

THE EUCHARIST

The Holy Eucharist, or Holy Communion, stands at the very heart of the life of God's People. Everything in the Church leads to and finds its source in the Eucharist, the fulfillment of all of the Church's sacraments.

A NECESSITY

Just as a healthy lifestyle requires adequate and wholesome food, a Christian lifestyle must also be nourished and fed with spiritual food. In the sixth chapter of the Gospel of Saint John, Jesus Christ comments on the necessity of the Eucharist in no uncertain terms:

Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink of His blood, you have no life in you (Jn 6:53).

PARTICIPATION

The Eucharist is, in essence, a meal. As such, it was not "invented" by Jesus Christ. In Old Testament times, ritual meals existed.

The Christian Eucharist is a meal specifically connected with the Old Testament Passover meal, which commemorated the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. On the eve of His death, Jesus Christ shared the Passover meal with His disciples:

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My Body." And He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you; for this is My Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins" (Mt 26:26-28).

Christ transformed the Passover meal into the center of the Christian life, the experience of the

presence of the risen Christ in the midst of His People. The Eucharist is not a mere remembrance of a past event; rather, it is our participation in the ongoing life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the affirmation of our hope that He shall come again in glory:

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the Blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the Body of Christ? (1 Cor 10:16).

Jesus Christ is the new and eternal Passover Lamb who liberates us from the slavery of evil, ignorance, and death and leads us into the everlasting life of the Kingdom of God.

THANKSGIVING

As a word, the term Eucharist is derived from the Greek *eucharistia*, which means gratitude or thanksgiving. This name is given to the sacred meal—the entire action of gathering, praying, reading the Holy Scriptures, and proclaiming God's Word. The word Eucharist is used because the all-embracing meaning of the Lord's Banquet is that of offering thanks to God for all that He has done in creating, saving, and sanctifying the world.

The Eucharist is also called Holy Communion as it brings us into a common union with God, with each other, and with God's People throughout the ages.

CHRIST'S VERY BODY AND BLOOD

Orthodox Christians strictly understand the Eucharist as the very presence of Christ. That which the faithful receive is the real Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, which is offered to the Father in Jesus' Name and changed by the action and descent of the

Holy Spirit. This is proclaimed in the prayer recited before the reception of the Eucharist:

I believe, O Lord, and I confess that Thou art truly the Christ, the Son of the Living God, who camest into the world to save sinners, of whom I am first. I believe also that this is truly Thine own most pure Body, and that this is truly Thine own precious Blood.

In the history of Christian thought, a number of attempts were made to explain how the bread and the wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ. Such attempts were characterized by the desire to explain philosophically or scientifically that which can only be understood by a deep and abiding Faith. Orthodox Christianity makes no attempt to "rationalize" that which is beyond human understanding. On the contrary, Orthodox Christians believe that the Eucharist is truly the Body and Blood of Christ because

- ✧ Jesus Christ clearly says it is: "This is My Body...This is My Blood." Faith prompts us to accept Our Lord's words;
- ✧ the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Truth who "fills all things with Himself"—changes our gifts of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ; and
- ✧ our faith leads us to believe that this is indeed reasonable and true. God's mysteries cannot be explained or rationalized in limited, exclusively human terms.

THE RECEPTION OF THE EUCHARIST

We would never accept a dinner invitation and then refuse to partake of the meal. In the same way, we should strive to partake of the Eucharistic meal whenever it is offered. The priest's exclamation, "in the fear of God and with faith and love, draw near!" is Christ's invitation to "receive the Body of Christ" and "taste the fountain of immortality."

The frequent reception of the Eucharist, however, requires careful preparation. Prior to our reception of the Eucharist, we should

- ✧ acknowledge our sinfulness and sincerely seek God's forgiveness;
- ✧ desire to enter into communion with the Father through Jesus Christ, His Son, in the Holy Spirit;
- ✧ see the Lord's guidance and will in redirecting our lives; and
- ✧ observe a period of prayer, fasting, and reflection, allowing our thoughts to be guided and directed by the "mind of Christ" in the Holy Spirit.

WHAT IS THE EUCHARIST?

For Orthodox Christians, the Eucharist is

- ✧ the Sacrament of sacraments;
- ✧ the very Body and Blood of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, "shed for the life of the world" and "given as food for the faithful";
- ✧ the source of our spiritual life;
- ✧ that which brings us into a common union with Christ;
- ✧ the most perfect way by which we show our love for God while rendering thanks for all He has done for us; and
- ✧ the real and visible sign that we are truly members of Christ's Body, the Church.

By receiving the Eucharist on a regular and frequent basis, we are spiritually nourished while being nurtured to "grow in life and Faith and spiritual understanding."

**FOR MORE INFORMATION,
PLEASE CONTACT:**

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