

Words of the Liturgy

BY Fr. Elias Greer

“Alleluia”

In the Psalms of King David we frequently find the word of praise ***“Alleluia”***. Apart from the Psalms, this word appears only twice in the Bible. Once, in the Old Testament, in the prophetic vision of the New Jerusalem in the Book of Tobit it is said that its streets will echo with alleluias. Then, in his Revelation, St. John says: “... I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honor, and power unto the Lord our God.” And alleluias continue to issue forth from the mouths of those who are holy and just and bow down before the Throne of the Almighty.

The word ***“Alleluia”*** which appears with such frequency in the hymns and prayers of our Liturgy is of Hebrew origin. The last syllable is an abbreviated form of 'Jahveh' or Jehovah, the Old Testament name for God. The preceding syllables mean praise. The whole word, then, means PRAISE GOD, PRAISE THE LORD. The Christian Church began early using this word of praise in the liturgical texts. The word became an expression of joy and triumph, a hymn to triumphant faith. In our Church, it is a part of all services, including the services of repentance during Great Lent and the services for the dead. The entire life of the Church is built on the unwavering faith in Christ's Resurrection. The attitude of the Church even to death is permeated with the joyous expectation of the forthcoming meeting with Christ and the life everlasting in the Kingdom of God.

During the Divine Liturgy, the word ***“Alleluia”*** is sung before the reading of the Gospel; at the end of the Cherubim hymn, it marks the translation of the Sacraments from the table of ablations to the Holy Throne; it is sung after the Communion and at the end of the liturgy. It is heard on many occasions during the vigil. So, it is present throughout our church services and, for all its brevity, it expresses that to which all divine services are dedicated -- the praise of God.

So there we have yet another minor word which does not always hold our attention. And yet, its content is so inexhaustible that the just will use it to express the praise of God in the New Heaven and the New Earth, in the everlasting Kingdom of God. For there is no better way of proclaiming the Divine dominion over the world and over mankind than by praising and glorifying Him, by singing praises to Him -- the King and the Lord.