

Church Mysteries

The Sacraments of the Orthodox Church, like the Church Herself, can be said to possess a double character, for they are at the same time inward and outward, visible and invisible. They combine in themselves both an outward visible sign with an inward spiritual grace. For example, in the Holy Eucharist, we eat the Body and Blood of Christ, although visibly they appear to be bread and wine. Likewise, in Holy Baptism there is an outward washing with water, but simultaneously an inward cleansing of sins. Thus, we often speak of the Sacraments as being mysteries, for, in the sense outlined above, what we see is not what we believe.

In most of the Sacraments, the Holy Church takes things that are material, e.g., bread, wine, water, and oil, and make them vehicles of the Holy Spirit, in imitation of our Lord's Incarnation, when, as the Second Person of the Trinity, He took material flesh and made it a vehicle of the Holy Spirit. We also note here another characteristic of the Sacraments, in that they are personal. That is, the grace of God is given to every Christian individually. Therefore, in most of the Sacraments, the Priest pronounces the Christian name of each person as the Sacrament is administered. Thus, for example, at the Holy Eucharist, when giving Holy Communion, the Priest says, the Servant (or Handmaid) of God [Name] partakes....

Customarily, in the Orthodox Church we speak of Seven Sacraments, although we must note that this was not fixed until about the 17th Century. The Fathers themselves disagreed as to the actual number some said two, some six, some ten, and there were even those who said seven, but differed among themselves as to what constituted that seven. Many other sacramental acts, such as the Blessing of Waters at Theophany, the Monastic Tonsure, the Burial Service, and the Blessing of Any Object, for example, possess the same criteria as the earlier definition of sacrament. In any case, the number seven has no absolute dogmatic significance in our Orthodox theology, but is used only for teaching convenience.

The Sacraments, as they are traditionally numbered, are:

1. Holy Baptism
2. Holy Chrismation
3. The Holy Eucharist
4. Repentance (Penance, Confession)
5. Holy Orders
6. Holy Matrimony
7. The Anointing of the Sick

Holy Baptism

First place among the Sacraments of the Orthodox Church is occupied by Holy Baptism, by which a man, who has come to believe in Christ, by being immersed three times in water in the Name of the Holy Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), is cleansed through Divine Grace of all sins (Original Sin and personal sins) and is reborn into a new holy, and spiritual life. This Baptism serves as the door through which man enters into the House of Eternal Wisdom the Church for, without it, a man cannot be united completely with the Savior, become a member of His Church, receive the other Sacraments, and be the heir to Eternal Life. As the Lord Himself said, in His discourse with Nicodemus, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God (John 3:5)

This Sacrament of Holy Baptism, however, is not the same as the baptism performed by St. John the Baptist, for although this baptism of John was from heaven (Mark 11:30), it was only a prototype of Christ's Baptism: / baptize you with water; but He Who is mightier than I is coming...; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Luke 3:16). The baptism of John prepared a man for the reception of the Messiah and His Kingdom (Matt. 3:1-2; Luke 1:16; 3:3). John's baptism was, in effect, a baptism of repentance (Mark 1:4; Acts 19:4) and not in the Name of the Holy Trinity. Therefore those baptized by him were not

reborn through the grace of the Holy Spirit and had to be rebaptized later (Acts 19:35).

The Sacrament of Holy Baptism was instituted by Our Lord after His resurrection, when He appeared to His disciples and said, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age (Matt. 28:18-20). The necessity of this baptism was further stressed by the Savior when He said to them, He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:16).

On the day of Holy Pentecost, the Holy Apostles were themselves baptized by the Holy Spirit in the form of tongues of fire and began to administer the Sacrament of Baptism themselves to all who believed in Christ, wanted to repent and to change their life in accordance with His teaching. And Peter said to [the people], 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'. So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls (Acts 2:38,41).

According to the Holy Apostle Paul, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17) and thus the regeneration of man's personality begins with the Sacrament of Baptism. As Scripture says, as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Gal. 3:27) and these words show that in Baptism the believer is united with Christ, a member of Christ's Church and through the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist becomes a partaker of the Divine Nature in spirit and body. In Baptism a new element a supernatural one which remains hidden and acts secretly is poured in and the newly-illuminated receives a new name. Through this essential change in his human nature, he turns into a new creature.

This essential change in man's nature takes place through the free and moral participation of man himself and only on this condition is sin abolished in man in the Sacrament of Baptism. The dominion of sin over the power of the soul loses its strength in Baptism: It is Christ Who now dominates. But the element of sin still remains before the conscience as a seductive principle. That is why it is necessary for man to perfect himself morally even after Baptism; there is still the possibility of his fall. In Baptism man is given the power to struggle with sin and he faces the task of translating into life the Gifts of Grace of the Holy Spirit given to him in this Sacrament.

The Savior commanded His disciples to teach the Faith and to baptize all nations (Matt. 28:19), for as descendants of Adam all are in need of rebirth. This rebirth is accomplished only through Baptism, which is why all men seeking salvation, regardless of sex, nationality, or any other condition, must be baptized. Thus the Orthodox Church holds Baptism to be as necessary for infants as for adults, since they, too, are subject to Original Sin and without Baptism cannot be absolved of this sin.

In the Old Testament, circumcision was the prototype of the Sacrament of Baptism in the New Testament, by which the believer enters into a new covenant with God (Col. 2:11-12). If circumcision was performed in the Old Testament on all males, adult and infant (being prescribed for infants on the 8th Day after birth), so much the more, according to the grace of the new covenant, the Sacrament of Baptism should be administered to infants. Having become a member of the Church through Baptism, infants can receive Holy Communion and from the first days of their life on Earth, they can become vessels of the Holy Spirit. Holy Scripture itself speaks of the baptism of whole families by the Apostles (Acts 16:14-15; 30-39; 1 Cor. 1:16), and there is no reason to consider that there were only adults in these families or to assume that when adults were baptized, the children in these families were not baptized. Christianity, above all, is a new life in Christ Jesus, and this life, according to the belief of the Orthodox Church, is given to all, and of course to children, for as the Lord

Himself said, Let the children come to Me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 19:14).

As St. Paul says, we are called upon to confess one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism (Eph. 4:5). The Church teaches one Baptism because rebirth through grace experienced by man in this Sacrament is one and unrepeatable, just as one and unrepeatable is our natural birth, our death and the Resurrection of Christ. Baptism was, however, repeated, and still is, in cases where the first Baptism was administered incorrectly not in the Name of the Holy Trinity and not according to the way instituted by Our Lord.

The Baptism of both adults and children takes place in the presence of sponsors, who act as guarantors for the one being baptized. Only one sponsor is actually necessary, although there are usually two (or more). According to Church tradition, the sponsor for a male is a male and for a female is a female. The sponsor(s) are responsible for following after the spiritual and religious upbringing of the child, for which reason it is absolutely necessary for the sponsor in question to be Orthodox.

In earlier times, Baptism was done, on occasion, on the 8th Day after birth and (in Russian practice, at least) the child was given the name of that Saint whose feast was on the 8th Day, for it was usually the day of spiritual, not physical, birth that was celebrated. In modern practice, the Baptism is usually administered on or after the 40th Day after birth, the day of Churching, although we do note that in ancient times the Baptism and the Churching were administered separately. The custom of Churching is connected with Old Testament rites and, in particular, with the life of Christ when, on the 40th Day, He was brought by His parents to the Temple, fulfilling the terms of the Jewish Law.

The Sacrament of Holy Baptism is preceded by a preparatory rite which, in Antiquity, was not a part of the Sacrament itself. This preparatory rite consists of:

1. The Catechumenate, which takes place through the Priest's breathing on the one to be baptized, accompanied by the Sign of the Cross and the laying-on of hands upon his head, as well as a prayer to expel from him the ancient deception and that he be united to the flock of the Church.
2. The Exorcism, which consists of four prayers, commanding the Devil and the powers of darkness to depart from the one to be baptized, as well as entreating that a Guardian Angel be given to aid him.
3. The Renunciation of the Devil, in which the catechumen, along with his sponsor(s) turns to the west, which personifies the region where in the powers of darkness abide, and renounces Satan and all his works, breathing and spitting on him as a sign of this renunciation. The catechumen then turns back to the east (which symbolizes the region wherein Light resides) and declares himself ready to unite himself to Christ.
4. The Adherence to Christ, in which the catechumen, three times, declares that he unites himself to Christ.
5. The Recitation of the Symbol of Faith, wherein the catechumen bears witness to his readiness to unite himself to Christ, after which he adores the Holy Trinity Father, Son and Holy Spirit in confessing the essence of the Faith.

This preparatory part leads to the Sacrament of Holy Baptism itself, which begins with the same exclamation by the Priest as at the Divine Liturgy: Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit... after which follows:

1. The Great Litany and
2. The Sanctification of the Water, which is an obligatory rite. [The practice of using, for brevity, water blessed on Theophany is strictly forbidden.] After the petitions for the Sanctification of the Water, the Priest signs the water thrice, immersing his hand in it,

making the Sign of the Cross, breathing on it and anointing it with oil.

3. The Unction With Oil. The Priest now anoints, according to ancient custom, the body of him to be baptized with the Oil of Gladness, after which there takes place

4. The Triple Immersion in Water. According to the meaning of the ancient practice, absolutely there is required immersion in water and not sprinkling (or even pouring). Immersion in water signifies dying to sin and coming up out of the water signifies a resurrection for a new life in Christ, something that the Baptismal Epistle reading speaks of clearly. The obligatory formula in so doing is the recitation of the Name of the Holy Trinity: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, just as was commanded the Apostles by the Lord Jesus Christ.

5. Psalm 31 is read after the Immersion in Water.

6. The Vesting. The newly-illuminated one is now vested in white garments and a cross is given to him.

Holy Baptism is the only Sacrament which, in extreme cases, a layman can also perform (both a man or a woman). The only requirements are that the one baptizing must be an Orthodox Christian and the Baptism must be done by immersion, if possible, according to the following formula: The servant (or handmaid) of God [Name] is baptized in the Name of the Father, Amen, of the Son, Amen, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. If the one being baptized in such a case were dying and later recovered, the Sacrament must be supplemented according the Church Order, i.e., the Priest must read the corresponding prayers of the Sacrament and administer the Sacrament of Holy Chrismation.

Holy Chrismation

In the Sacrament of Baptism man is called out of spiritual darkness into the light of Christ and is initiated into the economy of salvation by the Son of God. This initiation is effected, however, in the Sacrament of Chrismation. Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ, the Apostle Peter preached to the people on Pentecost, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Since that time the Divine Gift of the Holy Spirit is bestowed upon each person who rises from the baptismal font. And everything the Holy Spirit touches receives the seal of an invaluable treasure, a ray of eternal light, the reflection of Divine action.

The Sacrament of Chrismation awakens in the soul that inner, spiritual thirst which does not let one grow satisfied solely with the earthly and material, but always summons us to the Heavenly, to the eternal and the perfect. It makes the baptized person the possessor of the Spirit bearing beauty and a partaker of sanctity, of the Unwaning Light and Divine Life. It is for this reason that in Chrismation the new member of the Church not only receives the Spirit within, but is outwardly encompassed by Him, being robed henceforth as if in special spiritual garments.

The Prayer at Anointing with the Holy Chrism contains an assertion that the one who has been graced to receive the seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit receives aid to remain indomitable, unchanging, unharmed, untouched, unoppressed, safe from the designs of the Evil One, to abide in the Faith and to await the heavenly rewards of life and the eternal promises of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Such a lofty gift of the Holy Spirit, bestowed in Chrismation, obliges the person being anointed to remember constantly the words of St. Paul: Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you (1 Cor. 3:16)?

The prayer to God for the bestowing of the Holy Spirit, which precedes the anointing, and the anointing itself of certain parts of the body crosswise with the Chrism, accompanied by the words, The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit, Amen, have always comprised the basis for the Office of this Sacrament. It concludes

the grace-giving process of the new member's joining the Church, making him an equal among the faithful and rendering him worthy, henceforth, to partake of the Body and Blood of Christ.

Originally the Apostles conferred the Holy Spirit on those who gladly received the Word of the Gospel (Acts 2:41) and were baptized through prayer and the laying-on of hands. In the Acts of the Apostles, Peter and John were sent to the Samaritans who had received the word of God and they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.... Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:15, 17). The need to administer the Sacrament of the spirit through the laying-on of hands required the personal participation of the Apostles, but later they blessed the Bishops and Presbyter whom they consecrated to conduct the invocation of the Holy Spirit upon believers through anointing them with the Holy Chrism, and permitted Bishops alone to consecrate the Chrism. As St. Cyril of Jerusalem says, Holy Chrism...is a gift of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, which is validated by the presence of His Divinity.... And when the body is anointed in a visible fashion, the soul is consecrated with the Holy and Life-Giving Spirit.

The Chrism here used consists of olive oil, to which has been added white grape wine and a number of aromatic substances symbolizing the various grace-bestowing gifts of the Holy Spirit conferred through Chrismation. The Holy Chrism, which has been prepared at the beginning of Holy Week, is formally consecrated, usually by the Primate of the Church, on Holy Thursday and then distributed to the Bishops who, in turn, distribute it, as needed, to the Priests, for use in the Sacraments.

In the Office of the Sacrament of Chrismation, the anointing is performed with the recitation of the words, The Seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit, during which the Priest anoints crosswise with the Holy Chrism the forehead, eyes, nostrils, mouth, ears, breast, hands and feet of the Newly-illuminated. After the anointing, the Priest then leads the Newly-illuminated and sponsor (s) three times around the font to the singing of As many as have been

baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Alleluia! This circular procession is seen as a symbol of joy.

Then follows the reading of the Epistle and Gospel which (along with the preceding hymn) refer to Baptism, since, from antiquity, the two Sacraments have been linked into one rite. After this, the Chrism is washed off and the white baptismal garments removed. [In ancient times this was customarily done on the 8th Day after, i.e., St. Thomas Sunday.] The hair is then cut in a crosswise manner The Tonsure as a sign of humility and readiness for sacrificial service to the Lord an initiation into the Army of Christ.

Holy Communion

The central place among the Sacraments of the Orthodox Church is held by the Holy Eucharist the precious Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. In modern times the Holy Eucharist is celebrated in the Orthodox Church at the following Liturgies:

1. The Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom the usual Liturgy of Sundays and Weekdays.
2. The Liturgy of St. Basil the Great celebrated on the Sundays of Great Lent and certain Feast Days.
3. The Liturgy of St. James the Brother of the Lord celebrated on October 23 (St. James' Day) in certain places only (e.g., Jerusalem).
4. The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts celebrated on Weekdays of Great Lent and Holy Week. (At this Liturgy there is no consecration of the Holy Gifts, but rather Communion is given from the Gifts consecrated on the previous Sunday hence Pre-sanctified.)

The Savior Himself said, I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never

thirst....If any one eats of this bread he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of 'the world is My flesh (John 6:35,51). At the Last Supper, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and give it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body'. And He took a 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 covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins' (Matt. 26:26-28; cf. Mark 14:12-16; Luke 22:7-13; 1 Cor. 11:23-30).

This institution of the Eucharist by our Lord is the means whereby we become united with Christ and with each other as a church, for, as St. Paul says, the goal of every Christian is to grow up in every way into Him Who is the head, into Christ, from Whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied...makes bodily growth and up builds itself in love (Eph. 4:15-16). This is so since Christ is the head of the Church, His body, and is Himself its Savior (Eph. 5:23). We become part of the Mystical Body of Christ by our communion of the Holy Eucharist. As St. Paul says: 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? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

Only by belonging to the Church, or in other words, being in communion with the very essence of Christ through the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, can one attain salvation unto eternal life, thus we can answer the question, Who can be regarded as a member of the Church of Christ? by saying, All those who have been properly baptized in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the true Son of God come in the flesh (1 John 4:2-3), and are united by the grace of the Sacraments in particular the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist administered by the Priesthood of Apostolic Succession.

The unity of all Christian believers in the Holy Eucharist is strongly stressed by the Fathers of the Church. St. Ignatius of Antioch, in his Letter to the Ephesians reminds them that all of you to the last, without exception, through God's grace are united in common faith and in Jesus Christ..., so obey the Bishop and the Presbyters in complete harmony, breaking one bread, this remedy for immortality. Moreover, the Eucharist is not only a testament to the internal and external unity of the Church, but is also the means for strengthening this unity. Therefore St. Ignatius stresses more frequent Communion: Try to gather more often for the Eucharist and glorification of God. For if you gather together often, the forces of Satan are overthrown, and his destructive deeds are wrecked by your single-hearted faith [To the Ephesians].

The union of believers with Christ in the Eucharist is also stressed by St. Cyprian of Carthage who, speaking of the mixing of water and wine in the cup, gives an extended meaning to this mixing: The people are designated by water, the blood of Christ by wine. Mixing water and wine in the cup shows the people's union with Christ, the believers' union with Him in Whom they believe. Water and wine after mixing in the Lord's Cup are so inseparably and closely united that they cannot be separated one from another. In just this way nothing can separate from Christ the Church, that is, the people that make up the Church, firmly and unshakeably abiding in faith and joined by eternal, indivisible love [Letter to Cacaelius].

This is reaffirmed in the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great when, after the blessing of the Holy Gifts, we pray that the Heavenly Father unite us all, as many as are partakers in the one bread and one cup, one with another in communion with the One Holy Spirit. Thus we can say that whereas entrance into the Church begins with Holy Baptism, its fulfillment lies in the Holy Eucharist.

Orthodox Theology sees the Holy Eucharist as a sacrifice and this is affirmed in the words of the Priest, when he says, during the Eucharistic Canon, Thine own of Thine own we offer unto Thee

on behalf of all and for all. The sacrifice offered at the Eucharist is Christ Himself, but He Who brings the sacrifice is also Christ. Christ is, at one and the same time, High Priest and Sacrifice. In the prayer before the Great Entrance, the Priest prays: For Thou art the Offerer and the Offered, the Receiver and the Received, O Christ our God.... This Eucharist is offered to God the Holy Trinity, and so if we ask the threefold question, What is offered? By Whom is it offered? To Whom is it offered? we say in answer, Christ. In addition, the sacrifice is offered on behalf of all and for all, for it is a sacrifice of redemption which is brought for the living and the dead.

According to St. Nicholas Cabasilas, a medieval Orthodox teacher, the Church's understanding of the Eucharist is, as follows: In the first place, the sacrifice is not only an enactment or a symbol, but a real sacrifice. In the second, that which is sacrificed is not bread, but the very Body of Christ. In the third place, the Lamb of God was immolated only once and for all times. The Eucharist sacrifice consists not of the real or blood sacrifice of the Lamb, but in the transformation of bread into the sacrificed Lamb [Commentary on the Divine Liturgy, 32].

According to the Orthodox Church, then, the Eucharist is not just a reminder of Christ's sacrifice or of its enactment, but it is a real sacrifice. On the other hand, however, it is not a new sacrifice, nor a repetition of the Sacrifice of the Cross upon Golgotha. The events of Christ's Sacrifice the Incarnation, the Institution of the Eucharist, the Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension into Heaven, are not repeated during the Eucharist, yet they become a present reality. As one Orthodox theologian has said, During the Liturgy we are projected in time to that place where eternity and time intersect, and then we become the contemporaries of these events that we are calling to mind [P. N. Evdokimov, L'Orthodoxie, p. 241]. Thus the Eucharist and all the Holy Liturgy is, in structure, a sacrificial service.

How all this takes place is a mystery. As Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow wrote in his Longer Catechism, concerning the changing

of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, this none can understand but God; but only this much is signified, that the bread truly, really and substantially becomes the very true Body of the Lord, and the wine the very Blood of the Lord. Furthermore, as St. John of Damascus states, If you enquire how this happens, it is enough for you to learn that it is through the Holy Spirit.... We know nothing more than this, that the Word of God is true, active and omnipotent, but in the manner of operation unsearchable [On the Orthodox Faith, IV, 13].

Concerning the Communion itself, in the Orthodox Church both laity and clergy always receive Communion of both the Body and Blood of Christ. The Communion is given to the laity in a spoon containing a small piece of the Holy Bread together with a portion of the wine, and it is received standing. A strict fast is observed, usually from the night before, and nothing can be eaten or drunk after waking in the morning before Communion. As a theologian of the Church has well put it, You know that those who invite the Emperor to their house, first clean their home. So you, if you want to bring god into your bodily home for the illumination of your life, must first sanctify your body by fasting [Gennadius, Hundred Chapters].

After the final blessing of the Liturgy, the faithful come up to kiss the Hand Cross held by the Priest and those who have not communed receive a small piece of bread, called the Antidoron, which, although blessed, was not consecrated, having been taken from the same bread(s) from which the Lamb was taken in the Proskomedie. This bread is given out as an expression of Christian fellowship and love (agape).

Holy Matrimony

In the theology of the Orthodox Church man is made in the Image of the Most-holy Trinity, and, except in certain special cases (such as monasticism, for example), he is not intended by God to live alone, but in a family situation. Just as God blessed the first

humans, Adam and Eve, to live as a family, to be fruitful and multiply, so too the Church blesses the union of a man and a woman. Marriage, however, is not a state of nature, but is rather a state of grace, and married life is a special vocation (no less than the special calling of monasticism), requiring a gift or charism from the Holy Spirit this gift being conferred in the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony.

That Holy Matrimony has divine sanction comes no less from the words of the Lord Himself, Who says: Have you not read that He Who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh' [Gen. 2:24]. So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder (Matt. 19:5-6).

The Holy Apostle Paul sees this mystical union of husband and wife as reflecting the mystical union of Christ with His Church: Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, His body.... Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her.... Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the Church, because we are members of His body.... This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the Church... (Eph. 5:22-25, 28-30, 32).

The Sacrament of Holy Matrimony consists of two parts: Betrothal and Crowning. The Betrothal is, in some way, the civil act, sanctified by the blessing of the Church. It sanctifies the intention of two persons to enter into the marital union and reflects Old Testament customs, when on those who had expressed their intentions to marry, rings were placed. This exchange of rings in the Office of Betrothal is an outward token that the two partners join in marriage of their own free will and

consent, for without free consent on both sides there can be no Sacrament of Christian marriage.

The Office of Crowning also contains an Old Testament element in the crowning itself, which reflects the ancient practice of placing crowns on the heads of the betrothed. This is the outward and visible sign of the Sacrament, signifying the special grace of the Holy Spirit received by the couple. These crowns are crowns of joy and martyrdom joy for the new union and martyrdom since every true marriage involves immeasurable self-sacrifice on both sides.

In the Greek Churches, the crowns are usually made of leaves and flowers, while in the Russian Church they are usually made of silver or gold. Customarily in the Russian Church the crowns are held over the couples' heads by the best man and maid of honor, but in many places (as in Romania, for example) they are actually worn by the bride and groom.

The Gospel for the day contains the account of the Wedding in Cana in Galilee (John 2:1-11). The blessing, given by God to man in Paradise was renewed by Christ in the New Testament, when, at the beginning of His ministry, He performed the miracle of changing water into wine. Thus, at the end of the Marriage Service the newly-married couple drink from the same cup of wine, which recalls this miracle of Our Lord. The common cup here is also a symbol that henceforth they will share a common life with one another.

Divorce and Remarriage.

The Holy Orthodox Church does, however, permit divorce and remarriage, quoting as her authority the words of the Savior: For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: Whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery (Matt. 19:8-9). Here Our Lord allows an

exception to the indissolubility of marriage, and so, too, the Church is willing to allow an exception.

While in principle the church regards the marriage bond as lifelong and indissoluble, and condemns the breakdown of marriage as a sin and an evil, she still desires to help the sinners and to allow them a second chance. Thus, when a marriage has ceased to be a reality, the Church does not insist on the preservation of a legal fiction. Divorce, therefore, is seen as an exceptional, but necessary concession to human weakness. Yet, while helping men and women to rise again after a fall, the Church does not view a second or third union as being the same as the first and thus, in the ceremony for a second or third marriage, several joyful ceremonies are omitted and replaced by penitential prayers. Orthodox Canon Law permits a second or third marriage, but more than that is strictly forbidden.

When Weddings are Not to be Celebrated.

There are certain times during the year when the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony may not be celebrated. These are:

1. On the Eves of Wednesdays and Fridays throughout the year.
2. On the Eves of Sundays throughout the year.
3. On the Eves of the Twelve Great Feasts, patronal feasts of the parish or monastery, and other great feasts.
4. In all of the Fasts (Great Lent, Apostles' Fast, Dormition Fast and Nativity Fast).
5. From the Nativity of Christ (Dec. 25) through the Synaxis of the Baptist (Jan. 7).
6. During the course of Cheesefare Week (from Sunday of Meatfare through the Sunday of Cheesefare).

7. During the course of Bright Week.

8. On the Day and the Eve of the Beheading of the Baptist (Aug. 29) and the Elevation of the Cross (Sept. 14).

Holy Orders

In the Orthodox Church there are to be found three Major Orders-Bishop. Priest and Deacon and two Minor Orders Subdeacon and Reader (although in ancient times there were other Minor Orders which have now fallen into disuse). The Holy Apostles appointed seven men (Church Tradition calls them Deacons) to perform a special serving ministry (Acts 6:2-6) and in his first Letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul speaks of various ministries in the Church (1 Cor. 12:28). Likewise, he addresses his Letter to the Philippians, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philip pi, with the bishops and deacons (Phil. 1:1). In his first Letter to Timothy, the Holy Apostle also speaks of the qualifications of Bishops and Deacons (1 Tim. 3:1-13), as well as in his Letter to Titus (1.5-9).

Ordinations to the Major Orders always occur during the course of the Divine Liturgy, whereas those to the Minor Orders usually take place during the Hours preceding the Liturgy. Only the Bishop has the power to ordain (although in cases of necessity an Archimandrite or Archpriest, as representative of the Bishop, may be granted permission to ordain a Reader). Because of the collegial nature of the episcopacy, a college of Bishops (at least two or three) are necessary to consecrate another Bishop. And since any ordination requires the consent of the whole people of God, at a particular point in the Service the assembled congregation proclaims Axios! (He is worthy!), showing their assent.

The rite of consecration to the episcopacy is very solemn and the Bishop is ordained in the Sanctuary, in the midst of the Congregation before the singing of the Trisagion (Holy God]. Thus the reading of the Holy Gospel is done already with his blessing.

The Priest is ordained after the singing of the Cherubic Hymn before the sanctification of the Holy Gifts. The rite of ordination to the Diaconate is less solemn and takes place before the singing of the Lord's Prayer, when the sanctification of the Holy Gifts has already taken place, since the Deacon only assists at the performance of the Sacraments and does not perform them. At the conclusion of the Liturgy the Priest goes out to the people in order to read the Prayer Before the Ambo and the Deacon to say the final litany, these actions being the first external signs of their ministry.

In all cases of ordination to the Major Orders, there is a laying-on of hands on the head of the one being ordained and the grace of the Holy Spirit is invoked. Like ordination to the Major Orders, ordination to the Minor Orders also involves a laying-on of hands, but there is no invocation of the Holy Spirit in these ordinations.

Orthodox Priests and Deacons are divided into two distinct groups the married (white or parochial) clergy and the monastic (or black) clergy. The monastic clergy are by nature unmarried, but one seeking ordination to the ranks of the white clergy may now choose to be celibate (unmarried) or married, but must make the choice prior to ordination since, under Orthodox Canon Law, one may not marry after ordination. A celibate Priest or Deacon may not later marry and a married Priest or Deacon whose wife dies may not remarry. Also, one who has been divorced may not be permitted to be ordained. Bishops are drawn exclusively from the ranks of the monastic clergy, although a celibate or widower may be consecrated Bishop after having taken monastic vows. In ancient times married men were permitted to become Bishops (such was the case of St. Peter himself), but such has not been the case since at least the 6th Century.

Ecclesiastical Titles Patriarch.

This is the title borne by the heads of certain autocephalous (self-heading i.e., independent) Churches. At the present time the heads of the Churches of Constantinople, Alexandria (Pope and Patriarch), Antioch, Jerusalem, Russia, Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania bear this title. The heads of the other Churches are entitled Archbishop (i.e., Greece, Albania, Cyprus) or Metropolitan (Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR), Poland, Czechoslovakia and the Orthodox Church in America, OCA). The head of the autocephalous Church of Georgia is entitled the Katholicos.

Metropolitan, Archbishop.

Originally a Metropolitan (from metropolis) was the Bishop of the capital of a province, while Archbishop was a more general title of honor given to Bishops of special eminence (e.g., Bishops of long tenure) the Church of Russia still generally uses these titles in the original way, but the Greek Churches (except Jerusalem) give the title Metropolitan to every Diocesan Bishop and grant the title Archbishop to those who formerly would have been styled Metropolitans. Thus an Archbishop now ranks above a Metropolitan in the Greek Churches, but in the Slavic Churches the rank of Metropolitan is pre-eminent.

Archimandrite.

Originally this title was given to a Monk supervising several monasteries or who was the superior of an especially important monastery. Now it is usually given as a title of honor for distinguished Priestmonks.

Abbot (Hegumen or Igumen).

Originally a Priestmonk who was the Superior of a monastery was entitled Abbot (a practice strictly adhered to by the Greek Church), but in the Russian church, this is more often a title of honor given to Priest-monks. In the Russian Church, an Igumen ranks below an Archimandrite.

Archpriest, Protopresbyter.

These are titles of honor given to non-monastic Priests, and are generally equivalent to that of Archimandrite.

Hieromonk.

A Hieromonk is a Monk who happens to be a Priest.

Hierodeacon.

A Hierodeacon is a monastic Deacon.

Archdeacon.

This is a title of honor given to monastic Deacons usually those attached to a Bishop.

Protodeacon.

This is a title of honor given to non-monastic Deacons usually those attached to cathedrals or to Bishops.

Holy Repentance (Penance Confession).

The Sacrament of Repentance developed early in the Church's history in the time of the persecutions of the 3rd and 4th Centuries, when many people, giving in to the threats of the persecutors, apostasized and fell away from the Church. Apostasy was considered to be a very serious sin; many held the extreme position that such could not be received back into the Church in their lifetime, while others held that those who had lapsed should be re-baptized that is, their sins should be washed away by a second baptism. Moderation, in the course of time, prevailed and a penitential discipline the Sacrament of Repentance developed,

taking on the meaning of Second Baptism; for this reason it was eventually numbered among the Sacraments of the Church.

After the end of the persecutions, the Sacrament of Repentance remained, so that in the event of sins committed after Baptism, forgiveness could be obtained and the sinner reconciled to the Church. This Sacrament acts also as a cure for the healing of a soul, since the Priest also confers spiritual advice to the Penitent.

Since all sin is not only against God, but also against one's neighbor, confession and the penitential discipline in the early Church were a community affair and took place publicly before the whole local Christian community. In time, however, Confession has developed into a private action between the Priest and the Penitent, and the Priest is forbidden to reveal to any third party what he has learned in Confession.

In ancient times, before the beginning of Confession, it was appointed to read an entire series of Psalms from which Psalm 51 has been preserved in the present rite, being known as the Penitential Psalm. Then the Priest reads certain prayers, the first of which recalls King David who repented before Nathan the Prophet when he had caused the death of Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba whom David loved. After being rebuked by Nathan, David confessed, I have sinned against the Lord! Upon hearing David's repentance, Nathan proclaimed God's forgiveness, The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die (2 Sam. 12:13).

After this, begins the second part of the Sacrament the Confession itself before which the Priest speaks of himself as being only a witness, Christ standing invisibly before the Penitent. The Confession itself consists of questions put by the Priest to the Penitent regarding his sins, his attitude towards the Faith, fleshly temptations, thoughts and words. Thoughts are considered to be the beginning of sin, according to the words of the Savior, for in speaking of adultery, for example, He says, I say to you, that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matt. 5:28). The Sacrament of

Confession here aids in revealing these thoughts and the struggle against them that follows.

After the Confession, the Priest may, if he deems necessary, impose a penance, but this is not an essential part of the Sacrament and is often omitted. After this, the Priest lays his Epitrachelion (stole) on the Penitent's head and says the Prayer of Absolution, which differs in the Russian and Greek practices. In the Greek practice, the Priest says: Whatever you have said to my humble person, and whatever you have failed to say, whether through ignorance or forgetfulness, whatever it may be, may God forgive you in this world and the next.... Have no further anxiety; go in peace. The Slavonic formula of absolution, introduced by Peter Moghila, Metropolitan of Kiev and adopted by the Russian Church in the 18th Century, is as follows: May Our Lord and God, Jesus Christ, through the grace and bounties of His love towards mankind, forgive you, my Child [Name] all your transgressions. And I, an unworthy Priest, through the power given me by Him, forgive and absolve you from all yours sins.

In the ancient Church, not all Priests had the right to hear Confessions; special Confessors, often experienced Monks, were entrusted with this responsibility. From the 16th Century, however, it was accepted that every Priest could be a Confessor once he had reached a mature age. In many monasteries an experienced Monk who was not even a Priest was often the Confessor (such is the practice in many places on Mt. Athos), but the Penitent was always sent to a Priest for the Sacramental Absolution. In modern times it is also the custom for a baptized person to begin receiving this Sacrament when he or she reaches the age of moral discernment, usually around the age of six or seven.

Repentance the Road to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Man is weak, and thus sins and falls often, again and again falling into the same pits, driving the soul to utter despair. The urge here is to give in to one's sinful nature and to cease resisting the

powerful forces of sin. There is, however, an answer to this. A disciple came to a certain Elder, one day, and said, Father, I have fallen! The Elder answered, Get up! Again and again he came to the Elder and said, I have fallen! and the Elder invariably answered, Get up! Until when must I continue getting up? the disciple asked, and the Elder answered, Until the day when you give up your soul to God! Thus, every time when we feel that we have fallen, the Sacrament of Repentance tells us to get up.

When one wishes to partake of the Sacrament of Repentance, it is good to consider the meaning of sin and repentance, for sin is what separates us from God. Sin plunges the soul into darkness and we often lose peace, joy, and the courage to address ourselves to the Lord God. According to St. John the Evangelist, If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us (1 John 1:8), for every man sins and falls short before the glory of God.

God, Who reads the heart of man, knows not only our everyday affairs, but also our thoughts and intentions. Everything is open to Him. In response to sin, Our Lord Jesus Christ says, Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand (Matt. 3:2). Thus He expects from us true, heartfelt faith and true, heartfelt repentance. But what does repentance mean and what kind of repentance is agreeable to God and serves for our salvation?

To repent means to be fully aware of our sins and our iniquities and of their consequences of all that is pernicious to man, all that insults God and excludes us from His love, of all that creates discord in family life, in society, and of all that disturbs the soul's peace and tranquility. When we become aware of our sinful state, and consider ourselves at fault before God, then our heart sorrows and is full of contrition. This heartfelt contrition is, according to St. Paul, that godly grief [which] produces a repentance that leads to salvation (2 Cor. 7:10), that is, true repentance. Tears of contrition are the only means of purifying the soul, so that it may rise up, become cleansed, luminous, joyful, capable of good deeds and of attaining perfection.

St. John says that if we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). It is not easy, however, to confess, not easy to mourn over one's iniquities; for each of us has a sense of pride and, sometimes, also a coarse and stony heart that interferes with the sincerity of our repentance before God. Prayer, fasting, and mutual forgiveness, however, soften our hardened hearts and dispose our soul to true repentance. Then, in the Sacrament of Repentance we can, without shame or fear, confess our sins with faith to our Father Confessor, so that nothing vile or unclean should remain in us that could interfere with our lifelong striving to attain with all the Saints to the longed-for Kingdom of Heaven.

The following confession (originally printed in the Athos Paper of 1907, and translated from the Russian) is especially appropriate for all of us to consider before receiving the Sacrament:

A Lament for Sin.

St. Basil the Great says, Weep over your sin: it is a spiritual ailment; it is death to your immortal soul; it deserves ceaseless, unending weeping and crying; let all tears flow for it, and sighing come forth without ceasing from the depths of your heart.

In profound humility I weep for all my sins, voluntary and involuntary, conscious and unconscious, covert and overt, great and little, committed by word and deed, in thought and intention, day and night, at every hour and minute of my life.

I weep over my pride and my ambition, my self-love and my boastfulness;

I weep over my fits of anger, irritation, excessive shouting, swearing, quarreling and cursing;

I weep for having criticized, censured, gossiped, slandered, and defamed, for my wrath, enmity, hatred, envy, jealousy, vengeance and rancor;

I weep over my indulgences in lust, impure thoughts and evil inclinations; covetousness, gluttony, drunkenness, and sloth;

I weep for having talked idly, used foul language, blasphemed, derided, joked, ridiculed, mocked, enjoyed empty gaiety, singing, dancing and every pleasure to excess;

I weep over my self-indulgence, cupidity, love of money and miserliness, unmercifulness and cruelty;

I weep over my laziness, indolence, negligence, love of comfort, weakness, idleness, absent-mindedness, irresponsibility, inattention, love of sleep, for hours spent in idle pursuits, and for my lack of concentration in prayer and in Church, for not observing fasts and not doing charitable works.

I weep over my lack of faith, my doubting, my perplexity, my coldness, my indifference, my weakness and unfeelingness in what concerns the Holy Orthodox Faith, and over all my foul, cunning and reviling thoughts;

I weep over my exaggerated sorrow and grief, depression and despair, and over sins committed willingly.

I weep, but what tears can I find for a worthy and fitting way to weep for all the actions of my ill-fated life; for my immeasurable and profound worthlessness? How can I reveal and expose in all its nakedness each one of my sins, great and small, voluntary and involuntary, conscious and unconscious, overt and covert, every hour and minute of sin? When and where shall I begin my penitential lament that will bear fitting fruit? Perhaps soon I may have to face the last hour of my life; my soul will be painfully sundered from my sinful and vile body; I shall have to stand before terrible demons and radiant angels, who will reveal and

torment me with my sins; and I, in fear and trembling, will be unprepared and unable to give them an answer; the sight and sound of wailing demons, their violent and bold desire to drag me into the bottomless pit of Hell will fill my soul with confusion and terror. And then the angels of God will lead my poor soul to stand before God's fearful seat of judgment. How will I answer the Immortal King, or how will I dare, sinner that I am, to look upon My Judge? Woe is me! I have no good answer to make, for I have spent all my life in indolence and sin, all my hours and minutes in vain thoughts, desires and yearnings!

And how many times have I taken the Name of God in vain!

How often, lightly and freely, at times even boldly, insolently and shamelessly have I slandered others in anger; offended, irritated, mocked them!

How often have I been proud and vainglorious and boasted of good qualities that I do not possess and of deeds that I have not done!

How many times have I lied, deceived, been cunning or flattered, or been insincere and deceptive; how often have I been angry, intolerant and mean!

How many times have I ridiculed the sins of my brother, caused him grief overtly and covertly, mocked or gloated over his misdeeds, his faults or his misfortunes; how many times have I been hostile to him, in anger, hatred or envy!

How often have I laughed stupidly, mocked and derided, spoke without weighing my words, ignorantly and senselessly, and uttered a numberless quantity of cutting, poisonous, insolent, frivolous, vulgar, coarse, brazen words!

How often, affected by beauty, have I fed my mind, my imagination and my heart with voluptuous sensations, and unnaturally satisfied the lusts of the flesh in fantasy! How often

has my tongue uttered shameful, vulgar and blasphemous things about the desires of the flesh!

How often have I yearned for power and been gluttonous, satiating myself on delicacies, on tasty, varied and diverse foods and wines; because of intemperance and lack of self-control how often have I been filled past the point of satiety, lacked sobriety and been drunken, intemperate in food and drink, and broken the Holy Fasts!

How often, through selfishness, pride or false modesty, have I refused help and attention to those in need, been uncharitable, miserly, unsympathetic, mercenary and grasped at attention!

How often have I entered the House of God without fear and trembling, stood there in prayer, frivolous and absent-minded, and left it in the same spirit and disposition! And in prayer at home I have been just as cold and indifferent, praying little, lazily, and indolently, inattentively and impiously, and even completely omitting the appointed prayers!

And in general, how slothful I have been, weakened by indolence and inaction; how many hours of each day have I spent in sleep, how often have I enjoyed voluptuous thoughts in bed and defiled my flesh! How many hours have I spent in empty and futile pastimes and pleasures, in frivolous talk and speech, jokes and laughter, games and fun, and how much time have I wasted conclusively in chatter, and gossip, in criticizing others and reproaching them; how many hours have I spent in time-wasting and emptiness! What shall I answer to the Lord God for every hour and every minute of lost time? In truth, I have wasted my entire life in laziness.

How many times have I lost heart and despaired of my salvation and of God's mercy or through stupid habit, insensitivity, ignorance, insolence, carelessness, and hardness sinned deliberately, willingly, in my right mind, in full awareness, in all goodwill, in both thought and intention, and in deed, and in this

fashion trampled the Blood of God's covenant and crucified anew within myself the Son of God and cursed Him!

O how terrible the punishment that I have drawn upon myself!

How is it that my eyes are not streaming with constant tears? ...If only my tears flowed from the cradle to the grave, at every hour and every minute of my tortured life! Who will now cool my head with water and fill the well of my tears and help me weep over my soul that I have cast into perdition?

My God, my God! Why hast Thou forsaken me? Be it unto me according to Thy will, O Lord! If Thou wouldst grant me light, be Thou blessed; if Thou wouldst grant me darkness, be Thou equally blessed. If Thou wouldst destroy me together with my lawlessness, glory to Thy righteous judgment; and if Thou wouldst not destroy me together with my lawlessness, glory to Thy boundless mercy!

Holy Unction

This Sacrament is described in Holy Scripture by St. James the Brother of the Lord: Is any among you sick? Let him, call for the elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven (James 5:14-15). From the above text, we can see that this Sacrament has a twofold purpose bodily healing and the forgiveness of sins. The two are joined, for man is a unity of body and soul and there can be no sharp distinction between bodily and spiritual sicknesses. Of course, the Church does not believe that this anointing is automatically followed by recovery of health, for God's will and not man's prevails in all instances. Sometimes the sick person is healed and recovers after receiving the Sacrament, but in other cases he does not recover, but the Sacrament, nonetheless, gives him the spiritual strength to prepare for death.

The Sacrament is formally performed by seven Priests, reflecting an ancient practice of performing in the course of seven days, each day having its own prayers, although, if due to necessity, it can be performed by three or even one Priest. At each of the anointings the following prayer is repeated: Holy Father, Physician of souls and bodies, Who sent Thine Only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ Who healed every illness and delivered from death, heal Thy servant from the weakness that holds his/her body, of either body or soul, and enliven him/her by the grace of Thy Christ, by the prayers of the All-holy Lady Theotokos and all the Saints.

Seven Epistle and Gospel readings are said and seven anointings are performed. After the seventh, the open Gospel Book is placed over the head of the one receiving the Sacrament, during which the senior Priest reads the Absolution Prayer containing the following: I do not lay my sinful hands on the head of him who comes...but Thy mighty and powerful hand, which is in the Holy Gospel. This replaces an ancient practice of laying-on of hands.

We must note that this Sacrament is not only for those on their deathbed, but for anyone who is sick. It may also be performed over the healthy as well (as is the custom on Holy Wednesday in many places) and in Greece it is often performed over the healthy before Holy Communion, since the rite also contains elements of repentance, although it should be noted that this does not replace the Sacrament of Penance.

Excerpt taken from "These Truths We Hold - The Holy Orthodox Church: Her Life and Teachings". Compiled and Edited by A Monk of St. Tikhon's Monastery. Copyright 1986 by the St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, South Canaan, Pennsylvania 18459.

Sacraments in the Orthodox Church

