Liturgical Colors

Originally, all vestments were white, based on the following verses from the *Revelation of St. John the Theologian*, "The righteous have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:14). White vestments are also mentioned by St. John Chrysostom and St. Gregory the Theologian.

Worship development saw the use of vestments of other colors. However, the number of colors and their practical usage is not unified usage. According to St. Symeon of Thessalonica, just two colors — white and purple — were used during the late Byzantine era. In Slavic tradition, only three colors — white, crimson and gold — prevailed for a long time. White was used on Sundays, major feast days and for baptisms. Gold was the color for ordinary Services. Clerics wore crimson robes mainly during Great Lent or on feast days dedicated to the Lord's Cross.

The *Typikon* (Orthodox book of liturgical rubrics), compiled in mid-17th century, contains just two rules regulating vestment color: Priests have to wear white vestments on Great Saturday before reading the Gospel during the Liturgy; and they also must put on "all-brightest robes", i.e. white on Pascha (Easter Day). We find one more rule regulating the color of clerical robes in the *Lenten Triodion*: "The priest changes his robe at the Vespers when *Lord I Have Cried* is being sung, leaves the sanctuary and censes the church." Thus, rubrics do not generally specify how exactly any color is to be used.

A more or less consistent system of liturgical colors in Russia emerges only in the 17th to 18th centuries due to growing western influence. It was because of Roman Catholic influence that the idea of various colors corresponding to various feast days gained attraction.

Each bishop or monastery had his or its own system of liturgical colors. It was only in the 20th century that the system of liturgical colors gained contemporary forms and was recorded in the *Clergy Handbook*. Notwithstanding this fact, some dioceses and parishes still use their own color system. In our Exarchate, we use the standard Slavic system but allowing for local custom.