

SUNDAY THEOSIS #3-47

Evolution of the Byzantine Liturgy

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Part IV: Fruits of Holy Communion

To understand the fruits of Holy Communion, as they are expressed in the Byzantine liturgy, we must recall the text of the Epiclesis. It is there that we find the fruits of Holy Communion outlined: "That to those who partake of them, they may be for the purification of the soul, for the remission of sins, for communion in your Holy Spirit, for the fullness of the (heavenly) kingdom, for confidence in you, not for judgment or condemnation."

The first mentioned fruit of Holy Communion is the purification of the soul and the remission of sins. Here we must point out that our translation, purification of the soul, does not correspond to the present Greek text. The reason is that in Greek we have two words with the same pronunciation: *nêpsis*, meaning sobri-

ety or vigilance; and *nipsis*, meaning washing. The present-day liturgical text has "sobriety, vigilance", but it must be an error because of the identical pronunciation. *Nêpsis* ("sobriety, vigilance") is actually a specialized ascetical word, never found in reference to the soul, the principle of organic life, as it appears in this expression: *nêpsis psychês*, "purity of spirit." It refers always to the mind, the *nous*. So in this context, the word should be *nipsis*, referring to a true washing or purification of the soul from every stain of sin, as the first fruit of the eucharist.

In the prayer of preparation for Communion found before the Our Father, a similar petition is directed to God: "... grant us to partake of your heav-



only and awesome mysteries... with a pure conscience, for the remission of sins, for the pardon of transgressions, for communion in the Holy Spirit, for the inheritance of the Kingdom of heaven, for confidence in you, not for judgment or condemnation.” Here we find all the chief fruits of the eucharist repeated in practically the same words as found in the Epiclesis. Above all, we see the petition for remission of sins and pardon of transgressions that corresponds to that of the Epiclesis, confirming our proposal that the text of the anaphora should be understood with the word *nipsis* (“purification”), instead of *nêpsis* (“sobriety”).

Also the Roman Mass asks for the



remission of sins as a fruit of the eucharist: “Deliver me through this, your most holy Body and Blood, from all my iniquities” (*Libera me per hoc sacrosanctum Corpus et Sanguinem tuum ab omnibus iniquitatibus meis...*). And after Communion with the chalice, the priest says, “...grant that no stain of sin may be left in me, now that I am renewed by this pure and holy sacrament” (*...praesta ut in me non remaneat scelorum macula, quem pura et sancta refecerunt sacramenta*).

The remission of sins and our purification are the first fruits of the eucharist, as they were the fruits of Christ’s Blood shed on the Cross; and, at the same time they remove any obstacle to obtaining the central fruit, “the Communion of your Holy Spirit.”

The “Communion of the Holy Spirit”

This phrase comes from St. Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians (13:13): “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” We have already referred to this passage as the source of the solemn greeting that introduces the anaphora.

It should be noted that the genitive case can have a subjective or an objective sense. The English words *the love of God* can mean either the love

that God has for us (God being the subject) or the love that we have for God (God being the object). In Paul's phrase, the genitive is subjective, so that the Holy Spirit is the efficient cause of the communion; the sense would be well expressed by the paraphrase *the communion caused by the Holy Spirit*. If we want a concise translation, perhaps the best one would be *the communion in the Holy Spirit*, as we wrote above.



The Sense of "Communion"

Both St. Paul and St. John use the Greek word *koinonia* in the sense of intimate union, which we translate by communion.

St. John, in his First Epistle (1: 3), says: "That which we have seen and

heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship (*koinonia*) with us; and our fellowship (*koinonia*) is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." So the Christians, by their union with the Apostles, will obtain union with God, Father and Son, through the action of the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul explicitly says.

This union with God is achieved according to St Paul by an adoption of children: "When the time had fully come, God sent forth his son, born

of woman, born under the law ... so that we might receive adoption as children" (Gal. 4: 4-6). And it is the infusion of the Holy Spirit that makes us children of God and brothers of Christ: "All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ... when we cry, 'Abba! Father,' it is the Spirit Him-

self bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8: 14-17).

The Holy Spirit that makes us children of God is sent to the Church by



of the fullness of the Spirit that dwells in him that Christ became a life-giving spirit (I Cor. 15: 45).

To stress the presence of the risen Christ in the eucharist, the Byzantine liturgy added a new ceremony to the ordinary mingling water with the wine in the preparatory

rites before the anaphora. This is the addition of hot water to the consecrated wine just before communion. The priest blesses the boiling water by saying: "Blessed is the warmth of your holy (Gifts)." The warmth can be either the symbol of life or that of the Holy Spirit, meant in St. John's Gospel by the living water; possibly both significations are intended: life given by the Holy Spirit.

Christ, risen from the dead and glorified. He is the Giver of the Spirit, but it is the resurrected Christ we receive in the eucharist, and the permanent gift he pours into us is precisely the Holy Spirit.

To signify that we receive the risen Christ, the Church instituted a special ceremony before Holy Communion in all the liturgies: the commingling of the species of the bread, the Body of Christ, with the species of the wine, the Blood of Christ, symbol of life. As the separation of bread and wine served as a symbol of the Lord's death, so their mingling is a symbol of His resurrection. The Byzantine priest uses this formula when he puts the particle of consecrated bread into the chalice: "The fullness of the Holy Spirit"; for it is because

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