

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” (Ps 23:5)

✠ Lecture XI: The Sacrament of The Eucharist ✠

In the Sacrament of the Eucharist, believers eat Lord Jesus Christ’s Holy Body and drink His precious Blood under the physical appearance of bread and wine. This Sacrament is called the Sacrament of all Sacraments and/or the crown of the Sacraments. In the Coptic Orthodox Church, no Sacrament is to be administered (on the same day) after the person has partaken from Holy Communion.

✠ Institution of the Sacrament:

Our Lord instituted this Sacrament on Covenant Thursday, just a few hours before His arrest and trial. After He had washed the feet of the disciples as a sign of their repentance and preparation, “He took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body.’ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins’” (**Mt 26:26-28**)

St. Paul said, “The Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and 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.’ In 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.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes” (**1 Cor 11:23-26**)

✠ Symbols of the Eucharist in the Old Testament:

- The offering of Melchizedek (bread & wine) was a symbol of this Holy Sacrament, “Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High” (**Gen 14:18**). This is the first verse in Holy Scripture where the word “priest” was used and it is interesting to notice the connection between the priesthood of Melchizedek and the offering of bread and wine. Therefore, it was said about our Lord, “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (**Ps 110:4; Heb 5:6**)
- The Passover lamb that the children of Israel offered on the night of their exodus from Egypt, and which they used to offer every year thereafter was a symbol of this Sacrament “For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (**1 Cor 5:7**)
- The manna that the children of Israel ate in the wilderness of Sinai for forty years was a symbol of the Sacrament of Eucharist. Our Lord said, “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” (**Jn 6:58**) – “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” (**Jn 6:51**)

✠ The Question of the Real Presence:

Our Lord spoke about this Sacrament openly to the Jews but they “quarreled among themselves saying, ‘How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?’” (**Jn 6:52**). Moreover, **many** of the disciples protested saying, “This is a hard saying; who can understand it?” (**Jn 6:60**). When Lord Jesus explicitly emphasized His real presence in the Sacrament, it was written, “many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more” (**Jn 6:66**)

→ The question of the real presence is of considerable importance in relation to the differences, which have emerged within Christianity since the time of the so-called ‘Reformation’. A particularly important witness to the early Christian understanding of this Sacrament is provided by the ‘Catechetical lectures’ of St. Cyril of Jerusalem. This series of 24 lectures of instruction on the beliefs and practices of the Christian Church, given at some point around 350 AD to those preparing for baptism, are an important witness to the ideas that prevailed in the Jerusalem Church around this point. It is clear that St. Cyril regarded the bread and wine as becoming the real body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ:

- “[Jesus Christ], by his own will, once changed water into wine at Cana of Galilee. So why should we not believe that he can change wine into blood? ... We should therefore have full assurance that we are sharing in the body and blood of Christ. For in the type of bread, his body is given to you, and in the type of wine, his blood is given to you, so that by partaking of the body and blood of Christ you may become of one body and one blood with Him.” (St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

St. John of Damascus wrote the following about the question of **how** this transformation of the bread and wine takes place:

- “And now you ask how the bread becomes the body of Christ, and the wine and the water become the blood of Christ. I shall tell you. The Holy Spirit comes upon them, and achieves things which surpass every word and thought ... Let it be enough for you to understand that this takes place by the Holy Spirit” (St. John of Damascus).

✚ **Benefits of the Sacrament:**

- **Abiding in Lord Jesus Christ:** “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him” (**Jn 6:56**). Consequently we bear the fruits of the spirit, “He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (**Jn 15:5**)
- **Obtaining Eternal Life:** “Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day... He who eats this bread will live forever” (**Jn 6:54,58**)
- **Growth & Maintenance of Our Spiritual Life:** “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you... For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed... he who feeds on Me will live because of Me” (**Jn 6:53,55,57**)
- **Salvation & Remission of Sins:** “This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (**Mt 26:28**)
- **Unification of Believers:** “For we, being many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread” (**1 Cor 10:17**)

✚ **Consequences of Unworthy Communion:**

- St. Paul said, “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. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning (recognizing clearly) the Lord’s body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep (die). For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.” (**1 Cor 11:27-31**)

✚ **The Meaning of Worthiness:**

- **Orthodox Faith:** The person who approaches the Eucharist must be an Orthodox Christian having no doubt concerning the bread & wine being the true body and precious blood of Lord Jesus Christ.
- **Repentance & Confession:** The person must be practicing the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession on regular basis as St. Paul said, “let a man examine himself” (**1 Cor 11:28**)
- **Reconciliation With Others:** Lord Jesus Christ said, “If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come offer your gift” (**Mt 5:23-24**)
- **True Worthiness is Feeling Unworthy:** St. Paul, the meek and humble apostle said, “I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this” (**1 Cor 4:4**)
- **Obedying The Church Rules:** concerning food abstinence before communion, physical cleanliness, and early attendance of the liturgy.

✠ The Eucharist as a Sacrifice:

The Orthodox Church believes and confesses that the Eucharist is a sacrifice and an offering to God in addition to being a Sacrament. The following supports this belief:

- The words of Lord Jesus Christ Himself, “This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many” (Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24) – “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you” (Lk 22:20) – “This is My body which is broken for you” (1 Cor 11:24) – “This is My body which is given for you” (Lk 22:19). Undoubtedly, the terms “broken body” and “shed blood” refer to a sacrifice.
- The presence of an altar in the Church confirms that the Eucharist is a sacrifice. St. Paul said, “We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle (Jews) have no right to eat” (Heb 13:10). Isaiah the Prophet said, “In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt” (Is 19:19), this is a specific prophecy about the Coptic (Egyptian) Church which proves the presence of altars in the Christian era and consequently the presence of a sacrifice (the Eucharist).
- Malachi the Prophet prophesied about the New Testament offering saying, “I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, nor will I accept an offering from your hands. For from the rising of the sun even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; In every place incense shall be offered to My name, **and a pure offering**; For My name shall be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts” (Mal 1:10-11). This “pure offering” is nothing but the Eucharistic offering that Christians offer on their altars, for at which point in history did the Gentiles “in every place” offer an offering to the Lord?
- St. Paul said, “Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idol is anything (else)? Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord’s table and the table of demons” (1 Cor 10:18-21). The apostle is comparing the table (altar) of the Lord to the altar of the pagans upon which unacceptable demonic sacrifices were offered, which proves that the Eucharist that is offered on the Christian altar is indeed a sacrifice.

✠ The Sacrifice of the Cross & the Sacrifice of the Eucharist:

- **The Cross:** -The Holy Body & Precious Blood were offered visibly.
- **The Eucharist:** -The Holy Body & Precious Blood are offered Sacramentally as bread & wine.
- **The Cross:** -Offered by Lord Jesus Christ as the Chief High Priest.
- **The Eucharist:** -Offered by the New Testament Priests (according to the order of Melchizedek)
- **The Cross:** -The lamb (Lord Jesus Christ) was slain, His blood was shed, and He died.
- **The Eucharist:** -No shedding of blood and no death. Hence is called “bloodless sacrifice.”
- **The Cross:** -Offered once on Good Friday.
- **The Eucharist:** -Offered several times from it’s institution till the second coming of the Lord.

✠ FAQ:

Q1: Why don’t we allow Protestants to take communion in our Churches?

A1: The Didache or “the teaching of the 12 apostles” is a manuscript, which was used by 2nd century bishops and priests for the instruction of the catechumens. Many early Church Fathers have referenced it making this document relatively easy to date. It states: “Let no one eat or drink of your Eucharist but those baptized in the name of the Lord; to this, too the saying of the Lord is applicable, ‘Do not give what is holy to the dogs’” (Mt 7:6). St. Paul forbade the Jews from taking communion, “We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat” (Heb 13:10). The Church is actually **protecting** those groups from the judgment of taking communion in an unworthy manner. How can the Church allow a protestant, who denies the real presence of the Lord in the Eucharist, to take communion?

Q2: Why don't we allow Roman Catholics to take communion in our Churches?

A2: There are many theological and dogmatic differences between us and the Roman Catholic Church and we are not in full communion with them until these issues are resolved. Allowing a Roman Catholic to receive the Eucharist would imply a oneness which does not yet exist and for which we must all pray. Moreover, this person has access to the Holy Body and Precious Blood in his/her Roman Catholic Church.

Q3: Why doesn't the Church allow us to take communion in a Protestant service?

A3: Believe it or not, Protestantism has drifted away from the Truth. St. Paul explained that the devil is the author of all heresies, he said, "For such are false apostles [heretics], deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers [the heretics] transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works" (2 Cor 11:13-15). He also called the heresies "doctrines of demons" (1 Tim 4:1) Now, with this in mind, "you cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons." (1 Cor 10:21)

Q4: Are we repeating the sacrifice of the cross during the Eucharist?

A4: Absolutely not. The sacrifice of the cross cannot be repeated, "Christ was offered **once** to bear the sins of many" (Heb 9:28). Therefore, we said that in the Eucharist there is no death and hence it is called "bloodless sacrifice". We do not repeat the sacrifice of the cross but we **recall** it. The Eucharist takes us through the time to Calvary where we actually come in contact with the true body that was offered and precious blood that was shed on our behalf, it is **the same sacrifice not a repetition**. In fact this is the meaning of the Lord's words, "Do this in remembrance of Me". For example, the children of Israel celebrated the Passover every year but the exodus from Egypt took place once; they did not repeat the exodus but rather recalled it.

* This lecture is adapted from 'The Church Sacraments' by Archdeacon Habib Guirgess.