

Beloved Fathers and Fellow-concelebrants,

Christ is in our midst!

In this, my first communication with you as your bishop, the words of the holy Apostle Paul come to my mind:

Let a man so account us, as ministers of Christ and stewards of the Mysteries of God. Moreover, that which is required in stewards is that a man be found faithful.

(I Cor. 4:1-2)

And again, to Timothy, he wrote:

O Timothy, keep that which was committed to thy trust.

(I Tim. 6:20)

And again:

That good thing which was committed unto thee keep through the Holy Spirit which dwelleth in us.

(II Tim. 1:14)

As we recall from the rite of ordination, that good thing which is committed unto our trust as stewards of the Mysteries of God are, in a special sense, the Holy Gifts — the Holy Body and Blood of our Saviour.

In this stewardship, which has been committed unto us as a privilege and duty, we are duty bound by our love for our Saviour to be faithful even unto death. As soldiers of Christ, we are called to be pleasing unto Him Who has enlisted us.

Therefore, for the sake of being worthy in the eyes of the Lord God Who called us together from so many different ethnic jurisdictions — Antiochean, Greek, Romanian, Russian, Ukrainian — and also from heterodox bodies, it is incumbent upon us to take special care in the ministration of those things that pertain to the sacred rites of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, the Holy Orthodox Church, which is the Mother of us all in the Faith. For, indeed, it was to this purpose that we were ordained and set apart for the Lord God.

With this in mind, I would wish to draw your attention to two serious matters.

a) The first concerns the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist.

As our Saviour, the holy Apostles, and God-bearing Fathers have taught us and as we all

affirm, in the Holy Eucharist we partake of the very Body and Blood of Christ. This is confirmed in the holy Gospels, where our Lord addressed the disciples and said:

Take eat; This is My Body. . . Drink ye all of it; for This is My Blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

(Matt. 26:26-8)

Saint Paul, likewise, instructs us how we are to understand and approach this dread Mystery:

I have received from the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus, in the night in which He was betrayed, took bread; and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, "Take, eat; this is My Body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of Me." After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped, saying, "This Cup is the new testament in My Blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as ye eat this Bread and drink this Cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till He come.

Wherefore whosoever eateth this Bread and drinketh the Cup of the Lord unworthily shall be guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and thus let him eat of the Bread, and drink of the Cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's Body.

(I Cor. 11:23-29)

As a member of the generation immediately following that of the Apostles, Saint Justin the Martyr writes:

Among us this food is called the Eucharist; of which no one is allowed to partake but the one who believes that the things which we teach are true, and who has also been washed with the washing that is for the forgiveness of sins, and unto regeneration, and who is living as Christ has enjoined. For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but as Jesus Christ our Saviour, made flesh by the Word of God, took flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is consecrated by the prayer of His word, and by which our own flesh and blood by transmutation is nourished, is the Flesh and Blood of that Jesus Who became Flesh.

For the Apostles, in the Memoirs composed by them, and which are called Gospels, have thus delivered to us what was enjoined upon them, that Jesus took bread and, when He had given thanks, said, "This do ye in

remembrance of Me; this is My Body” (Lk. 22:19). And that, in the same manner, having taken the chalice, and given thanks, He said, “This is My Blood.”

(First Apology, chap. 66)

How heedful, then, we must be that we ourselves partake worthily of these holy Mysteries, and how careful we should be in this ministration, both at the time of receiving and of imparting the holy Gifts to others, and in uniting the elements of the holy Eucharist during the time of the Divine Liturgy, taking care that no particles fall out of the holy Chalice, and that the holy antimension be diligently cleaned during each Eucharist, so that there remain no Pearls of the immaculate Body of our Saviour, which might be brushed off inadvertently in the subsequent Divine Liturgy.

Also, in reserving Holy Communion for the sick, care should be taken that the sacred pyx be reverently kept in an appropriate place, with a perpetual (“unsleeping”) lamp burning before it. Because of the danger of break-ins in church buildings (which are usually unoccupied during the weekdays), and since there have been occasions where the holy Gifts were stolen or desecrated by robbers or vandals, it would be best if the reserved Gifts were kept in the homes of the clergy, in a suitable place, behind an icon, with a perpetual lamp burning before it.

Care also should be taken for the preparation of the holy Mysteries from the Liturgy of Holy and Great Thursday, so that the Particles be absolutely dry when they are finally stored in the sacred pyx. At Holy Transfiguration Monastery, an ample supply of the holy Mysteries is reserved annually. In the preparation thereof, the holy Gifts are dried during the period extending from Holy and Great Thursday until the feast of Mid-Pentecost. Also, to this end the monastery has purchased an abundant supply of sacred pyxes with threaded caps for the further safe-keeping of the holy Mysteries. These small pyxes have a beautifully engraved cross on the lid and are rhodium plated so that they do not tarnish. For several years, the monastery has been supplying individual parishes with the reserved holy Mysteries at their request. Should any of you have need of a sacred pyx, the monastery will supply one at no cost.

b) The second matter I wish to draw to your attention is the form of holy Baptism.

Again, because many of us come from different jurisdictions — which, alas, have been remiss in these matters so often and continue to be so — it is imperative to stress that the *Apostolic* manner of holy Baptism (i.e. three *complete* immersions) be followed in *all* instances, whether the Baptism be of infants or of adults.

Abuses in this matter are not of recent origin, nor are they peculiar to the New World. There have been instances in the past, both in Greece and Russia, where because of the influence of the Latinizers, the correct form was not observed.

In expressing concern over this matter, I bring to mind the example of Saint Macarius of Corinth, who was a leader of the Kollyvades Movement and who reposed as a great ascetic living in a cave on the island of Chios. When the Saint was still bishop of Corinth, out of his own family fortune he commissioned that many large baptismal fonts be made so that this abuse might be corrected in his diocese. These fonts were given as gifts to the parishes under the jurisdiction of the Saint, and he enjoined the clergy — under the pain of their being suspended — to observe the singular and saving form of triple immersion for the rite of holy Baptism.

The same is true of Saint Cosmas of Aetolia. It is recorded in his *Life* that the Saint “persuaded the rich, and they purchased more than four thousand large baptismal fonts of bronze at the price of twelve *grosia* each, and dedicated them to the churches so that they might always be found there as a memorial to the donors, and so that the children of the Christians might be baptized in the proper manner.”

A baptism without triple immersion (except in the instances of emergencies, i.e., clinical baptism) is no baptism. Even in the instances of clinical baptism, the holy canons make it clear that should the child or adult live, and is able to, the emergency baptism must be perfected by triple immersion in the baptismal waters.

It is a well-documented fact that in many local “Orthodox” jurisdictions — i.e., Constantinopolitan, Soviet, Japanese, etc., and especially in this hemisphere — the Church’s form is not kept. Indeed, it would appear as though they were even boasting about this abuse, for again and again photographs of this non-baptismal baptism appear in the periodicals of these jurisdictions, testifying to and confirming this abuse.

At the last year’s Orthodox Conference in Ipswich, I was asked to speak concerning the form of holy Baptism. In my presentation, I underlined the theological implications of the Church’s traditional form in this particular Mystery. Should any of you request it, I shall be happy to send you a copy of this talk. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need any clarification or further instructions in these matters.

In expressing these concerns to you, my beloved brothers in Christ, I am only seeking to be faithful to the vows I made at the time of my consecration as bishop. Since the third declaration which I read during the service of ordination includes a promise that the decrees and traditions of the holy Church shall be upheld by my lowliness, and since I have been set in the Church as an “episcopos” (i.e., “overseer”), it would be very grievous if I were remiss in my duties, and also it would be a source of sorrow to me if any of our clergy were lax and had to be corrected, or even reproved, for abuses in the two matters which I have outlined. Certainly, it is not I, who am the least among you, who beseech you to be faithful stewards of the Mysteries of God, but our Saviour Himself, the holy Apostles, and the Saints from all ages past.

It goes without saying that not only these matters which I have mentioned, but in general,

all the actions and the demeanor of the clergy are closely observed by the laity and those who assist us in the sacred rites. We serve as examples for them, either for better or for worse. Therefore, as the holy Apostle instructs us, let all things in the holy Church be done “properly and according to order” (I Cor. 14:40), lest our conduct or our ministry give rise to any scandal among the faithful.

I ask you to remember me in your holy prayers to God, so that I may be found worthy in fulfilling this responsibility which has been laid upon me, and which I have accepted in obedience and out of love for our Saviour and His holy Church.

Your fervent suppliant unto God,

✠ Ephraim, Bishop of Boston