




The Classification of Feasts

As the Church recognizes the importance of hierarchy in the clerical and priestly ranks, so in the different Feasts and liturgical observances throughout the year, we rank the grade of liturgical solemnity according to the level of significance and popular veneration. Lesser known and venerated saints are accorded the lower ranks; likewise the more universally venerated Feasts, saints and observances are given the highest levels. There is likewise a saint that is accorded a higher or lower rank in one local Church may not be accorded the same rank in another (e.g. St. John the Merciful is accorded a higher rank in the Russian Church than amongst the Greeks etc.) .

Each rank determines how much is chanted from the Ochoechos vs. the ranked Menaion service. During the weekday Menaion services share with the Ochoechos up to the Doxology rank  and from Polyeleos rank  upward, the service is exclusively from Menaion. On a Sunday, to a greater or lesser degree, all services share with the Ochoechos up to the highest degree with Great Feasts of the Lord  entirely suppressing the normal Sunday order.

The rank of each observance, then from the highest to the lowest, is as follows:

A) Great Dominical and Theotokos Feasts (this symbol may also include Lesser Feasts of the Master or Theotokos) .

These feasts number twelve and include the commemoration of events connected with Christ and the Theotokos. The great feasts of Our Lord always replace the Sunday office completely, while those of the Theotokos are combined with the texts of the resurrection celebration, as indicated by local typica. Other feasts marked with the same sign may be considered great feasts, but are not included among the twelve –e.g. Protection of the Theotokos, Circumcision. These “lesser” feasts always share with the Ochoechos on a Sunday. The title feast of any temple may always be elevated to the rank of a great feast. Pascha is the feast of feasts and, therefore, is above any classification. **Dominical Rule:** Each Sunday is considered a little Feast of the Resurrection and therefore can be assigned the status of a Dominical Feast in its own right. Sundays are never replaced by feasts of any kind other than those of Christ (Great Feasts), although the number of verses from the Ochoechos may be diminished according to the rank of the Menaion Saint or Feast.

The solemn character of the great feasts is always embellished by a preparatory period which includes the vigil or *paramony*, and is followed by a post-festive period of four to nine days. These festivals are brought to a close by a final day on which the entire office is taken as on the feast (Apodosis or Leavetaking).

B) Vigil Ranked Saints.

The first category of middle feasts, like the great feasts, is celebrated with All-Night vigil (Small Compline, Vespers/Matins/1st Hour). This means *Blessed is the Man* (1st Stasis of the 1st Kathisma of the Psalter) is read or chanted in place of the daily Kathisma. we have Old Testament readings, sing the Entreaty (Litya), the polyeleos, the gospel of the feast, Seasonal Katavasiae at the Canon, and the Great Doxology on the eve of the feast.

C) Polyeleos Ranked Saints.

This second kind of middle feast may or may not have a (night) vigil. Great Vespers is always celebrated (may have a Litya). *Blessed is the Man* (1st Stasis of the 1st Kathisma of the Psalter) is read or chanted in place of the daily Kathisma and the Polyeleos, Gospel, Seasonal Katavasiae at the Canon and Great Doxology are sung at matins. On a weekday –nothing is chanted from the Ochoechos, on a Sunday, the number of Resurrectional verses is reduced.

Ancillary Note: A small number of local traditions include between the rank of Polyeleos and Doxology a rank called **Small Bells**. This rank is usually ascribed to lesser ranked observances that relate to a particular Temple –e.g. a patron saint of the Temple, a particularly venerated relic in a particular Temple, etc. Generally most Typica ascribe the highest solemnity to the patron of a Temple, however it is of worthy note.

D) Doxology Ranked Saints.

These are ordinary days similar to the 6 Stichera Saint. Daily Vespers but at matins a full Katavasiae is chanted for all 8 Odes, Stichera are chanted at the Praises, the great doxology is chanted, and the Festal Matins ending is used. A Vigil is not celebrated on these days.

E) Six Stichera Saint

These are ordinary days with Daily Vespers and Matins. At Lord I have cried 6 Stichera are chanted to the Saint on a weekday, there is a Doxasticon at both Lord I have cried and the Aposticha of Vespers otherwise the service is shared with the Ochoechos.

F) Double Commemoration

These are ordinary days with Daily Vespers and Matins. The Double Commemoration is essentially two simple commemorated Saints in one service. There are 6 Stichera at Lord I have Cried, two 4 troparia Canons. *From this point upward the proportion of Ochoechos hymns begins to reduce.*

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Simple Commemoration

These are ordinary days with Daily Vespers and Matins. 3 Stichera are chanted to the Saint with the 1st set of verses being from the Ochtoechos. There is no Glory at either Lord I have Cried or the Aposticha at Matins. At Matins, all the sessional Hymns are from the Ochtoechos, there is one 4 troparia Canon to the Saint chanted at the end of the Ochtoechos canons, and the Hiermos of the 3rd, 6th, 8th and 9th Odes and the Aposticha of the Praises is chanted from the Ochtoechos and this rule applies to all the next upward ranks to E) & .

The lowest 3 observances: During weekday there is no Entrance at Vespers; the Joyous Light is read, there is no Polyeleos, or Gospel and the great doxology is not sung. Please see class handout on Daily and Great or Festal Vespers and Matins

Credits: Adapted from text from *Troparia and Kontakia* published by New Skete Monastery.