

Orthodox Catechism

Session 8 – Sacraments Part B

Chapter 1	Holy Eucharist
Chapter 2	Confession
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The Orthodox Sacrament of Holy Eucharist

Historical Reflection of the Eucharist

The Holy Eucharist is the oldest experience of Christian Worship as well as the most distinctive. Eucharist comes from the Greek word which means thanksgiving. In a particular sense, the word describes the most important form of the Church's attitude toward all of life. As has been mentioned, the origin of the Eucharist is traced to the Last Supper at which Christ instructed His disciples to *take and eat* in His memory. The Eucharist is the most distinctive event of Orthodox worship because in it the Church gathers to remember and celebrate the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ and, thereby, to participate in the mystery of Salvation through the receipt of the Word of Truth (the Gospels) and His Body and Blood (Holy Communion).

For the first thousand years of Christian history, when the Early Church was visibly one and undivided Holy catholic and apostolic Church (as we state in the Nicene Creed), the sacraments have always been present in the Christian communities as a means of transferring Grace, either through the bishop or the priest. How this occurred the Church confessed was a mystery. To this day in the Orthodox Church sacraments are referred to as Μυστήρια (Mysteries) to acknowledge the inadequacy of human language to contain or express divine concepts. The sacrament of the Eucharist or Holy Communion is considered by both the Orthodox and Catholics Church to be the *Το Μυστήριον των Μυστηρίων*, The Mystery of All Mysteries.

For the first 10 centuries of the Early Church the idea that the simple elements of bread and wine became the Body and Blood of our Lord was considered to be the unexplainable Mystery. By the 11th and 12th centuries the Scholastic Era brought the Age of Reason to the West. The Roman Church, which had become separated from the Orthodox Church in the beginning of the 11th century was pressed by the rationalists to define how the transformation of the bread and wine takes place. The Catholic Church developed the term *transubstantiation* (a change of substance) in an attempt to define the sacramental process. The Orthodox Church disagreed with this on the grounds that this was seen as reducing the holy sacrament, which only faith can comprehend, to an object of philosophical and humanistic description.

With the arrival of the Protestant Reformation, which continued the Scholastic tradition of the Catholic Church, Martin Luther developed the idea that in Holy Communion the body and blood of Christ and the bread and wine **coexist** in union with each other. This was termed consubstantiation. Luther illustrated this idea by the analogy of "*the iron put into the fire whereby both fire and iron are united in the red-hot iron and yet each continues unchanged*" The term consubstantiation is commonly applied to the Lutheran Church and some other Protestant Churches who practice the sacrament of the Eucharist, however most Protestant Churches today see the act of the Eucharist as simply symbolic with no transformative power through Grace. For these churches the celebration of Eucharist is merely an act of Remembrance, given by Christ when He instructed His disciples to partake of the Lord's supper "*in remembrance of Him*" (Luke. 22:19) but that He is not present physically in the communion celebration.

So is the Bread and Wine Truly the Body and Blood?

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In the Orthodox Church the Divine Liturgy observes the fullness of both of these commands of Christ. First, we recite the words of the Ανάμνησις (Anamnesis) which is His command to *Take and eat...Do this remembrance of Me*. The Anamnesis is not just the Platonic idea of recalling of things from a previous existence but a remembering that Christ is actually present and with us during the Divine Liturgy¹. Following this is the reciting of the Αναφορά (Anaphora) where the priest or bishop calls upon the Holy Spirit to mystically transform the bread and wine into the Blood and Body of Christ.

So why does the Orthodox Church believe so strongly that for us as believers in Christ we must share in His Body and Blood for our salvation? Meaning that for Orthodox the receiving of Holy Communion *is* essential for salvation. To answer this question we need to examine the fullness of the teaching of Scriptures concerning the Eucharist.

We need to examine both the account by Matthew as well as the account by Luke to appreciate the fullness of what Christ said. While Luke's account records Christ offering the bread and wine *in remembrance of Me*, in Matthew 26:26-27 we read the precise words of institution of the sacrament of the Eucharist:

"...λαβων ο Ιησους τον αρτον και ... ειπεν λαβετε φαγετε τουτο **ΕΣΤΙΝ** το σωμα μου... και λαβων το ποτηριον και ... λεγων πιετε εξ αυτου παντες ουτο γαρ **ΕΣΤΙΝ** το αιμα μου το της καινης διαθηκης το περι πολλων εκχυνομενον εις αφεσιν αμαρτιων

[and] He broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this **is** my body...Then He took a cup, and ... He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This **is** my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

The Orthodox Church believes that Scripture should be interpreted in a singular manner. The Holy fathers of the Church have always strived to interpret Scripture in four ways; *historical, metaphorical, allegorical, and literal*. Often times Christ spoke in metaphors, (*I am the door...* (John 10:9), other times in allegories, (*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me...* (Matthew 11:29) and other times He spoke literally. The challenge for the Church Fathers was, through a lifetime of prayer and study, to discern which statements are which. Both the Orthodox and Catholic Church believe that both statements by Christ at the Last Supper were to be taken literally since the Greek verb εστιν is a verb of "being".

The active form of the Greek verb εστιν (is) in Christ's statement to His disciples, "...this is My body ... this is My blood" does not indicate that these gifts merely symbolize His Body and Blood. If this were the case, then the Gospel writers would have used a more appropriate word such as *ὅμοιος* (like or similar to).

"...οτι εαν φανερωθη **ομοιοι** αυτω "...when Christ appears, we shall be **like** Him"

1 John 3:2

The Eucharist, as the *Μυστήριον των Μυστηρίων*, The Mystery of All Mysteries is the principal sacrament of the Orthodox Church, and is not something to be observed from

¹ Matthew 18:20

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afar, but rather experienced in the communion with the Living God, the ranks of heavenly powers, all the saints, and the parish community who together in which prayer, music, gestures, and architecture come into full orchestration. The Eucharist is a celebration of faith which touches all the human senses.

Receiving Communion in a Proper and Reverent Manner²

Holy Communion, for the Orthodox and Catholic Churches has always been and continues to be the “*medicine of salvation*”. At the Anaphora when the priest or bishop entreats the Holy Spirit to *come down upon us and upon these gifts*, we pray with the priest that the Holy Spirit as God, will change the elements of creation, bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus. In this way when we come to receive Holy Communion, Jesus abides spiritually and physically within us.

What then should we do to prepare to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus? Firstly, we should pay heed to the words of the priest as he presents the Holy Chalice;

“With the fear of God, faith and love draw near.”

Here, St. John Chrysostom offers us the essential qualities for receiving the Gift of Christ within us and what is required of us to *draw near* to the cup of Christ.

Fear of God. Not a childish fear that comes from ignorance of the unknown, but with a rational understanding and respect that at that very moment we stand before God Himself. Proverbs 14:2³. Some have replaced the Greek word φόβου (fear) in this part of the Divine Liturgy with the word “awesome.” This does an injustice to the reverence that the Early Church had when worshipping God. And this also diminishes the fear of our unworthiness when we will all stand before the Judgement Seat of Christ which in itself is a fearful thing.

Faith. In order to truly and worthily partake of the Body and Blood of our Lord the Orthodox Church demands that we believe that what we will receive *is* truly that, Body and Blood. This is one reason why the Orthodox practice closed communion since those who partake truly believe and have faith that what they are about to receive is the “*medicine of salvation*”.

Love. We should have love in our hearts for all people. Christ commands this of all of us who abide in Him.

*“A new command I give you: **Love one another**. As I have loved you, so you must love one another⁴.”*

² For a more detailed review of preparing for Holy Communion see the Appendix of Fr. Alexander Schmemmann’s book, *Great Lent – Journey to Pascha*, pgs. 107-134, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1996.

³ “He who fears the Lord goes in his uprightness, but he whose ways are perverse despises Him.” Proverbs 14:2

⁴ John 13:34.

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Again, St. John Chrysostom, when composing the Divine Liturgy place the reading of the Lord's Prayer just prior to receiving Holy Communion to remind us of this when we say, *"...and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."*

St Paul also reminds us of the importance of love when he tells the Corinthians, *"These three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.* This is why if we have any unresolved issues with our family, friends, coworkers, etc., or if we have hurt anyone, we should refrain from receiving Holy Communion until we can reconcile with them since, as St Paul says as we would be *"eating and drinking without discerning the body of Christ [and thus] eat and drink judgment upon ourselves⁵."*

Certainly, as one is able, they should practice a fasting regiment in preparation for receiving Holy Communion, however it is important to realize that the Orthodox practice of fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays is not connected to receipt of Holy Communion and is for the remembrance of the betrayal and crucifixion of our Lord. Also, Orthodox canon law prohibits fasting on Saturday⁶. It is also important to keep in mind that fasting without prayer and the giving of alms is not adequate preparation for receipt of Holy Communion.

Etiquette When Receiving Holy Communion.

On the morning before going to the Divine Liturgy, if we expect to receive Communion, you should not eat or drink anything for just as one would not spoil his appetite by eating before a special meal, so we sharpen our spiritual appetite for Christ through fasting. However, two important points of note. This does not preclude the taking of any prescribed medications which can be taken with the required liquids and does not apply to those who are elderly or whose health requires them to have some sustenance in the morning.

Prior to receiving Holy Communion, we should read the [Prayers before Holy Communion](#) as a final preparation in our readiness to receive the Body and Blood of Christ.

As we approach for Holy Communion, our hands should not be in our pockets, but at our sides or crossed over our chest. We should not have anything in our mouth such as gum. As the person ahead of you is receiving Holy Communion is when you would make the sign of the cross to avoid hitting the chalice while making the sign of the cross.

Once it is your turn to receive, approach the cup slowly and tell the priest your baptismal name, holding the Communion cloth carefully under your chin. This is to prevent any Communion from falling from the communion spoon or from our lips onto our clothing or to the floor. Also do not pull your head away quickly after receiving so as not to bump the spoon or the chalice.

⁵ 1 Corinthians 11:29

⁶ Canon 66 from the Canons of the Holy Apostles. This are a collection of ecclesiastical canons concerning the government and discipline of the Early Christian Church

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After receiving Holy Communion wipe your lips carefully with the Communion cloth (*not on your hand or shirtsleeve*). Then move carefully away from the chalice and the communion spoon and hand the Communion cloth to the next person.

Once we have received Communion, we should read the [Prayers after Receiving Holy Communion](#). Finally, we must remember that we are one with Christ and with all those who received Communion with us so that our actions are reflective of Christ who now literally abides in us. It is only by loving one another that we can truly love Christ. “*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another*⁷.”

⁷ John 13:35

Preparation for Confession – An Orthodox Guide



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What is confession?

According to the website of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Holy Confession has a twofold purpose:

First, through this sacramental act of the ordained priest and the Christian believer we have the assurance of divine forgiveness, according to the words of Christ (Jn 20:23).

This we have from Scripture when St John tells us; *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."* 1 John 1:9

The authority for the absolution of sin are given by our Lord when He says; *"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven"* (Matthew 16:19).

The keys of binding and loosing sins were given not only to one apostle but to all Christ's disciples, and—in a sacramental sense—to any priest who has his bishop's blessing to hear confessions.

Secondly, Holy Confession provides the opportunity to talk about one's deep concerns, to receive counsel and to be encouraged toward spiritual growth, all of which are universally recognized as extremely beneficial to personal life.

Why should I confess?

Holy Confession is appropriate whenever an Orthodox Christian feels the need for it. It is also a part of our total spiritual preparation during the fast periods leading up to the great feasts of the Church. Unfortunately, many Orthodox who have grown up in Protestant America have a negative perception of the sacrament of Holy Confession. In general, this perception centers around five objections each of which should be examined.

Objection #1 – Only God can forgive sin.

The Catholic and Orthodox Church teach that a priest can forgive sin, but a priest is only a man. Isn't it true that only God can forgive sin?

Reply to Objection #1:

This is true and is acknowledged in the following two prayers said by the priest's to the penitent during the sacrament of confession:

Before Confession *My spiritual child, inasmuch as you have come to me and to God, be not ashamed, for you speak not to me but to God, before whom you stand.*

After Confession *My spiritual child, who has confessed to my humble person, **I humble, and a sinner, have no power on earth to forgive sins, but God alone;** through that divinely spoken word which came to the Apostles after the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ saying, "Whosoever sins you remit, they are remitted, and whosoever sins you retain, they are retained," we are emboldened to say whatsoever you have said to my humble person...**may God forgive you** in this world, and the world to come.*

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*May God Who pardoned David through Nathan the Prophet when he confessed his sins, Who pardoned Peter who wept bitterly for his denial, the Harlot who wept at His feet, the Publican and the Prodigal, **forgive you all things, through me a sinner**, both in this world and in the world to come, and set you uncondemned before His terrible Judgment Seat.*

The idea of confession and forgiveness been given only by God is emphasized as these prayers as read while the penitent is facing the icon of Christ. Note also that these prayers also indicate the Orthodox concept of a spiritual father who is responsible for the spiritual welfare of his parishioners.

Objection #2 – The bible does not teach that a man can forgive sin.

Reply to Objection #2:

The priest prayer from the previous paragraph provides the Biblical source of priests being able to forgive sins as these are the words directly from the Gospel of John (20:22). After His resurrection Jesus Christ came to the disciples in the upper room and after breathing on them saying “Receive the Holy Spirit,” He told them “*Whosoever sins you remit, they are remitted, and whosoever sins you retain, they are retained.*” *This authority, in the Orthodox faith, is passed down to each canonical priest through direct succession (or laying on of hands) traceable from the original Apostles.*

Objection #3 – But I don’t need a priest, I can go directly to God and ask forgiveness.

I have a personal relationship with the Lord and thus I can go to him in prayer, asking him to forgive my sins. Why would I need a priest to get in the way?

Reply to Objection #3:

The Orthodox Church would absolutely agree that anyone can go directly to God and pray for forgiveness. Indeed, we should do when we are aware of having sinned. Our Church teaches and the Bible supports that God desires people to confess to Him *through* his priests. Confession, together with the Presanctified Liturgies, is part of our total spiritual preparation during the fast periods preparing us for the great feasts of the Church.

However Holy Confession to another person who is dedicated to the salvation of those placed in his care, that is the parish priest, is necessary in three particular cases.

1. *when a serious sin has been committed*
2. *when a habitual sin has overwhelmed a Christian*
3. *when a Christian has stopped growing spiritually due to other priorities.*

In case number 1), the problem is not asking for forgiveness, it is more about the person’s ability to discern what is and isn’t serious sin (this will be defined later), so Confession is there to help a person make this crucial discernment.

In the case of item 2) the person engaged in that habitual behavior is often blind to the sin. Examples are addictions such as alcohol, video gaming, drugs, or pornography and in these cases it is very difficult for the person to admit that they have a problem and outside intervention is necessary to help them recognize and acknowledge the adverse effects and consequences of their actions on both themselves and others who love them.

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In the case of number 3) these include people who have become disillusioned with the Church, angry at certain people in the church, or those whose work or family situations have taken them away from the life of the Church. In these cases, as with case 2) an intervention is vitally important. The Church, of whom the priest is the face, is there to reach out and help identify the cause of these issues and work to resolve those issues, where possible. Sometimes this will require the priest to suggest another church or congregation better suited to the needs of the individual.

The sacrament of Holy Confession is not only about forgiveness of sins but for the physical and spiritual improvement of the individual. And this requires someone to intervene and help them to recognize and acknowledge their sins, weaknesses or the lack of spiritual growth. Some Protestant Churches are somewhat returning to the idea of Confession by using the term “accountability partner.”

Objection #4 – If you are saved, nothing more is required.

When a person is saved, he cannot lose his salvation so what purpose does confessing to a priest serve?

Reply to Objection #4:

This reveals a misunderstanding of how we are saved. First, the sacraments are not works (in the Protestant sense), but channels of Grace through which God works. While God will never withdraw Himself from us, we can withdraw from God. Our free will gives us the ability to choose to draw nearer to our Lord or to move further away. That move away from Him jeopardizes our salvation. St John Chrysostom reminds us of this when he says:

“I am saved, I am being saved, I will be saved.”

In this statement St John shows us that salvation is a constant endeavor and that we should never take our salvation for granted. All Protestants will agree that we continue to sin daily, often without realizing we are doing it. Through sin we reject this freely offered gift of salvation from God, however we can once again receive this gift through the sacrament of confession. Confession is the vehicle by which we are reminded of this on a regular basis and without this reminder we are lulled into a false sense of salvation security.

This modern notion of “once save, always saved” is not only not found in scripture, St Paul warns against believing this.

“Now I am reminding you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you indeed received and in which you also stand. Through it you are also being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.” (1 Corinthians 15:1-2)

*“Therefore, whoever thinks he is standing secure should take care not to fall. No temptation has come to except what is common to Mankind. God is faithful and will not let you be tried beyond your strength; but with the trial he will also provide **a way out**, so that you may be able to bear it.” (1 Corinthians 10:12-13)*

This **way out** for us as Orthodox Christians includes Holy Confession.

Objection #5 – Confession is nothing more than a permission slip to keep on sinning. People keep on sinning after going to Confession, so it doesn’t work.

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Reply to Objection #5:

This statement again reflects a lack of understanding of the full purpose of the sacrament of confession. As was stated earlier, the sacrament of Holy Confession is not only about forgiveness of sins but for the physical and spiritual improvement of the individual. And this requires someone to intervene and help them to recognize and acknowledge their sins.

For those people that use confession as a “get out of jail free” card it is even most vital for someone to show to that person that they have a habitual problem which must be recognized and acknowledged so that this person may begin again their journey of spiritual growth towards salvation.

Holy Confession as a Healing Sacrament

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann provided a wonderful summary of the three key relationships that Holy Confession is meant to heal:

1. Relationship to God: Questions on faith itself, possible doubts or deviations, inattention to prayer, neglect of liturgical life, fasting, etc.
2. Relationship to one's neighbor: Basic attitudes of selfishness and self-centeredness, indifference to others, lack of attention, interest, love. All acts of actual offense—envy, gossip, cruelty, etc.—must be mentioned and, if needed, their sinfulness shown to the penitent.
3. Relationship to one's self: Sins of the flesh with, as their counterpart, the Christian vision of purity and wholesomeness, respect for the body as an icon of Christ, etc. Abuse of one's life and resources; absence of any real effort to deepen life; abuse of alcohol or other drugs; cheap idea of “fun,” a life centered on amusement, irresponsibility, neglect of family relations, etc.

So How often should I go for confession?

Although the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese does not mandate a specific schedule for Confession as do some other Orthodox Churches, it is certainly very helpful in preparing during the fast periods leading up to the great feasts of Pascha, Christmas, the Assumption of the Theotokos and the Feast of the Apostles. Also, anytime you encounter the aforementioned situations; *when a serious sin has been committed, when you are overwhelmed by a habitual sin, or when you feel you have stopped growing spiritually.*

How should I confess?

When you come to confession, you should confess your sins sincerely, remembering that you are not confessing them to the priest, but to God Himself, Who already knows, but wants you to admit your wrongs and your guilt. You should not feel embarrassed before your spiritual father, because, he, first of all, knows human weaknesses and the inclination that all people have towards sin, and thus he cannot judge you harshly when you come to confession.

While you should confess what is weighing most heavily on your conscience you should not add anything extra, or blame yourself for what you have not done by simply saying, “Everything I have done is sinful,” or some such catch-phrase. With regards to details, only give the amount of detail necessary to allow your spiritual father the background he needs

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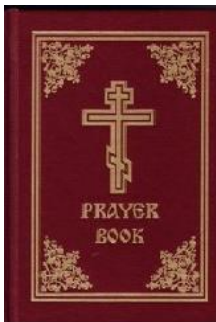
in order to give you good and relevant advice. In this way the priest can better help you understand the negative consequences of something you have done, whether you intended that outcome or not.

Confess your sins fully but don't make a story of them! That in itself can be an evidence of pride. If your spiritual father feels that you need to confess any particular sin in fuller detail, he will ask you about it. However, if you feel that it will help you can add the details regarding special circumstances, such as some particular temptation or outside pressure, which it would be useful for your spiritual father to know, so that he can advise you how to deal with it.

Do not mention sins that you have not committed, nor good deeds that you have done. If you are asked whether you have committed some sin and have not, simply say "No."

Do not mention the sins of others in your confession, unless this is necessary for your spiritual father to understand how and why you yourself have sinned. If you have a personal problem involving other people, which you would like to discuss with your spiritual father, or if you are in need of advice or some consolation for some unkindness that has been done to you, your spiritual father can offer help or just be there to talk.

Also, do not excuse your sin by saying *that many people commit some sin that you have committed*. Remember, you have come to confess your own sins, not those of others. Pay no heed to the sins of others. Oftentimes we imagine the motives and intentions and sinful inclinations of others, but in reality no-one knows the heart of someone else.



Before going to confession make a thorough preparation, and examine yourself. The next section offers some possible questions you can ask yourself and discuss with your parents. If you wish you can write out a list. The best place to start is the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, or any of the prayers of repentance available in most any Orthodox Prayer Book. Be very sensitive to include those sins which have become habitual, as these sins become so much a part of our life. Examples of this include sins like gossip, lying, vanity, disobedience and laziness. Also be cautious about committing sin by a careless word or action which has upset someone and perhaps caused them to sin.

You must be truly sorry for the sins you have committed. Unless you really regret having done them, and intend to try to avoid them in the future, you lack true repentance, without which your sins are not forgiven.

It is also necessary to confess with faith in Jesus Christ and to trust in His mercy. Only if we believe and trust in Jesus Christ can we receive remission of our sins. Judas Iscariot, for example, repented of his sin, not before one man, but before all, and he returned the pieces of silver. But instead of believing in Jesus Christ and trusting in His mercy, he fell into despair and seeking no remission, he ended his life in a terrible and lonely death. Contrast this with the confession and the tears of repentance of St Peter who after denying our Lord

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three times went back to our Lord confessing with tears of repentance and who was then given the keys to the kingdom of heaven.

If after your confession you are hoping to receive a blessing and partake of the Holy Communion, it is best to come for the confession a few days before the Sunday Divine Liturgy.

Here are some aids in preparing for confession. This comes from no single source but is drawn from a number of places.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

1. Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.
2. Thou shalt not make any graven image, or bow down before any creation in heaven or on earth.
3. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.
5. Honor thy father and thy mother.
6. Thou shalt not commit murder.
7. Thou shalt not commit adultery.
8. Thou shalt not steal.
9. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.
10. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's possessions.



COMMANDMENTS OF THE CHURCH

1. To attend Divine Liturgy on Sundays and Holy Days.
2. To fast and pray on the days appointed by the Church.
3. To confess our sins and to receive Holy Communion at least three times a year.
4. To pray to God every day, especially at morning and evening.

SEVEN DEADLY SINS

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------|
| 1. Pride | 4. Anger |
| 2. Covetousness | 5. Gluttony |
| 3. Lust | 6. Envy |
| | 7. Sloth |

ACCESSORIES TO SIN - Counseling, consenting, or provoking another to sin. Defending that which is wrong or being silent when a wrong is committed upon another.

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QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF AS YOU PREPARE FOR CONFESSION

- Have you complained about having to work or attend services or say prayers?
- Have you taken time each day to praise and thank God for your blessings?
- Have you given up hope or not having faith in God that He can and will change you?
- Have you been fully prepared to go to Church to worship?
- Have you conversed during the services about things not having to do with the service?
- Do you try to pay attention during the services?
- When in Church, are you attentive and keep idle talk to a minimum?
- Have you prayed to God upon rising and before eating and sleeping?
- During prayer do you try to focus and avoid being distracted by other thoughts?
- Did you make the sign of the Cross carelessly?
- Have you been ashamed to make the sign of the Cross in front of others?
- Have you failed to remember that God's is the source of all of our success?
- Do you show your parents proper respect? Have you been rude to them, talked back or otherwise offended them?
- If your parents are reposed, have you prayed for them?
- Have you been disrespectful to members of the clergy, your parents, elders, teachers or superiors?
- Have you asked forgiveness of those you may have offended?
- Have you donated to the needs of the Church?
- Are you properly attired when you come to church?

Idle speech

- Have you spoken without thinking? or spoken too much? or spoken anything that is impure? or shameless? or without need or order? or unreasonable? or unclean?
- Have you thought or said angry words or foul words?
- Have you participated with or sung worldly shameless songs in word or thought?
- Have you used the name of the Lord in swearing or in a joking way?
- Have you sworn or murmured against God?
- Have used the name of God without reverence?

Lying

- Have you failed to keep oaths or promises to God?
- Have you falsely confessed your sins or were you insincere about, your desire to repent, or kept silent about your sins during confession?
- Have you lied?
- Have you been sly or secretly mischievous, deceptive or hypocritical?
- Have you honestly obeyed your parents?

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- Have been argumentative or stubborn?
- Have you told falsehoods, distorted the truth, cheated, judged others or gossiped?

Speaking ill of others

- Have you spread rumors or gossiped in thought or in word?
- Have you joked of the faults of others, or exposed the faults of another to make yourself the better?
- Have you slandered anyone wanting to or intending to injure the reputation of another?
- Have you given bad ideas or words to people?
- Have you laughed at other's deficiencies or misfortunes?
- Have you treated anyone with malice or shown hatred toward or abused, insulted, or injured or anyone?
- Have you condemned anyone, made fun of people in thought, word, or action or mocked in a hurtful way?
- Have you taunted, teased, or tempted anyone?
- Have you laughed about things that you shouldn't have?

Gluttony



- Have you eaten before you pray and make the sign of the cross?
- Have you eaten too much at one time or became too full during the fasts?
- Have you eaten without having thankfulness to God?
- Have you respected the feasts and fasts as much as you could?
- Have you eaten foods merely for the enjoyment of them?

Stealing

- Have you stolen anything or thought seriously about stealing something?
- Have you taken something without asking?
- Have you failed to return a book or other thing that you have borrowed?

Love of money and possessions, and Envy

- Have you been content with what God gave you?
- Have you wished in your mind that you had more things than you do already?
- Do you have an unhealthy attachment to material things?

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- Have you been greedy or selfish?
- Have you acquired something that belonged to another?

Bearing grudges

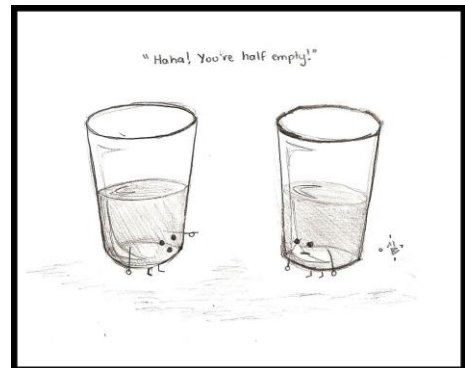
- Do you hold on to wrongs that someone did to you in the past?
- Do you bear any grudges against people instead of understanding and forgiving?
- Have you imagined ways you could have revenge on anyone?
- Do you envy others for what they are or have, or been jealous of them?

Injustice

- Have you judged anyone?
- Have you accused an innocent person of committing an act that they did not do?
- Have you rejoiced at the misfortunes of other's?
- Have you failed to give aid to someone in need, especially when asked?
- Does your inner peace disappear when others are unfair to you or judge you?

Pride

- Have you thought of yourself as better than anybody else?
- Have you considered yourself worthy while considering others unworthy?
- Have you had a high opinion of yourself or sought glory or praise for yourself?
- Have you talked down to anyone?
- Do you compare or measure yourself up to anyone?
- Have you looked out for other people's faults rather than your own?
- Do you speak of the shortcomings of others while trying to conceal yours?
- Have you been critical of other people or criticized anyone?
- Have you been arrogant, vain, or conceited?
- Do you rely completely on yourself rather than God?
- Have you bragged or boasted of things that you have accomplished?
- Have you been prideful of the good deeds that you have done?
- Have you failed to be respectful to your parents or superiors?
- Are you overly concerned with your appearance?
- Have you thought yourself self-important?
- Have you been self-willed instead of trying to do the will of God?



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- Have you self-justified your sins?
- Have you been impatient or anxious about anything in which you shouldn't be?
- Have you been prejudice towards anyone for any reason?

Anger, Lack of compassion, and cruelty of the heart

- Have you said anything unfeeling or hurtful things to anyone?
- Have you hurt anyone's feelings in any way?
- Have you carried on arguments with someone in your head?
- Have you had any harmful thoughts aimed towards anyone?
- Have you wished evil upon anyone?
- Have you been angry with people without a just cause?
- Have you been unfriendly to anyone or been cruel?
- Have you ridiculed anyone?
- Have you had abusive or violent thoughts?
- Have you been cruel to animals?
- Have you lacked mercy, forgiveness, compassion, and love for anyone?
- Do you put the needs of other before your earthly possessions?



Magic, sorcery, and incantations



- Have you seriously considered magic and things relating to magic?
- Have you imaged Holy things, such as icons, having some sort of magical properties?
- Do you have a serious belief in astrology, superstitions, fortune-tellers or the like?

1. Origin and Evolution of Christian Marriage
2. Orthodox View of Marriage
3. Marriage and Children
4. Inter-Christian and Inter-faith Marriage
5. The Orthodox Wedding Service
6. Videos



1. The Origin and Evolution of Orthodox Marriage

Prior to 9th century

Wedding services from the earliest time were blessed within the Eucharist. The sacramental seal of Christ came when the couple received Holy Communion together usually accompanied by a brief blessing. Early Christian documents indicate a lack of form or ritual evidenced by the fact that there is no reference to the ritual of marriage in the Didache as there is for baptism.



10th century

Longer form begins to emerge with the addition of local customs into the service. Byzantine Emperor Leo VI required that all weddings be sanctioned by the Church. An example of a Byzantine Marriage Belt circa 7th century is shown in figure 1. The inscription reads: *From God, oneness of Mind, Grace, and health.* Note that Christ is at the center of the artwork as He is in every marriage in the Church. Here graphically is the picture of Orthodox marriage. Christ at the center of the marriage, joining the couple in oneness of mind, under the Grace of the Holy Spirit, with the blessing of good health upon them.

16th century and onward

As more couples became a mix of Orthodox and Non-Orthodox, this led to the separation of the marriage service from the Liturgy since only Baptized Orthodox Christians may receive Holy Communion. Thus, the wedding service emerged into a separate rite where only non-consecrated wine is consumed by the couple. This is evident from the words of the priest just prior to the couple partaking of the wine,

*"...and bless also this **common** cup given to them that are joined in the community of marriage."*

While similar to the present-day service, the betrothal service was held in the Narthex and the Crowning performed in the main sanctuary. Today both the Betrothal and the Crowning are both performed in the main sanctuary, although the Betrothal could be performed separate from the crowning service, or be performed in the Narthex, as it was done originally.

We will see these same words echoed in the prayers of the Orthodox marriage service.

2. Orthodox View of Marriage

In opposition to the secular view marriage as a legal contract, and in contrast to the juridical aspect of marriage in the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church sees the sacrament of marriage as a temporal restoration of the union set forth by God between His created beings. It contains no vows or oaths. For the Orthodox, a complete and fulfilling marriage is a spiritual union that is instituted by the Father (Gen 2:18), confirmed and blessed by Christ (John 2:11), and under the Grace of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 9:8).

Marriage was instituted and blessed by God in the Garden of Eden prior to the Fall so that the union of man and woman into one body is God's plan. The disobedience of Adam and Eve brought the stain of sin upon humanity and negatively impacted this relationship of perfect love between to one another. Thus, the original expression of love between two people became disordered, and takes on various corrupt forms such as abuse, marital unfaithfulness, polygamy, and other marital flaws.

Even so, the essence of this original marital relationship was not completely lost. For this reason, we must be cautious when reading St. Paul's words to the Corinthians with regards to marriage as just a mechanism of valid release for a couple's desires.

"But if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry, since it is better to be married than to be burnt up."
1 Corinthians 7:9

But rather view it as did St. Augustine: *"Therefore, the first natural bond of human society is man and wife. Nor did God create each by Himself and join them together as alien by birth: but He created the one out of the other, setting a sign also of the power of the union in the side, whence she was drawn, was formed. For they are joined one to another side by side, who walk together, looking ahead together wherever they go¹."*

In his book, *The Sacrament of Holy Matrimony*, Orthodox theologian Fr John Meyendorff² expressed marriage not simply as the satisfaction of a natural human instinct, or the fulfillment of man's search for earthly happiness. It is an event which concerns Christ Himself, for two of His members are being joined into the Body of Christ. He reminds us that the crowns which are placed on the heads of the couple are martyrs' crowns, with "martyr" having the Greek meaning of "witness."

And this witness into the union of Christ is performed *within the Church* so that marriage ceases to be a "private affair." This spiritual blessing of the All-Holy Trinity is best experienced in the Church itself, where the bridal couple, together with their church community, can participate in the blessings of Grace that are bestowed in the celebration of the sacrament of marriage. It is

¹ *Of the Good of Marriage*, St. Augustine in defense of Jovinian, 401 AD

² Fr. John Meyendorff (1926-1992) was a prominent 20th century Orthodox Christian priest, theologian, and writer and was Dean of St Vladimir Seminary.

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the life of and in the Church that gives to the married couple and their families a renewed dimension, and a unified approach to life.

Having been married in the church surrounded by family and friends, and in many instances by the priest whom each have developed a spiritual relationship, when marital struggles occur (which every marriage experience) the couple will remember that they do not have to face these struggles in isolation but within the church community. This community of family, friends, and faithful can provide help and advice to the couple, especially those with years of marital experience, serving as mentors to the young couple.

Since the earliest times, the Orthodox marriage is seen as having 3 partners: the bride, the groom, and God (recall the Marriage Belt from figure 1).

The words of the Orthodox wedding service emphasize the ever-present Holy Spirit who sanctifies the work of God's free grace, constantly renewing the image of God as the source of,

- comfort (John 14:16-18, John 20:22)
- renewal (Titus 1)
- source of strength in difficult times (Luke 24:49)
- directs them to God (Heb. 10:15-16)
- unity (Acts 2)

This is echoed when the priest says to the couple in the marriage service,

"And now, O Master, Lord our God, send down Your heavenly Grace upon these Your servants."

The Indissolubility of Marriage

The Orthodox Church sees marriage as a sacrament conferred upon the partners in the Body of the Church with the priest as the *minister of the sacrament*. As any sacrament, marriage pertains to the eternal life in the Kingdom of God and therefore, is not dissolved by the death of one partner. An eternal bond is created between them—"it is given to them."³ (Matthew 19:11)

This view of the indissolubility of marriage presents to ideas foreign to the Latin West: first, that Orthodox sacramental marriage is not dissolved with the death of one of the spouses but remains forever, and secondly, that sacramental marriage is only one and can never be followed by another marriage, not even in the case of widows.

Thus, under the strict application of canon law (ακριβεία), the Orthodox Church calls upon Orthodox married couples to stay and live together for all their life and insists that widowed or divorced persons embrace celibacy for the remainder of their life. As we will see later the Orthodox Church's application of οἰκονομία addresses the question of divorce.

³ Marriage: An Orthodox Perspective by John Meyendorff, St. Vladimirs Seminary Press, 1975.

This indissolubility of marriage is reflected in several of the liturgical petitions said throughout the wedding service which invoke God to grant the gift of permanent love; the crowns as a symbol of victory over death, and the joining of the hands of the spouses by the priest.

Does Love Conquer All?

Today, and especially in America, many seem obsessed with the idea that love conquers all. Unfortunately, many couples, in the day-to-day realities of married life, see the initial heat of infatuation cool and one or both find they lack the skills or community support structure to cope with each other's "peculiarities".

In this isolated atmosphere, the love and acceptance of the couple can continue only as long as the other person is meeting their expectations. When these needs are not met, this causes hurt feelings, reduces positive communication and fuels anger, bitterness, and conflict.

Recognizing these dangers, the Orthodox Church promotes the message of the true source of a strong and healthy marriage as the one which Christ has for His Church, *submission, sacrifice, and compassion*, each of which are reflected in the Orthodox Marriage service.

Submission

This word is a hot button in our modern world as we are taught not to submit to anyone and that we are free to do as we please. This idea is antithetical to the concept of an Orthodox marriage as the Church believes that under the sanctity of marriage Christ joins "*them together in oneness of mind; crown them with wedlock into one flesh*".⁴

In the Epistle reading of the Marriage service, we hear the words of St. Paul, "*Be subject (υποτασσομενοι) to one another out of reverence for Christ.*"

This word "subject" (υποτασσομενοι in Greek) should be understood as it is used in Luke (2:51) with reference to Christ's action with regard to His parents: «...και Ιησους υποτασσομενος αυτοις.....»...and Jesus was subject to them (mother and father)." This is a relationship of submission not from a position of slave to master, but one of honor, respect, and love.

Sacrifice

In the Orthodox wedding service, we also hear, "*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her that He might sanctify her...*" This verse applies equally for both spouses and is the example of Christ's sacrificial love for the church.

Sacrifice doesn't mean major acts of martyrdom. It means acting in ways that build up our relationship with our spouse. It involves performing small acts of sacrifice such as helping with the laundry, doing the dishes, or sacrificing our own personal interests in favor of the interests

⁴ From the Orthodox Wedding Service just prior to the crowning of the couple.

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of our spouse. And it especially means balancing (sacrificing) the time spent on work or children to be *present* in the life of your spouse such as setting aside a day for “date night.”

St Paul’s advice to married couples regarding this is clear,

“You must not deprive each other, except by mutual consent for a limited time, to leave yourselves free for prayer, and to come together again afterwards...” (1 Cor 7:5)

Compassion

The path of destruction for a marriage is present whenever there is a lack or forgetfulness of the virtue of compassion. We must be ever vigilant that our hearts do not become hardened to the needs of our spouse or when constructive criticism in love becomes destructive. Recall that Christ admonished not only the Pharisees for their hardness of heart but also those who were closest to Him; the disciples. (ref Mark 8:17)

Marriage counselors point out that just reducing negative interactions is not enough for most couples to feel satisfied in their relationship, they also need to experience regular positive experiences. Marriages are strengthened when each couple treat each other with love and understanding and with dignity and respect. Once again St. Paul’s advice regarding the treatment of one another certainly applies to compassion in marriage,

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.” (1 Cor 13)

Arranged Marriage (Προξενία)

The Greek culture, just as many other older cultures, has had the practice of the “arranged marriage” for thousands of years. It is estimated there are over 20 million arranged marriages worldwide, and the surprising fact is the low divorce rates among those marriages. In the U.S., while the divorce rate is around 50 percent, the divorce rate for arranged marriages is 4 percent⁵. In America, particularly in immigrant communities, family members, friends, and relatives, have taken upon themselves the task of matchmaker or προξενήτρα.

While the matchmaking of the past saw little involvement on the part of those getting married, today’s arranged marriages place much more emphasis on free choice, according to Pamela Regan, professor at California State University in Los Angeles. She finds that more young people are willing to let their parents find someone, but if they don’t like him/her, they have the right to say no. The expectation is that all parties can have an opinion, but the persons getting married have the final decision.

⁵ Source: Statistic Brain Research Institute, 2018

Studies of arranged marriages indicate that as people are given more influence and say in their own arranged marriages, that once married the couple feels more inclined to work through issues and are more dedicated to remaining in the relationship. This process, which is a balance between love and logic, helps to avoid rash decisions to marry someone out of passion. Also, since the community has been involved prior to the marriage the couple is more likely to use that support system to help when problems and issues occur. The blend of tradition and modern independence allows people to find matches that make all parties happy.

It's important to remember that an arranged marriage and a forced marriage are very different things. In his book "Marriage: An Orthodox Perspective" Father John Meyendorff⁶ points out the danger of a forced marriages, where the couple themselves have no desire for a positive commitment and/or the parents or some other party are forcing the arrangement of marriage.

Also there has arisen the new concept of the "starter marriage" where both parties enter into marriage with the understanding that it more than likely will not be a lifelong union but an opportunity to experience the difficulties of marriage so that if it doesn't work out they will have a head start on the next marriage.

Both are totally antithetical to the idea of a Christian marriage and is one of the reasons for the importance of pre-marital counseling. This counseling by the priest helps the couple prepare for their marriage by helping them to not only understand the meaning and significance of Christian marriage but also prepares the couple for the issues they will face during their marriage, and should include not only the priest, but also with the parents, family, and trusted friends.

3. Marriage and Children

The idea that the purpose of marriage as a means for childbearing is as ancient as the Biblical command to "*Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth...*" (Gen 1:28)

People saw, through their children, the continuation of their lives and were comforted in their death, thus childbearing was regarded as the initial cause of marriage. After the resurrection of Christ, through which death was overthrown, St John Chrysostom, speaking on the consolation of childbearing is no longer necessary said,

"Marriage exists above all for its own sake as a full communion of two persons apart from all other considerations...[so that] a childless marriage is also a full and complete marriage without apology." Christian marriage is a witness of God in the world. They follow the way of the Cross. Their chief goal in life is their salvation and the salvation of others."

⁶ Ibid., 3

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As a point of clarification, and contrary to what most people believe, both the Orthodox and Catholic Churches teach that,

“Children are the supreme gift of marriage and contribute greatly to the good of the parents themselves... Spouses to whom God has not granted children can nevertheless have a conjugal life full of meaning, in both human and Christian terms. Their marriage can radiate a fruitfulness of charity, of hospitality, and of sacrifice⁷.”

For those marriages that are blessed with children the Orthodox Church sees the role of parenthood not as an obligation but as Godly profession worthy of sacrifice, effort, discipline and compassion. According to Chrysostom, a parent is not one who brings children into the world, but one who expends the energy to raise them.

“Not “child-making” but “childrearing” is the mark of a parent. “For a person does not become a father simply because he helped to bring about the birth of a child, but by raising the child correctly.”

Pope Benedict XVI counsel to young couples on how to avoid divorce is that they should be formed in their faith before marriage and once established, they can then form their children, together, from a young age.

This is the echo of St. John Chrysostom who wrote,

“...a well prepared husband and wife close the way to divorce: everything takes place joyfully and children can be educated to virtue. When the first child is born, he or she is like a bridge: the three become a single flesh because the child brings the two parts together and together, they constitute a family, a little Church.”

With regards to Inter-Christian marriages, the Orthodox Church’s position on the raising of children has softened over the years. Up until the 1970’s the Orthodox and Catholic Churches required that the Interchristian couple be married in the Church, baptized in the church, and agree to raise the children in the faith. Today however inter-Christian couples marrying in the Orthodox Church are encouraged to baptize and raising their children in the Orthodox faith and do what is in their power to share their partner’s faith with their children.

⁷ Catechism of the Catholic Church, Article 7, The Sacrament of Matrimony, para. 1652-1654

4. Inter-Christian and Inter-faith Marriage

In America, more and more marriages are being performed between Orthodox and Non-Orthodox. When immigrants first came to America, they stayed mostly isolated within their own communities and cultures so that marriage to a non-Orthodox was typically not an issue. However today more than 55% of all marriages in the Greek Archdiocese of America are between Orthodox and Non-Orthodox⁸. But this is not a recent problem, as it existed in Old Testament times,

“Yahweh, God of Israel, you are upright. We survive only as the remnant we are today...Then Shechaniah...said to Ezra, 'We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women from the people of the country. But, in spite of this, there is still some hope for Israel.'”

Ezra 9:13-10:3

Their solution, which was to *“make a covenant with our God to send away all the foreign wives and their children in obedience to the advice of my Lord”* is not an option that is open to us today.

Out of concern for the salvation of each person the Orthodox Church *“does not desire to place an insurmountable obstacle before her faithful by denying the sacrament of marriage to those who seek an Inter-Christian marriage. Therefore, the Orthodox Church permits the marriage of an Orthodox Christian and another Trinitarian Christian through *economia* (οικονομία)⁹.”*

This is referred to as an **Inter-Christian marriage**, that being one between an Orthodox and Catholic or Protestant.

Double performance of the wedding is not encouraged. Co-celebration with another priest or pastor from the Catholic or Protestant church is not permitted, however the priest or pastor can say a prayer either before or after the service.

Inter-Faith marriages, those where one party is of a non-Christian faith, such as Jewish, Muslim, Mormon, etc., are not allowed and are not recognized as sacramentally valid.

The Orthodox Church maintains that the differences between both partners' belief systems preclude individual, couple and family religious and spiritual development. As a result, it continues to discourage its faithful from entering interreligious marriages. Orthodox Christians who decide to enter an interreligious marriage are unable to wed in the Orthodox Church. Considering the growing numbers of interreligious marriages that Orthodox faithful are

⁸ According to the 2016 Registry statistics of the Greek Archdiocese of America

⁹ A Trinitarian baptism is one performed in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Some non-denominational churches only baptize in the name of Christ.

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entering, some Orthodox theologians have called for a reexamination of the Church's position regarding this issue but to date, nothing substantive has been done to address this subject¹⁰.

Premarital Counseling

While the Catholic Church has a long and well-established program for pre-marital counseling, the Orthodox Church has been somewhat haphazard in their approach to pre-marital counseling leaving the program up to the parish priest.

This has resulted in a vast divide in how pre-marital counseling is approached and conducted. Recently however the Department of Marriage and Family Planning, (within the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, GOA), under the direction of Pastoral Theology professor Dr. Philip Mamalakis and Fr. Charles Joanides, has created a great resource for pre-marital counseling.

This guide standardizes the approach and the content of a pre-marital counseling program. The focus is not on *should a couple get married* but rather on discovering more about one another and their backgrounds. This resource, when led by the parish priest, guides the couple through inter-Christian difficulties and provides useful strategies to navigate these difficulties.

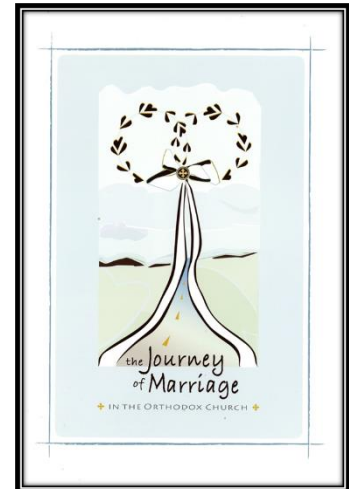


Figure 2 - Premarital Counseling Guide

¹⁰ Interreligious Marriage and the Orthodox Church, Fr. Charles Joanides, Office of Outreach and Evangelism GOARCH

5. The Orthodox Wedding Service

The Orthodox wedding service, just like all sacraments, must be a public event and can thus not prevent anyone from attending. Also, during the service no vows or oaths are exchanged between the couple, since the priest is the minister of the sacrament. Just prior to the start of the service the priest will meet the couple at the steps of the Solea holding candles. It is here that the priest will silently ask the bride and groom if they have “*entered into this sacrament of their own free will and without threat or coercion*”. If both couple answer in the affirmative, then the wedding service can begin and the priest will hand the couple their candles and ask them to come up onto the Solea and stand before the Analogion¹¹. The Analogion will have several items set upon a silver tray; the betrothal rings, wedding crowns, wine, a chalice, and the Gospel.

Betrothal – Placing of the Rings

After the reading of several prayers and petitions, passages from the Old and New Testament are referenced which refer to a ring by which,

- Joseph was given might in Egypt (Gen 41:42)
- Daniel was exalted in Babylon (Daniel 6:17)
- the truth of Tamar was made manifest (Gen 38:25-26)
- the Father showed compassion upon His prodigal son,

The placing of rings as an official act indicates that an agreement had been sealed between two parties and that the lives of the two are being entwined into one. The prayers during the Betrothal service reflect these passages. In the case of marriage, the agreement is that a man and a woman agree to live together in the fellowship of marriage as husband and wife. The priest will bless the bride and groom with the rings, after which the sponsor exchanges the rings between the bride and groom.

Crowning

The service then proceeds to the Crowning. The priest blesses the bride and groom in the same manner as he blessed them with the rings and the sponsor exchanges the crowns over the heads of the bride and groom in the same way as the rings. The crowns have several meanings:

- they conform to Biblical teachings in that God bestows His blessing upon His children in the form of crowns.
- they identify the bride and groom as the beginning of a new kingdom, under the Divine Authority of God, Who reigns over all. The exchanging of the crowns over the heads of the bride and groom seals this union.

¹¹ A small table.

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- They refer to the crowns of martyrdom since every true marriage will involve self-sacrifice love on both sides.

It is in the crowns that we see the stamp of the cultural tradition in the Orthodox service where in the Russian, Romanian and Arabic rites the crowns are actual crowns (figure 3) or olive branches in the Greek tradition.

The Common Cup

The Crowning is followed by the reading of from the Epistle and Gospel, after which the couple partakes of the Common Cup. As was previously stated this is not Holy Communion and contains only common wine which is offered to the couple denoting the mutual sharing of the joys and sorrows of life. No one other than the couple should drink from the common cup and in some traditions the breaking of the cup by the priest after the couple drink points to the indissoluble unity of marriage.

The Procession of Joy (Dance of Isaiah)

The priest, holding the Gospel, leads the couple around the table three times, with the sponsor following behind and holding the ribbon that links the two crowns. This symbolizes the joy of this new union and led by the priest holding the Gospel, the couple take their first steps as a married couple with the Christ as their guide.

Where and Whom Can Perform the Wedding Service?

As sacraments of the Orthodox faith are communal and never private affairs¹², all Orthodox marriage services must be performed *within the church sanctuary*. This is another area where differences in the sacramental theology of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches are revealed. At the present time, the Roman Catholic Church has spoken of the couple as "*ministering the sacrament [of marriage] to each other.*" Due to this, the Catholic Church accepts as sacramental those marriages of Christians baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity which are witnessed by a Catholic bishop or priest (or, in more recent discipline, a deacon), but it also envisages some exceptional cases in which, whether by law or by dispensation, **Catholics may enter into a sacramental marriage *in the absence* of a bishop, priest or deacon**¹³. Also, although not the preference, the Catholic Church will allow a marriage to occur outside the church sanctuary.

As the Orthodox Church insists that *the priest is the proper "minister of the sacrament"*, the Orthodox Church, as a rule, **accepts as sacramental only those marriages** of Christians baptized

¹² Except for confession and receipt of Holy Communion.

¹³ Source: [*A Pastoral Statement on Orthodox/Roman Catholic Marriages*](#), October 5, 1990, Johnstown, PA

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in the name of the Holy Trinity which are sanctified through the blessing of an Orthodox bishop or priest¹⁴.

¹⁴ Ibid

Concerning Second and Third Marriages

While Orthodoxy embraces the indissolubility of marriage, she is also aware that in some cases the fallen nature of this world creates difficult and untenable situations. The Fathers of Orthodoxy has always understood the words of Christ *“what God has joined together, let no one separate¹⁵”* as a moral ideal rather than as an ontological truth about marriage.

Thus, in response to harsh application of ἀκραιβία, when situations such as the death of a spouses or actions or circumstances that render a marital cohabitation impossible, the Orthodox Church invokes οἰκονομία and grants not divorce but permission to remarry. It must be noted, however, that this concession does not transform divorce into a good or praiseworthy experience and is viewed as a real tragedy both for the couple and the community. Moreover, any remarriage in the Orthodox Church is non-sacramental and carries a more repentant and penitential nature. Although celebrated with a liturgical rite which bestows a certain sacredness on the new union, second and third marriages lack the sacramental fullness of the first marriage.¹⁶

A more complete discussion on the Orthodox treatment of divorce is given in section ____.

Second Marriage

A second marriage is an extension of the Church’s mercy due to human failings and frailty and is permitted only in certain circumstances. As mentioned, the words of the service for the second marriage reflect a more repentant tone. If one (or both) of the parties has been once married and then divorced (rather than widowed), permission from the Metropolitan or Archbishop must be petitioned and received in order for the marriage to take place.

If it is the second marriage of the bride, her gown should not be white or elaborate nor does her father give her away. There is no bridal procession, as the wedding party is simply led by the priest from the narthex to the table on the solea.

Third Marriage

A third marriage is the final extension of the Church’s mercy due to human failings and frailty and is permitted after the similar filing of the petition by the parish priest to the Metropolis for permission to marry. A bridal gown is not worn, but rather a dignified dress. If it is not the bride’s first marriage, the dress may not be white. The number of guests at a third marriage should be kept to a minimum.

A fourth marriage is not allowed in the Orthodox Church.

¹⁵ Mk 10:9; Mt 19:6

¹⁶ Ibid, 3

VIDEOS

