

## **The Mystical Supper: The Holy Eucharist**

### *Prayer*

Illumine our hearts, O Master Who lovest mankind, with the pure light of thy divine knowledge, and open the eyes of our mind to the understanding of thy gospel teachings; implant in us also the fear of thy blessed commandments, that trampling down all carnal desires, we may enter upon a spiritual manner of living, both thinking and doing such things as are well-pleasing unto thee. For thou art the illumination of our souls and bodies, O Christ our God, and unto thee we ascribe glory, together with thine unoriginate Father, and thine all-holy, good, and life-creating Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

### *Introduction*

When we last met we spoke of the anaphora, wherein the priest offers up the gifts and in return God gives us himself, changing the Gifts into the Body and Blood of Christ. We showed how we participate in the whole economy of salvation represented to us each week.

Let us now turn our thoughts to the partaking of the Eucharist. We'll explore some aspects of Christ giving us himself in the Eucharist, through the meaning of the actions and prayers of this section of the divine Liturgy.

### *The Holy Things are for the Holy: One is Holy, one is Lord, Jesus Christ*

After the anaphora we all pray the Lord's prayer and the priest prays the prayer with our heads bowed.

We give thanks unto thee, O King invisible who by thy boundless power hast made all things and in the multitude of thy mercy hast brought all things from nothingness into being. Do thou thyself, O Master, look down from heaven upon those who have bowed their head unto thee; for they have not bowed down unto flesh and blood, but to thee, the fearful God. Therefore, O Master, do thou thyself distribute these gifts spread forth, unto all of us for good, according to

the individual need of each: voyage with those who sail by sea; journey with those who travel by land and air; heal the sick, thou who art the Physician of our souls and bodies: Through the grace and compassions and love toward mankind of thine only-begotten Son, with whom thou art blessed, together with thine all-holy and good and life-giving Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Then the priest and deacon, out of a knowledge of their own unworthiness to approach the chalice, make three low bows saying, 'O God, be gracious unto me, the sinner.' Many of the faithful, knowing their own hearts, and in awe that Christ enters under the roof of the house of our souls do the same.

The deacon proclaims: 'Let us attend.' And the priest exclaims while elevating the Bread: 'The Holy Things are for the holy.' The faithful respond 'One is Holy, One is Lord, Jesus Christ, to the Glory of God the Father. Amen.'

St Nicholas Cabasilas writes "No one has holiness of himself; it is not the consequence of human virtue, but comes to all from [Christ] and through [Christ]." We are holy inasmuch as we are united to Christ, partaking of his life through the Mysteries, having been united to him in Baptism, receiving forgiveness for our sins in Repentance, and communing with him in the Eucharist.

#### *The Fraction*

The deacon then says, 'Divide, master, the holy bread.' And the priest responds. 'Divide and distributed is the Lamb of God, who is divided, yet not disunited; who is ever eaten, yet never consumed, but sanctifieth those who partake thereof.'

At his Crucifixion, Christ's bones were not broken, as St John says, 'that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken."' Yet in the sacrifice of the Divine Liturgy, the Lord is broken and offered to the faithful. St John Chrysostom writes: "What Christ did not suffer on the Cross, He undergoes at the offering for your sake, and He endures to be broken so that all may be filled."

Note that while Christ is broken, he is not disunited. Mystically, in a way that surpasses understanding, every part of the Eucharist is Christ in whole. (This is also what we mean by 'catholic' in the Nicene Creed where we say we believe in 'one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church'. For where two or three believers are gathered together in worship, there is Christ in the midst of them. Christ is not separated from his body so the whole body of Christ is present where he is.)

Also, he is eaten but not consumed and sanctifies—or makes holy—those who partake. St Germanos writes,

Those who receive Communion can be called and can actually be gods by Grace, thanks to God, who in His entirety has filled them totally and left no part of them empty of his presence.

Recall also St Athanasius' famous line: "God became man so that man might become god." And from St Peter,

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

We also remember Christ was known to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, by the breaking of the bread and the opening of the Scriptures.

At this line, 'Divide, master, the holy bread,' the priest breaks the Bread (called the Lamb) into four parts, and places them on the paten in the shape of a cross. The deacon says, 'Fill, master, the holy cup.' And the priest places the top portion of the Lamb into the chalice, saying 'the fullness of the cup of faith, of the Holy Spirit.' The deacon then says, 'Bless, master, the hot water.' At which the priest blesses the hot water saying 'Blessed is the warmth of thy holy things O Lord, always now and ever, and unto ages of ages. As the deacon and pours the water into the chalice the priest says, 'The warmth of faith, full of the Holy Spirit.'

Placing the bread in the chalice shows that Christ is one, although made visible in both the Body and the Blood. Mixing the boiling water into the chalice reminds us of the Blood and Water that flowed from Christ's side at his crucifixion. Both actions remind us of the Holy Spirit coming into the world as evidenced by the priest's words.

#### *The Precommunion Prayers*

At this the priest leads the congregation in the pre communion prayers, 'I believe, O Lord, and I confess...' This prayer is the last of a series of prayers that we should pray the night before in preparation for Holy Communion. As Father frequently reminds us, 'Holy communion is reserved for baptized and chrismated Orthodox Christians who have prepared themselves with fasting, prayer, and recent confession.' We acknowledge that individually we are the chief of sinners and God's grace extends even to us. We ask to be remembered in Christ's kingdom like the penitent thief on the Cross and examine ourselves that we may not be found taking communion unworthily, and be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

#### *The Communion of the Clergy and Laity*

As the clergy prepare to commune, they first ask each other for forgiveness. The priest then takes a portion of the Lamb and before partaking prays:

The precious and all-holy Body of our Lord and God and Saviour  
Jesus Christ is imparted unto me, the unworthy priest [Name] unto  
the forgiveness of sins and unto life everlasting.

Before partaking of the cup he prays a similar prayer for the Blood of our Lord.

After communing he prays, 'Lo, this hath touched my lips and shall take away mine iniquities and purge my sins.' This comes from the passage of the Prophet Isaiah's throne room vision after the seraph touched his lips with the live coal.

After the deacon communes he takes the portions of the lamb for the laity and places them in the chalice with this prayer which recounts how Christ has worked our salvation:

In that we have beheld the resurrection of Christ, let us worship the holy Lord Jesus, the only sinless One. Thy cross do we adore, O Christ, and thy holy resurrection we praise and glorify; for thou art our God, and we know none other beside thee; we call upon thy name. O come, all ye faithful, let us adore Christ's holy resurrection. For lo, through the cross is joy come into all the world. Ever blessing the Lord, let us sing his resurrection, for in that he endured the cross for us, he hath destroyed death by death.

Shine, Shine, O New Jerusalem, for the glory of the Lord hath dawned upon thee. Dance and be glad, O Sion, And delight thou O pure Theotokos, in the rising of thy Son.

How divine! How beloved! How sweet is thy voice, O Christ! For thou hast faithfully promised to be with us to the end of the age. Having this as our anchor of hope, we the faithful do rejoice.

O Christ, great and most holy Pascha; O Wisdom, Word and Power of God: Grant that we may more perfectly partake of thee in the never-ending day of thy kingdom.

The priest and deacon then stand at the holy doors and proclaim: 'With fear of God and faith and love draw near.'

Many of the saints say that we get greater or lesser grace to the extent of our preparation. Not that Christ is diminished, but that we are unable to receive him. When we approach let us having prepared ourselves beforehand, with prayer, fasting, confession, and repentance.

As each communicant receives, the priest says,

The servant of God, [by name], partakes of the precious and all-holy Body and Blood of our Lord and God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, to the forgiveness of sins and unto life everlasting.

How awesome it is that the Good Shepherd knows each of his sheep by name! Truly, in all of the Mysteries, we are referred to by name, the name given to us in Baptism.

In holy communion we receive Christ's body to become Christ's body. We are transformed. Our whole being, not just our souls are sanctified. As St Nicholas Cabasilas wrote:

[His] Body [is mingled] with our body, [His] Blood with [our] blood,... What great mysteries are these!...What is our mind when the divine mind prevails over it; what is our will like when the divine will predominates; and what becomes of the dust [of our body] once the fire [of the Godhead] overcomes it!

After all have communed, the priest asks God to save his people and bless his inheritance. We respond,

We have seen the true light, we have received the heavenly Spirit; we have found the true faith, worshipping the undivided Trinity: who hath saved us.

The priest then blesses us with the chalice saying, "Blessed is our God, always, now and ever and unto ages of ages." And we sing:

Let our mouths be filled with thy praise, O Lord that we may sing of thy glory. For thou has permitted us to partake of thy Holy, Divine, Immortal, and Life-giving Mysteries. Establish us in thy sanctification, that all the day we may meditate upon thy Righteousness. Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

### *Thanksgiving Prayers*

How can we respond with anything other than thanksgiving? And, indeed, this is what we do. The deacons commands, "Stand upright. Having partaken of the divine, holy, immortal, heavenly, life-giving and dread mysteries of Christ, let us worthily give thanks unto the Lord." And we respond 'Glory to thee, O Lord. Glory to thee.' The priest prays a prayer of thanksgiving:

‘We give thanks unto thee, O Master who loves mankind, Benefactor of our souls, for that thou hast vouchsafed this day to feed us with thy heavenly and immortal mysteries. Make straight our path; establish us all in thy fear; guard our life; make firm steps; through the prayers and intercessions of the glorious Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary and of all thy saints. For thou art our Sanctification, and unto thee we ascribe glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages.

### *Conclusion*

This thanksgiving is meet and right, and indeed we continue it in our personal prayers after we return home. Christ has wrought our salvation, trampled down death by his death, and given us his life, we who were in the tombs of our sin and ignorance. In raising us to life with him he united himself to us and restored humanity. It is no wonder this is called the Eucharist for we give an offering of thanks and are united with God.

Are there any questions? {Questions and maybe answers.}

Well this is our penultimate talk, next time, we will discuss the dismissals and the week after that, we’ll have a final Q&A session.

Let us close with prayer.

Our Father...

Through the prayers of St Nicholas of Thessaloniki, and all our holy fathers and mothers in the faith, O Lord Jesus Christ, our God, have mercy upon us and save us. Amen