

## **Bishop Irenei's 'Six Days of Creation' Prosfora Recipe**

This recipe for prosfora is called the 'Six Days of Creation' recipe as an easy way to remember measurements: just as creation was accomplished in 6 days by the 1 God, so in this recipe, prosfora are made with 6 measures of flour, with the measurements for all other ingredients (salt, yeast, etc.) being 1.

This recipe is based on the that taught to Bishop Irenei of London by then-Abbot James, now Bishop James of Sonora, with several modifications Bishop Irenei has incorporated over the years. Please remember the God-pleasing Bishop James and his flock in your prayers!

This recipe is designed for home use — that is, prosfora bakers who are working in a normal home kitchen, rather than a dedicated prosfora workshop. Thus its measurements are designed to be practical in a common countertop mixer, for baking in a standard home oven, whether gas or electric. If using the recipe in a larger setting, you will need to multiply the amounts appropriately, doubling or tripling them (or more) depending on the size of your equipment and capacities.

## Illustrated instructions and explanation for beginning prosfora-bakers:

**STEP 1:** Bring a kettle of pure water to a boil. While it is heating, place **3 cups organic white strong flour** in your mixer's bowl. Make the sign of the Cross in the flour with your finger, three times, saying 'In the Name of the Father... and of the Son... and of the holy Spirit.' Just before your kettle boils, pour into the Cross indentation a small amount (approx. 2 tablespoons) of **Holy Water**. Ensure the mixer's attachment is a dough hook. (See fig. 1).



Fig. 1: Flour blessed with the Cross, with Holy Water added.

**STEP 2:** Pour **boiling hot water (straight off the boil)** into the flour while the mixer is on a low speed, scalding the flour (see fig. 2). Increase mixer speed slightly once most of the flour is wet. Keep adding **boiling** water until the flour becomes a paste approximately the consistency of semolina. Increase mixer speed to give the paste a thorough beating for a few minutes. Then stop the mixer, scrape any paste off the hook and remove the bowl (see fig. 3). **Cover with a towel and set it aside on the counter to cool; set a timer for 35 minutes.**

Note: The scalding with boiling water is an *absolutely essential* step in making good prosfora. Scalding the flour catalyses the transformation of the proteins into strong gluten, which provides the finished prosfora their good texture. If this step is skipped, or if you use only warm water rather than boiling, the final result will be crumbly and powdery prosfora that do not hold their shape when cut and dissolve when placed into the Chalice.



Fig. 2: Boiling water being added to scald the flour.



Fig. 3: Texture of the paste once all boiling water is added and firmly mixed.

**STEP 3:** As soon as you have set the timer, it is time to prepare the yeast: in a measuring cup, add **150 ml lukewarm water**; it is not necessary to be absolutely exact on this measurement. You can use the hot water from the kettle, adding substantial cold water until the final balance is only *barely lukewarm* to the touch. (If it is too hot, it will kill the yeast rather than activate it.) To the lukewarm water, add **1 teaspoon yeast**, and stir thoroughly. Set it aside to activate for the remaining time on your timer (approx 25 minutes), stirring once about halfway through to remove any yeast clumps that are present. By the time the timer sounds, the yeast should be fully activated and a substantial foam should have formed; if it hasn't, the likely cause is water that was too warm, that killed the yeast. If this is the case, repeat this step with new water and new yeast, until it activates properly.



Fig. 4: Yeast added to the lukewarm water.



Fig. 5: The yeast stirred into the water.

**STEP 4:** While the paste is cooling and the yeast activating, add **3-4 tablespoons of Holy Water** to a small bowl or glass, and add **1 teaspoon salt** to the Holy Water (see fig. 6). Stir thoroughly, until all the salt dissolves and the liquid is completely clear (see fig. 7); if you cannot get all the salt to dissolve, add more Holy Water until it does (don't worry over the measure; the amount of water need not be exact). Once this is ready, set it aside. (This is a good moment to wash and dry the dough hook, while waiting for the timer to finish: if you do not, the remainders of the paste on the hook will dry and fall into the mix when we next use it, which can destroy the consistency of the final dough.) (See fig. 8.)



Fig. 6: Salt added to Holy Water.



Fig. 7: Salt completely dissolved in Holy Water.



Fig. 8: Salt water and yeast when fully activated and ready.

**STEP 5:** Once your 35-minute timer sounds, place the bowl of warm paste back into the mixer with the cleaned dough hook. (Don't rush it back, give it the full 35 minutes to cool; if the paste is too hot when you add the yeast to it, it will kill the yeast. 35 minutes will accurately cool the paste in this recipe, with these quantities, to the right temperature; if in doubt, over-compensate by letting it cool more, not less.) Turn on the mixer to its lowest setting, and slowly **pour in the salted holy water mixture** (see fig. 9). Mix until it is fully absorbed into the paste, then **add the yeast mixture**, giving it a stir beforehand to reduce the foam (see fig. 10). Mix on a low to medium speed until it is fully incorporated into the paste, using a spatula to stir in any paste clinging to the sides of the bowl, so it all gets the yeast incorporated into it (see fig. 11).



Fig. 9: Adding the salted Holy Water to the paste.



Fig. 10: Adding the activated yeast and water mixture.



Fig. 11: Texture of the paste with salt water and yeast water fully mixed in.

**STEP 6:** Turn the mixer speed to its lowest setting, and gradually incorporate an **additional 3 cups of flour**, approximately 1/4 cup at a time, allowing it to be incorporated before adding more (see fig. 12). The amount of flour you end up adding will vary, depending on the amount of water in the paste mixture: if you had a bit more water in the yeast, or more holy water with the salt, you will find you need to add more flour. Sometimes with this recipe, 3 1/2 or even 4 cups ends up being added; but use 3 as your starting point. **The aim is the final consistency, which should be a sticky to the touch but rebound a little against your finger** (see fig. 13).



*Fig. 12: Gradually adding the additional flour.*

**STEP 7:** Remove the dough from the mixer bowl, onto a floured counter surface, and **knead it thoroughly**. (The more you knead it, the better the consistency will be when baked.) You will find yourself incorporating a bit more flour as you go, a pinch at a time, until it 'feels right' (see fig. 14). Once it does, make sure it is in a nice ball and return it to the mixer bowl, or another clean bowl (see fig. 15). **Cover with a towel and allow it to rise for 30 minutes**. (During this time you can wash all your utensils: we are done with the mixer, as well as the spatula, measuring cups, etc. These can be washed and put away.)



*Fig. 13: The dough mixture once all flour is added.*



*Fig. 14: The dough, once thoroughly kneaded.*



*Fig. 15: The dough formed into a ball to rise.*

**STEP 8:** When your 30-minute timer sounds, punch down the risen dough in the bowl (see fig. 16), then remove it and **knead it thoroughly** again for several minutes, incorporating a little more flour if required. (The more you knead, the better it will be. Stop when the dough is of an elastic consistency, thick and firm and with all air bubbles kneaded out of it, ready to be rolled. **Roll the dough to the desired thickness of the bottom portions of your prosfora.** This will vary depending on whether the prosfora are small (for commemorations), or large (for the Proskomedia). Flip the dough routinely while rolling, using the rolling pin on both sides, wiping away excess flour as you go. End with the clearest side upwards (see fig. 17). Wipe off all excess flour from the surface.



*Fig. 16: Punching down the dough after rising.*



*Fig. 17: Dough rolled for bottom portions.*

**STEP 9:** Use the **ring-cutter** you have chosen for the bottom portions of the prosfora (the larger of the two you are using), and use it to cut out the bottom portions of the prosfora (see fig. 18). Lift away the excess dough once all are cut, putting it in the bowl. **Transfer the bottom portions to the pre-waxed baking trays**, spacing them far enough apart that they will not touch when they rise (see fig. 19). When each tray is complete with these bottom portions, **cover with a towel to allow them to rise** (see fig. 20).



*Fig. 18: Cutting the bottom portions from the dough.*



*Fig. 19: Bottom portions on baking tray.*



*Fig. 20: Tray covered with a towel, to rise.*

**STEP 10:** While the bottom portions are rising, re-roll the remaining dough for the tops, making this layer thinner than the bottom portion; flip it as you go, rolling both sides, ending with the finest side on top. Brush away all excess flour from the surface, then **use your smaller cutter to cut out a number of top portions** to match the bottoms. Lift away the excess dough.

**STEP 11: Stamp the seals onto the tops:** Ensuring that the countertop remains floured so they will not stick, ensure the top surface of each is *entirely free* from excess flour. Dip your seal stamp into a bowl of flour, then tap it firmly three times against the counter to remove all this flour from its grooves. Then press firmly into the centre of each top segment, holding in place for the length of a single Jesus Prayer (see fig. 21). Remove the stamp carefully from the dough, setting it aside. Repeat the process for each top (see fig. 22).



Fig. 21: Stamping the dough.



Fig. 22: Stamped top portions.

After the seals are impressed in all the top portions, use the same ring-cutter that was used to cut them from the dough to 'clean up' the edges of the pressed seals, since in the pressing the top portion will have become thinner and wider; this returns it to its desired diameter, and also provides an opportunity to re-centre the seal if you notice that in pressing it became lop-sided in the dough.



Fig. 23: Tidying the edges.



Fig. 24: Tidying the edges.



Fig. 25: Finished top portions.

**STEP 12:** When all the tops have been stamped, remove the towel from the trays of bottoms (which will have risen slightly). **Using a brush, apply a thin layer of water to the surface of the bottom portions** (see fig. 26); in order for it not to dry out, apply this water to 2-4 portions at a time. **Then, for each moistened bottom portion, take one of the stamped top portions, turn it over in your fingers and brush away all excess flour, then lay it atop the bottom segment.** Use your finger to press it down carefully, attentive not to distort the seal but also ensuring that there is contact between the two segments throughout (if part of the top is separated from the bottom, it will result in an air bubble / interior split in the prosfora that may not be visible to you when they are done, but which makes them impossible to use for the Proskomedija). Repeat this process until all the prosfora on a tray have their tops affixed.



Fig. 26: Moistening the bases.

**STEP 13:** Taking a small cake-pin or toothpick, **pierce each of the assembled prosfora five times:** one in the centre, and four around the edge of the seal (see fig. 27). Remember the wounds of the Saviour as you do this. These piercings are essential in ensuring the prosfora combines properly, and allows yeast gasses to escape during baking, ensuring that air bubbles do not form. Once the whole tray of prosfora have been pierced (see fig. 28), re-cover with a towel and set aside to rise. Repeat these two steps until all your trays are assembled, pierced, and have been covered to rise for about 10-15 minutes. **While they are rising in their fully assembled form, preheat the oven to 140 C (or 180 C, depending on size of prosfora).**



Fig. 27: Piercing the prosfora.



Fig. 28: Assembled and pierced.



**STEP 14:** Once the oven is fully heated, remove the towels covering the trays, and **place them in the oven**. Use the middle rack if only one tray; the bottom and middle racks if two — try to avoid the top of the oven, as it is usually hotter (see fig. 29). **Bake at 140 / 180 C for approximately 20-30 minutes; the precise time depends on your oven, as well as the size of the prosfora:** smaller prosfora take about 20-25 minutes at 180 C; large prosfora can take 45-120 minutes at 140 C. You will know they are done when they are a gentle gold colour — rotate the trays every 20 minutes or so, since ovens tend to be hotter on one side than another, and in this manner you will end up with a uniform colour.



*Fig. 29: In oven for baking.*

**STEP 15:** Once the prosfora are doing baking, remove from the oven and their trays and **set them on a wire cooling rack** (see fig. 30). Immediately **cover each full rack with a dry cloth towel** (which should be of a type that isn't textured or made of loose fibres that might stick to the surface of the prosfora), and on top of this **place another cloth towel which you have wetted with cold water and thoroughly wrung out**, so that it is damp but not dripping wet. The prosfora should thus be allowed to **cool under these two towels for 1 hour** (see fig. 31) without being disturbed by lifting up the towels. (The combination of heat from the prosfora with the moisture from the towels creates a perfect cooling environment that provides a smooth exterior to the prosfora.)

**STEP 16:** Once fully cooled, remove the towels. The prosfora are now finished. If they are to be used within the next 3 days, place them a fabric prosfora bag to bring to the temple; **if they are to be kept on stock for longer, they should immediately be placed in sealable (i.e. ZipLock) plastic bags, only a single layer high; when sealing the bag, suck out all excess air** from the bag so that it forms a gentle vacuum seal. The prosfora are ready to go into the freezer. (Never, ever freeze



*Fig. 30: Immediately out of oven, onto racks.*



*Fig. 31: Covered with a dry and wet towel to cool.*

prosfora in a fabric bag, or in any bag that is not airtight, with the air removed: they will freezer-burn immediately, and though this will not be apparent to sight when thawed, the interior texture of freezer-burned prosfora makes them inappropriate for use in the Altar). **When using frozen prosfora, remove the required bags from the freezer the night before the service, placing them in the refrigerator.** By morning they will be thawed and ready to use. **Never, ever microwave prosfora to defrost them, as this destroys their texture.**

## General remarks:

1. Prosfora are like the soul: the gentler you are with your soul, the less spiritual growth results (one must ‘take the Kingdom by force’ as the Lord says); and the more gently you knead prosfora, the worse will be its result. When you knead the dough, do so a little longer than seems necessary — much more than you would with dough for a loaf of normal bread — and be ‘aggressive’ with it. The more you knead, the finer will be the texture of the prosfora in the end. If you do not knead enough, or are too gentle, the finished prosfora may look okay from the outside, but on the interior they will have many more, and larger, air bubbles. They will also be of a weaker consistency, since kneading strengthens the proteins in the flour: weak prosfora dissolve very quickly when placed in the Chalice, while strong prosfora hold their shape perfectly.
2. Use good yeast. You may wish to try different yeasts: each yeast has its own characteristics and imparts its own flavour to the prosfora. Also ensure that you use the correct amount of yeast, properly activated (as in this recipe). Too little yeast, and your prosfora will not rise, and will end up being beautifully crafted hockey-pucks; too much yeast and your prosfora will have air bubbles, will rise lop-sided, etc. The correct proportions and treatment of the yeast result in prosfora that have small, uniform air bubbles throughout, which rise appropriately and uniformly, so that the prosfora grow larger but do not change their shape.
1. In the rare instances (such as baking in a very cold environment that cannot be warmed up, and which therefore negatively affect the ability to yeast to activate), a tiny pinch of pure sugar can be added to the yeast-and-water mixture in order to aid its activation. This should not be done if not required (prosfora are traditionally only flour, yeast, salt and water); however, if an environment makes it impossible for the yeast to grow, this tiny pinch of sugar is permitted — not as an ‘ingredient’ of the prosfora, per se, but simply as a means of providing a catalyst for activating the yeast.
3. Use good, organic, pure strong flour. ‘Strong’ flour is so called because it has stronger protein content, which is precisely what is wanted for prosfora — but make sure it is not enriched with additional ingredients. If you use flour with weak protein content, the end result will be crumbly prosfora that dissolve in liquid (and therefore can’t be used in the Chalice). Good flour combined with good yeast and aggressive kneading result in prosfora with a sponge-like consistency, very fine air bubbles, that do not crumble and have an exterior that, when the priest cuts it with a Spear, cuts in clean, distinct lines without crumbling edges. It also tastes wonderful.
4. When making prosfora for commemorations, ask your priest what size he would like; these can be small to small-medium sized. When making prosfora to be used for the Proskomedie, these need to be considerably larger — and what is especially important for the Proskomedie are prosfora that are *tall*, as well as wide. The ideal prosfora for Altar use will be about 6-10 cm tall when fully cooked and cooled. This means that the bottom layer especially needs to be thicker than for commemoration prosfora; the top layer also a little thicker, but not dramatically since the pressing of the seal removes excess thickness to the top layer. Your main ‘tool’ for adjusting the height of finished prosfora is the thickness of the bottom layer.
5. Surprisingly to some, prosfora are not at their liturgical best when straight out of the oven. There is still too much moisture content, which makes them hard for the priest to cut (they are too sponge-like). Prosfora intended to be used without freezing should be made at 1-3 days before use, and kept in a fabric bag. Most priests, however, find the ideal situation is prosfora that have been *properly* frozen for at least a few days / weeks, then *properly* thawed; this process adds firmness to the prosfora and makes them easier to cut beautifully in the proskomedie. Properly frozen prosfora can keep for 1-3 months without any hindrance in quality (but, by contrast, if frozen in fabric or in bags with air in them, they will be spoilt within a week).