

Coptic Orthodox
Diocese of the Southern United States

RIT 102
RITUALS OF THE SACRAMENTS

Servants' Preparation Program
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THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

SACRAMENT: Literally, a "mystery." A sacrament is a way in which God imparts grace to His people. Orthodox Christians frequently speak of seven sacraments, but God's gift of grace is not limited only to these seven—the entire life of the Church is mystical and sacramental. The sacraments were instituted by Christ Himself (John 1:16, 17). The seven mysteries are : baptism (Matt. 28:18-20; Rom. 6:4; Gal. 3:27), Chrismation (Acts 8:15-17; 1 John 2:27), The Holy Eucharist (Matt. 26:26-28; John 6:30-58; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:23-31), Repentance & Confession(John 20:22, 23; 1 John 1:8, 9), Priesthood (Ordination) (Mark 3:14; Acts 1:15-26; 6:1-6; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; 4:14), Marriage (Gen. 2:18-25; Eph. 5:22-33), and Healing or Unction (Luke 9:1-6; James 5:14, 15).

The Purpose of Holy Baptism:

To remove the consequences of the 'original sin'. To wash away all other sins committed before the time of Baptism if the person is beyond the age of infancy. To unite the person to "The Body of Christ" (that is, the Church), and to open the door of salvation and eternal life to him or her.

The Institution of the Sacrament of Baptism

It was the Lord Jesus who instituted Baptism. "**He who believes and is baptised will be saved**" (Mark 16:16). "**Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...**" (Matthew 28:19). "**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). The great model of our baptism, then, is the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan.

Explanation of the Ceremony:

The Water Liturgy:

It is the first thing to be done by the priest and it should be attended by the person who is to be baptized (and his parents if a child).

The use of water is based upon the commandment of the Lord "to be born again of water and Spirit" and also as St.Peter explained in his first Epistle: "...in the days of Noah, while *the* ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight

souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism..." 1 Pet.3:20-21

The priest sanctifies the water through the prayers and Bible readings and finally by pouring the Holy Oil of Mayroon to give the water the power of the Holy Spirit so that it can "cleanse from sins" not only the filth of the flesh and be able to give the new birth from "water and Spirit " as the Lord said.

The absolution for the mother:

It is the special prayer for the mother when she brings her baby to be baptized, and the church here prays for the mother so that she will be purified from all her sins and be worthy to partake of the Holy Eucharist. (always the birth of a baby is a reminder to the woman of the original sin and how God punished her with the pains of labor and also as God ordered all the women to stay away for a time after the birth and not to touch the Holies of the Lord until she is clean from any product of the labour processe.).

After this prayer , the priest anoints the mother and allows her to partake of the Holy Mysteries.

The Prayers of the Holy Baptism:

From now on the prayers started to be directed toward the person to be baptized (or the Baby) and here the priest asking the Lord to uproot all the evil from his heart and prepare him to be a Holy Sanctuary for the Holy Spirit.

During these prayers , the priest anoint the person with the plain oil in his head , hands , heart and back and recite many prayers and supplications so that the Lord grant him the open heart and mind to keep and understand the Holy words.

The Exorcism or renouncing Satan:

The purpose of Baptism is to bring the person into the Church. To enter into the temple of God is to be with Christ, to become a member of His body. The Priest then calls upon the sponsor to renounce the devil and all his works on behalf of the child: "**I renounce you Satan, and all your works, and all your services... I renounce you , I renounce you , I renounce you.**" The exorcisms announce the forthcoming Baptism as an act of victory. The renouncing of Satan is done facing west because the west is where the sun disappears, and was regarded by the ancient Greeks as the place of the gates of Hades. Then the priest faces east whence the light of the sun rises and asks the

godparent to accept for the child Him who is the Light of the World: **"I accept you Christ..."** The renunciation of Satan and the union with Christ express our faith that the newly-baptized child has been transferred from one master to another, from Satan to Christ, from death to life.

The Creed

The godparent is then asked to confess faith in Christ on behalf of the infant and reads the confession of faith contained in the Nicene Creed. The Creed was a symbol or sign of recognition among the early Christians; it was like a password that distinguished the true members of God's family. By reading the Creed the godparent confesses the true faith that will be passed on to the infant in time.

The Anointing with the Oil of joy (Ghalilawen):

Right after renouncing Satan and confessing the Christian faith, the priest anoints the infant with Ghalilawen oil which is a semi-product of Mayroon synthesis symbolizing the implantation in the Holy church of God reminding us with what St. Paul has mentioned in his Epistle to the Romans: "and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree..." (Romans 11:17). Also like the chosen ones of God (kings and priests and prophets), were to be anointed in their ordination.

The Naked Infant

The infant is baptized in its naked state to denote that just as we came out of our mother's womb naked so we emerge naked out of the womb of God - the baptismal Font. The removal of all clothes also signifies the putting off the 'old man' which will be cast off entirely through Baptism.

Immersion into the Baptismal Font

In obedience to Christ's words, the Priest Baptizes the child with the words, **"I baptize you (name) in the name of the Father. Amen. And of the Son, Amen. And of the Holy Spirit, Amen"**. At each invocation the Priest immerses and then raises the infant up again while breathing gently in his face. After the Baptism is completed, the Priest places the child in a new linen sheet (towel) held by the Godparent.

The Sponsor or Godparent

The use of sponsors in Baptism dates back to the days when Christians were persecuted by the Roman Emperor Nero. Parents were often massacred during these persecutions. Thus sponsors were provided to instruct the children in the Christian faith in the event the parents were martyred. The godparent promises

to see to it that the child is raised and educated in the Orthodox Christian faith. For this reason, it is important that godparents be chosen not for social reasons, but because they are persons who love God and His Church. Sponsors must be Orthodox Christians in good standing with the Church, otherwise they will not be able to bring up the child in a faith that is not theirs.

New Clothes

Following the Sacrament of Chrismation the Priest then invests the newly Baptized child in a new robe or garment, saying: "**The garment of Eternal and immortal life Amen.**"

The new clothes signify the entirely new life that we receive after we are "buried with Jesus in His death" (Romans 6:4). Traditionally, the new white garment expresses the purity of the soul that has been washed from sin. It recalls also the shining robe in which Christ appeared at the Transfiguration. There is now a likeness between the one baptized and the transfigured Lord. St. Paul calls it a putting on of Christ: "**For as many of you as have been baptized in Christ, have put on Christ**" ([Galatians 3:26-27](#)). "**Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold the new has come**" ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#)).

The red ribbon and crown:

Right after putting on the white garment, the priest encircles the baptized infant with a red ribbon (usually it takes the shape of a cross from the back)...it reminds us with the Precious blood of Lord Jesus by whom we were saved. And as the blood of the Passover lamb was marking the houses of the Israelites to save them, so also the Blood of Jesus is the mean and sign of our deliverance.

Then a crown is to be put over the head of the child symbolizing his belonging to the heavens and his victory over death. (it is not a common practice nowadays.)

The commandment for the parents:

It is the most important part for the parents of the child...the church here urges them to remember the excellence of the mystery that their child had received and also keep reminding them of their duties concerning this new member of Christ's Body and how to raise him in a Godly manner.

Discharging the Baptismal water:

The last thing is the prayer upon the water to be returned back to its original nature (simple water) so that we can get rid of it...usually the Baptismal font drains its water to the outside ground or running water(not the regular swege).

The priest prays, "We ask and entreat Your goodness, O Philanthropic One, O Lord, to return this water to its first nature to be restored to the earth..."

Then he opens the plug below the Baptismal font so all the water trickles into the reservoir in the ground. Thus the Baptismal rite ends.

Questions about Baptism:

1- Why we baptize by emersion and for three times?

The three immersions in Baptism is in the name of the Holy Trinity : The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, for the Lord Jesus taught His saintly disciples, *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you"* (Matthew 28:19,20).

As Baptism is death with Christ and resurrection with Him, through it the believer is granted the blessings of salvation that is accomplished by the death of Christ on the Cross, and as Christ died and was buried for three days, so also immersion of the baptized occurs three times in the Baptismal water, then the child immerges from the Baptismal font as Christ the Lord came out of the tomb. *"Buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead"* (Colossians 2:12).

2-Why we baptize infants and children?

(1) We are concerned about the eternal life of children because the Lord says: *"...unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God"* (John.3: 5).

(2) Through baptism, little children are given the opportunity to practice the life of the Church and enjoy the divine Sacraments therein together with all their efficacious. They can also enjoy all the means of Grace in the Church and their effects on their lives.

(3) Those who deny infant baptism are in fact denying the necessity of baptism for salvation (Mark. 16:16); because if they believe in the necessity of baptism for salvation, it would be a serious matter to deprive little children of salvation.

(4) We baptize little children because the Holy Bible indicates this. The Holy Bible mentions baptisms of whole families or of a person with his entire household, and there is no doubt that there must have been children in those families.

The following are a few of numerous examples:

(a) The baptism of the jailer at Philippi: St. Paul and St. Silas said to him: *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household"* (Acts 16: 31).

(b) In the event of baptising Lydia, the dealer of purple cloth, it is written: *"And when she and her household were baptized"* (Acts 16: 15).

(c) St. Paul the Apostle said: *"Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas"* (1Cor.1: 16).

(5) Circumcision in the Old Testament symbolized baptism as we have previously explained. The circumcised was considered a member of God's people according to the covenant between

God and Abraham (Gen.17: 11). It is known that circumcision was to be done on the eighth day after birth, according to God's command (Gen.17: 12).

(6) The crossing of the Red Sea was a symbol of baptism or a baptism itself as St. Paul the Apostle explained in (1Cor.10: 2). It represented salvation from the slavery of death, Satan and sin. What was the position of the little children who were carried by their mothers and fathers across the Sea? Of course they received salvation from slavery; they were baptized, not on their own faith but on the faith of their parents.

3- How was the penitent thief saved without baptism?

We say that this thief received the best baptism after whose example we all wish to be baptized. What is baptism but dying with Christ, as our teacher St. Paul says (Rom.6)? The Penitent Thief actually died with Christ and his death became a baptism. Similarly is the baptism by blood attributed to the martyrs who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and were killed at the time of persecution before they had received the grace of baptism by water. Their death became a baptism because they died with Christ like the Penitent Thief.

All the lecture is quoted (with some modifications) from:

✠ *SACRAMENTAL RITES IN THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH “
His Grace Bishop Mettaous”*

✠ *ORTHODOX CATECHISM Basic Teachings of the Orthodox Faith
By Metropolitan Archbishop Sotirios
A publication of The Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Toronto (Canada)*

SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION

The Sacrament of Myron, also known as the Holy Anointment, or the Sacrament of Confirmation, or Chrismation, is a holy Sacrament, with which we receive the seal of the Holy Spirit. The word 'Myron' is a Greek word which means 'ointment' or 'fragrant perfume'.

The Lord Jesus instituted it when He said: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water". But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom these believing in Him would receive, for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:37-39).

Confirmation is not only a God-sent sacrament, but also is based on the practice of the apostles whereby they would place their hands on those who had believed and had been baptized so that by the laying on of the Apostles hands these would receive the Holy Spirit. The two Scriptural passages that support this practice are as follows: "Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit," and "when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them" (Acts 8:17;19:6). There is no doubt then that the sacrament of Confirmation is God-sent and is an apostolic practice.

Confirmation is done immediately after baptism. In the past, in its attempt to closely follow the practice of the apostles, the Church practiced Confirmation performed by the Bishop. Because this was not always possible, the Church established the custom of preparing the Holy Chrism to be used by the priests. The Myron oil consists of about 30 kinds of spices and perfumes which have been added to pure olive oil and simmered four times. The filtered oil is then poured into a large container and after the Liturgy of the Sanctification of the Myron, the Patriarch places the old leaven in the Myron recently made, whilst saying certain prayers.

The rites of the sacrament:

The priest anoints the babe with the Holy oil in 36 spots as follow:

- ✠ 8 SPOTS ON THE FACE:** forehead, 2 nostrils, mouth, right ear, right eye, left eye, and left ear. (Shape of cross on the face).

- ✠ 4 SPOTS ON THE TRUNK:** heart (upper chest), stomach (navel), upper back, and lower back.

✠ **6 SPOTS ON THE RIGHT ARM: 2 front and back of the shoulder, 2 front and back of the elbow and 2 fronts and back of the wrist.**

✠ **6 SPOTS ON THE LEFT ARM: the same as before**

✠ **6 SPOTS ON THE RIGHT LEG : 2 front and back of the hip, 2 front and back of the knee and 2 front and back of the foot.**

✠ **6 SPOTS ON THE LEFT LEG: the same as before.**

Those 36 anointments or crosses are very important part of the ritual itself. It is to make sure that the whole body is sanctified to be a Holy temple for the Holy Spirit to dwell in.

There is also a spiritual meaning behind these anointments:

✠ *Anointing the face all around is to sanctify the senses of the person...forehead to sanctify the mind and thoughts.*

✠ *Nose is to sanctify the smell.*

✠ *Ears are to sanctify hearing.*

✠ *Eyes are to sanctify vision.*

We can see the importance of anointing all these parts so the church has to make sure that all the senses of the child is being sanctified to God and the child will be able to keep his senses pure by the grace of the Holy Spirit that dwells in him.

+ Anointing the heart and back is also important as the Psalmist prayed, "Create in me a pure heart O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10), and, "Examine me O Lord and prove me. Try my mind and my heart" (Psalm 26:2).

Also the wise King Solomon advises us saying, "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23).

+ Anointing the hands is important, as they are instruments of work and contain the sense of touch. We should keep our hands pure from all things that may defile; from touching things that are impure, from partaking in ungodly deeds, from taking part in murder, stealing, and so on.

+ Anointing the areas of the hip joints: these are sensitive parts of the body, for near the inner hips lies the reproductive organs, and the church anoints this area so that the child may lead a life of purity. The sexual organs are called the holy of Holies of the body, and so keeping them pure is required. Through the anointing of the Myron, these organs are protected from sexual immorality, which greatly angers God.

God destroyed the old world because of their profanity, through wiping them out by the flood. Likewise, He burnt the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and judged them to become an example of the fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries, "Those who died in the plague were twenty four thousand" (Numbers 25:9). For this reason, St. Paul our teacher advises every youth saying, "Keep yourself pure" (1 Timothy 5:22), for without holiness no one can see the Lord.

+Anointing the feet is to protect them from walking in the way of sin, and from going to corrupt places. Avoiding the way of sin will enable us to live a virtuous life, and finally gain eternal life

After finishing the anointments, the priest places his hand on the child's head, saying, "May you be blessed by the blessings of the heavenly, and the blessings of the angels. May the Lord Jesus Christ bless you in His name...After that he breathes into the face of the child while saying "receive the Holy Spirit and be a pure vessel..."

In case of giving this Sacrament to an adult, the priest only anoints the exposed parts of his or her body (the face, the neck and the hands.)

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SACRAMENT OF REPENTANCE AND CONFESSION

The Sacrament of Repentance and Confession is a holy sacrament, by which the sinner returns to God, confessing his sins before the priest to be absolved by the priest through the authority granted to him by God. By this absolution the confessing person is granted the forgiveness of those sins which he confessed.

In order to understand how the sacrament should be performed we need not look further than the meaning of the words repentance and confession. Repentance means a changing of the mind, of thoughts, attitudes, and feelings. It is a recognition of the responsibility and the guilt for committed sins, but also of man's sinful nature. This recognition must be followed by a willingness to change our ways, yet even this is not enough. This attitude needs to be accompanied by a continual will and effort not to remain in a state of sin, but to continue in the sphere of grace, to live in a state of righteousness, and to climb continually to the spiritual ladder that never ends. This is why repentance is not a momentary matter. It is a way of life. It is a progressive state. This element is totally necessary for the forgiveness of sins, cleansing, purification, justification, sanctification, and glory.

Confession means that what a man has in his heart, he reveals to the representative of Christ, the Bishop or the Priest--whatever wrong he has done, whatever evil thing he has thought--all this is a necessary element for the forgiveness of sins. How can the Priest forgive if he does not know? And how can it be true repentance without confession?

Instituting the Sacrament of Confession

Our Lord Jesus Christ founded the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession when He said to His disciples, the pure apostles: “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth, will be loosed in heaven” **(Matthew 18:18).**

Also, after the Resurrection the Lord said : “‘As the Father sent me, I also send you.’ And when He said this He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them, if you retain the sins of any they are retained’” **(John 20:21-23).**

By this He gave them the authority of binding sins or loosing them, through the authority given to them by the Holy Spirit, and according to the contriteness of the confessing person.

The Necessity of Confessing to a Priest

From a humane perspective ...

Human beings by nature require comfort and wise counseling, and the need to speak to someone regarding problems or worries. They feel the need to have someone share their joys as well as their sorrows, and this is especially so when disclosing sensitive issues to a person who is a priest, a confession father, a teacher, or a guardian; one who keeps secrets, and has a nurturing nature.

From the Old Testament perspective ...

Confession was a necessary act for the repentance of a sinner who brought the sacrifice, laid his hand on its head and confessed his sins to God before the priest. The priest then took the sacrifice and slaughtered it, offering it onto the altar of burnt sacrifice as an atonement for sin. The Lord said: *“If a person sins or touches any unclean thing ... or if a person swears ... he shall confess that he has sinned in that thing, and he shall bring his trespass offering to the Lord for his sin which he has sinned ..., so the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his sin”* (Levi.5:1-6). Hence, the sinner is obliged to confess all his trespasses.

When David the King sinned and committed adultery and murder, his conscience did not rebuke him and the Lord sent Nathan to him who persuaded David to confess saying, *“I have sinned against the Lord”, so Nathan the prophet said to David, ‘The Lord also has put away your sin, you shall not die’* (2 Samuel 12). *“Then Nathan declared to David the divine punishment for his sins. The Lord will strike his child and the child would die, the sword shall never depart from your house. I will raise up adversity against you from your own house, and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of the sun”* (2 Samuel 12), *“and the child died and when Absalom rebelled against his father, he did what the Lord said exactly”* (2 Samuel 16:2-22).

It is worth mentioning that the sins David committed against Bathsheba and her husband Uriah the Hittite was considered by God as personally committed towards Him, as Nathan said: *“Why have you despised the commandment of the Lord and do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife”* (2 Samuel 12).

When David confessed to Nathan the prophet, he heard the declaration of putting away his sin and that he would not die the eternal death or perish because of it,

but certain punishments were imposed on him, necessary for repentance. Solomon said: *“He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy”* (Proverbs 28:13).

From the New Testament perspective ...

John the Baptist preached repentance saying, “Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand ... then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins” **(Matthew 3:1-6)**.

The Lord Jesus Christ gave the authority to the Apostles and their successors by saying, “Assuredly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” **(Matthew 18:18)**, and after His resurrection, “He breathed on them and said to them, ‘As the Father sent me, I also send you. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven, if you retain the sins of any, they are retained’” **(John 20:21,22)**.

The book of Acts tells us that the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession was practiced during the days of the Apostles : *“And many who had believed came, confessing and telling their deeds”* **(Acts 19:18)**.

Our teacher St. James advises us: *“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed”* **(John 5:16)**.

From the church fathers perspective...

St. Athanasius the Apostolic said, *“As the Baptized is enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, by means of the priest, the repentant is granted forgiveness of his sins by the grace of Christ, also through the priest.”*

And St. Augustine said, “The Lord Jesus Christ rose Lazarus from the death and those around him (the apostles) loosed him from the grave clothes that bound him.” Was the Giver of life unable to loosen the grave clothes? By loosening them, the apostles denoted their authority of absolving and forgiving sins, which the Lord granted to them and their successors.

St. Gregory of Nyssa said : “Regard the church priest as a spiritual father for you, reveal to him your secrets openly, just as a patient reveals his hidden wounds to the physician, and so is healed.”

It is mentioned in the Apostolic Orders, “You must honor your spiritual fathers as they are given the authority of life and death from God, to judge the sinners and punish them, or to absolve the repentants from their sins.”

STEPS NECESSARY FOR AN ACCEPTABLE CONFESSION

True repentance because of our love for God, and not for fear of punishment (the most important step in confession).

To have honest intention and steadfast will, and so abandon sin and its causes.

To examine our conscience and self carefully, to be aware of the sins committed by deed or word or thought or senses,

To be truthful in confession, knowing that lying to the confession-father is lying to the Holy Spirit. As in the example of Ananias lying to St Peter : *“Why has Satan filled your heart to be lying to the Holy Spirit?”* (Act 5:3).

Not to hide any secrets and hidden thoughts, but to reveal all frankly before the priest to enable him to offer the best remedy in order to build and revive the spiritual life of the confessing person. Jeremiah the prophet speaks to the human soul saying: *“Pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord”* (Lamentations 2:19). When water is poured forth, it leaves no trace or smell, but if oil is poured it leaves behind a trace, and if vinegar is poured, it leaves behind a smell. So just like water which leaves behind no residue, we also should pour forth all our confessions before the priest in order to be cleansed.

Not to find excuses for yourself, and blame others, for confession is about blaming yourself for the sins committed, and not condemning others. King Solomon advises us: *“Do not say before the messenger (Priest) of God that it was an error”* (Ecclesiastes 5:6).

A person must be fair with oneself, not too sympathetic nor too harsh, doubtful or anxious, but rather, should confess with a straightforward, mature conscience.

The confessor must adhere to the advice given them by their confession father, and be diligent in following his advice as a remedy necessary for spiritual life.

To practice all the spiritual exercises given by one’s confession-father, and with love and patience, *“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”* (Philippians 2:12). As St Basil the Great says, *“As we bear the scalpel of the*

physician to remedy the body and the medicine's bitterness, we also should bear the suffering of rebuke, chastisement and various practices so that the soul may be remedied from its sins and weaknesses."

To confess bravely without embarrassment, all the sins and its details, and if the priest asks concerning certain points, one must not complain or hide, but answer honestly, knowing that it is for our own benefit that the priest will provide us with useful advice.

THE RITE OF PRACTICING THE SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION

Before Confession :

The period in between Confession must not exceed one month or a month and a half maximum. Delaying confession encourages a person to be negligent, and forget many sins committed. Delaying confession is a great loss to a person and delays spiritual growth noticeably.

The confessing person must care for three important things while preparing for confession:

Sins and mistakes committed

Thoughts and feelings encountered which need counseling from the confession-father in order to distinguish the good from the bad

Any questions regarding the spiritual life which need guidance or discussion with the confession father.

Self-examination must be honest, and without condemning others, for in confession we should blame ourselves, not other people or circumstances.

During Confession :

Confession must take place be in a quite corner in the Church, facing the altar, so that we feel empowered and sanctified. Confession, being a sacrament, should always take place in Church, however, if the priest comes across a person who has not been regular in church or in church life, but wishes to repent, the priest may visit them at home and accept their confession there, and at the same time encouraging them to come to church. In addition, the Sacrament of Confession may take place at home if someone is sick, before they receive the Holy Communion.

The priest must wear a cloak or cape whilst accepting Confession, as he is taking part in a Holy Sacrament that needs physical and spiritual preparation.

After confession:

After the person is done with his confessions, the person bows down his head or even kneel down to accept the absolution. The priest puts the cross over his head and prays the Absolutions...usually they are 3 absolutions...2 of them prayed secretly and the third one is prayed out loud.

There are some prayers mentioned in the book of Agpeya that might be helpful for the confessing person, he may use them before and after the confession.

Finally, repentance and confession are not a trial or a court. It is a shelter for sinners, a hospital. The one who confesses is not judged or condemned. He is surrounded by love, comfort, sincere interest; he is taken care of, healed, assisted, treated by the physician, instructed, and forgiven.

The priest is not a judge who just condemn... He is a doctor, a loving father. He is not a warden, but an angel of freedom and forgiveness.

When there is true repentance and confession, remission is granted. No sin is unforgivable except for the sin of unrepentance, which is, in essence, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. In other words, the one who will remain unforgiven is the one who does not believe that God can forgive and save.

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SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST

Known as : Sacrament of Holy Communion , Sacrament of Thanksgiving The Lord's Supper , The Mysterious Supper or Sacrament of Community

The Meaning of the Eucharist

The Sacrament of Communion is a Holy Sacrament by which the believer eats the Holy Body and Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, presented by the Bread and Wine. This Sacrament has the greatest importance among the Seven Church Sacraments. Sometimes it is called: "The Mystery of Mysteries".

Its Institution

The Lord Jesus instituted the holy Eucharist on Covenant Thursday, in the Upper Room of Zion, shortly before His arrest and trial. After He celebrated the Rite of Passover of the Jews, He rose and washed the feet of His disciples, as a sign of repentance and preparation, then sat down and instituted the Passover of the New Covenant, which is the Sacrament of Holy Communion. *"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 His disciples 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'"* (Matthew 26:26-28), and our teacher St Paul repeats the same words in 1 Corinthians (11:23-25).

From these words of Christ we see that the Holy Eucharist is truly the body and blood of Christ. It is not a symbol. It is truly the body and truly the blood of Christ. Christ did not say that "this symbolizes My body" and "this symbolizes My blood." He said, "this is My body" and "this is My blood." Of course, even after the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, all we see with our human eyes is bread and wine. Even the taste on our tongues is that of bread and wine. In reality and in essence, though, that which we see and that which we taste is truly the body and blood of Christ. How does this happen? How does this change occur? No one can say. It is done in a mysterious way with the intervention of the Holy Spirit. As the celebrant says: "And He makes this bread into His Holy Body...and this cup also into the precious Blood of His New Covenant."

Therefore, from the above words of Christ we see that this sacrament was established by Christ "for the forgiveness of sins." The main purpose of the sacrament then is the forgiveness of man's sins. Along with the forgiveness, though, come the sanctification and glory, eternal life. This is why when the

celebrant gives Holy Communion, he says to each person: "the Body and Blood of Christ, for the forgiveness of sins and life eternal."

Beyond the above statements, the very words of Christ reveal that this sacrament has to be repeated "in remembrance" of Christ, of His incarnation, sacrifice on the cross, burial, resurrection, and of His ascension into Heaven to be seated at the right hand of the Father, and His second glorious coming. So the word "in remembrance" does not mean "not true Body nor Blood" but it just gives the idea of repeating the Sacrament since Christ Himself testified about the "reality" of His Body and Blood.

In other places in Holy Scripture, Christ has assured us that His Body is "truly food" and His Blood is "truly drink." Moreover, this is shown by the fearsome saying that "whoever does not eat My body and does not drink My blood, has no life in him." This proves that the Holy Eucharist is the spiritual nourishment of man. Just as man cannot live without natural nourishment, so neither can he live without spiritual nourishment--the body and blood of Christ--without Holy Eucharist. Christ makes this very clear. He says that "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you have no life in you; he who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life" (John, 6:53-54).

How do we view the Eucharist?

For the first thousand years of Christian history, when the Church was visibly one and undivided, the holy gifts of the Body and Blood of Christ were received as just that: His Body and Blood. The Church confessed this was a mystery: The bread is truly His Body, and that which is in the cup is truly His Blood, but one cannot say how they become so.

The eleventh and twelfth centuries brought on the scholastic era, the Age of Reason in the West. The Roman Church, which had become separated from the Orthodox Church in A.D. 1054, was pressed by the rationalists to define how the transformation takes place. They answered with the word transubstantiation, meaning a change of substance. The elements are no longer bread and wine; they are physically changed into flesh and blood. The sacrament, which only faith can comprehend, was subjected to a philosophical definition. This second view of the Eucharist was unknown to the ancient Church.

Not surprisingly, one of the points of disagreement between Rome and the sixteenth-century reformers was the issue of transubstantiation. Unable to accept

this explanation of the sacrament, the radical reformers, who were rationalists themselves, took up the opposite point of view: the gifts are nothing but bread and wine, period. They only represent Christ's Body and Blood; they have no spiritual reality.

What is the meaning of “an unworthy manner”?

“He who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks Judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s Body” (1 Corinthians 11:29).

Worthiness has various meanings :

True Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ: as the person who approaches the Holy Communion must be a Christian Orthodox believer, baptized in the Orthodox Church, and strongly believes in the transformation of the Bread to the Body of Christ, and the mixture into the Precious Blood of Christ, and that the Communion is the actual Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus.

Repentance: the person coming to Communion must practice repentance and confession regularly with their confession-father. The priest who is the Minister of the Sacrifice, can ask the person if he is not acquainted well with them, if they practice confession? If the person does, then the priest will give them the Communion, if they do not, the priest can forbid them until such time that they do confess. This is for the personal benefit of the person and the priest too, who keeps the commandment of Priesthood carefully, for as St. Paul says: *“Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that Bread and drink of that Cup”* (1 Corinthians 11:24). Self-examination is all about being aware of ones sins and mistakes, and confessing them honestly, as St. John Chrysostom says: *“No one approaches idly or negligently, but let us approach with zeal and fervor and stay alert (ready as the judgment is prepare for those who share in an unworthy manner”.*

Reconciliation with others: anyone who approaches the Communion must be first reconciled with others, for the Lord’s advice is clear: *“Therefore 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 and offer your gift”* (Matthew 5:23,24).

We read in the Canons of St. Basil, that, “If some laymen are hostile and the clergy know about this hostility, they should not receive the Mysteries and offerings until they are reconciled” (Law 97).

Worthiness is feeling unworthy and sinful, and knowing that the Holies are for the holy person, and that no person has reached this holiness but struggles to attain it. Even if the person is contrite, repentant and confesses, he must believe in what our teacher St. Paul said: *“For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this”* (1 Corinthians 4:4).

Necessary Physical Purity For Communion:

As we spoke previously about spiritual conditions necessary for receiving Holy Communion, there are also some necessary physical preparation before receiving the Holy Communion, such as:

- + Control over all physical senses so that no obscure sins may enter the heart.
- + Cleanness of body and clothing; respectable clothes should be worn, as you are going to Church to meet the King of kings and Lord of lords.
- + The faithful must be fasting and eat light food on the eve of Communion.
- + Sexual relations between married couples should not take place either on the eve of Communion, as well as on the day of receiving the sacrament.
- + If a person is in a state of impurity,(having any impure discharge from his (her) body), he(he) must not approach Holy Communion as this is considered breaking the fast. St Severus Bin Moqufaa said, *“Sexual impurity is fast breaking, and who breaks the fast cannot be forbidden from praying, or entry of the Church or attendance of the Mass (after a complete physical cleaning of course), but only forbidden from partaking of the Mysteries.”*
- + Period of abstaining from food must be nine hours for adults, according to the number of hours of suffering of the Lord Christ during His Crucifixion, (from the Third Hour (9 am) until His sentence at the Twelfth Hour (6 pm)). For weaning infants, it is variable but usually the parents like to have some time of abstinence as a matter of honoring the Holy Sacrament (three hours is also the usual time between feeds).
- + Before Communion, it is advisable not to brush your teeth or gargle water right before Communion, in case water may accidentally be swallowed.
- + Women should not partake of the Holy Communion when they are menstruating.

+ After a woman gives birth, she is not to partake of the Holy Communion until after forty days, if she delivered a boy, and eighty days if she delivered a girl. Hence, the first time she receives Holy Communion, after child birth, is on the day of her child's baptism after the priest prays for her the woman's absolution.

Finally, these regulations were made by the Church to keep the reverence of the Holy Mystery, yet we can not ignore that many times there are special cases and considerations for different people and this is why the confession father has the right to give absolutions according to what he sees good or suitable for the benefit of the person.

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SACRAMENT OF HOLY MATRIMONY

The family is the basic unit or 'cell' of society, and the Christian family is also a major building block of the Orthodox Church. The Church places great importance on the family to fulfill its role as a small church, as expressed by the Apostle Paul. When St. Paul greeted Priscilla and Aquila, his "fellow workers in Christ Jesus" he also greeted "the church that is in their house" (Romans 16:3, 5). He also greeted "Nymphas and the church that is in his house" (Col 4:15).

The Holy Scriptures tell us that God "blessed" marriage from the beginning of time saying "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth" (Gen. 1:27-28), showing that marriage is part of God's eternal purpose for humanity. Further on, in Genesis 2:24, we read, "Therefore a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh". Our Lord Jesus Christ reiterated these words when asked if it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife. He continued, "So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matt. 19:4-6).

Christ forever sanctified marriage by His presence at the marriage in Cana of Galilee (John 2:1-11). This was the first time Christ performed a miracle, and the first time the Theotokos interceded with Christ on behalf of others saying, "They have no wine", and then instructs all humanity, "Whatever He say to you, do it".

St. Paul expressed the sanctity of the Sacrament of Christian Matrimony, saying, "This is a great mystery" (Ephesians 5:32), and, "Marriage is honorable among all and the bed undefiled" (Hebrews 13:4).

THE THREE GOALS OF CHRISTIAN MATRIMONY

1. Cooperation between man and woman;
2. Procreation;
3. Protection against adultery and fornication.

The Matrimonial Rite is divided into three parts:

- (1) Betrothal
- (2) Ceremony of Marriage (Akd El- emlak)
- (3) Holy Matrimony.

(1) Betrothal (Engagement)

It precedes the Sacrament of Matrimony, but is **not** one of the Church's Sacraments. Betrothal is a voluntary agreement resulting from a pure and holy love between a man and a woman, who accept to marry each other willingly and by their own choice. The man is called the 'fiancé', and the woman is too the 'fiancée', being an engaged couple.

The Rite of Betrothal:

The deacons proceed the couple into the church, chanting the hymn 'O King of Peace'. The fiancée stands on the right side of her fiancé, and together they proceed to the place assigned for the prayers, whether it be in church, or at home.

The priest holds the two rings in his left hand in a red silk ribbon and says the following prayers together with three signs of the cross ...

On the First Sign of the Cross

The priest prays, "In the name of our Lord, our God, and our Savior Jesus Christ, the founder of the laws of perfection, we declare at this Orthodox ceremony the betrothal of the blessed Orthodox son (...name) to the blessed Orthodox daughter (...name)."

(The priest makes the sign of the cross on himself, then the couple, and then the rings, (and jewelry) saying, "*In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, Amen. Blessed be God, the Pantocrator. Amen.*" Then the congregation prays the 'Our Father'...then he repeats this three times while saying :“blessed be His only begotten Son Jesus Christ our Lord” on the second time and “Blessed be the Holy Spirit The Paraclete.” on the third time.

After that, the priest prays the prayer of Thanksgiving and upon finishing the deacons chant the hymn: “ Khen efran”.

During the chanting the priest blesses the rings and allow both of them to put them in their fingers, then he prays a special prayer for blessings and asking God to complete this celebration in peace. The priest asks that their betrothal be kept pure and legitimate, making them one in mind and soul, and granting them a peaceful and spiritual happiness, shepherd by God.

Finally, all pray the Lord's Prayer, then the concluding Prayer, followed by the blessing

(2) The Rite of the Marriage Ceremony (Akd El-emlak)

In the past, it used to be separate from the Holy Matrimony having its own readings and prayers but as of today, it is performed before the beginning of the Holy Matrimony and we pray some parts of it not the whole prayers. It became an introduction to the Holy Matrimony.

The deacons proceed the bride and groom into the Church while chanting the hymn 'O King of Peace'. The bride, holding the groom's hand, is on his right side. They proceed down the aisle, and stand in front of the two adjacent seats placed before the altar, facing the south. The bride sits on the right of the groom according to the Psalm, "**At your right hand stands the queen**" (Psalm 45:9),

(Those who are in the ceremony must take care to dress reverently and modestly, for they are in the house of God. Therefore, indecent and inappropriate clothing and must be abandoned, for they are an insult to the house of God. In the Psalm is written, "**Holiness adorns Your house, O Lord, for ever**" (Psalm 93:5).)

Standing close by the couple, the priest begins prayer by making the sign of the cross on the rings and the couple three times ...

The First Sign of the Cross

The priest prays, "In the name of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, the founder of the laws of perfection, in this Orthodox ceremony and before the altar of the Lord of hosts, we declare the marriage of the blessed Orthodox son (...name) to the blessed Orthodox daughter (...name),"

With the cross in his right, the priest makes the sign of the cross on the couple, and the rings, saying, "*In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, Amen. Blessed be God, the Pantocrator, Amen.*" Then the deacons respond chanting, "*Amen,*" followed by all praying the Lord's Prayer. He then repeats this three times while saying :*"blessed be His only begotten Son Jesus Christ our Lord"* on the second time and "*Blessed be the Holy Spirit The Paraclete.*" on the third time.

The priest prays the Thanksgiving Prayer, with the deacons and congregation saying the appropriate responses in joyful tunes.

The priest prays the prayer of "Matrimonial pledge" while making the sign of the Cross upon their foreheads.

Then, the priest prays on the vestments (garments) saying, “We ask You Lord to bless these vestments (making the sign of the cross on them), so that they may become for Your two servants who are wearing them, through Your goodness, vestments of glory and salvation, vestments of joy and happiness. Preserve them both pure in the soul, body and spirit through acts of righteousness. Grant them both heavenly and earthly comfort. Fill their houses and stores with all blessings ...”

The deacons chant the hymn of ‘The Spiritual Vestment’ in the joyful tunes of Psalm Sunday, whilst the priest places the priestly cloak on the groom.

The cloak is a priestly vestment. The groom wears it to symbolize him becoming head of the house, for he will lead his family in prayers at the family altar. He offers with his family, praises, and thanks unto the Lord, for he takes the place of the family priest, responsible before God.

In Old testament times, it was the father who always offered sacrifices to God and lead his family in prayers, just like Noah (Genesis 8), Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job and many others, and it pleased the Lord (Genesis 8:20).

Wearing the rings: (sometimes it is done after the crowning):

The priest places the rings onto the couple’s hands, for he is the minister of God’s Sacraments, and so his hand signifies the hand of Christ. Therefore, the Christian Matrimony should remain intact, for what God has joined together, no one shall separate.

Each partner wears their ring which has been engraved with their spouse’s name, as proof of their love, commitment, and possession of each other in all things. St Paul said, **“The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does”** (1 Corinthians 7:4)

The bride and groom wear the rings on the left hand, for the left side is near the heart, and so they must love one another and be close to each other’s heart.

(3) Rites of the Holy Matrimony

It used to be separate from the Marriage ceremony (AkdElemlak), but now it is done as a continuation of it.

It starts with the end of the Marriage ceremony beginning with the readings from the scriptures...Pauline Epistle (Eph.5:22-6:3) and then the hymn of the Holy

Spirit (Pi Epnevma) and the Trisagion and the Gospel reading (Psalm 18:5-6, Psalm 128:3-4 & Mathew 19:1-6). Then, the wonderful Gospel response is chanted which is very significant to the occasion... "Those that have been united together in harmony by the Holy Spirit, are praising God continually like a harp. With Psalms and praises and spiritual songs, day and night, with an incessant heart"

Many things are done during the rites of the Holy Matrimony which are very important regarding the message behind this celebration...the most important part of the whole rite is when the priest prays for the crowning, blessing and sanctification of the two to become one (the action of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament).

The rest of the rites goes as follow:

✠ **SUPPLICATIONS**

The priest prays twelve supplications, and after each supplication, the congregation respond, "*Lord have mercy.*"

✠ **The three minor Litanies & the Creed**

✠ **Three Matrimonial prayers.**

✠ **Prayer for submission.**

✠ **Prayer before anointing the Couple with Oil.**

✠ **Prayer before Crowning.**

✠ **Commandments (for both of them).**

✠ **The final blessing and conclusion of the prayer before the Holy Altar.**

All the prayers & rituals have wonderful meanings behind it...and also every act in the rituals is to give a message and teaching to the married couple for example:

+ Anointing the couple with oil while praying and asking God to give both of them the joy and happiness- as anointing with oil is always a symbol of joy of heart (Your God has anointed you with the oil of gladness more than your companions" (Psalm 45:7)). - and also reminding them of the prophets and priests who were to be anointed for the call of God in their lives to live in Holiness and purity.

+ Putting the Crowns above their heads to remind them of the first state of Adam and Eve when they were crowned by God as the heads of all creation when they were living in the Obedience of God and His commandments. Also, Crowns signify royalty and king/queen ship. By placing the ceremonial crowns on the

heads of the bride and groom, represents that they are the king and queen of their new kingdom - their home.

Wearing the crown signifies that the couple have become the glory of the other person: **“An excellent wife is the crown of her husband”** (Proverbs 12:4), and, **“The head of woman is man”** (1 Corinthians 11:3).

+ In the last part of the ceremony, we see the married couple coming while holding their hands together to kneel down before the Altar and hear the final blessing given to them...the priest is asking God to bless them as He blessed Noah while getting out of the Ark (Church) and multiplied him in blessings.

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SACRAMENT OF UNCTION OF THE SICK

It is called the 'Sacrament of Lamps', for the early Christians used to place oil in a lamp, from which hung seven other lamps. Each lamp was lit at the beginning of every prayer. This rite still exists, however, the seven lamps were replaced by seven wicks, made from cotton wool, which sit in a plate of oil. The number seven signifies the seven spirits of God, which are mentioned in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 3:1). The Spirit of God dwells and sanctifies the oil in order to heal those anointed by it. It is advisable that the wicks be placed in the sign of the cross, in the plate of oil.

Our Lord Jesus Christ instituted this Sacrament when He said to His disciples: "Heal the sick, cleanse the leper" (Matthew 10:8), and, "Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, heal the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The Kingdom of God has come near to you'" (Luke 10: 8-9). Our fathers the Apostles practiced it according to the orders of their Master, as the Bible says, "So they went out and preached that people should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them" (Mark 6:12,13).

"Is any among you sick? Let them call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and 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 5:14-5). These are the words of St. James and he leaves no doubt that the sacrament of Unction is established by God and this how the Apostles practiced it. Historically, it is proven that the sacrament of Unction was celebrated in conjunction with Repentance and Confession.

From these words of St. James the purpose of the sacrament is vividly clear. It is bodily healing and forgiveness of sins. And as the priest anoints with Holy Unction, he says that this sacrament is for the "healing of the soul and the body."

The sacrament of Holy Unction is celebrated every time a Christian needs it. The sacrament is not an obligatory, but a voluntary sacrament. It is good, though, for all Christians to draw near to this sacrament. This is why our Church has laid down that the sacrament be celebrated in Church on the last Friday of the Holy Lent.

Just as with all sacraments, so too here, if we expect to have the proper results we must accept the sacrament with faith. Of course, an ill person is not always healed, because God may have another plan for him.

Holy Unction does not replace Repentance and Confession. In essence, the forgiveness of sins comes through faith in God, sincere repentance, and confession of sins.

RITE OF THE SACRAMENT OF UNCTION OF THE SICK

When the priest comes to perform the Sacrament of Unction of the Sick, he must wear an Epitrachelion (priestly vestment), as he will be accomplishing two Sacraments together; the Sacrament of Confession and the Sacrament of Unction of the Sick.

During confession, which must take place before the Sacrament of the Unction of the Sick, the sick person confesses honestly and with true repentance, promising to walk with God after his recovery, and striving never to return to sin. Then the priest reads the absolution for him, after giving him advice, guidance and spiritual exercises which may be needed for his spiritual growth. The priest then advises him to receive the Holy Communion as soon as possible after the Sacrament of the Unction of the Sick.. If he is too sick to go to Church, the priest can bring him the Holy Communion at home.

On the table is placed a dish which contains some pure oil (preferably olive oil) with seven pieces of cotton wool shaped like wicks. Each wick is lit at the start of each prayer. The priest stands facing the East, and the sick is seated before him in reverence, facing the west. The rest of the family members stand around the priest.

The priest then starts the seven prayers of the Kandeel.

The Prayer starts by the Thanksgiving prayer and Psalm 50 (for repentance). Each prayer consists of the following :

- 1- A litany (Oushia)
- 2- Reading from the Pauline Epistle.
- 3- The Litany of the Gospel.
- 4- A reading from the Holy Gospel.
- 5- A special prayer.
- 6- The Lord's prayer.

Except for the first & last prayers which both have extra or different prayers to be said...for example: the first prayer has some prayers and supplications that the priest is asking for God's mercy and salvation to the person and the place.

Also in the first prayer we read the Catholic Epistle from James (5:10-20), instead of Pauline Epistle reading.

In the last prayer, there are 4 different prayers to be said by the priest after the gospel reading, then they recite the Orthodox creed with 41 times "Kirialison"

After that the priest prays the absolutions for the sick person and anoints him with the Holy oil.

In the church books, it is said that the sick person is to receive anointing for 7 days.

Also in some old church books, there are 7 prayers to be said while putting off the wicks.

The order of Prayer of the litanies is the same as those in the Baptismal Rite and Laqqan :

1. The sick
2. Travelers
3. Waters
4. Leaders
5. The Departed
6. Oblations
7. Catechumens

Notes:

+No unbeliever should be anointed by the oil of Unction of the Sick, as it is holy sacramental oil given only to the baptized. If a non-believer asks to be anointed, a common oil is brought and the priest makes the sign of the cross on it three times, prays the Litany of the Sick, and then anoints the sick person.

+No one should be anointed directly after Holy Communion, as Holy Communion is the perfection and seal of all Sacraments.

General Kandeel on the last Friday of Lent

It is a known fact that all sacraments are accomplished in the Church, with the exception of the Sacrament of Unction of the Sick as the sick may be too weak to come to church so the priest officiates it in the home. However, once a year the Church performs this Sacrament in the Church, and it takes place on the last

Friday of the holy Lent (that is, the Friday before Passion Week). It is called the 'General Kandeel'. The General Kandeel serves the purpose of :

- ✠. Reminding people of the importance and significance of the Sacrament of Unction of the Sick, for the healing of every believer.
- ✠. Serving all those believers who have not called the priest privately at home.
- ✠. Anointing all the believers prior to Passion Week, for it is not permissible to perform the Sacrament of Unction of the Sick during the Holy Week, because the Church cares for the prayers of this great week and concentrates its prayers and contemplations on the passion of Christ and the blessings of the mystery of redemption and act of salvation. Hence, the General Kandeel must take place before the holy Passion week, just as in the same way the General Funeral takes place following the Palm Sunday Mass and prior to the Pascha prayers. As no funeral rites are allowed to take place during Passion Week.

Officiating the Sacrament of Unction of the Sick in homes during Holy Lent

+ Some believers are accustomed to asking the priest, during the Holy Lent, to perform the Sacrament in their homes, as a means of blessing, even though they may not have a family member sick and in need of the Sacrament of Unction of the Sick. Because so many people request this, the priests are obliged to visit the homes, but because of time constraints, are unable to perform all seven prayers. Therefore they only end up praying one or two of the prayers in each home. They are also obliged to perform the Sacrament any time of the day or night, even if people are not abstaining from food. All these practices are incorrect, and must be stopped because:

- ✠ The Sacrament of Unction of the Sick must be performed for a person who is genuinely sick and in need of this sacrament.
- ✠ The priest and the person who accepts the Sacrament must be abstaining from food for certain hours before accomplishing the Sacrament. Hence, performing the Sacrament in the early morning whilst people are still fasting, is the most appropriate time.
- ✠ Many people consider that the priest coming to the house is a blessing, especially during the period of Lent, which is a time of spiritual revival.

They consider that the priest visiting the house is a way to encourage the household to continue in praying and fasting, and always practice the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession. There is no objection to the priest visiting and blessing homes, but there is no need for him when doing this to pray part of the prayers of the Unction of the Sick. Instead, he should pray the ritual prayers of 'Blessing the House'; prayers which ask the Lord to dwell within the house and keep the members of the household from all evil.

Prayer for blessing houses:

It is different from the Holy Sacrament of Unction, so it can be done at any time in the homes of the believers. It is not a necessary requirement, however, that the members of the household, and the priest fast, for this rite is not a Church sacrament. This Prayer can be done at any time, and as often as people like. This prayer is not just restricted to those with new homes, but all people, as a source of blessing in the home.

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THE SACRAMENT OF PRIESTHOOD

This sacrament was instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ when He chose the twelve of his followers, and consecrated them for ministry, “He called His disciples to Him, and from them He chose twelve whom He named apostles” (Luke 6:13)

These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them saying: “Preach saying, ‘the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons” (Matthew 10:5-8)

He gave them the authority of absolution and binding: “Assuredly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 18:18).

After His resurrection He appeared to them in the upper room in Zion and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven, if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (John 20:22-23).

Only for them He said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19,20)

There are three ranks in Priesthood:

- The order of Deacons
- The order of Priests
- The order of Bishops

Deacons are servants,

Priests are teachers,

Bishops are overseers, and shepherds.

The Priesthood is celebrated and is active here on earth. It has, however, a divine origin and works upon divine things. In essence, there is only one archpriest, Christ. The priesthood of Christ is, as it were, made present by all clergy, and especially by the bishop. The deacon and priest derive their priesthood from the bishop, just as the bishop derives his from Christ.

Priesthood does not exist when there is no canonical apostolic succession. Every priesthood that does not draw its source from the Apostles, and as a result from Christ, is not a true and genuine priesthood, but rather counterfeit. It is a false priesthood. It does not have grace and cannot give grace. It cannot sanctify and save. It is a pity and crime. False priests blaspheme the Holy Spirit and condemn their own selves and bring the naive to damnation.

Here we must repeat that the bishop has the fullness of the priesthood. This is why he is the only one who can celebrate all seven sacraments. The deacon and the priest derive their priesthood from the bishop and that is why they must be in canonical and continuous dependence on the bishop; otherwise their priestly works are not valid. The priest celebrates all the sacraments except ordination, while the deacon cannot celebrate any of them on his own. The deacon is the helper of the priest and bishop in the celebration of the sacraments and in the execution of the responsibilities and practices that originate from the Priesthood.

The order of Deacons

‘Deacon’, pronounced as such in Greek, is a Syrian word meaning ‘servant’. The deacon’s responsibility is to help the priest or bishop perform the religious ministry. The first church appointed seven deacons who were full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom to help in service, “The twelve summoned the multitude of disciples and said: ‘Seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom whom we may appoint over this business’” (Acts 6:2,3).

“When they were chosen, they set them before the apostles and when they had prayed they laid hands on them” (Acts 6:6).

The apostles stipulated the following three conditions for nominating deacons:

They must be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.

They should be appointed by the apostles through the laying on of hands with prayers.

They should carry out certain responsibilities in the church.

Our teacher St. Paul also specified the requirements of a deacon, in his First Epistle to Timothy (3:8-13): “Likewise deacons must be:

- reverent

- not double tongued
- not given to too much wine(drunkenness)
- not greedy for money
- holding the mystery of faith with a pure conscience
- ruling their children and their houses well
- should be tested first, and then proved and found blameless, so they can be ordained” (1 Timothy 3:10)
- Although the rank of deacon is the most junior rank of priesthood, St. Paul praises it saying, “For those who served well as deacons, obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 3:13).

In our Coptic Church, there are five ranks of deacons. In ascending order, they are:

Epsaltos (hymnist):

‘Epsaltos’ is derived from the Coptic word ‘Epsalmos’ meaning Psalm or hymn. Hence, ‘Epsaltos’ means ‘hymnist’.

According to his title, his responsibilities include learning and singing the hymns and praises of the church. This rank is mentioned in some of the early Church Canons, “Hymnists also must be blessed by the bishop.”

The Epsaltos is permitted to wear the tunic without the stole.

Ognostis (reader):

‘Ognostis’ is Greek word derived from two words : ‘Anagnosma’, meaning ‘reading’, and ‘Tis’, meaning ‘related to’. Thus ‘Ognostis’ means ‘the reader’.

He must be fluent (English, Arabic and Coptic) in knowing by heart the responses said before and after the Epistle readings, and read the daily readings. He must read clearly and without mistakes to enable the congregation to hear and understand. The Ognostis wears a white tunic with the stole. He wears the stole

crossing over the left shoulder and around his waist as a belt, and the ends of the stole hang from his shoulders. ('Stole' is a Greek word (Patrachelion) meaning 'grace', the rank of deacon is a grace which is taken by an individual and carried on his shoulders.). It hangs on the back like a cross to symbolize that he is sharing in carrying the cross, for the Lord says: "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24). The stole comes around the waist like a belt, as proof of preparation and readiness for service, like John the Baptist who wore a leather belt around his waist.

Epideacon (subdeacon) : Epideacon is a Greek word composed of two parts: 'Epi' meaning 'assistant', and 'Diacon' meaning 'deacon'. Hence, 'Epideacon' means 'Assistant Deacon'.

His Responsibilities :

He must keep watch of the church doors to forbid the entry of heretics and false teachers.

He is responsible for organizing the seating in the church, that is, the place allocated for men, women, nuns, and so on.

He is responsible for lighting the church lamps.

He is responsible for keeping in order, the church books, and the priestly and servants vestments.

He is responsible for preparing the censors

He is responsible for helping the other deacons, and replacing them if necessary.

Deacon (full deacon): 'Deacon' in Syrian, or 'Diakon' in Greek and Coptic, mean 'servant'.

The Responsibilities of a Deacon

He is responsible for saying the responses of the litanies prayed by the priest during the raising of incense and Liturgy.

He is responsible for maintaining order and quiet in the church, to ensure that the congregation stands with reverence and respect.

He is responsible for helping the priest in visiting the church's congregation.

He is responsible for recording the names of the people who have offered gifts and oblations to the church, so that the priest can remember them during the Litany of oblations. In the Apostolic Canons (Diaskolia), it is written : "The deacons write every day the names of those who have given offerings, whether they are alive or departed, so that they may be remembered during the readings and prayers" (Diaskolia 35)

In the old days, there would be a private room located at the western door of the church called the 'deacon's room', where the deacon sits and receives the gifts and offerings of the congregation in private, before they enter the church. He would write the names of those who offered gifts, including the names of those who have departed in whom the gifts are being offered, and the deacon would then give these names to the priest, who would mention them, silently, one by one after the Litany of Oblations during the divine Liturgy.

He is responsible for cleaning the altar and putting in order the tabernacle. He must ensure the cleanliness of the altar and its coverings, before the priest comes.

He is permitted to read the Holy Gospel of the divine Liturgy. During the deacon's ordination, the bishop says: "... he is honored to read the Gospel."

He is permitted, when necessary, to carry the chalice and give the congregation the Precious Blood, by permission from the priest.

Archdeacon (leader of deacons): Archdeacon' is a Greek word composed of two parts : 'Arch' meaning 'leader', and 'Diakon' meaning 'deacon'. Hence, 'archdeacon' mean 'the leader of deacons'.

His responsibilities: Same as the Deacon.

RANKS OF PRIESTHOOD

There are three ranks of priesthood:

Priest

Archpriest (hegomen)

Khoori Episcopos

The Priest

This is the first and essential priestly rank.

Priest means elder and also an intercessor in the holies of God for the congregation.

He is a presbyter who has the right to administer all the church sacraments except the laying on of hands and appointing priestly ranks, which is the right of a bishop or overseer or someone above him.

He is a teacher who teaches the people the word of God and leads them to the way of God, virtues, mysteries of the religion, and explains the dogmas and rites and details the word of truth, "For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts" (Malachi 2:7).

He is a father who pastors his children compassionately, visits them with tender care and love as he is zealous for the salvation of the souls of his people and leading them to Christ, as his salvation is related to their salvation, "For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 3:8). He humbly serves them as a servant to a master as Lord Christ washed the feet of His disciples, so his service is successful and acceptable before God and people too.

The Hegomen

The word 'Hegomen' or 'Egomenos' is derived from the Greek word meaning 'provider' or 'presenter', and the 'Egomenos' is the 'senior' or 'leader' priest in church. Hegomen is only a promotional rank from a priest to a hegomen, within the rank of priesthood, and is not considered as a new ordination.

Khoori - Episcopos

KHOORI-EPISCOPOS is a Greek word meaning 'bishop' of 'villages' or 'fields'. He helps the bishop or metropolitan of the diocese in the service and visitation of the villages.

The rank of Khoori-episcopos (or the bishop or overseer) came to existence by the end of the third century AD in Asia Minor when the dioceses extended and their division was not preferred, so there existed an utmost need for the presence for the bishop to visit and care for them.

RANK OF BISHOP:

It includes: Bishop, Metropolitan and Patriarch

This is the highest rank of priesthood and its owner has the perfection of priesthood and leadership of priesthood.

The word EPISCOPOS is a Greek word that means overseer or looking from above. The Bishops are chosen among celibates who were not previously married. The bishop is distinguished from the priest by having the perfection of priesthood, and the authority of laying on of hands and ordination of all the ranks of deacons and priesthood in his diocese.

Some duties or responsibilities of the bishop:

Must not lay hands on anyone hastily but carefully after his goodness is testified.

Does not accept any complaint about a priest or a deacon except from two or three witnesses.

Judges rightly among his congregation without hypocrisy.

May reward or punish any deacon or priest in his diocese after he assures his deeds and attitude and service, and after hearing the witnesses and giving him a chance to defend himself.

Does not absent himself from his diocese except by a permission from the Patriarch and for a period no more than six months.

Does not move from his diocese because it is small or due to poverty, draught or small number of congregation, to another richer or larger diocese.

The bishop does not occupy himself with any worldly work like trade or industry so that he is free to shepherd his congregation.

Metropolitan:

Whatever applies on the bishop from rules, specifications and responsibilities, it also applies on the metropolitans as they have the same bishopric rank. "Metropolitan" is derived from the Greek word: Metropolitans which means the mother city or the major city of the diocese. So Metropolitan is the bishop of the progressing Mother City.

Metropolitan is progressing the bishops in all Church Rites.

Rank of metropolitan is only a promotion from bishop to metropolitan on the same diocese with the same name.

THE POPE: PATRIARCH

Patriarch is a word derived from Greek word “Patriarchies”, composed of two parts: Patria: the tribe & Arches: ruler, so it means ruler of the tribe.

+ But the word ‘Pope’ is said to be derived from Greek word Papas, which means father. Others say it is a compound word from father of fathers, then simplified to Pope for ease of pronunciation. It is historically known that this surname is specified for the Pope of Alexandria first, since Pope Yarokloos (the thirteenth Pope) and from Alexandria it conveyed to Rome.

The Patriarch is the highest rank in the bishopric level and has the highest or greatest ruling of priesthood.

Patriarch is the leader of the Church, bishops and all metropolitans.

Patriarch is the successor of the Apostles and first father of the Church.

Patriarch is entrusted by Christ for all the congregation and the souls of the flock in his ordination. The archbishop says to him, after he places the rod of pastorate on the altar: “Receive the rod of pastorate from the hand of the Great Shepherd Jesus Christ, the Ever Living Son of God, to shepherd the flock, nourish it by living doctrine as He entrusted you on the soul of His flock, and from your hands their blood will be asked.” So it is a great and difficult responsibility, and needs its carrier to pray a great deal for God to help him to carry it and accomplish its many serious duties.

The Patriarch is distinguished from the bishop or metropolitan by these two rights: right of ordination of bishops and their promotion, and the right of making the Holy Myron for the whole Church.

The Great Cathedral is the location of the Patriarchal See where bishops are ordained and promoted by the Patriarch.

Patriarch must be chosen from among scholar, spiritual, capable monks for leadership and rightly defining the word of truth, or from among common bishops who have no dioceses, as the Church Canon forbids transfer of bishop from one diocese to another for whatever reason. His age must not be less than forty years upon his ordination.

Generally, all the ordinations of the deacons & priests are performed in the Holy Liturgy right after the prayer of Reconciliation since their ministry is like ambassadors of Christ calling people to reconcile with God while the ordination of the Bishops (Metropolitan & Patriarch) is performed after the reading of the Acts of the Apostles as the church consider them to be the successors of the Apostles, and their ministry is the continuation of that of the Apostles.

All the lecture is quoted (with some modifications) from:

- ✠ SACRAMENTAL RITES IN THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH “
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- ✠ ORTHODOX CATECHISM Basic Teachings of the Orthodox Faith
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