

The Unction of Sick

The Mystery of Unction of the Sick is a prayer said over oil by which the believer is anointed. With all its beautiful prayers, this Mystery provides for the healing of the soul, which in turn provides cure for bodily ailments. This is due to the strong link between the soul and the body, and if the soul is sick, the body will likewise suffer. For this reason, the Church always asks her children to firstly repent from their sins, so that the spirit and the soul will consequently be healed. The Bible clearly mentions this Mystery: "*Is anyone among you sick? Let him call the priests of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven*" (James 5:14, 15); the Apostles "*anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them*" (Mark 6:13).

Matrimony

Holy matrimony is the Mystery by which a man and a woman are united together as one through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Marriage, therefore, is a sacred tie symbolizing the union of Christ (the groom) and the Church (the bride). It is a lawfully instituted by God (Gen 1:8-24; Mt 19:9; Eph 5:32). Christian marriage is characterized by its unity and indissolubility except by death or adultery. According to the Coptic Church canon law, divorce, except in cases of adultery, is



forbidden; for "*what God has joined together let no man put asunder*" (Mt 19:6).

Holy Orders (Orthodox Priesthood)

This Mystery was established by Christ with the calling of His disciples, giving them the authority to loose and bind the sins of the people, and sending the Holy Spirit upon them on the day of Pentecost. As successors of the Apostles and representatives of Christ in His Church, clergymen continue the work of Jesus. They teach the word of God; offer the Holy Eucharist and administer the other mysteries; they govern the Church and take care of the spiritual needs of the members of their congregations. St. Paul writes to Bishop Timothy, "*Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the council of elders laid their hands upon you*" (1 Timothy 4:14). To the clergy at Ephesus, St. Paul writes, "*Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which he has purchased with his own blood.*" (Acts 20:28). All these prove that the priesthood is God-sent and an apostolic practice.

The Mysteries



"When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him." (Psalm 5: 6-8)

A Mystery also known as a Sacrament is an invisible grace given through a visible (material) sign. For each Mystery the invisible grace is given by the Holy Spirit (God). Mysteries must be administered by a canonical priest (a priest validly ordained by the Orthodox Church). The Coptic Church believes in seven Mysteries, all of which existed during the time of the Apostles and were handed down from generation to generation for about 2000 years. They are the following:

Baptism*

Baptism is a spiritual rebirth of water and spirit by complete *immersion* in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, according to the Apostolic Tradition. Complete immersion is absolutely necessary since through baptism a person dies with Christ and rises with him; and so complete immersion in water resembles death.

Moreover, the Mystery of Baptism has the first rank among the seven Holy Mysteries, as it is the door by which the believer enters the church and has the right to partake in the rest of the Mysteries and become an heir to Eternal Life. It is recommended that children be baptized at the earliest possible age, confirms that God loves us and accepts us before we can ever know or love Him. If one is baptized as an adult, he or she is expected to repent and confess his or her sins before doing so.

This is one of the four mysteries necessary to live eternally in heaven after death, as Christ said: *"Unless one is born of water and Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."* John 3:5.

These four will be noted by an asterisk.

Chrismation *

The Mystery of Chrismation is the actual receiving of the Holy Spirit. During the Chrismation the priest anoints the infant with Myron (holy oil). Although it is received directly after Baptism, Chrismation is an independent Mystery. This Mystery is necessary to complete the process of baptism. After this Mystery, the Holy Spirit dwells in the new Christian. The baptized individual receives the Myron immediately after Baptism, so as to become a temple for the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit aids him to grow in his spiritual life. The priest is very careful to apply the Myron accurately to the baptized, anointing him or her with 36 crosses.

In the Bible, the Apostles used to administer this Mystery by the laying of hands. After the Apostles heard that nearly an entire city was "baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" the Apostles traveled to that city and "laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:16-17). The Apostles later substituted the laying of hands with the anointing of special Holy Oil referred to as the Myron. The first batch of Myron was created by them, and it is continually replenished to accommodate those in need of this mystery.

Repentance and Confession*

By this Mystery, the Christian attains reconciliation with God and forgiveness of sins committed after baptism. Actual remission of sins occurs upon partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ through the mystery of the Eucharist during the Divine Liturgy. However, without confession to God through his steward the Priest, a person's sins are not forgiven simply by partaking of the Eucharist. Oral confession has been practiced since the time of the Apostles

(Acts 19:18). Regular confession with a personal priest, referred to as one's "father of confession," is necessary to receive the Eucharist. Through ordination, the priest receives the authority given by Christ to the apostles to absolve the sins of those who repent (Mt 18:18; Jn 20:22, 23). Confession is mentioned in the Old Testament: *"He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy"* (Proverbs 28:13); and also in the New Testament: *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9-10).

Eucharist*

Holy Eucharist is valued by the Church as "the Mystery of mysteries," by which the faithful consume the Body and Blood of Christ. As Christ did with His disciples during the Last Supper before his death, so too the Church takes Bread and Wine which the Holy Spirit changes into the actual Body and Blood of Christ. After consecration, both elements

are given separately to all faithful members of the church who have been initiated into the Church by receiving the Holy Spirit through baptism and Chrismation. *"Then Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My Flesh, and drinks My blood, has eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.'*" - (John 6:53-54)

