

### **Italo Greek Traditions**

*I took the text from Lost Traditions, written by Fr. Francis and Sub-deacon Paul, and I updated it with the dates we will be doing Mystagogia, as well as modified it for the services we will be able to do. Because we will not have mystagogia on the normal days because I have to be away, unfortunately, this was the best solution I could come up with for this year. – Fr. Nathan*

### **New Year Mystagogia.**

It is fitting that the celebration of the end of the Church year is with the beautiful tradition of the Mystagogia. With the Mystagogia, we recall the holy mysteries – which in the West are known as the Sacraments. The Mystagogia – for the Italo-Greeks and many of the Byzantines – is a three-day period of silence and no eating on round plates. August 29th is that of the beheading of John the Baptist. We are reminded of what happened to John for his commitment to Christ, and we are asked to think about and reflect upon our commitment to our Faith during this time. The Mystagogia expects the revelation of God to be integrated into our thinking process and into our thanksgiving process while we pray through these three days (which we will celebrate on the 3-5<sup>th</sup> this year). Tradition says that John the Baptist had prayed for the destruction of the world on his feast day and God said he would grant that wish. However, when I was a boy, my parents told me that the Lord Jesus would put John the Baptist to sleep the day before...so he slept through his feast and woke up on the 31st. When he asked the Lord to destroy the world, the Lord said: “But, the day has passed. Wait until next year”. It is the way, I suppose, to explain why we keep silence and pray for these three days (These are the three usual days leading to the Feast). The actual process of the Mystagogia is to look at your life, reflect on your life, and identify where you have wounds in your relationship with God in the person of Jesus Christ over the past year. Identify those faults you would like to change, the virtues in which you would like to grow. The goal is to have your prayer life increase from year to year and each year you hope to improve your relationship with God. That is the kind of reflection that takes place over this period. During Mystagogia, the Holy Mystery of the Eucharist is placed in what looks like a chalice with a crown on it. It is placed in front of the great Angelic Doors, surrounded by flowers. During the day, the Church is open to the parishioners to come and reflect. At the end of each day, the Divine Liturgy is celebrated and the people are blessed at the end of the Liturgy with the words: “...blessed is our God at all times, ever and forever” as they normally would in Liturgy. But it takes special meaning during these three days. You are expected to go home to fasting and praying for the great gift God has given all of us in our lives. Reflect on whatever is, whatever we are grateful for, whatever we want changed. This year, on Sat. 3<sup>rd</sup> of Sept. before Vespers and Divine Liturgy, there is agapé where everything in creation is placed on the table for the celebration. It is a feast and a celebration for the New Year. On that day, we bring for the Vespers, round plates that list the sins we have asked God to forgive during this time of reflection and also lists our intentions of how we are going to improve our relationship with God in the coming year. At the end of Vespers, the congregation processes outside with their plates; the people are blessed, the listed sins are forgiven, and the intentions are blessed for the coming year. Then, the plates are smashed – as a sign that the sins of the old year are now gone. As we process back into Church, we reflect on the hopes of doing better in the coming year, growing in virtue. Then, Divine Liturgy is celebrated. In many churches, particularly the Slavic churches, they will have a tremendous party again and a procession outside. The Italo-Greeks, unfortunately, lost that tradition in America. In the Old World, they would go through the town with a band, everyone would join the procession, and go to the Church – where they would have Vespers and Divine Liturgy and then have a party that lasts the whole night long! The Russians and certain European countries still have that tradition. We do, however, have a potluck party as our celebration and agapé – which is then extended into the Church for Vespers and Divine Liturgy.