

CHAPTER 3

COMMUNION

**"He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood
abides in Me and I in him."**

(John 6:56)

A) Honor and Work of This Sacrament

B) How Do We Benefit From This Sacrament?

C) What Is Communion?

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A) HONOR AND WORK OF

THIS SACRAMENT

Many are the blessings of the Almighty, abundant is His grace, strong is His might, and deep is His love... Truly what St. Gregory said in his Divine Liturgy, "Holy, Holy, O Lord and Holy in everything, indescribable is the power of Your wisdom, and **no manner of speech can measure the depth of Your love of mankind.**" St. John Chrysostom said, "How many of you say, "I wish to see the appearance, looks and clothes of the Lord." Here, you see, touch and eat Him. You still desire to see His clothes although He gave you Himself, not only to see, but also to touch, eat, and take inside you!" Meditate then on that great honor, the food that God offers you to enjoy! We eat Him and with Him we unite, He is Who the angels wish to see but do not dare to look at because of His shining glory."

All God's works are full of majesty and glory but the Sacrament of Communion is the greatest of them. If God has granted us spiritual weapons with which we fight and overcome as the Apostle mentioned in Ephesians 6:11-16, **certainly this sacrament is the strongest of all in strength and effect. It is the extension of the sacrifice of the cross** by which the Son of God redeemed the world and defeated the devil and death. St. Macarius the Great said, "Through this sacrament you are protected against the devil, and if anyone abuses this sacrament, the power of darkness will win over him."

Through the Holy Communion, we have the power to overcome the causes of sin, especially inner desires, the devil's temptations, and lusts of the world. The church calls it "the food of the strong." It is written about Jesus, "For power went out from Him and healed them all." (Luke 6:19)

St. John Chrysostom said, **"We, who are sick, let us partake of this sacrament with faith, for those who touched His garment were healed; what about those who eat Him all."** He also said, "After eating this spiritual food, let us turn into lions which frighten the devils, inflamed with the fire of love." St. Ambrose said, "Let the Lord Jesus be your guest, Who will immediately drive the devil away and shut off the doors which lead to temptations."

Our weapons get their power from the Divine Grace received from the Blood of Jesus, which in this sacrament. Using other spiritual weapons, we fight the devil with the power of Jesus, but **in this sacrament, Jesus Himself fights our enemies.** He said, "Whosoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him." (John 6:56) St. Paul said, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." (Galatians 2:20) The Revelation says, "They overcame him (the devil) by the blood of the Lamb (Christ)." (Revelation 12:11) or as David prophesied, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." (Psalm 23:5) This is the holy table, which the Lord prepares for us by which we defeat our spiritual enemies.

The Holy Communion is food for our spirit and life. "The Lord has made His wonderful works to be remembered; The Lord is gracious and full of compassion. He has given food to those who fear Him; He will ever be mindful of His covenant." (Psalm 111:4-5) St. Augustine said, "He who wants to live with You and loves life, let him proceed and eat Your Body." **As the Israelites were fed with manna in the wilderness until they entered the promised land, so does this Holy Communion feeds our souls and protects us in the world until we enter the heavenly Jerusalem.**

Let us meditate in Jesus' promises as He established this sacrament. "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood **abides in Me and I in him.**" (John 6:56) How does this abiding in Jesus occur? We do not know. All that we experience are the blessings and effects of that abiding. Jesus said, **"I am the vine and you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you."** (John 15:5-7) Therefore, through the Holy Communion, we abide in Jesus and He abides in us and we can say with St. Paul, "Your life is hidden with Christ in God." (Colossians 3:3)

When the Lord descended in the past on the Mount of Sinai with His glory, the mount was blazing with fire and smoke. “And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with an arrow. And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.” (Hebrews 12:20-21; Exodus 19:12-13; Deuteronomy 9:19)

O Lord, in the Old Testament, they could not dare touch the mountain upon which You descended with Your glory. In the New Testament, the priest carries You in his hands as the Blessed Virgin Mary carried You in her arms. Moreover, we all eat You to abide in You and to live by You. It is written, “You are a Consuming fire.” (Hebrews 12:29) So how does this fire which devours the evil ones change to fire which purifies us from sins, burns all evil planted inside us and inflames our hearts with Your love?

The blessings of this Holy Sacrament extend not only to this life but also to the life to come. The Lord Jesus said, “I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood, **has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.**” (John 6:51,54)

St. Erynaos said, “How can they say the person who eats the Lord’s body and drinks His blood will perish and will not have eternal life? Let them then change their opinion or abstain from the Eucharist.” St. Cyril the Pillar of faith said, “He gave us His body and blood so that the power of corruption would disappear. He would live in us with the Holy Spirit and we would become partakers of His holiness and be more spiritual than the heavenly creatures.” He also said, “Because of Adam’s disobedience, our bodies became subject to corruption and death. However, because **Christ is inside us with His body**, we will undoubtedly rise in perfection, for it is impossible that “the Life” does not raise those in whom it is dwelling.”

When you partake of this Holy Sacrament, you receive Christ in your heart. Whenever Jesus enters a place, He blesses, sanctifies, and purifies it. He entered St. Mary’s womb and made her Queen of heaven and earth. He entered Zacharias’ house and filled John the Baptist with the Holy Spirit, while he was still in Elizabeth’s womb. He entered the manger in Bethlehem and made it a sanctuary and a paradise for the angels and humans. He entered Egypt and broke down its idols. He went into the Jordan River and sanctified its water. He entered Peter’s house and cured his mother-in-law. He entered Jairus’ house and raised his daughter from the dead. He entered Zacchaeus’ house and saved him. He entered the house of Mary and Martha and they became saints.

If people have been able to preserve fruits and vegetables for longer periods without rot, can’t the body of Jesus and His blood preserve our life from the corruption of sin?

B) HOW DO WE BENEFIT FROM THIS SACRAMENT?

So far, we discussed some of the blessings of this great sacrament, but we might wonder and ask, “Why do we not feel all these holy blessings whenever we receive the Holy Communion?” The answer is clear. It is because we do not prepare ourselves well enough to receive this great sacrament. We do not spend the time or the effort in this preparation.

Noah had spent a hundred years in building the ark in which he was saved with his family. King Solomon spent seven years in building God’s temple and made a feast to sanctify it which lasted eight days, and offered one thousand sacrifices. However, we do not spend even half an hour to prepare ourselves to receive this great blessing!

We shall point out to some of the spiritual practices, which help us with the grace of God to enjoy the blessings of Holy Communion. It is preferable to start these practices the night before communion. These practices are to be followed in addition to examining ourselves and confessing.

First: Stir Your Emotions and Prepare Yourself.

Sit with yourself quietly the night before communion to stir in your heart holy desires and emotions for your beloved Jesus Christ Who offers Himself to you in this Holy Sacrament. The more you prepare yourself, the more you feel God’s comforts and blessings filling your life after the Holy Communion.

When the disciples asked Jesus, “Where do you want us to prepare the Passover?” He asked two of them to go into the city to find **“A large upper room, furnished and prepared.”** (Mark 14:15) Jesus Himself had chosen the place where He ate the Passover with His disciples and established the Sacrament of Eucharist. He had chosen an upper room, furnished and prepared. Let us think about each of these characteristics.

Jesus established this sacrament in an upper room, that is, in a place, which is upstairs, referring to elevating ourselves up to heaven. Likewise, in the transfiguration, when Jesus wanted to show His glory to three of His disciples, He took them to a high mountain. (Mark 9:2) Again, anyone who wants to encounter God’s glory has to lift himself upward by meditating. The upper room was furnished and prepared. The Lord wants our hearts to be prepared and decorated with virtues ready to receive Him. It is not enough to clean the streets whenever we want to receive great dignitaries, but we also have to decorate them. It is not enough to clean our hearts from sin and evil, but we also have to decorate them with feelings of love and humility.

Sit with yourself and meditate on how your Savior desires through your participation in this sacrament to prepare a place in your heart so that He may be united with you and help you overcome all your enemies. His desire to unite with us because of His great love for us. Why

does He love us? We do not know. All we know is that He loves us for no reason. He said, “My delight was with the sons of men.” (Proverbs 8:31)

By establishing this great sacrament, God lowered Himself from His glory, and offered Himself as food to satisfy our souls. He said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.” (Matthew 5:6)

As Moses had made the tabernacle with impeccable wood covered with pure gold just to contain the two stone tablets of the commandments, how much more should our souls be free from the vice of sin and be decorated with the gold of divine virtues!

Joseph of Arimathea put the body of our Lord in a new sepulchre where no one had been buried before to honor Him so that the Holy Body would not be in a place where there were decayed dead bodies. Then, how can a Christian accept the Lord in a heart full of hatred, love of the world, or evil lust?

Never proceed to this holy table while you are not ready; without the garment of the feast. Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter from death and gave her food to eat. Likewise, after repenting from the death of sin you should eat this heavenly food. The manna that God gave to His people in the wilderness was a symbol of His holy body and precious blood. In the wilderness of this world, we too should eat this spiritual manna. The manna was given to the Israelites after their exodus from Egypt, the land of slavery, and their crossing of the Red Sea. No one deserves to eat this spiritual food unless he has been freed from Pharaoh - that is, the devil - and has crossed the sea of repentance.

Second: Meditate on God’s Great Love:

Meditate on the great love, which God displays to you in this sacrament. God did not only create you in His image, send His only Son to save you from the bondage of the devil and restore you to your original image, but He also gave you His body and His blood as food for you, a cure for your spiritual ailments.

Think carefully **“When did God start to love you?”** Did He love you at the same time you started loving Him or when you were yet a child and your angel was always looking at the face of the Father in heaven? He loved you even before that. He loved you before your arrival in this world, even before its creation!

Before you became a son of God, He had been preparing for you all your needs and blessings. “Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love. Therefore, with lovingkindness have I drawn you.” (Jeremiah 31:3)

The Lord Jesus did not only grant us salvation and redemption, but He also gave us an eternal promise that He would be with us even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:20) His presence with us is apparent in this sacrament whereby His body is in the midst of His people. His name is “Emmanuel”. It means, “God is with us.”

King Ahasuerus, of Persia, once prepared a great feast that lasted for six months, and invited all the prominent people in his kingdom. That was the talk of the entire world. On the other hand, the Lord Jesus prepared for us, a feast that lasted two thousand years and will continue to the end of the world. King Ahasuerus offered earthly food to his invited guests, while Jesus Christ offers Himself. No one ever in the history of mankind has fed his children his own flesh.

The love of the Lord Jesus is very evident if we consider the circumstances in which He established this sacrament. It was while the people were plotting to kill Him in a horrible way. He was busy showing His love by giving them the Food of Life! As the carpenter was making His cross, the blacksmith preparing the nails which would thrust His flesh and others were gathering the thorns which would pierce His holy head, Christ was preparing for them the Food of Life; His body!

St. John Chrysostom said, “Which shepherd feeds his sheep his body?” We hear of mothers who give their babies to nurses to feed them. Jesus did not want to do that with us; instead, He fed us His blood and united us with Him.

Third: Meditate on His Great Humility:

If you have meditated on God’s love while preparing yourself to partake of the Holy Sacrament, you should then meditate on the most astonishing humility of your Savior. **He did not only reveal His love, but He also revealed it in humility.**

As he was dying, St. Jerome looked at the priest who came to give him the Holy Communion and said, “How great is Your humility, O Lord! You come to a sinner like me to feed me Yourself?” Meditating on the humility of our Lord Jesus creates in us a feeling of unworthiness to have Him in our weak temple. He said, “Learn of Me for I am gentle and lowly in heart.” (Matthew 11:29) As the almighty God humbled Himself for me, should not I humble myself to be worthy of His presence inside me?

How great is Your humility, O my Master? Heaven is not pure in Your eyes and You call me, the sinner, to come close to You and be united with You! Who would believe these words had you not said them? When Your mother St. Mary visited Elizabeth, she said in humility, “But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord come to me?” (Luke 1:43) How should my feelings be when I receive not St. Mary but her Lord Himself, Creator and Savior? The pagan centurion found himself unworthy of having Jesus enter his house to heal his servant. He said, “Lord I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word and my servant will be healed.” (Matthew 8:8)

Let us meditate in what St. Paul said, “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away to renew them again in repentance” (Hebrews 6:4-5)

Fourth: Exercises Before and After Communion:

The previous exercises should be performed the day before communion. It is preferable that you sleep early that night so that you may wake up early the next morning. If you wake up during the night, fill your heart with holy words so that you may prepare yourself to receive the heavenly Bridegroom Who watches over you while you are sleeping and offers you precious gifts.

1. On The Morning Of the Communion Day:

Before going to church that morning, examine your mind and remember all the times you strayed from the Lord and sinned against Him since the last time you had communion. Remember how much you have insulted your Lord every time you sinned.

However, Do not lose hope, fill your heart with hope for the great gift you are about to receive. Proceed to the Lord in humility in your heart. He will come into you and rest, not with Moses and Elijah as was in the Transfiguration, but with you revealing His glory so that you may say, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." Try to close the door of your heart to anything except the Lord Jesus.

On your way to the church, struggle hard to keep your mind and heart on the Lord and on the great Sacrament that you are about to receive. Say the psalms that are said as one goes to the house of the Lord. Stir your emotions and heart toward the love of God and His humility as mentioned earlier.

2. During the Holy Eucharist:

In church, stand in a quiet place. When communion time approaches, **think deeply and humbly: Who is Jesus Who will abide and unite with you and who are you to receive Him?**

He is the Son of God in Whose presence the heaven and all its hosts tremble. He is the Holy of Holies. In His great love, He made Himself of no reputation taking the form of a servant, although He is God carrying everything by the word of His might.

Who are you? You are nothing. You are the worst of all creatures due to your evil and corruption. You are very weak, as the devils laugh at you and trick you. You have insulted your Lord and Creator. Instead of thanking Him for His blessings, you have trodden over His priceless blood shed for you. (Hebrews 10:10)

After all this, He is still calling you to receive this Holy Sacrament because of His great love for you. Moreover, **His great love reaches a stage whereby it obliges you to partake of it**, for He said, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53) As He never shuts the door of his mercy; moreover, He never turns His face away from you even if you are enslaved to all evil desires.

3. The Sacred Moment:

After you have warmed up yourself with His love and mercy proceed to the Holy Communion in awe and reverence saying, “My Lord, I am not worthy of receiving You for I have often displeased You by my sins over which I still have not wept. I am not worthy of receiving You, O Lord, for I did not purify myself of all evil. St. Mary bore You because she was full of grace, but I am full of evil, hypocrisy and lust. O my Almighty God, make me worthy to receive you in my heart, for I have come to you in faith.”

At the moment of communion, when you open your mouth to eat the pure Body, say to the priest, “I have sinned, absolve me father.” Then proceed in complete faith, love and hope to the One Whom you love. Put the handkerchief on your mouth with eagerness and cautiousness as if you want to hide a great treasure, the treasure hidden in a field and the unique pearl of great value which the merchant found. (Matthew 13) You also want to hide this great grace in your heart as David said, “Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You.” (Psalms 119:1)

4. After Communion:

In church: After you have received communion and drunk water, choose a quiet place in the sanctuary and shut yourself completely to all surroundings. Then pray deeply from your heart saying, “O my King, the almighty in heaven and earth, what made You enter my unworthy heart? I am poor, blind and naked! O great and incomprehensible love! What do you want from me a sinner? Nothing except that I love You and that the fire of Your love be inflamed in my heart, that fire which burns out every unwanted love and unholy desire. Lord; Listen to the promises of my heart. Look at me, and let my desire and will be the same as Yours. As You have given me Yourself, I submit myself completely to You so that I may be in You. I am weak and cannot do that with my own power, but I am confident that You will help me.”

Even after the priest gives the congregation the final benediction to leave, do not leave the church right away to avoid meeting your friends and talking nonsense and useless conversation. Instead, stay behind for a while until everyone has left the church. **Try to spend the day of communion in quietness and make good use of the grace you received.** Try to store inside you a spiritual riches so that you may benefit from this great sacrament.

For example, we do not advise students and employees to have communion before going to work unless it is urgent for them to do so, because the nature of their work does not provide the desired quietness. It is the wisdom of the church to prohibit some physical practices such as spitting, or taking anything out of the mouth on the communion day so that her children may remember the grace they have received for a longer period of time and may lift their thoughts to heavenly matters.

At Home: Return home directly, and if possible, try not to get busy doing any physical or worldly work. We exclude studying for the students and spiritual ministry. Do not hurry to eat, but rather keep alone and pray to God to preserve your life and to help you start a new one, free from disdain, abasement, and shame.

Try to spend your day in quietness and be careful of even the simplest annoyances that you may encounter, for the devil always wants to trick you and tempt you. He is like a snake awaiting the hatching of an egg to snatch it. He is watching you since the time you had this great blessing and armed yourself with this strong and mighty weapon. Struggle to increase your faith in that great sacrament so that it may make you more blessed and holy. “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (John 20:29)

St. Basil the Great describes the responsibility of the one who takes communion, based on St. Paul's words, saying: “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.” (1 Corinthians 11:26) This death suffered by the Son of God for all the people including the partakers of the Holy Communion means that they should live not for themselves but for the One Who died and rose for them. (2 Corinthians 5:15)

Therefore, all those who proceed to take communion must be ready to be faithful to God’s commandments, not live for the world, but for the One Who they have received inside them. Never be like the people of Jerusalem who accepted Jesus joyfully on Palm Sunday singing, “Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord,” then rejected Him a few days later. In the morning, they spread their garments in front of Him, and in the evening, they plotted to take His clothes off. Be faithful in your love to Him and be loyal to Him; ask Him to keep you steadfast in the road of grace and to keep your garment pure.

C) WHAT IS COMMUNION?

“What is Communion, what is the objective of Communion?”

1. Communion is a Covenant:

Communion is a holy covenant between God and His people. Through it, God becomes their Lord and they become His children. “This cup is the new covenant in My Blood which is shed for you.” (Luke 22:20) St. Paul also said, “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a **new covenant** with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah - not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because **they did not continue in My covenant**, and I disregarded them, said the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their mind and write them on their hearts and I will be their God, and they shall be Me people. **For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.**” (Hebrews 8:8-12) This covenant implies privileges as well as duties and responsibilities.

The first covenant, which God made was with the Israelites, when He took them out of the land of Egypt, was by the “Passover Lamb”. It was a symbol of “Jesus the Lamb of God” in the new covenant that He was going to constitute by the sacrifice on cross. As we know, the Holy Communion is an extension to the sacrifice of the holy cross.

2. Communion Means Membership in the Church:

It is our membership in the holy church; that is, we are all members in the Body of Christ, which is the church. (Ephesians 1:23) St. Paul said, The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, being many are one bread and body, for we are all partakers of that one bread.” (1 Corinthians 10: 16-17) **Therefore, the believers take the Holy Communion so that they may have a covenant with one another and be united as members in the one flesh.** “And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.” (1 Corinthians 12:26) St. Basil’s Liturgy says, “Make us worthy, O Lord, to partake of this Holy Sacrament and purify our souls, bodies and spirits so that we may be **one body and one spirit.**”

3. Communion is a Spiritual Grace for Righteousness:

It is a great spiritual grace, which grants us the gift of life, of abiding in Christ and of growth, which supersedes all other spiritual means. We mentioned this point earlier. The priest prays in the sanctification part of the liturgy saying, “He decreed this **great sacrament for our righteousness**” The priest also prays secretly in St. Basil’s Liturgy after the fraction saying, “We ask and entreat Your goodness, O lover of mankind, that You may purify us so that we may partake of this Holy Sacrament to be filled with Your Holy Spirit, abiding in Your right faith, to be filled with Your true love and to speak of Your glory all the time.”

D) GENERAL TOPICS ABOUT COMMUNION

1. Partaking Regularly of the Holy Communion:

Partaking of the Holy Communion has a great honor, blessing and effect on our lives unequalled by all other spiritual means. We should be regular in receiving this Holy Sacrament.

Nothing prevents you from receiving this gift; the holy table is close to you. Many abstain from taking communion either because they are afraid of it or because they neglect the salvation of their souls. We shall discuss these two points.

It is necessary for the believers to partake of this great sacrament regularly. We are asked for nothing more than spiritual preparation and we should always be prepared. **In early ages, that was what all the Christians did.** They used to partake of the Holy Communion every Sunday. The Book of Acts says about the Christians of the early church, “They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayer.” (Acts 2:42) By being regular in receiving the Holy Communion, we feel our attachment to God and live a pleasing life to Him. This is known from the canons set by the Apostles and the church fathers. St. Eustinas the martyr said, “The holy Body was carried by the priests to those who could not attend the church because of difficult circumstances.”

Hence, we should partake of the communion regularly every week, once every two weeks, or at least once a month.

One might say that receiving the Holy Communion frequently will lead to lessening our reverence and honor of the sacrament and will weaken its moving effect on the soul.

To answer that we say that the spiritual preparation that precedes communion and the spiritual secret effect of communion will awaken our spiritual awareness. If this theory is true, we should stop praying for a while not to lose the feeling of reverence. The opposite is true. The more we pray, the more our hearts are inflamed with the holy love for God. The Bible asks us to pray all the time; “Men always ought to pray.” (Luke 18:1) and “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

2. Partaking of the Communion on Certain Occasions

Some Christians do not receive the Holy Communion except on special occasions they set for themselves such as Holy Thursday or Saturday before Easter. It is good to receive the Holy Communion on such occasions. Yet, we should take communion at regular close intervals so that we may keep the holy covenant with our Lord.

Another group of Christians; students for example, take communion before their exams, so that God may help them. Others receive communion on their birthdays. There is nothing wrong in seeking God in times of difficulty for He said, “Call Me in trouble and I will save you so that you may glorify Me.” It is also good to remember your Creator on your birthday so that you may have a good start for your new year. Yet, **true penance and thorough confession should precede communion so that our sins would not block God’s mercy when we make that material request.**

There is a tradition in our church for the two fiancés to receive the Holy Communion before the Sacrament of matrimony. The main point is that no one should proceed to have the Holy Communion without true repentance and complete confession. Hence, if the two persons do so, they will overcome all the marital problems that may lead to separation or divorce. There is nothing wrong in this tradition; yet, if it is done in a superficial way without repentance and confession, then it is not beneficial.

Besides, if one of the fiancés confessed-certain problems just a day before marriage, there will neither be enough time nor the opportunity to overcome them. If one of the fiancés is confessing for the first time, we cannot expect a complete and open confession in this case. We recommend that the fiancés practice the Sacrament of Confession from the beginning of their relation if they are not already doing so.

3. Meaning of “Worthy to Partake of Communion”

Many refrain from partaking of the communion although they have the desire. That is because of their fear of the sacrament or because they do not understand what it means to be ready to partake of the Holy Sacrament. The words of the priest in St. Basil’s Liturgy may scare them; “O Lord, make us worthy to partake of Your holies in purification for our souls, bodies and spirits.”, “Holy to the holies.” and the words of the deacon right before communion, “Pray for the worthy communion of the immaculate heavenly, and holy mysteries.” What is the state of being worthy of the communion?

Is it that you proceed when you have no sin and your life is free from all evil? One of the basic principles of the Christian faith is that being righteous is due to the divine grace, not due to one’s own struggle. St. Paul says, “If righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.” (Galatians 2:21) If we wait to become righteous before we proceed for the communion, this means that we want to become righteous by our own efforts.

On the contrary, we should proceed with all our weaknesses and imperfections so that God would make us righteous like the prodigal son. He went to his father with his dirty, worn-out clothes, and his father was the one who put on him the new robe, shoes on his feet and a ring on his finger. In short, our life will not be complete unless we are united with God.

The right preparation for communion is true repentance from the heart over all our past sins and a hearty determination to submit all our life to God, to live with Him in holiness and righteousness, and to get rid of all our weaknesses which hinder our relationship with God.

To be worthy to partake of the communion means to proceed in awe, reverence, and appreciation of that great sacrament with the feeling that we are not worthy of that great honor. Therefore, the Christian proceeds as a sick person who needs the medicine to cure all his diseases.

St. John Chrysostom comments on what the priest says in the liturgy, “Holy to the holies,” by the answer all the people give, “We are not holy, but we are sinners not worthy of that name. The only Holy and the Holy of holies is Jesus Christ Who was crucified for our salvation. Thus, the people respond by saying, “One is the Holy Father, One is the Holy Son, One is the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

When the deacon says, “Pray for the worthy communion of the immaculate heavenly, and holy mysteries” he warns those who dare to proceed for communion carelessly and without fear.

As St. Paul said, “He who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgement to himself, **not discerning the Lord's body.**” (1 Corinthians 11:29)

He also said, “Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup” (1 Corinthians 11:28) It is most important to examine ourselves and see if we made an honest confession. St. John Chrysostom says, “Let no one proceed to the Holy Communion with laziness or negligence, but let all go to receive it with enthusiasm and preparation so that we may not be punished. Do not be guilty of His body and blood as those who crucified Him.”

Sometimes, after we determine to lead a holy life with God, we revert to sinning, not deliberately or carelessly, but owing to our weak nature. **Do not be alarmed** and lose hope. St. John said, “My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.” (1 John 2:1-2)

4. Physical Purity for Partaking of Communion

As partaking of the Holy body and blood needs preparation and spiritual purity, it also requires physical purity.

1. For a male person, nocturnal emission (wet dream) is not considered fasting so you should not partake communion on that day. If this act is repeated, you should confess it to your father, as this might be a war by the devil to prevent you from communion, and the priest will guide you to what you should do then.

2. For a female person, during menstruation and after delivery she should refrain from partaking communion - 40 days following delivery of a baby boy and 80 days following the delivery of a baby girl.

3. Husbands and wives should refrain from marital relation the night before communion for it is considered not fasting.

4. One should take a bath or a shower before communion and proceed with clean clothes.

5. The Priest and the Sacrament

The devil puts doubts in the minds of some believers to prevent them from the blessings of this Holy Sacrament. Some people refrain from taking communion with the excuse that the priest is a bad person or has many faults and therefore they doubt the holiness of this sacrament. Moreover, they do not go to another priest, in whose righteousness they feel confident, but rather restrain from communion because they have doubts about all priests.

Obviously, this is a trick of the devil to deprive those people of the blessings of this great sacrament.

The question is: **“Is there a relation between the holiness of the priest and the fulfillment of this sacrament? Does the changing of the bread and wine into the holy Body and Blood of Jesus Christ not happen except when a holy priest prays?”**

Of course, the priest should be a righteous person full of faith, worthy of this great service. However, the wholesomeness of the sacraments does not depend on the faith or righteousness of the priest administering them. In other words, **the power of the sacrament and the grace it grants do not depend on the worthiness of the priest. It only depends on the worthiness and the will of our Savior Jesus Christ Who is granting this grace.** Jesus said in the “Last Supper”, “This is My body, this is My blood”, by His power, it is always the same. He said in the past, “Let there be light,” and it was and is still existing and will remain until the end of the world. Thus the seven sacraments of the church, including communion, do not depend on the righteousness of the priest but on the work of the Holy Spirit, on Whom the priest calls.

Therefore, the priests are only visible instruments by whom the Lord fulfills His sacraments to reach His believers in an invisible way. Again, if the faith of the priest and his holiness were essential matters for the sacraments to be real, this would cause many doubts in the church and would hamper reaping the fruits of the Holy Sacraments. The people will always be in doubt about the righteousness of the priests, only God the examiner of the hearts knows. Moreover, the priest may be holy today and evil tomorrow, like all the other human beings.

St. Gregory the Theologian said regarding Baptism, “I have two seals: one made of gold and the other of iron, each bearing the same royal picture. Each one makes a print on wax. Is the print made by one seal distinguishable from that made by the other seal? Nothing makes it distinguishable. If you think yourself extremely clever, tell me which is the picture printed by the golden seal and which by the iron one and why both pictures look alike. Similarly, look upon each of the priests who baptize you, one might be more spiritual than the other, but the power of baptism is the same.”

John the Baptist’s testimony about Jesus was, “This is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” (John 1:33) We compare this with what St. John wrote in his gospel, “Jesus Himself did not baptize but His disciples” (John 4:2) That means, if Peter baptizes, then Jesus Himself would be baptizing. If Paul baptizes, it is still Jesus Who is baptizing. If Judas baptizes, it is still Jesus Who is baptizing. The given power does not differ from one minister to the other; John the Baptist said, “He (Jesus) is the one Who baptizes.”

St. Paul also wrote, “So then neither he who plants anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.” (1 Corinthians 3:7) The power and effect of the sacrament are due to Jesus and not to the priest who only administers it.

Again, St. Augustine wrote in his third book, “It makes no difference as to who administers the sacraments, a righteous person or a sinner, this is like the seeds in the hand of the farmer. Whether his hands are clean or dirty, the seeds will bring forth fruit.”

We conclude that the priests are mere instruments in the hand of God Who sanctifies this sacrament and all other sacraments by the power of the Holy Spirit. We should proceed with

praise and confidence thanking God for His love, mercy and compassion, having prepared “this great sacrament for our righteousness.”

6. Communion and Fasting

The person partaking of the Holy Communion should be fasting with the church in its fasts. The healthy person should fast with the church in joy, love and eagerness without giving excuses not to fast. He should feel that fasting is a blessing to his life.

The church has put in its consideration whose circumstances prevent them from fasting such as pregnant or nursing mothers, the sick and the old. The spiritual father will advise them, to fast or not. The length of the fast and the way of fasting are according to the physical and spiritual circumstance of each person.

Period of Abstinence: The period of abstinence is the period before communion in which the person refrains from eating and drinking. It is known that this period is nine hours that start from midnight of the day of communion except in other special circumstances. After communion, one should be careful not to take anything out of his mouth the rest of the communion day.

7. Communion and the Orthodox Belief

Is it allowed for non-Orthodox believers to partake of the Holy Communion in the Orthodox churches? It is definitely not allowed. The truth cannot be divided or compromised.

Another question: Is it allowed for the Orthodox believers, including the immigrants, or those in countries which have no Orthodox churches, to partake of communion in non-Orthodox churches? The answer is no. It is the church’s responsibility to extend the service to those people wherever they are. The laws of the church prevent its children from attending meetings which the church considers heretic.

A final point, the communion partaker should attend the Matins absolution, the absolution of the ministers and must attend the Gospel reading. It is not allowed for the person who comes to the church after the Gospel reading to partake of the Holy Communion. Early attendance of the church has special blessings as the Psalmist says, “GOD, You are my God; Early will I seek You; My flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land Where there is no water.” (Psalm 63:1) Also Solomon said, “Those who seek me diligently will find me.” (Proverbs 8:17) Let us say with the church, “My eyes have awakened before the morning watch that I may meditate on Your sayings.”

E) PRAYER BEFORE COMMUNION

Lord, I am not worthy that You enter under my roof for I am a sinner. Just say a word and my soul will be healed. Tell me, “Your sins are forgiven.” I am empty of all righteousness. I

am depending completely on Your abundant compassion, Your mercy and love to mankind. You humbled Yourself from Your unlimited glory, and accepted to be born in a manger. So please my holy Savior, do not refuse to come to my poor soul who is eagerly awaiting Your presence. You did not refuse to enter the leper's house to heal him, so please come into my soul to purify it. You did not forbid the sinful woman to kiss Your feet so please do not deprive me from coming near You to partake of Your holy body and Your precious blood. May this Holy Communion banish my impurities and mortify all my evil desires. Help me O Lord to keep Your commandments, for the purification of my soul and body from every sin and for the acceptance of Your gifts and blessings. Let Your Spirit abide in me and unite me with You so that I may live for the glory of Your holy name. Amen.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

My heart is filled with joy and my tongue with rejoicing. My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior. I have come to You, O Lord, so You may clothe me with purity that I may be worthy of Your joy. Let my union with You today be everlasting for it makes me grow in virtue and strengthens my faith and my hope. Let this communion be a symbol of my salvation, a robe for my new birth and for the purity of love. Let it be an everlasting joy for my soul and an answer to my prayers before Your fearful altar.

I yield myself to Your arms. Let me be one with You. Direct me according to Your will. Awaken my heart and conscience. Fight the devil for me. Tell the storm to stop. Walk with me. Quench my thirst. In flame the fire of Your love in my heart. Overcome all my weaknesses. Abide with me for the day is far spent, for You are my goal and my happiness, only You, Lord. Amen.