

The Basics of Orthodoxy Class 102

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Topic 7: Holy Communion (the Mystical Supper), and the Communion of Saints (*The Faith*, Chp.14, and Special Study, p. 211)

“In the Holy Eucharist we offer to God the substance of our life and receive it back as the Body and Blood of Christ for the sanctification of our souls and bodies and as the mystery of the Church’s unity in Christ.” (*The Faith*, p. 203)

In the Orthodox Church on Sundays, our Main Action as we gather to pray to God and to hear the preaching of His Holy Word, is to receive Christ, the Logos (the Word), in the Holy Mystery (Sacrament) of Holy Communion. **Holy Communion** is usually referred to as **the Holy Eucharist**, the Holy and True Body and Blood of Christ, the Mystical Supper. It is a Great and REAL Mystery, which we accept with the faith of a child, as it surpasses our rational understanding.

Eucharist = is a Greek word. **Ev** (“good”) + **charis** (“gift”) -- literally this means “**good gift**”, but it has the usual meaning: “**to give thanks**” [note: in Greek, “ev” and “eu” are often interchangeable]

The word “evcharisto” is still used in modern Greek as “**thank you.**”

When we receive the Mystical Holy Body and Blood of Christ, we receive the Ultimate and Greatest GOOD GIFT possible...The Gift of the Presence of God Himself into our very souls and bodies as we offer our “evcharisto” (our thanks) to God.

For this awesome Gift given to us, our proper response is to say “Thank You.”

I Corinthians 11:24

“And when He had **given thanks** (literally = “when He **had eucharisted**”, in Greek “**eucharistesas**”), He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body...’ (vs.24)

In the Church, there are Three Holy Mysteries that follow one after another: Holy **Baptism**, Holy **Chrismation**, and Holy **Eucharist** (Communion)

Acts 17:28 “in Him we **live**, and **move**, and have our **being.**”

St. Nicholas Cabasilas connects St. Paul’s words with these three Sacraments:

- 1) **Baptism** gives us our new being.
- 2) **Chrismation** infuses us with divine energy to move in this new life.

- 3) The **Eucharist** preserves, nourishes, and enables us to continue to live in this new life.

“Having been **united with Christ in Baptism**, and **empowered by the Holy Spirit [in Holy Chrismation]**, we are led to the Holy Table and **partake of the Bread of Heaven**”—**the Holy Eucharist**. (*The Faith*, p. 204)

“God gave the world to Adam and Eve as a **means of communion with Himself**. However, they refused this GIFT and instead made the world **into an END in and of itself**.” (*The Faith*, p. 204)

Everything made by God was to be enjoyed by humans through thanksgiving to God. **Everything**, therefore, was to be seen **as a gift from God**.

Recognizing this gift was the only proper humble response. At least say “Thank you” to God your Benefactor. Through constant grateful THANKSGIVING we humans were to stay in communion (common union) with God.

Receiving God’s gifts and **offering Him thanks** in return was **Man’s original “job”** (or vocation) here on earth. It was our Eucharistic vocation. To live a divine life of receiving and sharing the love and loving gifts of God. To be loved and to love in return.

But Adam and Eve stole the only forbidden fruit, and thus left God out of their private stolen meal. They offered Him **NO thanks**. They quit their job/vocation of giving thanks. They broke their communion with God. In fact, there was NO communion—no common union with their Creator—in their sinful act. The world and the things of the world NO LONGER were seen as vehicles to unite man with God, but became ENDS in and of THEMSELVES. **Idolatry** had been invented.

In other words, man started to love the things of this world MORE than the Creator of the world.

To **reverse** this fall of humanity away from God, away from common union with the Creator, in Jesus Christ God became man, and offered Himself on the Cross for the life of the world. He loved God His Father **more than even human life itself**, and thus as the New Adam offered Himself in pure love and obedience to His Father. In doing so, as Jesus the Son of God allowed His human body to be broken and His human blood to be spilled on the cross, He offered drops of Divine Immortality to spill out for all mankind—on behalf of all and for all—to offer to us (His brother and sister humans) forgiveness, eternal life, reunion, and **communion with God once again**.

The Eucharist IS that one sacrifice of Christ on His Cross. The Ultimate Good Gift, for which we say “Thank You” to our Maker as we receive it.

1 Corinthians 11:24-25

²⁴and when He had **given thanks**, He **broke** it and said, “Take, eat; **this is My Body which is broken for you**; do this in remembrance of Me.” ²⁵In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the New Covenant in **My Blood**. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”

“Do this in remembrance of Me.”

“Remembrance” = (in Greek) “anamnesis”, literally means “to re-present or make present,” not in a mere cognitive manner or mere psychological recollection (thinking), but in a real way.

Christ is made “present” **in reality** through the Mystery of Holy Communion.

We do not believe that this is a repetition, but that It is in reality the Once-for-all-Sacrifice.

Matthew 26:26-28

²⁶While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when He had given **thanks**, He **broke** it and gave it to His disciples, saying, “**Take and eat; this is my Body.**”

²⁷Then He took a cup, and when He had given **thanks**, He gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸**This is my Blood** of the Covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

John 6:32-69

32 Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 **For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.**”

34 Then they said to Him, “Lord, give us this bread always.”

35 And Jesus said to them, “**I am the bread of life.** He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. 36 But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe. 37 All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. 38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. 39 This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. 40 And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”

41 The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, “I am the bread which came down from heaven.” 42 And they said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, ‘I have come down from heaven’?”

43 Jesus therefore answered and said to them, “Do not murmur among yourselves. 44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. 45 It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me. 46 Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father. 47 Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. 50 This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. 51 **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.**”

52 The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, “How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?”

53 Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. 54 **Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. 56 He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. 58 This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.”**

59 These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum.

60 Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, “This is a hard saying; who can understand it?”

61 When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, “Does this offend you? 62 What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?”

63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. 64 But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. 65 And He said, “Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.”

66 From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. 67 Then Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you also want to go away?”

68 But Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

1 Corinthians 10:16-17

16 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**? 17 For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.

1 Corinthians 11:27-30

27 Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of **the Body and Blood of the Lord**. 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's Body. 30 For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep [i.e. died].

Here is more historical testimony about how the Early Christians understood Holy Communion. See this first century quote from the *Didache*, (shown on p. 205 in *The Faith*):

“There is no doubt that the early Christians understood the Eucharist as a **sacrifice**. In the **first-century** Syrian church manual called the *Didache* we read,

‘On the Lord’s Day **assemble** together and **break bread** and **give thanks**, first making public **confession** of your faults, that your **sacrifice** may be pure...For this is the **sacrifice** spoken of by the Lord: *In every place and time offer Me a pure sacrifice...*(Malachi 1:11).’”

More words from the first-century Didache, describing the Eucharistic Prayer of the Divine Liturgy at that time, (shown on p. 210 in *The Faith*):

Give thanks in this manner. First, over the **Cup**: “We give **thanks** to Thee, our Father, for the Holy Vine of Thy son David, which Thou hast made known to us through Jesus Thy Son: Thine be the glory forever.” Then over the **broken Bread**: “We give **thanks** to Thee, our Father, for the life and knowledge which Thou didst make known to us through Jesus Thy Son: Thine be the glory forever. As this broken Bread was scattered upon the mountains and was gathered together and became one, so let Thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy kingdom: for Thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for ever and ever.” Let none eat or drink of this **Eucharist** of yours except those who have been **baptized** into the name of the Lord. For on this point the Lord said, “Do not give what is holy to the dogs” (Matthew 7:6).

Another important historical quote is from **St. Justin the Philosopher**, about 150 AD, “*Apology I*”, in which he defended Christianity to the Roman Emperor. He explained the good Gift of the Holy **Eucharist** in an attempt to beg the Emperor to stop the persecution of Christians. (Shown on p. 207, *The Faith*)

We do **not** receive these Gifts as ordinary food or ordinary drink. But as Jesus Christ our Savior was made flesh through the Word of God, and took flesh and blood for our salvation; in the same way the food over which **thanksgiving** has been offered through the prayer of the Word which we have from Him—**the food** by which our blood and flesh are nourished **through its transformation—is, we are taught, the Flesh and Blood of Jesus Who was made flesh** (*Apology I*).

The Communion of the Saints

(The Faith, p. 211-213)

The **Liturgy and worship of the Church** takes place ***both*** in **heaven** and on **earth** **simultaneously**, being celebrated in the presence of all the angels and saints before the **Throne** of God, on which sits the **Lamb (Jesus)**.

The Trisagion (**Thrice Holy**) Hymn and the **Cherubic Hymn** which we sing on earth in the Divine Liturgy is **constantly being sung in heaven** by the holiest of **angels**:

Isaiah 6:1-4

“In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the **Lord sitting upon a throne**, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the **temple**. 2 Above Him stood the **seraphim**. **Each had six wings**: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one **called to another** and said: “**Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts**; the whole earth is full of his glory!” 4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with **smoke**.”

Rev. 4:8

“The **four living creatures, each having six wings**, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, **saying**: ‘**Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!**’”

Icons of saints adorn the walls on the Orthodox Church and these remind us that we are spiritually surrounded by their presence as a “**great cloud of witnesses** [martyrs].”

Hebrews 12:1

“Therefore we also, since **we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses** [*martyrs*], let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us”

The **Anaphora Prayers** of the Divine Liturgy mentions the saints, specifying different categories of them: “ancestors, fathers, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, preachers, evangelists, martyrs, confessors, ascetics, teachers, and every righteous spirit made perfect in faith.”

The earthly Old Testament Temple of Solomon was a **copy** of the REAL Temple of God in Heaven, where Christ our Forerunner has entered, with the saints that He released from Hades during His Resurrection.

Hebrews 9:23-24

“23 Therefore it was necessary that the **copies of the things in the heavens** should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. 24 For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but **into heaven itself**, now to appear in the presence of God for us”

Hebrews 12:18, 22-24

In the **Eucharistic worship** we also mystically **enter the Heavenly Throne Room, to mingle with saints and angels and to stand before God and receive the Holiest Blood of all:**

“18 For you have **not come to the mountain** that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest...22 But **you have come to Mount Zion** and to the **city** of the living God, the **heavenly Jerusalem**, to an innumerable company of **angels**, 23 to the **general assembly and church** of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to **God** the Judge of all, to the **spirits of just men made perfect**, 24 to **Jesus** the Mediator of the New Covenant, and to the **Blood** of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.”

Luke 20:37-38

The departed saints are with the Lord—their spirits **live, and their bodies** will eventually **be raised:**

“37 But even Moses showed in the burning bush passage that the **dead are raised**, when he called the Lord ‘the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ 38 For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him.”

Mark 12:27

The **departed saints** are **alive** and are present with God:

“27 He is not the God of the dead, **but the God of the living**. You are therefore greatly mistaken.”

Luke 16:19-31

Parable of poor man Lazarus in **Paradise** and the rich man in **Hades:**

“...25 But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is **comforted** and you are **tormented**. 26 And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.’...”

Luke 23:43

On the cross, Jesus **promised Paradise** to the believing repentant thief:

“43 And Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, **today you will be with Me in Paradise.**’”

Rev. 4:4

In a vision, the Apostle John saw the **Throne Room in Heaven:** [12 Old Testament Patriarchs and/or Prophets and 12 New Testament Apostles = **24 elders** in Heaven with God at His Throne]

“4 Around the **throne** were **twenty-four** thrones, and on the thrones I saw **twenty-four elders** sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.”

Rev. 4:10-11

“10 the **twenty-four elders** fall down before **Him Who sits on the throne** and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: 11 ‘You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.’”

Rev. 5:8-12**Heavenly worship, angels and saints (the elders):**

“8 Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the **twenty-four elders** fell down before the **Lamb**, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of **incense**, which are the **prayers of the saints**. 9 And they sang a new song, saying:

‘You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were **slain**, and have redeemed us to God by Your **blood** out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, 10 And have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.’

11 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many **angels** around the throne, the living **creatures**, and the **elders**; and the number of them was **ten thousand times ten thousand**, and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice: ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!’”

Rev. 6:9-11

The souls of martyred saints were seen under the altar in Heaven, awaiting their Resurrection. In the Early Church, especially in the catacombs, the tombs of the martyrs were used as Altars for the Holy Eucharist celebration, and thus, since that time until now, every consecrated Orthodox holy Altar table must have a saint’s relic placed into it: [the holy Altar table is called “thronos”, or “throne”, in Greek; “testimony” = “martyrian”, in Greek]

“9 When He opened the fifth seal, I **saw under the altar the souls** of those who had been **slain** for the word of God and for the **testimony** which they held. 10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” 11 Then a **white robe** was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.”

Rev. 7:9-12

A great number of **saints with angels worship** at God’s Throne in Heaven:

“9 After this I looked, and behold, a **great multitude that no one could number**, from every **nation**, from all **tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne** and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, 10 and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’ 11 And all the **angels were standing around the throne** and around the **elders** and the four living **creatures**, and **they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God**, 12 saying, ‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.’”

Phil. 1:23-24

St Paul wants to **go to Heaven** to be **with the Lord**:

“23 I am hard pressed between the two. My **desire** is to **depart and be with Christ**, for that is far better. 24 But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.”

II Corinth. 5:8

“8 We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be **absent** from the body and to be **present** with the Lord.”

Matthew 17:1-3 THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

Moses and Elijah appeared and talked with **Jesus** at **His Transfiguration on Mt. Tabor**.

Elijah had never died; but Moses had died, yet his **soul is alive and present** with the Lord and was heard speaking to Him. This was seen by the 3 Apostles. This is a prime example of the “**communion of the saints**”...those who have gone on ahead of us into the Next Life, if God allows, can be seen and heard and can communicate with us still on earth.

“1 Now after six days **Jesus took Peter, James, and John** his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; 2 and He was **transfigured** before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. 3 And behold, **Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.**”