



SAINT MATTHEW



# Saint Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

24 BURKE ROAD

FREEHOLD, NJ 07728

Twenty First Sunday after Pentecost

November 17, 2013

Father Robert E Lucas, Pastor; Subdeacon Daniel J. Korba and Nikitas Tsokris, Cantors  
Rectory 215-862-9227; Parish Center 732-780-3158

## We Are A Stewardship Parish Of Time, Talent and Treasure

The mission of our parish faith community is to teach the Gospel message in the rich tradition of the Orthodox Church; to enable people to reflect the image of Jesus Christ in every day activities of life; to offer spiritual formation through changing times; and to celebrate community among Orthodox believers in our Freehold area.

We of St. Paul the Apostle Parish dedicate ourselves to maintaining the sanctity of worship and spiritual enlightenment in a family environment that reaches and involves all ages and unifies all people.

We believe in the spirit of ecumenism in which we share our faith by word and example and extend our spiritual insights to all people.

We accept the responsibility of Christian Stewardship that through generous giving we may all experience a faith communion with Christ as the Center of our lives.

We dedicate ourselves to insuring the well-being of all people so that we may truly experience the message of Christ's salutary gospel.

We are a beacon on a hill with the eyes of many upon us; that beacon is the inspired Light of Christ which must shine brightly in our lives.

*It is not ourselves we preach but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts, that we in turn might make known the glory of God shining on the face of Christ. This treasure we possess in earthen vessels to make it clear that its surpassing power comes from God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way possible, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in us* 2 Corinthians 4: 5 – 8.

## GLAD TIDINGS

+++ Every Monday, we have prayerful devotions before the Myrrh bearing icon at 6:00 PM. Everyone is invited to be present in praise. The Birthgiver invites us to manifest our faith in response to her first shown love, to unite our prayers with hers for the salvation of our souls. Invite your friends and neighbors to join us.

+++ The THANKSGIVING BAKE SALE will take place this Saturday. Please secure orders to insure its success. We begin Saturday at 6:00 AM with pick-up between 2:00 PM and 5:00 PM.

**Heavenly**

**Mysteries**



## Baptism

# Heavenly

The holy sacramental Mysteries are the most important means of our salvation, which are established and entrusted to the Church by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. There are generally accepted seven such sacramental Mysteries administered by the Orthodox Church, the very first being the holy Mystery of Baptism, by which we become regenerated into the divine life of God's children in Jesus Christ and become living communicants of the Body of Christ, the Church.

# Mysteries

The term *baptism* is a Greek word and literally means bathing or washing, as suggested by St. Paul, "He saved us by means of the cleansing water of regeneration, renewing us by the Holy Spirit" Titus 3: 5. St. John Chrysostom (d. 407) remarks: "This mystical cleansing of baptism is also called the bath of regeneration."

Baptism is also popularly called *Christening*, since it makes us Christians, followers and disciples of Christ. "...the first disciples were called Christians for the first time" Acts of the Apostles 11: 26, for all "who have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ" Galatians 3: 27. Being mystically united by Baptism to Christ, we do not belong anymore to



ourselves, we "...belong to Christ" 2  
Corinthians 10: 7.

Before His Ascension, our Lord commissioned His disciples and through them His Church, to teach all nations and make all of them Christians, saying: "All power in heaven and on earth is given to me. Go, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" Matthew 28: 19, 20, and only those "...who will believe and be baptized will be saved" Mark 16: 16.

The institution of Baptism comes directly from our Lord Jesus Christ, Who at the beginning of His public ministry solemnly proclaimed, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a man is born again of water and Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" John 3: 5. The Church then recognizes and accepts Baptism as a new birth by the Holy Spirit which marks the beginning of our divine life in Christ Jesus as testified by St. Ireneus (d. 202): "Baptism is the seal of eternal life and our rebirth in the Spirit of God, so that we become not only the children of men but also the children of the Eternal God" Apostolic Demonstrations.

When on the day of Pentecost, the Jews were asking Peter what they must do to be saved, he answered, "Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for

forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Scripture assures us that those who accepted Peter's advice "were baptized, about three thousand of them" Acts of the Apostles 2: 37, 38, 41. "When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" Acts of the Apostles 19: 5.

The apostles and their successors did not fail to baptize all those who believed in Jesus Christ and promised to abide by His teaching. Thus they were initiated into Christian community as witnessed by the second century martyr, St. Justin Martyr (d. 156): Those who believe in the truth of our teachings and undertaken to live accordingly...are led by us to a place where there is water to be regenerated in the same way as were we, in the name of God the Father and of our Saviour Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit" First Apology.

Initially the baptismal ritual was very simple as described to us by the first century document, *The Teachings of the Twelve Apostles*, generally known by its Greek title, *Didache*, (teaching) written about 90 AD. "Concerning Baptism, baptize in running water. But if you do not have running water, use whatever is available. Immerse the candidate into the water completely, three times in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. But with time, as the liturgical life of the Church was developing, the



administration of holy Baptism became more and more elaborate, being constantly enriched by highly impressive and more symbolic ceremonies in imitation of the supposed pomp and perceived splendor of the heavenly court. After all, the Church is indeed representative of God's kingdom on earth.

By the middle of the fourth century the baptismal ritual of the Orthodox Church reached its full development as testified by the *Catechetical Lectures* of St. Cyril of Jerusalem which he delivered during the Great Fast of 348 AD in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Another authority on the development of the baptismal ritual and its inherent richness is St. John Chrysostom who delivered his *Baptismal Instructions* in Antioch between 388 – 390 AD.

In these patristic instructions, we can clearly trace all the integral parts of the present baptismal initiation, namely: 1) Reception and preparation of the candidate for baptism which is known as the catechumenate, who had to be presented by a sponsor; 2) Exorcism since in consequence of the loss of their spiritual inheritance the candidates are subject to a certain degree to the hostile power of the evil spirit; 3) Renunciation of the devil and adherence to Christ, referred to by St. John Chrysostom as the "contract of faith"; 4) Profession of faith, called by St. Cyril the "saving confession"; 5) Anointing with the oil of catechumens,

making us the "athletes of Christ" as described by St. John Chrysostom once again; 6) Baptism by "water and the Holy Spirit" John 3: 5, restoring in us the image of God. "Let us make man in our own image, in our likeness" Genesis 1: 26; 7) Clothing with a white garment, called the "robe of justice" symbolic of the soul's righteousness, free from "every blemish"; and finally 8) Handing the burning candle as a reminder to the baptized to "Shine brightly with the light of faith and good works" during his or her entire lifetime.

With these ceremonies we actually conclude the administration of -holy Baptism, although in the Orthodox Church the priest continues the ritual by imparting the holy Mystery of Chrismation as well, followed then by imparting the grace of the Holy Eucharist.

In order to enter the kingdom of heaven, we must be baptized according to the witness of our Lord Himself (John 3: 5). Since infants are born in lacking a heavenly inheritance due to the sin of Adam and Eve, infant baptism has always been a part of the tradition of the Church as witnessed to by the famous teacher of Alexandria, Origen (d. 253), in his *Commentary on Romans*. "There fore, just as through one man sin entered the world and with sin, death, death thus coming to all men inasmuch as all sinned – before the law there was sin in the world, even though sin is not imputed



when there is no law – I say, from Adam to Moses death reigned, even over those who had not sinned by breaking a precept as did Adam, that type of the man to come” Romans 5: 12 – 14. The Apostles remembered the admonition of the Lord, “Let the children come to me and do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” Luke 18: 16.

The second century Father of the Church, St. Irenaeus, in his classic, *Against Heresies*, insisted that Jesus Christ “came to save all who through Him are born again to God: infants and children, boys and girls, young and old.” St. John Chrysostom gives the following explanation: “We baptize infants although they do not have personal sins, that they be given the gift of sanctification, righteousness, filial adoption and the inheritance of heaven, and that as members of Christ, that is the Church, they become a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit.”

During the fourth century, when some misguided Christian parents began to postpone the baptism of their children to a mature age, many of the Church Fathers, like St. Basil the Great (d. 379), St. Gregory Nazianzen (d. 389), St. Ambrose of Milan (d. 397), just to mention a notable few, vigorously tried to eradicate such an abuse. Finally, the pristine custom of baptizing little children prevailed.

Since the baptismal ritual of the Orthodox Church is constructed in such a way that the candidate must take an active part in it and answer some questions of the priest like the renunciation of satan, the irrevocable promise to belong to Christ, the profession of faith, the institution of sponsors became necessary. The sponsors bring the child to the be baptized into the church and in the name of the infant give necessary consent, support and answers as the ritual proceeds and requires.

The main responsibility of sponsors is to secure a Christian education and formation of the soul for their spiritual children and extend to them guidance in their spiritual life. They are to augment and affirm the spiritual work of natural parents. In his work, *Baptismal Instructions*, St. John Chrysostom calls them “spiritual parents” since they “ought to show their paternal love by encouraging, counseling and correcting those they sponsor” in the teaching and love of Christ. Such practice was already confirmed by the First Ecumenical Council of Nicea, assembled in 325 AD in its Canon 22.

Initially only one sponsor was required, but later in the Middle Ages the custom of two sponsors was introduced, one male, the other female. It thereby raised their dignity in the spiritual realm to that of the natural parents. Godparents then become official witnesses of the mystery being



conferred and their names and pertinent information are entered into the parish Baptismal Register.

At Baptism, candidates receive their Christian name. In the first three centuries they were baptized by their birth names. Only after 313 when Christianity became legalized in the Roman Empire, the Church Fathers began to enforce the custom to change the pagan names of the baptized into Christian names. The first Council of Nicea in 325 already legislated to this effect in its Canon 30: "The faithful ought not give pagan names to their children, but let the Christian people use their own names."

Christian names were considered those of the apostles, martyrs and confessors, who would "secure for the baptized their heavenly protection" according to Theodoret of Cyprus. Later biblical names were introduced, both from the Old and New Testaments. Also the names of Christian virtues, such as Charity, Faith, Grace, Justin, were considered worthy of naming children.

In his *Homily on Genesis*, St John Chrysostom explains: "Christian parents should always give to their children such names that would inspire them to a virtuous life and serve others as a reminder of a true and honorable Christian life." This then became the traditional practice of the Body of Christ.

On the fortieth day after the child's birth a special ceremony is prescribed generally known as the *Churching of a Child*, in imitation of the presentation of our Lord in the temple. As the priest leads the mother with the child into the parish church, hence the description, *churching*, he says, "Enter into the house of God and adore the Son of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Adore Him who has granted to you that you shall bear a child." At the conclusion of the ritual a special blessing is imparted to both mother and child while the priest sprinkles them with holy water.

Originally the churching of the newly baptized took place right after - the baptismal ceremony, when they were led by the clergy in a solemn procession into the church where they were received with the joyous singing of the assembly: "All you who have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ, Alleluia" Galatians 3: 27.

After infant baptism was introduced with the immense growth of the Church, the original churching ceremony had to be modified and developed into a special separate ritual under certain circumstances. Nevertheless, the full and elaborate development of churching took place in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries as testified to by St. Simeon of Thessalonica (d. 1429): "On the fortieth day the infant again is brought to church by its mother, who offers her child to God as a gift." He then goes on to give a complete



description of the ceremonies involved. Presently, this ceremony is ordinarily solemnized at the conclusion of the baptism ritual.

### **Baptismal Vows**

Turning to the West, symbolizing the darkness and realm of satan, we three times solemnly promise:

"I renounce satan, all his works, all his angels, all service to him, all his arrogance."

Then turning to the East, the symbol of paradise (Genesis 2: 8), to which we are being introduced through baptism, we publicly declare three times:

"I believe in Christ and promise to serve Him."

Next we profess our faith, reciting the Symbol of Faith, "I believe in one God..."

Again in his *Baptismal Instructions*, St. John Chrysostom encourages the newly baptized to repeat often their baptismal vows, saying, "Keep repeating these words, for nothing will keep you more secure than these words, as long as you prove them with your deeds. They constitute our contract or covenant with our Master, Jesus Christ." If faithfully adhered to, they help us become like Him, actually Christ-like.

### **The Baptismal Formula**

St. John Chrysostom tells us that not man, but Christ baptizes us, saying, "There comes after me he who is mightier than I...and he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" Luke 3: 16. For this reason, when the priest baptizes us, his is the vehicle of God through whom grace is imparted, and he does not say, "I baptize you," but rather, "The servant of God (name), is baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." This way the priest showed that it was not he who baptized, but God in the Blessed Trinity."

The sacramental Mystery of Baptism is the doorway to heaven and without these credentials one cannot receive any of the succeeding sacramental Mysteries; it makes it possible to continue in the mystical life of the Body of Christ.

### **Chrismation**

Holy Baptism is our personal mystical participation in the glorious and triumphant victory of the Resurrection of Christ, since having "died to sin," through baptism, we rise with Christ to "live in newness of life" Romans 6: 2 - 4, as children of God. By holy Chrismation, which in the Orthodox Church is administered immediately after baptism,



we mystically participate in Pentecost, the coming and descent of the Holy Spirit upon us. Thus this Mystery is often called the Seal of the Holy Spirit.

Chrismation is performed by anointing with a sacred oil, consecrated by the Ecumenical Patriarch on Holy and Great Thursday in solemn ceremonies at the Phanar. It is called *chrism*; hence the proper name of the mystery, Holy Christmation. In Greek and Old Slavonic, chrism is called *myron* and the Mystery is called *Miropomazanije* meaning the anointing with *miro*, or in English, Chrismation.

Our Lord Jesus Christ promised His apostles to send them "another Advocate, the Spirit of Truth" John 14: 16, 17. And He kept His promise since on that memorable first Pentecost all the apostles "were filled with the Holy Spirit" Acts of the Apostles 2: 4. But our Lord also promised to send the Holy Spirit to all who would "believe in him" John 7: 39. Therefore St. Peter assured the crowd in Jerusalem, "Repent and be baptized...and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise that was made is for you and your children and for all those whom the Lord our God will call" Acts of the Apostles 2: 38, 39. Chrismation makes it possible for us to be believers in Christ and thus, communicants of His Body, the Church. It completes the grafting-on process of belonging intimately to the Lord.

At the beginning the apostles bestowed the Holy Spirit on the newly baptized by the imposition of hands. "...imposed hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit" Acts of the Apostles 8: 17. Since they also administered Holy Orders by the "imposition of hands", "They presented these men to the apostles who first prayed over them and then imposed hands on them" Acts of the Apostles 6: 16, under the guidance of the very same Holy Spirit, they agreed to anoint the newly baptized with the holy oil, chrism, and indeed make them *Christians*, the anointed and marked ones. Just as St. Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386) explained to his neophytes: "Now you have been made Christs, the anointed ones, for you have received the emblem of the Holy Spirit, the holy anointing." The name Christ means "anointed one."

This change seems to be indicated already by St. Paul when he says, "The one who anointed us is God, giving us the Spirit" 2 Corinthians 1: 21, 22; and also by St. John the Evangelist, "You have the anointing that comes from the Holy One" 1 John 2: 20. In the biblical sense anointing means the reception of the Holy Spirit. The first patristic testimony concerning the anointing comes to us from the second half of the second century, given by St. Theophilus of Antioch (d. 180 AD), when he wrote, "We are called Christians because we were anointed with the oil of God." We are then destined to coreign with Christ in heaven for all eternity.



Since Apostolic times, Chrismation took place immediately after Baptism as testified by St. Luke in his history of the early Church. "...they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. As Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came down on them..." Acts of the Apostles 19: 5, 6. In his *Catechetical Lectures*, St. Cyril explains: "Christ having been washed in the Jordan River imparting the fragrance of His divinity to the waters. As He was coming up from the waters, the Holy Spirit in His fullness enlightened Him, by resting upon Him. In the same manner, after you had come up from the pool of the sacred stream, you were anointed, the same as Christ was anointed by the Holy Spirit."

Because of this example of the Lord and His teaching, "I solemnly assure you, no one can enter into God's kingdom without being begotten of water and the Spirit" John 3: 5, Chrismation followed immediately after Baptism in the tradition of the Church, both in the East and West. It was usually performed by the bishop. But when the age of masses of adult converts was past and the ordinary administration of Baptism of children began taking place, the administration of Chrismation was entrusted to the parish priest as small cells of faith communities were being established. As the population of the Church grew, the bishop was not able to be everywhere in each parish as the need arose. Priests, as a practical reality were delegated to represent the bishop. Then a difficulty arose regarding

Chrismation, since from apostolic times it was the prerogative of the bishop as testified to by the *Apostolic Constitutions*, "Let the bishop anoint with holy chrisms those who were baptized."

After the discontinuation of the solemn celebration of Christian initiation, the administration of these mysteries was another reason it was extended to priests as a practical gesture. In the West, during the ninth century, this mystery was separated from Baptism altogether and solely reserved to the office of bishop as it so remains today. But in the east, the bishop distributed the holy Chrism received from his lawful patriarch to the priests in his diocese. On this point the Council of Laodicea, which convened in the middle of the fourth century clearly stated its Canon 48: "Those who are being initiated immediately after baptism must be anointed with the heavenly Chrism and become partakers of the kingdom of Christ."

The Fathers of the Church always considered Chrismation as a completion of Baptism, bringing it to its perfection, that is, to spiritual regeneration by "water and the Spirit" John 3: 6, fulfilling the expectation of Christ our Saviour. Thus for example, the fifth century anonymous author of the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* calls Holy Chrismation a "perfective anointing" conferring to us a "gift of the divine Spirit." Therefore, consecrating chrisms, the Patriarch prays, "Make this chrisms for



those being baptized to be, the *seal of perfection.*"

The pristine ritual of imparting the Holy Spirit as presented to us by the Acts of the Apostles "...imposed hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit" Acts of the Apostles 8: 15 – 17. It was very simple: a) Prayer. SS. Peter and John in Samaria "prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit"; b) Imposition of hands, which was soon to be changed to the anointing with Chrism, as mentioned before; c) Invocation of the Holy Spirit, perhaps with St. Peter's words, "Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" Acts of the Apostles 2: 28.

The ritual for this sacramental Mystery developed in its present form already in the third century as recorded in the *Euchologion* of Bishop Seraphion of Thmuis (d. 362). The invocation of the Holy Spirit, the chrismal formula, certainly remained the same: "Being regenerated and renewed by the washing of a new birth, let them become partakers of the gift of the Holy Spirit". We also know that the great Alexandrian theologian, Clement (d. 215), referred to Chrismation as the *blessed seal* in his *Stromata*.

The connection between the anointing and the seal is clearly indicated by St. Paul saying: "It is God who anointed us and has also put his seal on us, giving us the Spirit" 2 Corinthians 1: 21, 22.

Hence the invocation of the Holy Spirit, as used today in the Orthodox Church, was formulated since ancient times. It reads, *The seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit.* This formulary can be traced at least to the fourth century, since the Second Ecumenical Council celebrated in Constantinople in 381, ordained that the newly baptized should be "anointed with holy chrism on the forehead, eyes, nostrils, mouth and ears. As they are anointed, we say, "The Seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit," as prescribed by Canon 7 of this Council.

Through holy Baptism, a seed of divine life is planted in the Christian soul, making him or her a child of God. Then the Holy Spirit, imparted in holy Chrismation, makes this seed of divine life sprout in the soul and grow to its maturity, "to the extent of the fullness of Christ" Ephesians 4: 13. As we grow older, we must cooperate with the Holy Spirit working in our soul. Hence all members of our body become anointed with holy chrism in order that they be divinely guided, confirmed and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386), mentions the forehead, the eyes, the nostrils, the mouth, the ears and the breast of the newly-baptized to be anointed with Chrism. He explains that we are anointed on our forehead to be identified and marked and branded as property of God;



on our eyes in order to be able to behold "with unveiled face the glory of the Lord" 2 Corinthians 3: 18; on our ears to be prepared to listen to the teachings of the gospel, to "pay attention to what you hear" Matthew 11: 15; on our nostrils that, perceiving the sweet aroma of Chrism, we may ourselves become "a sweet aroma of Christ" 2 Corinthians 2: 15; on our mouth to be able to boldly profess and proclaim the true faith, "the Spirit of your Father will be speaking in you" Matthew 10: 20; and finally on our breast, that having put on "a breastplate of righteousness" Ephesians 6: 14, we may stand firm against the wiles of the evil one.

Then he continues: "As Jesus Christ, after His baptism and the descent of the Holy Spirit, went forth and vanquished the adversary (Luke 4: 1 – 13), so likewise, you, after holy Baptism and the mystical Chrism, having put on the whole armor of the Holy Spirit, are to stand against the power of the adversary and vanquish it, saying with St. Paul, "I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me" Philipians 4: 13.

The anointing of hands and feet was added somewhat later. They are mentioned for the first time in the *Sinaitic Euchologion*, a manuscript from the ninth or tenth century. The hands are anointed since every Christian must "be ready to do good works" Titus 3: 1; and the feet since we have to "walk and live not

according to the flesh but according to the spirit" Romans 8: 4.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem concludes his explanation about the anointing with Chrism in the following words: "The holy anointing is symbolically applied to your forehead and to your other senses. While the body is anointed with the visible Chrism, your soul is sanctified by the Holy and life-giving Spirit."

During the first centuries the newly baptized, after their Chrismation, were escorted by the clergy into the church to participate in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy and to receive their first Communion. As they entered the church the faithful welcomed them with what at that time was the entrance hymn: "All you who have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ, Alleluia" Galatians 3: 27. From this point on the celebration of the holy Liturgy continued.

Some time during the eighth century when infant baptism was the prevalent practice, the *Rite of Christian Initiation* became separated from the celebration of the Divine Liturgy and was a distinct service. As a liturgical service it then needed a proper conclusion of ritual. Thus the eighth century document, the so-called *Barberini Code*, already records the concluding ritual, as we have it in many instances today. It included the Prokimenon (Psalms 27: 1), scriptural



readings of the epistle (Romans 6: 3 – 11), and Gospel (Matthew 28: 16 - 20) as well as the Litany with a special petition for the newly enlightened that he or she may be "sustained in a pure profession of faith, in all holiness and in the fulfillment of the commandments of Christ."

At long last the ritual of Christian Initiation comes to its end and is concluded with a proper dismissal as every liturgical service does in the life of the Church of Christ. In recent years, in an effort to renew the liturgical celebration of Christian Initiation properly it is once again being celebrated in the context of the Divine Liturgy at which time the Christian neophyte is then communicated with the Body and Blood of the Saviour.

### **Consecration of Chrism**

The ritual for consecration of Chrism includes the following deeply meaningful prayer, "O Lord, God Almighty by the descent of your holy and adorable Spirit, make this chrism for those being baptized the robe or incorruption, the seal of perfection and symbol of divine calling...Grant that those marked with this holy seal being clothed in your incorruptible glory and sanctified in their soul and body, may be a source of fear to the evil spirits, as a "chosen race, a royal priesthood and a holy people" 1 Peter 2: 9. Grant that all those marked with this

your sacred mystery will have Christ abiding in their hearts as in a dwelling place, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit."

### **Chrism**

"After the invocation this holy Chrism is no more a simple or common ointment, but the gift of Christ and, by the coming of the Holy Spirit, it is suitable to impart to us His divine gifts...While the body is anointed with this visible Chrism, our soul becomes sanctified by the holy and life-giving Spirit" St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*.

### **Soldier of Christ**

"As Christ after His baptism and descent on Him of the Holy Spirit went forth and defeated the adversary, so likewise, you, having received holy Baptism and mystical Chrism, stand firm against the power of the enemy and vanquish it, saying, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" St. Cyril of Jerusalem *Catechetical Lectures*.

### **The Holy Eucharist**

Through Baptism we are regenerated to the divine life of grace and become



children of our heavenly Father because we mystically triumph over our sins and victoriously rise to participate in the Resurrection of the Saviour. Through Chrismation we mystically participate in the descent of the Holy Spirit, who seals and confirms us in the divine life of God's children and enriches us with His abundant gifts. However, it is through the Holy Eucharist that we become intimately united to the Lord and Saviour, Who becomes our spiritual nourishment, leading us into life everlasting. Baptism and Chrismation renders us communicants of the Church, wholly and completely. The newly baptized and chrismated, therefore, are entitled to have this spiritual initiation completed and fulfilled by receiving the Lord in Communion. They become participants then, with the disciples at the Mystical Supper of the Lord.

In its original Greek language, the word, *eucharist*, means thanksgiving, since at the Mystical Supper, before changing bread and wine into His Body and Blood our Lord "gave thanks" Matthew 26: 27. Therefore the central part of the Divine Liturgy is the *Prayer of Thanksgiving, Eucharistia*, in which the gathered faith community through the celebrant thanks almighty God for all His benefits, especially for the gift of redemption. In the biblical sense, then, thanksgiving or eucharist is blessing and praising God for His manifold gifts bestowed on us. The believer in Christ knows he can never thank God enough for all he has received

of heaven's rich and munificent bounties. Thus grateful souls are eager to express themselves always and often on a regular basis before the heavenly throne.

The Apostles first called the celebration of the Holy Eucharist the *Breaking of Bread*, "...to the breaking of bread and prayers..." Acts of the Apostles 2: 42; since at the Mystical Supper Jesus "took bread and after he had given thanks, broke it and said This is my body!" 1 Corinthians 11: 23, 24. And it was "at the breaking of bread" that Jesus was recognized by His two disciples in Emmaus Luke 24: 30, 31. Thus in apostolic times, the Breaking of Bread became a technical term to indicate the celebration of the Holy Liturgy which could not be made known to non-believers.

It was also called the *Lord's Supper* 1 Corinthians 11: 20, since the celebration of the Holy Eucharist was considered a liturgical continuation of the Mystical Supper, the time our Lord ordered His disciples to "Do this in commemoration of me" Luke 22: 19. St. John Chrysostom (d. 407) explains that St. Paul by the expression, "The Lord's Supper" was referring to "...that evening on which Christ delivered the awesome Mysteries."

At the end of the first century, a new term *Eucharist* appeared as indicated by the *Didache* around 95 AD, "On the Lord's Day, as you come together, break bread



and offer the Eucharist, having first confessed your sins, so that your sacrifice may be pure. By the end of the second century the term *Holy Eucharist* prevailed in usage and practice.

The Eucharist is considered a sacrifice of the New Testament as well as a mystery of the Body and Blood of our Lord. The Eucharist is the holy Mystery of the New Covenant instituted by Jesus Christ in which under the species of consecrated bread and wine we receive the Body and Blood of our Lord as spiritual food and nourishment of soul.

The Eucharist is indeed mystery in Greek, *mysterion*, which means a secret, hidden thing to the human eye. In it, to use the inspired words of St. John Chrysostom, "What we believe is not the same as what we see. One thing we see, bread and wine, and another we believe, that it is the Body and Blood of Christ. And such is the nature of our Mysteries."

And it is a unique Mystery, since by Holy Communion, we receive not only the increase of salutary grace by the very Author and Source of grace, our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus we become intimately united with our Saviour Who assures us, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him" John 6: 56. Hence the reception of the Holy Eucharist is popularly called Holy Communion rightly (from its Latin, *cum*

*unio, united with*) meaning *united with* the Holy One, the Son of God.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386) confirms, and teaches us in his *Catechetical Lectures*, "By partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, we become one body and one blood with Christ, we become *Christ-bearers, Christophers*. In this way, according to blessed Peter, we "...share in the divine nature" 2 Peter 1: 4.

The Holy Eucharist was instituted by our Lord at the Mystical Supper, which was celebrated in the atmosphere of tender love, as testified by St. John: "Jesus, knowing that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father, He loved his own in the world, he loved them to the end" John 13: 1. Prompted by His infinite love, our Lord took a loaf of bread in His hands and after, giving thanks, He broke it and gave it to the apostles, saying: "Take and eat, this is my body, which is broken for you" Luke 22: 19. Then He took the chalice with wine, gave thanks, blessed it and, gave it to the apostles saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" Matthew 26: 27, 28.

After the apostles received their First Communion, our Lord commissioned them to perpetuate this Mystical Supper, saying: "Do this in commemoration of me!" Luke 22: 19. St. John Chrysostom



explains, "Therefore, the offering is the same which Christ gave to His disciples and which now the priests minister. For the words which Christ spoke are the same which the priest now pronounces, so also the offering is the same" Homily on 2 Timothy 2: 4.

*This is my Body; This is my Blood;* these are simple and elementary words; but they are the words and expression of Almighty God Who by His word created heaven and earth: "He spoke and they were made, He commanded and they stood forth" Psalms 33: 9. St. Gregory Nyssa (d. 394) does not hesitate to affirm, "We rightly believe that the bread which is consecrated by the Word of God is changed into the body of God the Word, meaning Jesus Christ."

A similar explanation is also given by St. John Damascene (d. 749) in his theological discourse, *On the Orthodox Faith*, "If heaven and earth and the whole universe were established by the word of God, then can He not make the bread His body and wine His blood? The Word of God said: 'This is my body' – 'This is my blood,' and then, 'do this in commemoration of me!' Thus by His almighty command it is done."

In Scripture we read that when the Prophet Elias was persecuted by the impious Queen Jezabel, he fled to the desert and hid. After some time on the

run, Elias became dejected and at the end of his strength, asked God to take his life. Then he fell on the ground and soon was fast asleep. But before long an angel of the Lord awakened him, and offering him a loaf of bread and a jug of water, he encouraged him: "Get up and eat, for you have a long way to go!" So the prophet got up and ate. Being refreshed he then walked forty days and nights until he came to the holy mountain Horeb, where he had a vision of God (1 Kings 19: 1 – 18).

Along the road of our life, we too, being persecuted by the enemy of our salvation, often become weary and dejected and at the end of our spiritual strength. Then our Lord, through his messenger, the celebrating priest, at the Divine Liturgy, invites us, "Take and eat, this is my body!", and again, "Drink of this, this is my blood!" And after Holy Communion, being refreshed by this "bread from heaven" John 6: 32, and "the cup of the Lord" 1 Corinthians 11: 27, we are ready to continue our pilgrimage toward the holy mountain to meet God our Father in heaven.

In the Holy Eucharist, then, Jesus gives us His own body and blood as spiritual food in order to nurture and sustain the divine life of grace in us. And He himself assures us: "Just as I have life because of my Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me" John 6: 57. Therefore, St. Ignatius of Antioch (d.



110), calls the Holy Eucharist "the medicine of immortality, and antidote to ensure that we shall not die, but live in Jesus forever" Epistle to Ephesians.

Our Lord did not give any specific instruction concerning the frequency of the reception of Holy Communion, but He warned us, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will have no life in you" John 6: 53. In other words, in order to sustain divine life of grace, we must regularly, as long as we live, receive the sustenance of heaven. Otherwise, we run the danger of losing our soul.

From the very beginning, the Fathers of the Church insisted that the faithful receive Holy Communion as often as possible, even daily. Thus, St. Basil the Great (d. 379), says, "To receive Holy Communion daily and thus partake of the holy body and blood of Christ is an excellent and most beneficial practice since Christ distinctly said: 'He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has life everlasting' John 6: 54. And who can doubt that to share continually in the life of Christ is nothing else than to enjoy a full divine life?"

The practice of frequent and regular communion in the Church lasted until the Middle Ages when the fervor of Christian faith began to decline considerably. Consequently, the faithful were warned

not to approach the holy altar table carelessly in a state of serious sin, referred to in the Scripture as "sin unto death" 1 John 5: 16, without first going to confession. Otherwise they would commit a serious offense or sacrilege against "the body and blood of the Lord" 1 Corinthians 11: 27, by receiving the Holy Eucharist unworthily as warned already by St. Paul when he said, "Whoever eats the bread and drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily, eats and drinks for his own condemnation" 1 Corinthians 11: 27, 28.

The laziness of the faithful, instead of investing time going to confession of sin with genuine repentance more frequently, in order to be ready for Communion, began instead to abstain from the spiritual food of heaven. To correct this deplorable practice, the Church Fathers established for us penitential fasting seasons, before the Nativity of our Lord, prior to the Resurrection, the feast of the Prime Apostles, Peter & Paul and the Dormition of the Birthgiver of God, in order that the people properly prepare themselves by going to confession, thus being disposed to continually receive Holy Communion.

As the moral life of the faithful steadily continued to decline and Holy Communion became more and more neglected, the Church was finally forced to impose a special precept, binding the faithful, under pain of serious sin, to go to confession



and receive Holy Communion at least once a year during the Passover season. Otherwise, the faithful would expose themselves to the danger of not attaining their salvation since according to the words of Christ, "unless we eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, we will have no life of grace in us" John 6: 53. Therefore the precept of the Church regarding regular confession of sins and regular Eucharistic communion should be taken seriously.

The Resurrection season during which the faithful are able to solemnly celebrate only if they are freed of their sins extends from the first day of the Great Fast until the Sunday after Pentecost, the Sunday of All Saints, so that there is no excuse not to receive the Eucharist at least once a year. But we should keep in mind that in the light of the teaching of our Lord, it is not enough to receive but once a year, or even periodically in order to "have life and have it more abundantly" John 10: 10, we must nourish our soul with the "bread from heaven" John 6: 32 constantly, even daily, if possible. Receiving the Eucharist for the believer cannot be simply understood or dismissed as a choice, but understood as actual necessity.

Believers, then, eagerly, zealously, even enthusiastically, approach the holy altar table "with fear of God and with love and faith" Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.

## Communion Prayer

O Lord, I believe and profess that You are truly Christ, the Son of the living God, Who came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the first.

Accept me as a partaker of your mystical supper, O Son of God, for I will not reveal your mystery to your enemies, nor will I give you a kiss as did Judas, but like the thief I confess to You:

Remember me, O Lord, when You shall come into your kingdom. R

Remember me, O Master when You shall come into your kingdom.

Remember me, O Holy One, when You shall come into your kingdom.

May the partaking of your holy mysteries, O Lord, be not for my judgment or condemnation, but for the healing of my soul and body.

O Lord, I also believe and profess that this which I am about to receive is truly your most precious body and your life-giving blood, which I pray, make me worthy to receive for the remission of all my sins and for life everlasting. Amen.

O God, be merciful to me a sinner.



O God, cleanse me from my sins and have mercy on me.

O Lord, forgive me for I have sinned without number.

### **Prayer At Distribution Of Communion**

The servant of God receives the precious, most holy and most pure body and precious blood of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins and for life everlasting. Amen.

### **Reconciliation With God**

The very first gift which resulted from the glory and triumph of the Resurrection from the grave by Christ is forgiveness of sin. Our Lord and Saviour commissioned His Church to preach "the repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations" Luke 24: 27, in His name. Since He does not "wish that anyone should be lost, but that all be brought to repentance," 2 Peter 3:9, our Lord endowed the Church from the very beginning of His triumph over death with the power to forgive sins by instituting the holy Mystery of Penance, Confession, or Reconciliation.

This holy Mystery instituted by Christ forgives in His name, by His authority, the

repentant sinner all sins committed after baptism.

Sin is disobedience to God's will, therefore it is a direct affront to and offense against God. Hence, only God Himself can forgive sin if the necessary conditions are fulfilled. But Almighty God, "generous in His mercy" Ephesians 2: 4, sent His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ "to save His people from their sins" Matthew 1: 21. And Jesus Christ came into this world "not to condemn but to save the world" John 3: 17, therefore He called all people "to repentance" Matthew 4: 17, and to those who responded and came to Him He "forgave their sins" Luke 7: 49.

In answer to the Pharisees, who questioned His power to forgive sins, our Lord even healed the paralytic man saying, "That you may know that the Son of Man has power to forgive sin on earth, He said to the paralytic, I say to you, pick up your mat and go home." And the Evangelist assures us that the paralyzed man arose at once, picked up his mat and went home, while the people remained astonished, since they "had never seen anything like that" Mark 2: 10 - 12.

Therefore anyone who does not believe that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world, has the power to forgive sins, cannot be a true Christian, since he does not believe in the mission of the Son of



God, "to save people from their sins"  
Matthew 1: 21.

The authority "to forgive sins on earth"  
Mark 2: 10, Jesus Christ passed on to His  
Apostles and their duly ordained  
successors, charging them to continue His  
salvific work until the "end of the world"  
Matthew 28: 20. First our Lord only  
promised to invest the Apostles with  
power to forgive sins, saying "Whatever  
you shall bind on earth, shall be bound in  
heaven, and whatsoever you shall loosen  
on earth, shall be loosed in heaven"  
Matthew 18: 18.

On the evening of His glorious  
Resurrection our Lord entrusted the  
Apostles with His own mission, saying,  
"As the Father has sent me, so I also send  
you!" And then, after breathing His own  
divine commission on them and sharing  
heaven's authority, He said, "Receive the  
Holy Spirit, whose sins you shall forgive  
they are forgiven them, and whose sins  
you shall retain, they are retained" John  
20: 21 - 23. With these words our Lord  
instituted the holy Mystery of  
Reconciliation after man separates himself  
through sin from His Creator and Maker,  
and commissioned the apostles and their  
duly appointed successors, bishops and  
priests of the Church, to forgive or to  
retain sins "in His name" Acts of the  
Apostles 10: 43, as testified by St. Paul  
the Apostle: "God who has reconciled us  
to himself through Christ, has given us

the ministry of reconciliation" 2  
Corinthians 5: 18.

St. Ambrose of Milan (d. 397) voices the  
unanimous teaching of the ancient Church  
Fathers when he says, "We are  
commanded by our Lord to confer the  
grace of the heavenly sacramental  
Mystery to those who are guilty even of  
the greatest sins, if they with a sincere  
confession bear penance due to their  
sins" On Repentance.

It is entirely true that "only God can  
forgive sins" Mark 2: 7, but in virtue of  
Christ's commission, what God does  
through His duly ordained priests whom  
we can affectionately call our confessors,  
He does it by His own authority. In His  
profoundly inspiring, *On The Priesthood*,  
St. John Chrysostom explains, "What  
priests do on earth, God ratifies in  
heaven. The Master confirms the  
decisions of His servants, the priests.  
Indeed, He has given them nothing less  
than the full authority of heaven!"

The practice of Reconciliation and  
forgiveness of sins was a constant belief  
of the incipient Church, according to the  
witnessing words of St. John the  
Evangelist: "We confess (in Greek,  
*homologein* - to acknowledge, to declare  
*openly*), our sinful offences. God is  
faithful and will forgive them, and will  
cleanse us from every iniquity" 1 John 1:  
9.



Already at the end of the first century, the *Didache*, written somewhere around 96 AD, reminds sinners, "Confess your sins in church and do not go to the Eucharistic prayer with an evil conscience. This is the way of life." A similar order is given in the so-called *Epistle of Barnabas*, written before 132 AD: "Make confession of your sins and you shall not go to prayer in church with a bad conscience." And in his epistle to the Philippians, St. Polycarp of Smyrna (d. 156), admonishing confessors, says, "Be compassionate and merciful toward those that strayed...knowing that we are all under the debt of sin and need forgiveness."

The administration of Confession in the Church is clearly testified to by St. Cyprian (d. 258), insisting in his book, *On The Lapsed*, "Let everyone confess his sins while he is still in this world, while his confession can still be heard, while the forgiveness of sins granted him by a priest is still acceptable to God."

From these and many other testimonies, we can clearly see that the Church not only preached "repentance for the forgiveness of sins" Luke 24: 47, but also practiced what she preached by the administration of the holy Mystery of Reconciliation, Confession, Penance according to the words of St. Ambrose, "If you want to be justified in God's sight, confess your sins." It was rather plain, then, from the very beginning of the life of the Body of Christ that pursuing a life

of virtue required a regular and frequent apology to our heavenly Father for missing the mark and challenge proposed by the Lord in seriously seeking after divine life.

Instituting the Mystery of Reconciliation, our Lord left the responsibility as to whether to forgive and/or retain sin with the individual confessor based on the teaching authority of the Church. Such a decision would logically require the acknowledgement or actual confession of sins by a penitent, since the confessor is not able to read the secrets of the human heart. A humble confession of sin is also required on the part of the penitent in order to manifest sorrow or contrition along with a firm resolution to "sin no more" John 8: 11. The confessor must be able to hear the offense and its gravity so that a decision can be made regarding sincerity of heart and soul in offering absolution in the name of God. The confession of sins is so important that the Mystery of Reconciliation is simply and popularly called Penance or Confession.

The ritual of the Mystery of Reconciliation, just as that of the other sacramental Mysteries has undergone a long process of development. In the first centuries there were two kinds of penance: *public* and *private* as witnessed by St. Irenaeus in his *Against Heresies*. Public confession was made openly before the entire gathered faith community and was required in cases of public sin, especially



those of homicide, adultery, and apostasy. With time the number of public sins kept increasing. Private, or so called "hidden" sins were confessed privately before the bishop or priest alone.

As the Church rapidly grew in numbers, difficulties arose. Due to an increase of scandal involving these public confessions, they began to dwindle in number and decline during the fourth century. Already St. Basil the Great (d. 379), states, "The confession of sins should be made before those that are able to heal them," meaning before priests. But it was Archbishop Nectarios of Constantinople (d. 397) who canceled the practice of public confession although in some places the practice continued but only on voluntary basis. In the West, public confession was abolished by Pope St. Leo the Great (d. 461), who decreed that it was "sufficient to manifest one's sins, even public ones by a private or secret confession to priests alone."

The Mystery of Reconciliation is the ordinary way to obtain the remission of sins committed after baptism. On the part of the penitent, it requires a) a sincere and complete confession of sins; b) a heartfelt sorrow for sins committed, sealed by a firm resolution not to sin anymore, and c) readiness if necessary to make satisfaction for committed sins according to the disposition of Zachaeus, the tax collector, "Lord, half of my possessions shall I give to the poor and if

I have cheated anyone I will pay him back four times the amount" Luke 19: 8.

To be able to confess our sins sincerely, first we must "come to our senses" Luke 15: 17, as the Prodigal Son in the gospel narrative, and sincerely admit that we have indeed offended our loving and merciful God. Only then we will be able to conceive in our heart a sincere sorrow for all our sins, leading us to a true repentance and amendment of our life. This can be achieved only through a good and thorough examination of conscience before going to confession.

The essential part of repentance is sorrow for our sins, since without a sincere regret for having offended our loving God and a decisive rejection of the sins committed, no forgiveness or absolution can be granted. Hence the Prophet tells us, "Cast away all sins you have committed and make a new heart for yourself" Ezekiel 18: 31. And according to the teaching of St. Paul only sincere contrition of our heart, called by him "a godly sorrow" will assure us a true "repentance that leads to salvation" 2 Corinthians 7: 10. Even David was convinced that a "contrite and humble heart God will not spurn" Psalms 51: 19.

On his return the Prodigal Son humbly confessed, "Father I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son!" And the



father? He not only received his son back with joy, but also ordered his servants "to bring and put on him the finest robe, to put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet" Luke 15: 20 – 22. In other words, he restored him to all the privileges of a son, fulfilling the legacy of our Saviour, "I tell you, there will be likewise more joy in heaven over one repentant sinner than over ninety nine righteous people who have no need to repent" Luke 15: 7.

In such manner does our heavenly Father receive back with profound and enduring joy every repentant sinner when he comes back to Him and sincerely admits his wrongdoings. God also restores to the repentant sinner all the privileges of sonship. In the context of the sacramental Mysteries, absolution by the confessor and forgiveness by the God of heaven, the Creator once again clothes penitent souls with the "finest robe" of sanctifying grace, restoring divine life lost by "deadly sin" 1 John 5: 16; making the penitent soul "free from the slavery of sin" John 8: 36, symbolized in the parable by sandals, since in those days slaves went barefooted. And by "putting a ring on his finger", our Lord indicated the restoration of the Prodigal to all his inheritance rights, in our case, everlasting life with our Creator in heaven.

No wonder the *Apostolic Constitutions* of the fourth century reassure their readers, "God not only receives back the penitent sinner, but restores him back to his

former dignity as a child of God." This sacramental Mystery restores us to unity with the Father and regenerates divine life in the soul. It is cause for true celebration.

### **Prayer Before Confession**

I a sinner confess to Almighty God, One in the Holy Trinity, to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God to all the Saints, and to you, Father confessor, all my sins.

### **Prayer After Confession**

For these and all my other sins, which I remember or cannot call to mind, I am very sorry for having offended my loving God and having angered Him against me. I am sincerely sorry and promise with the help of God to better my life. For this I firmly ask of you, Father confessor, salutary penance and absolution.

### **On Reconciliation**

"As the man whom the priest baptizes is enlightened by the Holy Spirit, so does he who in penance confesses his sins, receive through the ministry of the priest, forgiveness of sins in virtue of the grace of Christ" St. Athanasius the Great Against Novatian.



## The Mystery Of Marriage

The holy Mystery of Matrimony is one of the seven channels of divine grace, instituted by Christ to sanctify and support Christian family life and the sanctification and salvation of individual souls. Christian marriage is a particular vocation that is a special invitation by God to two baptized persons in marital union, male and female alone, in order to devote themselves to the service of new life in Christ. That is why St. Paul considers Christian marriage a "special gift of God" 1 Corinthians 7: 7. The Fathers of the Church have never failed nor hesitated to underscore the great importance of married life, sanctified by a particularly rich and enduring sacramental grace.

The very first pages of God's revelation to us in Scripture give witness to the great and sublime dignity of matrimony, indicating special reasons for its institution by Almighty God. Created in the "image and likeness" Genesis 1: 26, man alone among the vast creation, was endowed by the Creator with a spiritual soul. While the physical body is passed on from the parents to their children through the process of generation in cooperation with Almighty God, the human soul, the "breath of life" Genesis 2: 7, must be instilled as if by inbreathing directly by God. In other words, God must necessarily enter into marital union so that the procreation of children and

propagation of the human race may be assured; that citizens for heaven may receive their exalted dignity.

Having made man "male and female," our God blessed them and said, "Be fertile and multiply and fill the earth" Genesis 1: 27, 28, in cooperation with the heavenly design of procreation. Thus the spiritual nature of man and his vocation to cooperate with God in the propagation of the human race constituted the great dignity of matrimony, especially when it is sanctified by the Church as ordered by the heart, soul and mind of Christ.

While the very first chapter of the Book of Genesis bears witness to the dignity of marriage, the second chapter presents matrimony as the institution of God. We are told by the sacred writer that Adam felt lonely, since there was "no suitable partner" for him Genesis 2: 18. So, God formed a woman out of his rib in order to emphasize her equality with man as an image of God. Adam, confronted with woman, exclaimed, "This is bone of my bones; and flesh of my flesh!" Genesis 2: 23.

At this point of the primordial story, the sacred author adds an important reflection, which later Jesus made His own: "That is why a man leaves his father and mother, and clings to his wife and the two become one flesh" Genesis 2: 24; Matthew 19: 5. By these words the sacred



writer intended to point out that the marital union is honorable since it is willed by the Lord for the fulfillment of his human creation.

In the Old Covenant, marriage did not have the specific religious character it achieved with the coming of Christ and was considered rather a private matter, sanctified and blessed by the temple ceremony. Over the course of centuries however, under the influence of pagan customs and the tolerance of Mosaic Law, the pristine institution of marriage became to a certain degree perverted. Hence our Lord, Who came to "restore the law" Matthew 5: 17, among other things, had to restore marriage as well to its pristine and original dignity and honor, as it was intended by God, when He proclaimed divorce unlawful.

The Pharisees, in order to discredit the Lord before the people, insisted that divorce was lawful, since it was permitted by Moses himself (Deuteronomy 24: 1 – 4). But Jesus quickly retorted: "Because of the hardness of your hearts Moses allowed you to divorce your wives. But from the beginning it was not so!" Matthew 19: 8. Then, turning to the people, He further explained: "From the beginning of creation God created them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So, they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God

has joined together, no human being must separate" Mark 10: 5 – 8.

In other words, in order to restore marriage to its pristine dignity as willed by the Creator, the Mosaic brief permission of divorce had to be revoked since it became reality under duress from poorly believing Old Covenant members. The indissolubility of marriage had to be renewed. Jesus, by divine authority invested in Him, did just that by the following assertion: "I say to you, whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery" Matthew 19:9; and "If a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery" Matthew 19: 12.

The Fathers of the Church, particularly St. Epiphanius (d. 403), St. Augustine (d. 430), and St. Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444), are unanimous in teaching that Jesus Christ sanctified and elevated Christian marriage to the dignity of a sacramental Mystery by His presence and blessing of the wedding at Cana in Galilee, where He also performed His first miracle and sign. This is the reason why the gospel of St. John (John 2: 1 – 11), describing the miracle at the wedding in Cana is read at the marriage ceremony.

The holiness and mystical character of Christian marriage are beautifully explained by St. Paul in his monumental epistle to the Ephesians. He models



conjugal love and fidelity on the mystical union of Jesus Christ with His Church and points out that our Lord, out of love for the Church, "handed himself over to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water and with the word (baptism), that He might present to himself the Church in splendor...that she might be holy and without blemish" Ephesians 5: 25 – 27.

Having proposed the mystical union of Christ with the Church to spouses as a perfect model for their conjugal relationship, St. Paul exclaims: "This is a great mystery!" Ephesians 5: 32. In other words, the Apostle himself admits that such was a high ideal to strive after in married life, but still he expected Christian spouses to attempt to seriously imitate the ideal as much as possible, of course, always with the help of God's grace. Hence this passage of St. Paul's epistle is also read and proclaimed at the wedding ceremony (Ephesians 5: 20 – 33).

According to the continued traditional teaching of the Church, Jesus Christ, the Divine Spouse of the Church, comes into the life of Christian spouses through the sacramental Mystery of Marriage. And thereafter He abides with them so that, just as he loves the Church and handed himself over on her behalf (Ephesians 5: 25), so also the spouses may love each other with perpetual fidelity through mutual never-ending self-giving and love. Then true married love is caught up into

divine love and is governed and enriched by the Church's redeeming power and the saving action of the Church.

For this reason, Christian spouses have at their disposition a special sacramental Mystery by which they become fortified and receive a kind of consecration for the duties and dignity of their marital state. By virtue of this sacramental Mystery, as the spouses faithfully fulfill their conjugal and family obligations, they become penetrated with the spirit of Christ, which suffuses their entire life with profound faith, hope and charity.

The Church Fathers, from early times, insisted that Christian marriage be celebrated in the parish church, being solemnized with splendid religious rites. Already St. Ignatius of Antioch (d. 110), ordained: "It is proper for those who marry to be united with the consent of the bishop so that the marriage may be according to the Lord and not according to lust." And St. John Chrysostom teaches, "Do you want Christ to come and sanctify your marriage? Then invite the priest. Through His servant Christ will come and sanctify your marriage, just as He did at Cana."

To make Jesus truly and really present at the Christian wedding, the Fathers of the Church ordained that the marriage be celebrated in conjunction with the holy Liturgy in order that the spouses could



receive the living Christ in Holy Communion and thus permit Him to sanctify their married lives.

Over the centuries the ritual of marriage was subject to various changes, or enhancements. It received its present form only in the middle of the seventeenth century when two originally separate rites, that of the Betrothal and of Crowning, were combined into one Ritual of Marriage.

Originally, marriage was preceded by the rite of betrothal, which consisted of a ring ceremony and a priestly blessing. The use of rings at the betrothal is already mentioned by St. Clement of Alexandria (d. 215). To avoid all canonical implications that later were imposed on church betrothal by the Council of Trullo in 691, the majority of engagements were celebrated privately, without the presence of a priest. For this reason the Rite of Betrothal, often referred to by the Fathers as the ring ceremony was then celebrated immediately before the marriage, but still as a separate service. Wedding rings symbolize the pledge of fidelity between the spouses.

Since Christian marriage is indissoluble and its validity depends on the free consent of both spouses, there are no vows in the Orthodox marriage ceremony as it is God alone Who not only creates man and woman, husband and wife, but He alone who unites them into one flesh.

The ceremony of joining of the hands of bride and groom is old and is already mentioned by St. Gregory Nazianzen (d. 389). It symbolizes the presence of Christ, Who through the servant-priest confirms the marital union saying, "What God has joined together, let no man put asunder" Matthew 19: 6.

Highlighting the entire ritual of marriage is the ceremony of crowning, mentioned by St. John Chrysostom (d. 407), by which the marriage becomes officially recognized by the Church. The crowning of spouses was adapted from the Old Testament, "Like a bridegroom adorned with a diadem..." Isaiah 61: 10. It symbolizes the "glory and honor" of Christian marriage, since it was instituted by God and elevated by Christ to the dignity of a sacramental Mystery.

Crowns remind the spouses that in their marital union they must assist and help each other attain to "unfading crown of glory" 1 Peter 5: 4, in heaven as suggested by the priestly celebrant's concluding prayer, "O God, our God...accept their crowns into your kingdom, keeping them pure, blameless and above all reproach."

Behold the beauty and deep spiritual meaning of Christian marriage, sanctified and blessed by our Lord, Jesus Christ, Who through His holy sacramental Mysteries continues to live and act in



union with His Mystical Spouse, our blessed Orthodox Church.

### **Initial Prayer**

O Holy God, You formed man out of the dust of the earth, You fashioned a woman from his rib and joined her to him as a helpmate, for it pleased your great generosity that man should not be alone upon the earth. Now, O Master, stretch forth your hand from your holy dwelling place and join these your servants (N) and (N) for You alone join the wife to her husband. Unite them in one mind and in one flesh, granting them fruitfulness and rewarding them with good children.

For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and ever, and forever. Amen.

### **Priest Forever**

It has been the unaltered teaching of Orthodoxy that Christ is the only priest, pastor and teacher of the Church. He alone guides and rules His people. He alone forgives sin and offers communion with God, the eternal Father.

It is also the conviction of true believers that Christ has not abandoned His people,

but remains with the Church as its living and unique Head. Christ remains present and active in the His Body, the Church through the Holy Spirit. The sacramental Mystery of Holy Orders is the objective guarantee of the perpetual presence of Christ with His people. The bishops, priests and deacons of the Church have no other function or service than to manifest the presence and action of Christ to His people. In this sense, the clergy do not act in behalf of Christ, or instead of Christ as though he Himself were absent. Through Holy Orders, the bishops, priests and deacons receive the gift of the Holy Spirit to manifest Christ in the Spirit to mankind.

Thus, through His chosen ministers, Christ exercises and realizes His unique and exclusive function as priest, perpetually offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice to the Father in behalf of His human brothers and sisters. Through His ministers in the Church, Christ acts as teacher, Himself proclaiming the divine word of the Father. He acts as the good shepherd, the one pastor Who guides His flock. He acts to forgive and heal, remitting sins and curing the ills of man, physical, mental and spiritual. He acts as bishop, overseeing the community which He has gathered for Himself. "At one time you were straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd, the guardian of your souls" 1 Peter 2: 25. He acts as deacon which means servant, for He alone is the suffering servant of the Father Who has come "not to be served,



but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" Matthew 20: 28.

The sacramental Mystery of Holy Orders takes its name from the fact that bishops, priests and deacons give order to the Church. They guarantee the continuity and unity of the Church from age to age and from place to place from the time of Christ and the apostles until the establishment of God's kingdom in eternity.

As the apostles received the special gift of God to go forth and make Christ present to men in all of the manifold aspects of his person and work, so the clergy of the Church receive the gift of God's Spirit to maintain and manifest Christ's presence and action in the Church.

It is the continued teaching of the Church that the clergy must strive to fulfill the grace imparted them with the gift of "laying on of hands" in the most perfect way possible. But it is also the conviction and doctrine of the Church that the reality and effectiveness of the sacramental Mysteries ministered by the clergy do not depend upon the personal virtue of the ministers, but upon the presence of Christ Who acts in His Church by the Holy Spirit.

"Let us consider our call, brethren" I Corinthians 1: 26.

This is the impassioned and persistent invitation the Church of Christ continually makes to its priests so as to rediscover the greatness of the mysterious gift of the priesthood by looking to the eternal priest, to Jesus Christ, incarnate Son of the Father born of the Virgin Mary. It is this sacramental Mystery which alone continues and propagates all the sacramental Mysteries of the Church bequeathed her by Christ the Saviour. Thus all believers respond positively to rediscover this vocation of Christ among us.

Today more than ever the priest runs the risk of embracing the mentality that an individual's nature is measured only by his accomplishments. How easy it becomes for us to think that a priest is just a replaceable administrator of spiritual goods. Or that he is a Church bureaucrat. Or that his identity depends on the opinions of his foes and his friends.

Aware of the danger of thinking this way, the Church continually reminds believers to live the mission which constitutes them.

The identity of the priesthood derives its greatness from the priesthood of Christ, which has its roots in the mystery of the Holy Trinity. The Father, rich in mercy, did not abandon man to his own misery. He sent His only-begotten Son to offer that perfect sacrifice which is able to



restore the friendship between God and man. Christ the Redeemer of man, returns the love of the Father by giving back to Him the whole of creation in that unique and complete offer of himself on the cross.

Christ's loving exchange allows the unfathomable love of the Father to reach every human being through the Holy Spirit, Who is the bond of love between the Father and the Son, and their ultimately rich fruit. In Jesus of Nazareth, the One that is sent by the Father, through the Holy Spirit, man can encounter, experience and intimately participate in that divine love without which man remains incomprehensible to himself.

Christ accomplishes his mission to communicate the mystery of the triune God by imitating the Father that is to say, by generating communion and friendship. "I solemnly assure you the Son cannot do anything by himself – he can do only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise" John 5: 19; "I no longer speak of you as slaves, for a slave does not know what his master is about. Instead I call you friends, since I have made known to you all that I heard from my Father. It was not you who chose me, it was I who chose you, to go forth and bear fruit. Your fruit must endure, so that all you ask the Father in my name, he will give you" John 15: 15, 16.

Jesus of Nazareth chose some men and made them His friends. He offered them such a unity with Himself that He gave them His very mission. To encounter them was to encounter Jesus Christ and the Father Who sent Him. "He who welcomes you welcomes me; and he who welcomes me welcomes him who sent me" Matthew 10: 40. They became His sacramental representation in the world. The identity of the Apostles and of the priests after them, derives from the love of the Father given in Christ in Whom they are sacramentally united through the power of the Holy Spirit. Even before what He manages to accomplish for the Eternal Father, the priest prolongs the presence of Christ because He continues the vocation of Christ among us.

The priest's relation to Christ is a treasure given not only to the priest to personally enjoy, but also for him to share. Christ brings some men into communion and friendship with Him because He desires that through them everyone be part of the Father's merciful love. The priest is a steward, one who is brought into the dwelling place of God to distribute His riches. He gives what has been given to him, the sacramental presence of Christ and He speaks of Christ the One in Whom and for Whom everything is made.

The priest cannot communicate Christ without giving his very self, and he does it with and through all of his humanity. This is why the priest is not only ordained to



celebrate the Eucharist, but his whole life is eucharistic. In the Upper Room, the priesthood and the Eucharist are born together and this unity is a sign of what they are to be and to give to others.

## **Anointing With Holy Oil**

The Evangelists tell us that from the very beginning of His public life our Lord Jesus Christ showed and exhibited His merciful love and compassion toward the sick and the suffering who were seeking His help. And St. Matthew assures us that Jesus "cured every disease and illness" Matthew 9: 35. In other words, Jesus considered the healing of the sick as a part of His messianic mission. "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me; He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the broken hearted..." Isaiah 61: 1. Afterward, He entrusted this healing mission to His disciples. "Cure the sick, raise the dead, heal the leprous, expel demons" Matthew 10: 8.

Christ's mission did not stop at mere bodily healing, for the primary concern of His mission was the healing of soul, the salvation of the world. Hence, He instituted a special sacramental Mystery, Anointing with Holy Oil, which is one of the seven Mysteries of salvation entrusted to the Church that all aspects of human life be elevated and sanctified, seen and

recognized in their rightful divine perspective.

The sacramental Mystery of Anointing with Holy Oil was foreshadowed by the ministry of healing, entrusted to the Apostles by Jesus Himself as recorded by St. Mark: "And they anointed many sick people with oil and healed them" Mark 6: 13. In these words of the evangelist, some theologians see the origin of the sacramental Mystery of Anointing with Holy Oil. The manifestation of this Mystery of salvation is entrusted to St. James the Apostle who taught, "Is anyone sick among you? Let him summon the priests of the Church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed any sins, they will be forgiven him" James 5: 14, 15.

According to those who interpret the Scripture, in these words, St. James transmitted the apostolic practice concerning the administration of Anointing of the Sick as it was instituted by Jesus Christ, "in the name of the Lord" James 5: 14.

From its inception, this sacramental Mystery was administered privately, quietly, in moments and time of great need, hence the writings of the Church Fathers during the first incipient era of its



history, it was mentioned only incidentally, without any doctrinal explanation. For the first time Anointing with Holy Oil is mentioned at the end of the first century in the so-called *Teachings of the Twelve Apostles* or the *Didache*. At end of the second century it is mentioned again by St. Ireneus in his text, *Against Heresies*.

In the third century it was Origen (d. 255) who first quoted the Epistle of St. James to support Holy Anointing. And in the fourth century it was St. Athanasius the Great (d. 377) who alluded to Anointing in his commentary on the Psalms. The Syrian writer, Aphraat (d. 345), presented Anointing already as "the Mystery of life" in his publication, *Demonstrations*. Also St. John Chrysostom (d. 407) explained "Anointing of faith" with the words of St. James. Thus, by the fourth century, the doctrine and administration of Holy Anointing of the Sick was publicly firmly established because the Church was finally free to reveal its teaching to the world.

In the fifth Century, Church Fathers such as St. Augustine (d. 430), St. Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444), Victor of Antioch (d. 432) and others treat this holy Mystery already with greater and more extensive deliberation and detail, considering it a complement of the Mystery of Reconciliation or Penance. The first complete presentation of Anointing with Holy Oil as a sacramental Mystery was

made by St. Innocent (d. 417) in his epistle to Bishop Decentius, which also includes an authentic interpretation of the scriptural text of St. James.

In view of these myriad testimonies, the apostolic origin and constant practice of the Church in administering Anointing with Holy Oil to the sick can be safely held and defended. In the early lives of the saints, like in the *Life of St. Hypatius* (d. 446), or the *Life of St. Eutichius* (d. 582), we actually read that they, before passing to a better life, receive Holy Anointing with great devotion and contrition of heart.

The ritual of this blessed Mystery reaches back to the eighth century. The individual prayers of the ritual are much older, however, and were in use also by other Churches.

The most important ancient prayer for the "blessing of the oil of the sick" is from the first half of the fourth century and was preserved in the recently discovered *Euchologion* of Serapius, bishop of Thmuis near Alexandria. A similar prayer can be found in the work of Syrian origin entitled *Apostolic Constitutions* from the end of the fourth century. Both these prayers indicate that by the fourth century the administration of this sacramental Mystery was celebrated by the entire Church.



According to tradition, previously also followed by western Church, Anointing with Holy Oil was conferred by several priests in accordance with the words of St. James, "Let him summon the priests of the Church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil." Through the centuries the number of priests varied but in the Orthodox Church the custom prevailed to call upon seven priests if available since in Scripture or God's revelation to us, the number seven is considered a "perfect number" Isaiah 11: 2, 3; 2 Kings 5: 14; Acts of the Apostles 21: 26, 27.

Because of the scarcity or unavailability of priests, it is generally admitted that even one priest is sufficient to administer Holy Anointing with Oil. Our present abbreviated form reflects that codified by Metropolitan Peter Mohyla of Kiev in 1646.

The ritual of Anointing with Holy Oil begins with a series of prayers including the *Our Father* which constitute what is called the *Customary Beginning*. These are followed by Psalm 143, describing confidence in the Lord at times of distress. Then the Litany of Peace is prayed with two special petitions imploring Almighty God to send down the Holy Spirit, first to sanctify the oil, then to sanctify the sick person. The introductory part of the ritual ends with blessing of the oil to be used in anointing.

The central part of the ritual starts with scriptural readings, introduced by the Prokimenon: "May your kindness, O Lord, be upon us, who have placed our hope in you" Psalms 33: 22. The epistle is taken from that of St. James, telling us about the anointing (James 5: 10 – 16). Then the gospel narrative is read describing the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25 – 37). This is followed by the Insistent Litany, imploring God "for mercy, life, peace, health, salvation, divine visitation, and forgiveness of sins" of the sick person, that the Lord "send upon him the grace of deliverance from illness, raising him from his sickbed."

The actual anointing is preceded by a short prayer invoking the power of the Holy Spirit to descend upon the blessed oil and make it for the sick person "a perfect deliverance from his sins and an inheritance of the kingdom of heaven." Then, dipping his finger into the holy oil, reciting the Prayer of Anointing, the priest anoints the sick person on the forehead, which is the seat of bad thoughts, the five external senses, the eyes, ears, nostrils, lips and hands as organs of sensuality, and on the chest as the seat of the heart because "from the heart comes all evil" Matthew 15: 19, as attested by the Lord. Then the feet, leading us astray on the path of iniquity. All these must be healed by divine grace, since they hide in themselves "the remnants of sin". Thus, according to the teaching of the Fathers of the Church, the soul of the sick person



becomes completely purified as it was at the time of baptism.

After the anointing, to emphasize the mystical presence of Jesus Christ, the Gospel Book is placed over the head of the sick while the priest entreats the merciful Lord to forgive sin. This is in conformity with the words of St. James: "If he has committed any sins he will be forgiven" James 5: 15. Thus, in case the sick person is unable to confess sins on account of impaired speech or lack of memory, the Anointing with Holy Oil becomes the sacramental Mystery of salvation forgiving sin, provided the sick person has at least habitual sorrow for sin.

Following the ritual of Anointing with Holy Oil we can readily and clearly perceive all the spiritual benefits of this sacred Mystery. It not only increases sanctifying grace in the soul of the sick through the descent of the Holy Spirit, but also delivers from all remnants of sin. In cases of emergency, it even substitutes for the Mystery of Reconciliation, forgiving sin.

Anointing with Holy Oil also brings to the sick a spiritual comfort and relief in suffering, inspiring him to turn to the merciful goodness of God with renewed confidence and trust, even increasing the strength and ability to accept the pain and pangs of impending death. Thus the sick person is encouraged to endure more

patiently sufferings and to resist with greater determination all the pains and assaults of the evil one. In other words Anointing with Holy Oil confers upon the sick a special grace and blessing of spiritual strength and endurance.

In those instances where the soul of the recipient is properly disposed and it is the will of God, Anointing with Holy Oil obtains a physical healing of the sick, when it is advantageous for the recipient's salvation. Of course, bodily healing and that of the soul as well is the primary purpose of this Mystery. It thus then shows in a visible way the working of Christ's merciful love through the Mysteries He instituted to assist souls in their assault on heaven.

Through Anointing with Holy Oil Jesus always comes to the sick and invites them to join Him in their sufferings, according to the exalted example of St. Paul, "I rejoice in my sufferings, since in my flesh I am making up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ on behalf of his Church" Colossians 1: 14. What he is teaching us is that we must make our own the grace of Christ, we must be united with it and permit it to act in us that we be transformed and healed. In return Jesus extends His divine help to sick persons to bear more patiently their sufferings in union with His own on our behalf. And in case of their dying, Jesus is ready to take them to Himself in paradise as He promised the repentant thief:



"Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise!" Luke 23: 43.

The believer, then is eager to permit sin and all its limitations die within as he remembers "Blessed are those who die in the Lord!" Revelation 14: 13.

### **Prayer Before Anointing**

O Uncreated Eternal God, Holy of Holies, You sent your only--begotten Son to heal every infirmity and every wound of our souls and bodies. Send down your Holy Spirit and sanctify this oil, making it for your servant about to be anointed, a perfect deliverance from his sins and an inheritance of the kingdom of heaven.

For it is You, our God Who shows us your mercy and saves us and we give glory to you, together with your only-begotten Son, and your most holy, gracious and life-giving Spirit, now and ever, and forever. Amen.

### **Prayer of Anointing**

Holy Father, Physician of souls and bodies, You sent your only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ to heal every infirmity and to deliver us from death. By this Anointing + heal your servant (Name) of the spiritual and bodily sickness which afflicts him and restore his health by the grace of your Christ,

through the prayers of our most holy Lady, the Birthgiver of God and every-virgin Mary and all your saints.

For You, our God are the fountain of healing and to you we give glory, together with your only-begotten Son and your consubstantial Spirit, now and ever and forever. Amen.



## **THE CAPACITY TO CHANGE ONE'S LIFE**

**O**ne day, as our Lord Jesus Christ walked along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, He saw a man seated at the place where custom taxes were paid to the Roman government. The tax collectors were called "Publicans." They were looked upon as extortioners who extracted more money from the people than they were supposed to. The people also thought of them as betrayers of the Jewish tradition, for they served the foreign master: pagan Rome. Some of the strict Old Testament leaders would not even sit at the same table with a Publican. They were, in fact, surprised that Jesus talked with them.

Levi was the Publican at Capernaum whom Jesus saw. The Lord looked deeply into the heart of this man, and called him to be one of His chosen Apostles, saying "Follow Me." Levi arose, left the counting table and all its possibility for wealth, and followed Christ. The Lord not only saw the evil in men, but the good in them, and their potential for service to His cause.

So it was Levi, the despised Publican, who became St. Matthew - the beloved Apostle. He was the oldest of the Lord's apostles, and served Him faithfully until the day he died. After our Lord's Ascension, Matthew preached the Gospel throughout Judea, and journeyed to Persia and Ethiopia to spread the Christian faith.

St. Matthew is best known to us by the Gospel that bears his name. Each of the Gospels was written for a particular purpose and from a particular point of view. We might say that St. Matthew's was written for the Jewish converts, for he writes to show that Christ was the Messiah foretold by the prophets of the Old Testament. One day some emissaries came to Jesus and asked: "Art Thou He that is to come, or do we seek for another?" St. Matthew's Gospel answers this question: Jesus is the Christ, the promised Messiah, and we need not look for another.