

Sunday of Orthodoxy: Pre Communion Prayers 1

A sermon by the Rev. Fr. David G. Subu
delivered on February 25, 2007

This 1st Sunday of Lent we begin a series on the Pre-Communion prayers of the Orthodox Church. The service of preparation for Holy Communion is able to be found in many prayer books and liturgy books. In the little black Liturgy Vol. 1 books in the pews the service is found starting on page 103. These prayers are quite likely the most important prayers we can offer to the Lord. For even as the Eucharist is the heart of our corporate worship, our personal preparation for the Eucharist also must be the heart of our private spiritual lives. It also follows the basic rule of “lex orande, lex fidei,” or what you pray is what you believe. The prayers in preparation for Holy Communion are the example par excellence of what we truly believe about our God, the sacraments, and our salvation. It should be the goal of every Orthodox Christian to make this personal service of preparation an integral part of their spiritual lives.

The heart of the Pre-Communion service is a sequence of prayers by the saints, such as St. Basil, St. John Chrysostom, St. John of Damascus, as well as lesser known saints as St. Symeon Metaphrastes and St. Symeon the New Theologian. This Lent during the Sunday and Wednesday services we will look closely at some of these prayers and learn the depth and wisdom of Christ revealed in His saints.

Now, one could argue that all of our prayers are in a certain sense “Pre-Communion Prayers.” The model and first of all pre-communion prayers is the Lord’s prayer: “Give us this day our daily bread.” This prayer is indeed in many ways the model for all our pre-communion prayers: First identify and magnify the object of prayer God—“Our Father, who are in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven.” This teaches us to recognize to whom we are addressing our prayer and to give him due glory and

honor. In doing so we place ourselves in the proper position to supplicate one who is infinitely greater than our selves.

Next, we make our request. The Lord's prayer gives us three inter-related requests: 1) Give us this day our daily bread; 2) and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and 3) and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one. In these three requests we address present, past, and future—the whole of our existence. Our present is in the daily bread, our past is acknowledge by our seeking forgiveness, and our future is addressed by seeking deliverance from the evil one. A Pre-Communion prayer must do the same. For to approach communion we must identify what it is we are seeking in the present: what is our daily bread and what does it mean. We also need to confess why we need to receive it, because of our infirmity of both soul and body. It always comes back to forgiveness. And we pray that having received communion that it may bless us both our immediate and eternal future.

Lastly, the Lord's prayer ends with doxology: "For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, amen." You may have noticed that all Orthodox prayers end with this type of doxology. Having begun with evoking the great divinity of God, we conclude in the same manner, bearing a witness that our whole existence is encapsulated in His will (or kingdom), His grace (or power), and His love(or glory). We remember that in the end it is by God's grace alone that we can even know Him enough to approach. Rather we turn it over into His hands completely and let his eternal glory shine.

With all this in mind let us look at the first pre-Communion prayer of St. Basil the Great:

First Prayer of St. Basil the Great (pgs. 109-110)

O Lord and Master, Jesus Christ our God, fountain of life and immortality, the Creator of everything visible and invisible, the eternal and everlasting Son of the eternal Father, Thou hast

come in these latter days because of Thy goodness. Thou hast out on our human flesh and wast crucified and buried for us thankless and graceless men, and through Thine own Blood Thou hast renewed our human nature which is corrupted by sin. And now O immortal King, accept the repentance of me a sinner, and incline Thine ear to me and listen to my words. [Evokation]

I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned before heaven and before Thy face, and I am not worthy to look upon the height of Thy glory.

I have provoked Thy goodness, I have transgressed Thy commandments, I have not obeyed Thy statutes. [Past]

But O Lord, since Thou dost not remember evil, but art longsuffering and of great mercy, Thou hast not given me over to destruction for my lawlessness, but hast ever awaited my conversion.

O Lover of mankind, Thou hast said by Thy Prophet: “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.”

For Thou dost not wish, O Lord, that the work of Thy hands should perish, neither dost Thou take pleasure in the destruction of men, but Thou desirest that all men should be saved and come to a knowledge of the Truth.

Therefore, although I am unworthy both of heaven and earth, and of this passing life, having completely yielded myself to sin and defiled Thine image, yet being Thy creature and of Thy making, **I do not despair of my salvation in my wickedness. But made bold by Thy infinite compassion, I draw near.** [Present]

Receive me, O Christ who Lovest mankind, as Thou didst receive the prostitute, the thief, the tax-collector, and the prodigal. Take away the heavy burden of my sins, for Thou takest away the sins of the world. Thou who healest the infirmities of men, thou callest to Thyself and givest rest those who labor and are heavy laden.

Thou hast not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. Cleanse me from every stain of flesh and spirit. Teach me to fulfill holiness in the fear of Thee, that having the testimony of my own conscience clean, and having received communion of Thy holy Things, I may be united with Thy holy Body and Blood, and have Thee to dwell and abide in me with the Father and Thy Holy Spirit.

O Lord Jesus Christ, my God, **may the communion** [Future] of Thy most-pure and life-creating Mysteries not bring me into judgment, nor may I become weak sick in body or soul by partaking in an unworthy manner; but grant me to receive communion of Thy holy Things without condemnation even unto my very last breath, and by them to receive communion of the Holy Spirit, provision for the journey of eternal life, and an acceptable answer at Thy dread judgment seat; that I, together with all Thy chosen ones, may also be a partaker of the incorruptible blessings which Thou hast prepared for those who love Thee, O Lord, **in whom Thou art glorified forever. Amen.** [Doxology]