

OR^{TI} XC^{NI} KA^{KA} HODOXY

IN A NUTSHELL: The Sacraments of the Church

Because God wishes all human persons to be united to Him, both in body and soul, He has given us deifying Mysteries or Sacraments. Because each person consists of both body and soul, the Sacraments are for the healing and restoration of the physical and spiritual together, and therefore are comprised of both physical and spiritual “elements.” They are called “deifying”



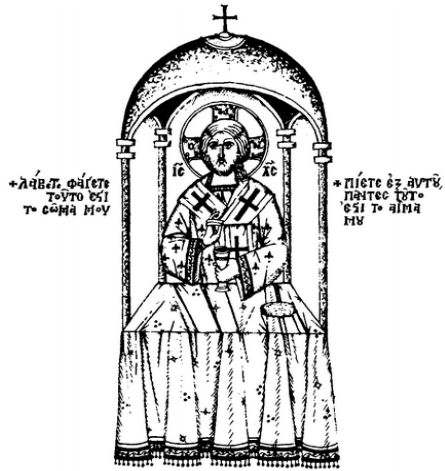
because by partaking of them in a spiritually receptive state we receive union with God and His Church by Divine Grace in a special way that is for our salvation.

Throughout Church history the terms “Mystery” and “Sacrament” have been used interchangeably. The English terms come from the Greek Mysterion and from the Latin Sacramentum. Yet the two terms themselves both let us know something about the nature of the Mysteries of the Church. For example, the term “Mystery” lets us know that Grace is transmitted in a distinctly supernatural way that is unseen unless spiritually perceived through faith, love and reverence for God. The term “Sacrament” signifies “a pledge.” It is a pledge from God to us in the New Covenant and by its reception it is a pledge from us back to God that we will remain loyal to this Church which He made His Body and Bride. In the prayers of the deacon after Communion, there is the verse: “With this pledge (sacrament) as the anchor of our hope, we rejoice.” The Pledge is Christ’s promise to always be with us in the Sacred Mysteries. It is for this reason that the Priest is given the Consecrated Lamb at his ordination and told “receive this Pledge (sacrament)” for which he will be held accountable in his stewardship thereof on Judgment Day.

Holy Communion: the Mystery of Mysteries

The Orthodox Church of Christ is bound together above all in the Great Mystery of Holy Communion, the Eucharist, which is known as the Sacrament of Sacraments. The Eucharist is the “seal” of all other Sacraments. Scripture calls it the Great Mystery of the union of Christ and His Church as Bridegroom and Bride—the two thereby

becoming “one Flesh.” It is that which makes the Church the Body of Christ by partaking of the Body of Christ. “For we, though many, are one Bread and one Body, for we all partake of that one Bread” (1 Cor. 10.17). According to the service of the preparation of Communion, found in the Great Horologion, we partake of Communion that we might have Christ, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit “living and abiding within us.” We are told by Christ Himself, by the Ecumenical Councils, and by the Church Fathers to partake of it frequently and preparedly.



Baptism and Chrismation, the Sacraments of Illumination

But before we partake of the One Body of the Anointed One (Christ), we must ourselves become disciples of Christ, “anointed one’s” and “little Christ’s,” being spiritually reborn in Him and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit through Baptism and Chrismation. Just as natural birth and the natural breath of life precedes being fed earthly food in life, so also supernatural Birth and the Breath of Eternal life in the Spirit precedes the partaking of the Heavenly Food.

In the Baptismal service of the Orthodox Church, we find the following order: 1. Repentance and renunciation of the devil and all his works 2. Baptism for the remission of sins 3. Receiving the seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit in Chrismation. We find this very same order in the book of Acts: “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the Apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call’” (Acts. 2.37-39). Notice here that the opposition of some protestants to baptizing infants is immediately refuted—“let **every one of you** be baptized” and again “the promise is to you **and to your children** and to all who are afar off,” and throughout Scripture we read that the entire families of

many, including infants, were baptized by the Apostles and Presbyters of the Church (cf. Acts. 16.15,33; 1 Cor. 1.16).

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28.19). Baptism literally means “immersion.”

Christ was baptized in the river Jordan to show us an example. Normally, when we immerse



Baptismal Font

ourselves in water, we are seeking to bathe just our body. Because the human person is both body and soul, there is cleansing of both body and soul together in Baptism—the body by being immersed in Spirit-filled water, and the soul being cleansed by the Holy Spirit who indwells the water. Just as the water of our natural mother broke and it is then that we came out of the womb, so also we are spiritually reborn out of the “womb” of our spiritual mother the Church, the baptismal font, also in water. Christ said “Unless a person is born from above...Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God...Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘you must be born again’” (John 3.3-7). It is here that Orthodoxy differs from Protestantism, which tries to separate being “born again” from the Sacraments of spiritual rebirth established by our Lord. But true and full spiritual birth begins, not as an individual event, but as an event that unites the individual to the fullness of the Kingdom of God in the Church at Baptism. Toward the end of His ministry, Christ became the “first born of the dead” descending to death in the tomb and was resurrected from the same tomb, so also we participate in His death and resurrection by being “buried with Him in Baptism” by going down into the font, and “raised with Him” through the Faith by coming back out of the font which is the working of God (Col. 2.12). It is our spiritual resurrection in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Baptism is confirmed by the *seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit* in Chrismation, and in it we are made members of Christ’s eternal Kingdom and Priesthood and become “little Christ’s.” Christ means “the anointed one,” meaning the one anointed to be King of Kings and Great High Priest of all mankind. In this Holy Sacrament the Lord “has made us kings and priests to His God and Father” (Rev. 1.6). We are told by the Church Fathers that the name “Christian” refers to the fact that we belong to the Anointed One and that we are likewise anointed kings and priests with Him. Baptism is confirmed by Chrismation, and Chrismation is sealed by the Eucharist. Thus, just as God is three, and three is the number of perfection, so also “illumination” is a threefold process of being spiritually resurrected or

“born again” in Baptism, being anointed a “little Christ” and member of the Royal Priesthood of all believers and thereby united to the Kingship of Christ through Chrismation, and finally fully united to the Body of Christ by partaking of the Body of Christ.

Baptism, Chrismation, and Communion are the three basic Sacraments that are essentially and universally received unto salvation by all. In addition to these three basic Sacraments, there are two that bestow particular graces according to need: Reconciliation for the repentant and Holy Unction for the infirmed. The remaining two are not received by all, but all benefit from them. In Marriage the “little Church” is perpetuated throughout the generations. Holy Orders, although bestowed upon few, benefit all, since it is through the priestly leadership of those ordained that the other Mysteries are brought about, spiritual direction is established, and the teaching office exercised.

Holy Repentance—*The Mystery of Confession, Penance, and Reconciliation to the Church.*

What happens when we, who have been made members of the Church through Baptism Chrismation, and Communion, find ourselves in danger of being estranged or separated from the life of the Church through sin? That is where another Sacrament comes in: the Sacrament of Confession. Some ask: “Why must we confess to a priest or anyone else? Why not directly to God?” Scripture commands us: “confess yours sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much...he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins” (James 5.16,20). Scripture also warns us that “If we say we have no sin” to confess that “we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us, but if we confess our sins (i.e. not only “generally” but particularly), God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1.8-9).

Thus, it is not “either-or” situation. Confessing our sins daily in prayer to God *and* periodically confessing our sins in the Church are *both* required of us. This is because, although “all unrighteousness is sin,” nonetheless, there is “sin not unto death,” which can be prayed about daily, yet there is also “sin which is unto death” for which individual prayer is not enough—something more is required (1 John 5.16-17)—namely spiritual direction, restoration, and the binding and loosing of the Apostolic office in the Church (John 20.22-23; Matt. 18.18). We are told by both Scripture and the Holy Fathers that there are sins “not unto death”—i.e. the “ordinary” sins encountered daily

that have not gotten the “upper hand” and thus do not sever us entirely from the life of the Church (hence the meaning of “not unto death”). But sins “unto death,” or mortal sins, refer to sins that separate us from the life of the Church, referring both to sins that are grievous by their very nature (murder, blasphemy, theft, etc.), and also to sins that were originally ordinary sins but have compounded and gotten “the upper hand” and result in addiction or lack of repentance. Because of their gravity and depth, sins unto death require a more complex way to rectify them and repent of them, since the healing of the soul and the healing of rifts with others becomes more difficult. Such sins, because they have separated us entirely from the life of the Church, require sacramental reconciliation through confession of sins, the accomplishing of restorative spiritual exercises called penances that move the soul to a state of being able to once again be fully restored to Communion with God and approach Communion once more. Once one has fulfilled any penance and received absolution, he ought to return as soon as possible to Communion which, as with all other Mysteries of the Church, crowns and completes them.

If you find that you have a particular sin that repeats itself and that you no longer struggle against it nor even continue to try to correct it, it has become “mortal,” that is, it has separated you from the full life of the Church and you need confession. In other words, if the sin now has become so deeply entrenched in the soul that you can no longer control it but it controls you, and you no longer are able to struggle against it or keep yourself from it, this is known as a pathos, or severe addiction to sin. The 6th Ecumenical Council says that such a sin, which initially may have been non-mortal, has become deadly, has rooted itself in the soul, and requires the full Sacrament of Repentance and Reconciliation to the Church.

Nonetheless, the Sacrament of Repentance also has another use, as a preventative measure of periodic cleansing so that our ordinary sins over time do not compound into mortal sin, thereby building up spiritual strength. Thus, we come periodically in order that we may receive spiritual guidance and forgiveness so that we do not slip into a state of severance by letting our sins get the upper hand. We go to the priest for spiritual direction to combat sins so that we continue the struggle for virtue and against sin in order that they do not become so serious that they separate us from the life in Christ.

Thus, although when we are in a state of mortal sin we absolutely must approach the Sacrament of Repentance before approaching Communion, nonetheless, because we all need the strength to combat sins to keep them from becoming mortal, we should

also approach periodically in any case, as the Fathers state, during the four penitential periods, or for the more spiritually advanced once a month, and not less than once a year.

Holy Unction: The Mystery of Holy Unction, as with all Sacraments of the Church, also has its origin in Holy Scripture. It was part of the ministry of the Apostles: “And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them” (Mark 6.13). St. James states that this should be continued in the Church: “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the presbyters of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord” (James 5.13). In the Roman Church this became “extreme Unction,” but in the Orthodox Church this Sacrament may be received as often as it is served by any who seek the healing of any malady of mind, soul, and body.

Holy Matrimony: Christ blessed this Mystery by being present at the wedding at Cana of Galilee. Scripture identifies Holy Matrimony as an icon of the Great Mystery of the Eucharistic Union of Christ as Bridegroom and the Church as His Bride. Likewise Scripture calls the Church the “family of God” or “household of God.” In the Mystery of Matrimony the man and the woman, being complimentary parts that represent the whole of humanity (male and female), “become one flesh,” reflecting the Mystery of Communion of Christ and His Church, thereby becoming “the little Church” or “the little Kingdom of God” as the Fathers have called it. Just as the great Church adds spiritual children to its number, so also the family of the little Church adds children to its number if God so wills it.



·MARRIAGE·

Holy Orders: In order that the other Mysteries of the Church may be brought about, from within the Royal Priesthood of all believers received at Chrismation, some are called to the Apostolic order of Priestly leadership, known as Holy Orders. In the early Church, as is

the case today, all of the faithful were members of the royal priesthood of the Church, but very few were called to be Apostles, teachers, and overseers, but only those who received a distinct call to Apostolic Orders. As we read in the miracle of the loaves and fishes, Christ gave to the Apostles, and the Apostles distributed to the People. To the Apostles Christ entrusted His Kingdom: “I bestow upon you a Kingdom, just as My Father bestowed it upon Me” (Luke 22.29). This Mystery is unique in that, although it is bestowed upon few, yet the entire Church benefits from it, for it is through those who receive it that Sacramental Grace and teaching flows to the whole of the Church.

Christ first called the twelve to this leadership and sent them out two by two giving them power over unclean spirits (Mark 6.7). He then “appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go. Then He said to them, ‘The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest...He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent me’” (Luke 10.1-2., 16).

The Apostles appointed Bishops over cities and their surrounding territories to be the spiritual head of the local Church in these regions, who in turn ordained Presbyters for every city and town. Titus, for example, was appointed by St. Paul to be the Bishop of Crete, leaving him with this instruction:



“For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint Presbyters in every city as I commanded you” (Titus 1.5, cf. Acts 14.23). “The Apostles and Presbyters came together” in the first Bishop’s council to consider some problems of the early Church (Acts 15.6). This established the synodical system whereby bishops meet together to solve the Church’s problems.

There were four basic orders of service in the early Church. St. Clement of Rome (95AD), who was Bishop of Rome and wrote his Epistle to the Corinthians while St. John the Apostle was still alive, speaks of “High Priest, Priest, Levite, and Layman” while St. Ignatius (105AD), who began his reign as bishop of Antioch while several of the Apostles were still alive, identifies the three orders of Church leadership that Clement called “High Priest, Priest and Levite” as “Bishop, Presbyter, and Deacon.” To this day, we still call the highest office both Bishop and High Priest (Hierarchy), we still call the middle office both Presbyter and Priest, and we still call the third office both Deacon and Levite (although “Levite” is used much less often).

The Bishop himself exercises the fullness of the Apostolic Ministry in his own diocese, and has the authority of oversight (the word Bishop means “overseer”), to ensure that the will of the Head of the Church, the sole Great High Priest Jesus Christ, is accomplished in his diocese. He forms, in communion with his brother Bishops throughout the world, the Episcopacy of the Church. Only several Bishops together share the ability to consecrate another Bishop. The Bishop ordains Presbyters, or Priests, to serve in a leadership role in the cathedral, the parishes, and the monasteries of the diocese. The deacon, which means “minister,” is ordained to assist the Bishop and the Priest, in the liturgical and temporal ministry of the Church.

These three, the Bishop, Priest, and Deacon, are called the “major orders” of the Church. Without canonical cause, no Bishop may break off communion with his brother Orthodox Bishops, and no Priest may break from his Orthodox Bishop. The only time a Priest or Deacon may transfer to another diocese is when a canonical release has taken place. There are also “minor orders” of the Church. The highest in rank of the minor orders is the Subdeacon. The next highest rank is the Reader or Taper-bearer (Acolyte). In the early Church other orders existed including chanter, doorkeeper, catechist, and others. These orders are being revived in many places.

And beyond these seven Evangelical Mysteries, because ultimately the whole of Christian life in the Church is a single Mystery, there are many other graces in the Church which have a sacramental nature. Among them are monastic tonsure, the blessing of waters, the consecration of a Church, the service for the burial of the dead, prayers for mother and child after its birth, the blessing of the mother after she has rested from her labor, the office of exorcism, the blessing of liturgical objects, the blessing of homes, the various liturgical blessings of food, objects or elements throughout the year, and many others. In this way the Sacramental grace of God surrounds us and penetrates our whole life in and through His Church, which is His Body, the “fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Eph. 1.23).



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