

The Liturgy is a Spiritual Mystery

By: His Grace, Bishop JOSEPH

By living the Liturgical life in its fullness, we receive the Spirit of our Lord and God Jesus Christ, and thus we become sharers in His divinity, and in His uncreated energies. When we partake of His flesh and blood with purified hearts, we become fully embedded and related to Him, for “We are bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.”

If we are truly united to Him spiritually, we become one spirit with Him, and also one body, because physically we eat His body and we drink His blood. Outside the Liturgical life, we can not find anything anywhere that expresses this deep spiritually, even if we explore all creation.

Our Liturgical services are the link to the uncreated. Even the words which we hear at the Divine Services are prepared for those who love Him and love their brothers, as they confess Him with one accord “ὁμονία ὁμόνοια,” i.e., one νοῦς. They are not confined to a text read mechanically, or repeated halfheartedly, or unintelligibly, but they are expressions of the uncreated.

To strengthen our faith, let us hear the words of our Lord Himself who said to the Jews and His own disciples: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth in me shall never thirst.... I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world....He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. (John 6: 32-56)

In the Liturgy, Jesus reveals Himself and gives Himself as the true Bread of Life. The manna was just a type, and not the very truth itself. Leading them on little by little, our Lord first prepared their mouths to taste His bread and His blood. He gave them lesser things to entice us to come and receive His Supreme Gift, which is priceless.

When they heard this, the people, however, replied, “Give us this bread to eat.” Thinking that it was something material, they expected to satisfy their carnal appetites.

For this reason, He says, “The bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

The Bread of God is Our Liturgical Bread, because He Is Our Life. Tertullian says that “Christ is our Bread, because Christ is Life, and bread is life.” The only begotten of God the Father is

the true manna, the bread from heaven, given to all rational creatures by God the Father in the Divine Liturgy.

Once we receive, in the Holy Mysteries, grace upon grace, we become like the grace which we receive. In the Liturgical life, we are restored and renewed in our souls, and ultimately we become incorruptible, and we live as resurrected from the dead.

By eating of this bread of life, we Christians are now given power over death, and eternal life. Through the descent of the Holy Spirit, Christ preserves us for incorruption, as we partake of the Divine Mystery. The bread of Christ remains the food of saints, making us partakers of His resurrection.

Saint Ignatius of Antioch: “Do not talk about Jesus Christ while you desire the world. Do not let envy dwell among you. . . . I take no pleasure in corruptible food or the pleasures of this life. I want the bread of God, which is the flesh of Christ who is of the seed of David; and for drink, I want His blood, which is incorruptible love. Epistle to the Romans 7.1

The Liturgy does not give corruptible things, but rather that blessing in the participation of His holy flesh and blood that restores humanity wholly to incorruption. The holy body of Christ gives life to those who partake thereof, granting incorruption, inasmuch as it is commingled with our bodies.

Our role is, first to see with the eyes of the mind νοῦς that this bread even though is small parcel, is changed into God and becomes the bread which comes down from heaven. Since our God is real, so that bread and drink are real and are able to grant eternal life. If we look at the Eucharist as only visible bread, and not the heavenly bread, we will be deprived of life, and we will remain dead in our sins.

Listen to what the Lord says now: “Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood remains in Me and I in him.” When this is achieved, we become spiritually baptized by the Holy Spirit, and we become children of God. The Incarnate Word dwells in us like light through our participation in his immaculate body and precious blood, then we behold His Divine glory.