy Liturgy of the Orthodox Church is therefore paramount. Indeed, the Holy Liturgy is a re-enactment and re-living of the Last Supper of our Lord. In connection with this we read:

The Lord Jesus, on the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread. And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is my body which is broken for you. This do in remembrance of me." (1 Cor.. 11:23)

The round loaf of bread used in the preparation of the gifts of Holy Communion is called *Prosphoron*, meaning "offering," that is, the "bread of offering." On the top surface of the *prosphoron* a seal is stamped that looks like this:

This center portion is called the "lamb," since it is prepared at this part of the Liturgy (*Proskomidia*) and will become the body of the crucified Christ. It is removed by the priest and placed on the paten. The Greek letters IC and XC are abbreviations for the words Jesus Christ. The combination of the letters NI and KA means "conquers," from the Greek *nikao*, "to conquer."

The large triangular piece is then removed and placed on the paten in honor and commemoration of our Lord's Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary. Then the nine smaller triangular pieces are removed and also placed on the paten. These commemorate the Old Testament Patriarchs, the Angelic Hosts, and the Prophets, Apostles and Saints of the Holy Orthodox Church.

In preparing the *Prosphora*, one first begins with prayer:

O Lord Jesus Christ, only-begotten Son of the Eternal Father, who has said: Without me you can do nothing! O Lord, My God, with faith I accept your words. Help me, a sinner, to prepare the bread of offering, that the works of my hands may be acceptable at the Holy Table and may become through the works of Thy Holy Spirit, the communion of "Thy Most Pure Body for me and all Thy people." In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*Continued..*

Next, the following ingredients are placed in a large bowl or pan that has been warmed with warm water:

- 1 pkg. yeast
- 3/4 cup of warm water (105 - 115 F)
- a dash of salt
- 3 1/2 cups of flour (approx.)

Directions: dissolve the yeast in water; add salt and enough flour to make manageable but not sticky dough (the degree of humidity will determine whether more or less flour is needed). Knead until smooth and elastic about twenty minutes by hand or seven to ten minutes with a dough hook. If using a dough hook knead one half of the dough at a time. This amount will make one medium-sized two-tiered loaf.

To shape into a loaf, roll out the top portion smaller than the bottom portion. The top portion should be just large enough to set the seal upon it (see diagram, p. 131). Press the seal firmly into the top portion. Brush the top surface of the bottom loaf lightly with water to make sure that the top portion adheres to the bottom, then place the top layer on the bottom one. Cover the loaf with a cloth and allow it to rise until it has doubled in size (one to one and a half hours). Then, bake the loaf about twenty to thirty minutes at 325 degrees Fahrenheit. Remember, the preparation of the *prosphora* is not just the making of another bread, but an offering to the Church which will become the Precious Body of our Lord; therefore it should not be made as part of bread prepared for regular use. Finally, conclude your work with a short prayer of thanksgiving of your own.

Courtesy of Serbian Unity Congress: [www.serbianunity.net](http://www.serbianunity.net)

