



**Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States**  
**Subdeacon Exam Study Guide**

## **How to use this study guide:**

This study guide is absolutely not meant to replace the candidate's independent reading of the book *Christ in the Eucharist* by Fr. Tadros Malaty (source text): it is meant simply to guide the text review in an organized and systematic fashion. This pointed text review will be broken down book-by-book and organized in parallel with the source text and included in the document in sections 1-4. Furthermore, this guide will cover general rites and rituals that should be common knowledge to those at the subdeacon rank, which will be covered in the last section of this study guide.

Using this guide with a prayerful heart, and with a mind of a lifelong learner, you will be directed to specific sections and page numbers in the source text to distill down the most salient points that are found on the exam. It is important to reiterate that not all the test questions will be covered in this guide. Similarly, not all the exam questions are covered in Fr. Tadros Malaty's book. A modest portion of the exam covers common rites and rituals that are critical to the knowledge of a subdeacon candidate.

If in your review of this study guide, you find errors, omissions or needed-improvements, please send them to Mark Soliman ([mark@marksoliman.com](mailto:mark@marksoliman.com)).

## **Book 1 - The Liturgy in the Early Church**

- Eucharist
  - Define Eucharist
  - Understand what the practical application of the eucharist in our life is (i.e., the Eucharist restored our ability to be reunited with and to acknowledge God)
  - Know the symbols of the Eucharist in the Old Testament (pages 59-68)
- Liturgy
  - Define liturgy (page 9)
  - Understand the importance from a theological and historical perspective
  - Understand the 7 mysteries that the Eucharist grants (pages 8-9)
    - Pay close attention to how the other sacraments (e.g., the sacrament of Baptism [the mystery of illumination]) affords us adoption into the body of Christ and how that factors into the relevance of the Eucharist and Liturgy.

## **Book 2 - The Liturgy and the Bible**

- Have a working knowledge of where the general sections of the divine liturgy originated from the Old and New Testaments.
- Have a general understanding of the Liturgy and the Old Tradition.

## **Book 3 - The Eucharistic Rites and Ceremonies in the Coptic Orthodox Church**

- Understand the historical evolution of the liturgy during the:
  - early centuries
    - Know which centuries are referred to as the ‘golden age’ of the writings of the church fathers.
- This understanding is important to solidify the candidate’s knowledge regarding the importance of consecrated ranks and in maintaining an Orthodox approach to liturgical
- Understand the importance of liturgical rites in theology and spirituality
- Know the three common liturgies used in the Coptic Orthodox Church
  - Know who composed them and to Whom the liturgy is addressed (i.e., Father, Son, or Holy Spirit).
- Have a solid understanding of the liturgical cycle - i.e., daily, weekly, monthly and yearly cycles
- Understand the historical organization of the divine liturgy - i.e., Synaxis (meeting), Offertory, etc.

- Must have a solid understanding of the outline of the contemporary liturgy -
  - Know each of the separate sections with specific focus on titles (e.g., Offertory, Intercessions, Sanctus, Pre-Anaphora, etc).
  - Offertory
    - The offertory has 4 subsections at its beginning:
      - Putting on the Sacred Vestments
        - Know the exact configuration of the deacon's vestments per rank
          - chanter only wears tunic
          - reader AND subdeacon wears tunic and stole crossed in rear
          - deacon and archdeacon (NOT subdeacon) wears tunic and stole crossed over left shoulder
        - Know which prayers the deacons and the priest are to pray while dressing (page 98)
      - Prayers of Preparation
      - The Canonical Hours (Agpeya)
        - Know which hours of the Agpeya are prayed on which day of the week
        - Know how the rites of praying the Agpeya changes during fasts and feasts
        - Know what the theme of each hour is and what we are specially addressing during the litanies (e.g., crucifixion during the sixth hour, etc)
      - Hand Washing
    - The bread and wine
      - Know the general ingredients of the korban (blessed bread/antidoron) and what each ingredient symbolizes
      - Know the symbolism of the stamp that's in the center of the korban (see page 103 section 3)
        - Know what the *Spadikon* is
      - Know exactly how the korban is organized in the basket, the number chosen and the significance of each
      - Know the symbolism that is occurring during the selection of the lamb (page 107)
    - General notes
      - Know the meditative and practical meaning of each of the responses that the deacon chants during the Thanksgiving Prayer (page 113). For example, understand that each time the deacon chants "Stand up for prayer," it is an

- announcement to the congregation to be reverent when we enter into dialogue with God and assist at the holy mysteries.
- Know the rites, symbolism and terminology of the main elements in the Offertory prayer. For example, know what the Greek word *prospharine* means, what it's referring, its symbolism, and the rites associated with it. (Page 117-120)
- The Liturgy of the Catechumens (also known as Liturgy of the Word)
- Outline
    - Lections (a guide/map of the journey in the Divine Liturgy) - God speaks through the following:
      - Apostolic writings (Pauline and Catholic Epistles)
      - Apostolic acts (Book of Acts)
      - Church's acts (Synxarion)
      - Teachings of the prophets who preceded Christ (Psalm)
      - Christ's teachings (Gospel)
      - Church's teaching (Sermon)
    - Intercessory litanies and Creed
    - Aspasmos prayer (reconciliation prayer/Apostolic kiss)
  - Know why this service is known as both Liturgy of the Word and Liturgy of the Catechumens (described in points 1 and 2 on page 122)
  - Pauline Epistle
    - Prayer of the Pauline Incense
      - Know the prayers that the deacon should pray during the circuit of incense
      - Know how many spoonfuls of incense are placed in the censer
      - Know the path the priest takes around the church during the circuit of incense
  - Catholic Epistle
    - Know who the four authors of the Catholic epistles are
    - Prayer of the Mystery of the Catholic Epistle
      - The priest prays the litany of the oblations inaudibly — the deacon should likewise respond with the deacon's response for the litany inaudibly
    - The priest then prays the Mystery of the Acts inaudibly
      - This includes seven 'stops' around the altar while praying three inaudible litanies. (Know which litanies are to be prayed.)

- The priest does not exit the altar to offer incense to the people. (Know the significance of why he does not exit the altar to offer incense [page 127])
  - Acts of the Apostles
  - Synaxarion
  - Psalm and Gospel
  - Sermon
  - Three Great Litanies are then prayed - know which litanies are prayed
- Liturgy of the Faithful
  - The Liturgy of the Faithful is taken as a whole and not actually separated into smaller parts. We however see how the church fathers composed the Divine Liturgy as a dialogue that has sections to it. There are 3 main sections of the Liturgy of the Faithful, which are the Eucharistic prayers, the Fraction, and finally Holy Communion. This order is logical in that during the Eucharistic prayers, we are preparing ourselves and the bread/wine to become the Body and Blood of Christ; during the Fraction the sacrament is being divided; and lastly in Communion, we partake of the Body and Blood of Christ.
  - Each of the aforementioned sections have subsections within them, which are outlined below.
  - You should be familiar with the wording of how each of the prayers begin. For example, know that “As we commemorate His holy Passion and His Resurrection from the dead...” comes from the Anamnesis of the Divine Liturgy. You don’t have to memorize these passages, but be familiar with and able to recognize their placement in the service.
  - Liturgy of the Faithful outline:
    - Eucharistic prayers
      - Heavenly Hymn (i.e., The cherubim worship You...)
        - This special hymn is taken from the book of Revelation and is what signifies the church entering into heaven. (This new place that we enter is known as the Eschaton.) It is for this reason that the doors are shut and only the faithful/believers are in attendance. The remainder of the service is conducted with this fact in mind — we are in the literal presence of God and His angels and looking through this lens, the rites make sense as to why we are called to stand, look towards the east, attend, prostrate in reverence, etc.

- Consecration
  - Institution Narrative
  - Anamnesis (a memorial or remembrance/reminiscence - where we recall God's saving deeds and the redeeming action of Christ that is still active)
  - Epiclesis (descent or invocation of the Holy Spirit)
    - Holy Spirit descends on the bread and wine. Out of reverence, the entire church prostrates during this prayer.
- The Church in Jesus Christ
  - Once the bread and wine have been transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, the church, being the Body of Christ, begins to mention her different members and ask special requests. Specifically we pray:
    - Seven short litanies
      - Peace (i.e., the peace of the church)
      - Fathers (i.e., the fathers of the church)
      - Clergy (i.e., the clergy of the church)
      - Place (i.e., the the physical place we live)
      - Season (i.e., the agricultural seasons of the church. There are three, the waters, the plants and the weather)
      - Oblations
    - Commemoration of the Saints
    - Diptych (prayers for the departed members of the Body of Christ)
- The Fraction
  - Prayer before the fraction (i.e., Introduction to the Fraction)
  - Fraction
    - Be able to describe which fraction you as a deacon would open for the priest on common feasts such as the feast of any archangel or the feast of St John the Baptist, etc
  - The Lord's prayer
  - The secret prayers
  - Confession

- Communion
  - Note the phrase that the priest mentions to each believer as he/she partakes of the Holy Mysteries (Page 186)
  - Note the historical practice of how communion was administered in the first century (page 186)
  - Note the order or rites at the end of communion: which psalm is prayed, which prayers are prayed and the technical names of what is distributed to the congregation (page 187-188)

## Rites and Rituals

- Know at which points in all services that the deacon is to present the censer and incense box to the priest
- Know which Psalms the deacon is to read as he puts on his vestments. (See Coptic Reader Agpeya > Selected Prayers > Deacons)
- Know exactly which responses the deacon should chant inside the sanctuary versus outside the sanctuary
- Know the rules of the Agpeya prayers (i.e., which hours are prayed on specific days of the week, feast days, Paramoun days, fasting days etc).
  - Offering of the Evening Incense (Vespers)
    - On non-fasting days (including Saturdays and Sundays of fasting days, as well as Feasts of the Lord and Feasts of the Cross), the prayers of None (Ninth), Vespers (Eleventh) and Compline (Twelfth), and Veil in the monasteries are prayed.
    - On fasting days (except the weekdays of the Great Fast and Jonah's Fast), the prayers of Vespers and Compline (and Veil in the monasteries) are prayed.
    - No Agpeya hours are prayed in the Offering of Evening Incense of the Feasts of Nativity or Theophany, since they were all prayed in the Liturgy of the Paramoun. If the Paramoun falls on a Saturday or a Sunday, only the Terce (Third) and Sext (Sixth) hours are prayed in the Paramoun liturgy; the Ninth, Vespers and Compline (and Veil in the monasteries) are prayed in the Offering of Vespers Incense.
  - Midnight Praise
    - The Midnight Prayer is prayed (all three watches) before the Midnight Praise.
  - Offering of the Morning Incense (Matins)
    - The Prime (First) Prayer is prayed before Matins Praise (Doxology of Matins) and the Offering of Morning Incense.



- The Prime Prayer is not prayed before the Offering of Morning Incense of the Feasts of Nativity, Theophany and Resurrection.
- The Liturgy
  - On non-fasting days (including Saturdays and Sundays of fasting days, as well as Feasts of the Lord and Feasts of the Cross), the prayers of the Third and Sixth hours are prayed.
  - On fasting days (except the weekdays of the Great Fast and Jonah’s fast) the prayers of the Third, Sixth and Ninth hours are prayed.
  - On the weekdays of the Great Fast and Jonah’s Fast and the Paramoun of the Feasts of Nativity and Theophany, the prayers of the Third, Sixth, Ninth, Vespers and Compline hours (and Veil in the monasteries) are prayed.
  - On the Feast of Pentecost, only the psalms of the Third Hour and the Gospel are prayed. The litanies are prayed after the reading of the Praxis (Acts).
- During the Offertory, when the priest presents the wine to the deacon for olfactory inspection (i.e., smell the wine), you’re smelling for two things: (1) ensure the wine doesn’t smell like vinegar, or (2) it doesn’t smell like strong alcohol.
  - The deacon’s response should be “good and honored” if it indeed is good and honored.
- Know that the Silver/Gold Gospel (Bishara) that is kept on the altar is not to be held or used except during the litany and reading of the Gospel (Reference: Euchilogion of Fr AbdelMessih El-Massoudi)
- It is critical to understand what litanies in the Offering of Incense are prayed on which days and according to liturgical season. Commit the table below to memory.

	Sundays	Feasts of the Lord	Pentecost Period	Saturdays	Weekdays
<b>Evening Incense</b>					
Litany of the Departed	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Morning Incense</b>					
Litany of the Sick	X	X	X		X
Litany of the Oblations	X	X	X		
Litany of the Departed				X	
Litany of the Travelers					X

Table 1. Arrangement of litanies to be prayed relative to day of the week and church season. Courtesy *Service of the Deacons*, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States, page 14.

- Know exactly how to calculate the number of days the Paramoun of a feast is. Commit Table 2 to memory.

<b>Feast Day</b>	<b>Paramoun Day(s)</b>
Sunday	Friday, Saturday
Monday	Friday, Saturday, Sunday
Tuesday	Monday
Wednesday	Tuesday
Thursday	Wednesday
Friday	Thursday
Saturday	Friday

Table 2. Determination of the day(s) of the Paramoun, based on the day its Feast falls. Courtesy *Service of the Deacons*, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States, page 302.