

THE EUCHARIST: PREPARATION AND THANKSGIVING

Before partaking of a banquet, we generally take great pains to make proper preparations. We anticipate those who will be in attendance, what we want to wear, and what our host or hostess will serve. Foremost among our preparations is “saving our appetite”; feasting is generally preceded by a period of fasting.

The Eucharist is the Lord’s banquet. As with any banquet, proper preparation is required.

SEEK GOD’S FORGIVENESS

The Eucharist is offered to us “unto life everlasting” and “for the remission of sins.” Hence, our preparation for the reception of the Eucharist logically begins with the desire to change our lives—to rid ourselves of all that is sinful—and to acknowledge that without repentance, “life everlasting” is impossible. A key element in overcoming physical illness is the desire to be healed. Similarly, we cannot derive any benefit from the Eucharist unless we first desire to be healed of our spiritual afflictions.

Prior to the reception of the Eucharist we should reflect upon every aspect of our life. Having considered the ways by which we have failed to live according to God’s will, we must desire God’s forgiveness, while making a firm commitment to improve our relationship with Him and with those around us.

BE RECONCILED WITH OTHERS

We cannot enter into a common union with God if we have not been reconciled with those around us. On this point Jesus Christ is emphatic:

If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift (Mt 5:23-24).

In our desire to receive God’s forgiveness, we first must be willing to forgive—and to seek forgiveness from—others.

PRAY, MEDITATE, AND READ THE SCRIPTURES

Prayer is essential in our preparation for the Eucharist. There are any number of appropriate prayers, readily found in most prayerbooks, which can guide us in our preparation and prompt us to pray in our own words as well. Time also should be spent in prayerful meditation and reflection, as well as in reading the scriptures. Appropriate scripture readings include Matthew 5-7, John 5-7, Romans 12-14, 1 Corinthians 13, 1 John, and Psalms 32/31, 37/36, 51/50, 102,/101, 130/129, 143/142.

PARTICIPATE IN GREAT VESPERS

Great Vespers prepares us liturgically for the celebration and reception of the Eucharist. The Vesper hymns and prayers remind us of our need to enter into communion with our Creator, who lights our lives through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Strive to attend this service as often as possible, while refraining from distractions and unnecessary entertainments the evening before. Before or after Vespers we may wish to receive the sacrament of Penance, or Confession, as well.

FAST

In fasting prior to the reception of the Eucharist, we should put aside those things that we do not need. We should refrain from eating, drinking, and smoking from at least midnight on the eve of our reception of the Eucharist. In cases where medication or other special needs must be considered, however, common sense should guide our consciences.

PARTICIPATE IN THE ENTIRE LITURGY

The Eucharistic Liturgy is the common work of God’s People. The first portion of the Divine Liturgy—the Liturgy of the Word—serves as a preparation for the Eucharist. Having been fed by the Word of God through the scriptural lessons and the homily, we are prepared to “lay aside all earthly cares” and to properly “receive the King of all.”

Our preparation for the reception of the Eucharist, however, must never be carried out in a vain attempt to “make ourselves worthy.” No one—except God—is sinless; consequently, no one is truly “worthy,” as the priest prays during the Divine Liturgy:

No one is worthy to approach or to draw near or to serve Thee, O King of Glory, for to minister to Thee is great and awesome even to the heavenly powers.

Nothing we do makes us worthy to approach the Eucharist. God makes us worthy; we prepare ourselves to accept His gifts “in faith and love.”

Make me worthy to partake, without condemnation, of Thy most pure Mysteries, for the remission of my sins, and unto life everlasting (The Divine Liturgy).

In approaching the chalice, we acknowledge our sinfulness—not our “worthiness”—and our need for “the remission of sins.”

THANKSGIVING

We would never think of accepting a valuable gift without expressing our thanks to the giver. The Eucharist is God’s greatest gift to His People; having received it, we should render thanks to God for this, His greatest blessing.

At the end of the Divine Liturgy, we find the following prayer of thanksgiving:

We thank Thee, O Master, Benefactor of our souls, that Thou has made us worthy this day of Thy heavenly and immortal mysteries. Make straight our path; strengthen us all in Thy fear; guard our life; make firm our steps; through the prayers and intercessions of the 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...

This prayer should set the tone for our lives until the next time we receive the Eucharist. Our expression of thanks must continue from Eucharist to Eucharist, and it should constantly remind us that every moment of our lives should provide a point of contact and union with God.

REFLECTION

Take time to reflect upon the meaning of the Eucharist in our lives. The reception of the Eucharist is not a mechanical act—one “performed” out of “habit.” It demands a conscious attempt to integrate God’s grace into every aspect of our day-to-day lives and should affect everything we do, think, and say. Just as we have been made one with Christ, so too we should strive to live in oneness and harmony with those around us.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION,
PLEASE CONTACT:**

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