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In the Orthodox Church, the Holy Chrism is sanctified for use in the celebration of the sacrament of Chrismation. It is a visible sign of the transmission of gift of the Holy Spirit to those who are baptized. Through the seal of Chrismation, the baptized attain "mature manhood, to the measure of the fullness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:13). During the early years of Christianity, the transmission of the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the baptized were given by the Apostles through the "laying on of hands." *Then they laid their hands upon them and they received the Holy Spirit.*" (Acts 8:14-17). This "laying on of hands." is still used today during the ordination of Deacons, Priests, and Bishops.

When the Early Church spread throughout the world and the number of the baptized increased, it was not possible to continue the practice of Laying on of hands so the Apostles introduced the use of the sanctified Chrism. The Holy Chrism was sanctified by the Apostles and was continued thereafter by the bishops through the Apostolic Succession.

Today , Holy Chrism is also used to chrismate the non-Orthodox joining the Church, and to chrismate those fallen away from the Orthodox Faith and who are returning to the Orthodox Church. In addition, Holy Chrism is used to consecrate holy churches, altar tables, objects, and utensils, and for other sacred ceremonial circumstances. In past centuries, it was also used to anoint the Orthodox kings during their crowning.

Over the years Holy Chrism has been known by many names, such as oil of Thanksgiving, oil of anointing, Chrism, Chrism of thanksgiving, and holy and great myrrh. Today, the terms nerally used are "Holy Myrrh" or "Holy Chrism."

## Preparation of Holy Chrism

The preparation of the Holy Chrism was introduced to the Christian Church from the existing Old Testament practice.

*"The Lord said to Moses, 'Take the finest spices -- 12 pounds of liquid myrrh, 6 pounds of sweet-smelling cinnamon, 6 pounds of sweet cane, and 12 pounds of cassia (all weighted according to official standard). Add one gallon of olive oil, and make a sacred anointing oil, mixed like perfume.'" (Exodus 30:22-25)*

At the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, there is an official list of 57 kinds of fragrances from which the Holy Chrism is made.

Information on how Holy Chrism was sanctified during the first centuries of Christianity is not available. Presently the Ecumenical Patriarchate prepares Holy Chrism in accordance with the rubrics that were updated from ancient surviving church so that the sanctification of the Holy Chrism takes place in the following order:

After the doxology on Palm Sunday, the Patriarch blesses the Archon of the Myrrh who, along with the other Archons, work with him to make the Holy Chrism. They wear a



Figure 1 Holy Myrrh being prepared

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white tunic reaching to the ground. The next day, on Holy and Great Monday, after the Divine Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, the Patriarch enters the Patriarchal Church of Saint George, where an appropriately decorated sepulcher and the boilers for the Holy Chrism are located. The Patriarch then blesses the beginning of the cycle of the sanctification of the Holy Chrism with a special holy service. Following the blessing, he sprinkles holy water on the prepared materials, the utensils to be used, and the copper boilers. Then, holding a lighted candle, he touches each boiler, placing pieces of old charred holy icons in them. Then the Patriarch reads chapters from the Holy Gospel. These readings from the New Testament are then continued by those present, including hierarchs, clergy from the Patriarchate, as well as visiting clergy. This order of readings continues all day on Holy Monday, Holy Tuesday, and Holy Wednesday.

On Holy and Great Tuesday, after the Divine Liturgy, a small supplication to the Theotokos is sung at the holy sepulcher. Prayers are offered for those who contributed material, money, and effort to prepare the Holy Chrism.

On Holy and Great Wednesday, after the Divine Liturgy of the Pre-sanctified gifts, the Patriarch once again comes to the holy sepulcher and, after a brief service, places in the boilers rose oil, musk, and other sweet-smelling oil. On this day, all preparations for making the Holy Chrism are completed.

On Holy and Great Thursday, after Matins (Orthros) the procession from the Patriarchal Palace to the Patriarchal Church begins. During the procession, the Patriarch holds the small myrrh container. The first in order of the hierarchs holds an alabaster container of pre-sanctified Chrism. The second in order of the hierarchs holds an alabaster container of unsanctified Chrism. The other hierarchs hold small silver vases containing Chrism from the prepared materials to be sanctified. During the Divine Liturgy, at the appointed time after the exclamation: "And may the mercy of our Great Lord," the congregation kneels, and the Patriarch sanctifies the Holy Chrism according to the rubrics. At the end of the Divine Liturgy, the sanctified Holy Chrism is transferred from the church to the Patriarchal myrrh center.

As was stated earlier, Holy Chrism is used mainly in the celebration of the sacrament of Chrismation, which takes place immediately following the sacrament of Baptism. It is, however, a separate, distinct sacrament from Baptism. According to Orthodox Church readings, through the administration of the sacrament of Chrismation, the baptized receive gifts (charismata) that are transmitted to them by the Holy Spirit.† Such gifts also help the baptized live a life in Christ, which they enter through baptism, and equip them in their struggle against sin and the attacks of evil.†

# The Orthodox Sacrament of Holy Eucharist

## Historical Reflection of the Eucharist

The Holy Eucharist is the oldest experience of Christian Worship as well as the most distinctive. Eucharist comes from the Greek word which means thanksgiving. In a particular sense, the word describes the most important form of the Church's attitude toward all of life. As has been mentioned, the origin of the Eucharist is traced to the Last Supper at which Christ instructed His disciples to *take and eat* in His memory. The Eucharist is the most distinctive event of Orthodox worship because in it the Church gathers to remember and celebrate the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ and, thereby, to participate in the mystery of Salvation through the receipt of the Word of Truth (the Gospels) and His Body and Blood (Holy Communion).

For the first thousand years of Christian history, when the Early Church was visibly one and undivided Holy catholic and apostolic Church (as we state in the Nicene Creed), the sacraments have always been present in the Christian communities as a means of transferring Grace, either through the bishop or the priest. How this occurred the Church confessed was a mystery. To this day in the Orthodox Church sacraments are referred to as *Μυστήρια* (Mysteries) to acknowledge the inadequacy of human language to contain or express divine concepts. The sacrament of the Eucharist or Holy Communion is considered by both the Orthodox and Catholics Church to be the *Το Μυστήριον των Μυστηρίων*, The Mystery of All Mysteries.

For the first 10 centuries of the Early Christian Church the idea that the simple elements of bread and wine became the Body and Blood of our Lord was considered to be the unexplainable Mystery. By the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries the Scholastic Era brought the Age of Reason to the West. The Roman Church, which had become separated from the Orthodox Church in the beginning of the 11th century was pressed by the rationalists to define how the transformation of the bread and wine takes place. The Catholic Church developed the term *transubstantiation* (a change of substance) in an attempt to define the sacramental process. The Orthodox Church disagreed with this on the grounds that this was seen as reducing the holy sacrament, which only faith can comprehend, to an object of philosophical and humanistic description.

With the arrival of the Protestant Reformation, which continued the Scholastic tradition of the Catholic Church, Martin Luther developed the idea that in Holy Communion the body and blood of Christ and the bread and wine **coexist** in union with each other. This was termed consubstantiation. Luther illustrated this idea by the analogy of "*the iron put into the fire whereby both fire and iron are united in the red-hot iron and yet each continues unchanged*" The term consubstantiation is commonly applied to the Lutheran Church and some other Protestant Churches who practice the sacrament of the Eucharist, however most Protestant Churches today see the act of the Eucharist as simply symbolic with no transformative power through Grace. For these churches the celebration of Eucharist is merely an act of Remembrance, given by Christ when He instructed His disciples to partake of the Lord's supper "*in remembrance of Him*" (Luke. 22:19) but that He is not present physically in the communion celebration.

# The Orthodox Sacrament of Holy Eucharist

## So is the Bread and Wine Truly the Body and Blood?

In the Orthodox Church the Divine Liturgy observes the fullness of both of these commands of Christ. First we recite the words of the Ανάμνησις (Anamnesis) which is His command to *Take and eat...Do this remembrance of Me*. The Anamnesis is the Platonic idea of remembering of things from a previous existence. Following this is the reciting of the Αναφορά (Anaphora) where the priest or bishop calls upon the Holy Spirit to mystically transform the bread and wine into the Blood and Body of Christ.

So why does the Orthodox Church believe so strongly that for us as believers in Christ we must share in His Body and Blood for our salvation? Meaning that for Orthodox the receiving of Holy Communion IS essential for salvation. To answer this question we need to examine the fullness of the teaching of Scriptures concerning the Eucharist.

We need to examine both the account by Matthew as well as the account by Luke to appreciate the fullness of what Christ said. While Luke's account records Christ offering the bread and wine *in remembrance of Me*, in Matthew 26:26-27 we read the precise words of institution of the sacrament of the Eucharist:

"...λαβων ο Ιησους τον αρτον και ... ειπεν λαβετε φαγετε τουτο **ΕΣΤΙΝ** το σωμα μου... και λαβων το ποτηριον και ... λεγων πιετε εξ αυτου παντες ουτο γαρ **ΕΣΤΙΝ** το αιμα μου το της καινης διαθηκης το περι πολλων εκχυνομενον εις αφεσιν αμαρτιων

[and] He broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this **is** my body...Then He took a cup, and ... He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This **is** my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

The Orthodox Church believes that Scripture cannot be interpreted in only one manner. Often times Christ spoke in metaphors, (*I am the door...* (John 10:9), other times in allegories, (*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me...* (Matthew 11:29) and other times He spoke literally. The challenge for the Church Fathers was, through a lifetime of prayer and study, to discern which statements are which. Both the Orthodox and Catholic Church believe that both statements by Christ at the Last Supper were to be taken literally since the Greek verb εστιν is a verb of "being".

The active form of the Greek verb "is" (This is My body ... this is My blood) does not indicate that these gifts merely symbolize His Body and Blood.

The Eucharist, as the *Μυστήριον των Μυστηρίων*, The Mystery of All Mysteries is the principal sacrament of the Orthodox Church, and is not something to be observed from afar, but rather experienced in the communion with the Living God, the ranks of heavenly powers, all the saints, and the parish community who together in which prayer, music, gestures, and architecture come into full orchestration. The Eucharist is a celebration of faith which touches all of the human senses.

# The Orthodox Sacrament of Holy Eucharist

## Receiving Communion in a Proper and Reverent Manner

There is a special cup which holds the wine that becomes the blood of Christ is referred to as the chalice, the cup of salvation. When we kneel during the Anaphora (calling down of the Holy Spirit), we pray with the priest that God the Holy Spirit may change the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus. In this way when we come to receive Holy Communion, Jesus abides spiritually and physically within us.

What should we do to prepare to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus? We should pray. We should have love in our hearts for all people. We should ask forgiveness from God and from our parents, brothers, and sisters. Also from anyone we may have hurt. On the morning before going to the Divine Liturgy to receive Communion we do not eat or drink anything if our health allows, just as one would not spoil his appetite by eating before a special meal, so we sharpen our spiritual appetite for Christ through such fasting. But we must never allow an overemphasis on fasting to become a wall separating us from Christ Who wishes to come to us in every liturgy.

When we come before the priest for Holy Communion, our hands should not be in our pockets, but at our sides and not have anything in our mouth such as gum. We make the sign of the cross, tell the priest our baptismal name, hold the Communion cloth carefully under our chin, and open our mouth wide. We do not slurp from the spoon, nor should our teeth scrape on the spoon. After receiving Communion we wipe our lips carefully with the Communion cloth (*not on our hand or shirtsleeve*), make the sign of the cross, and hand the Communion cloth to the next person.

We are always careful that we do not allow Communion to fall from the communion spoon or from our lips onto our clothing or to the floor. For this reason we move very slowly toward the chalice and the communion spoon, and we do not pull our head away quickly after receiving. We are careful not to bump the chalice or the hand of the priest. After receiving Communion, we do not chew gum (or spit), because when we dispose of our gum it may contain particles of Holy Communion.

Once we have received Communion, we must remember that we have become one with Christ and with all those who received Communion with us. The same Christ now lives in all of us. We are all living icons of Jesus. It is by loving one another that we love Jesus. After receiving Communion our bodies become holy chalices. God has come to live in us. His blood now flows through our veins.



## **I. SHOULD CHRISTIANS FAST TODAY?**

### **A. YES! BECAUSE OF THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS...**

1. He assumed his disciples would fast ("when you are fasting...")  
[Mt 6:16-17](#)
2. Christ said the disciples would fast when He was gone  
[Mt 9:14-15](#)
3. He taught His disciples...
  - a. Fasting is favorable to God - [Mt 6:18](#)
  - b. That there would be occasions when prayer joined with fasting might be needed - [Mark 9:29](#) (Codex Sinaiticus shows "...and fasting" added)

### **B. YES! BECAUSE WE HAVE EXAMPLES OF THE CHURCH FASTING...**

1. The brethren at Antioch - [Ac 13:1-3](#)
  - a. Fasting in their service to Lord
  - b. Fasting and praying before they sent out Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journey
2. The churches in Galatia - [Ac 14:23](#)
  - a. There was fasting in each church
  - b. Fasting and praying before they appointing elders

On Fasting by His Eminence Metropolitan Maximos of Pittsburgh (retired)

Fasting was practiced by the Lord Himself. After prayer and fasting for forty days in the wilderness, the Lord victoriously faced the temptations of the devil (Matthew 4:1-11). The Lord himself asked the disciples to use fasting as an important spiritual weapon to achieve spiritual victories (Matthew 17:21; Mark 9:29; Luke 2:37). The example of the Lord was followed by His disciples (Acts 14:23; 27:9; 1 Corinthians 7:5; 2 Corinthians 6:5, 11:27, etc.). What is fasting? Why is it so important?

The Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church has placed the problem of fasting as one of the items on its agenda. It is hoped that through this Council the age-old practice of the Church to use fasting as one of the important means of spiritual growth will regain its proper place in the life of the Church.

But why does fasting precede such important feasts such as Easter and Christmas?

The importance of fasting depends on its meaning. Many of the Fathers have written on fasting. Among others, St. Basil has left us with most inspired comments on fasting. St. Basil tells us that fasting is not abstaining from food only; it is first of all, abstaining from sin. Grounded in the teaching of the Fathers, the Church in its hymnology describes fasting as the mother of chastity and prudence, as the accuser of sin and as the advocate of repentance, the life worthy of angels and the salvation of humans. ***Fasting becomes all of these when observed in the proper spirit.***

First of all, fasting is abstinence from food. By detaching us from earthly goods and realities, fasting has a liberating effect on us and makes us worthy of the life of the spirit, a life similar to that of angels. Second, fasting, as abstinence from bad habits and sin, is the mother of Christian virtues, the mother of sound and wholesome thinking; it allows us to establish the proper priority between the material and spiritual, giving priority to the spiritual.

Fasting is the advocate of repentance. Adam and Eve disobeyed God; they refused to fast from the forbidden fruit. They became slaves of their own desires. But now through fasting, through obedience to the rules of the Church regarding the use of spiritual and material goods, we may return to the life in Paradise, a life of communion with God. Thus, fasting is a means of salvation, this salvation being a life we live in accordance with the Divine will, in communion with God. And fasting has a liberating effect, both material and spiritual and thus the Church has connected fasting with the celebration of the major feasts of our tradition.