

PART FOUR

SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST



HIS GRACE BISHOP METTAOUS,
Abbott of El Syrian Monastery

Known as :

- ✠ Sacrament of Holy Communion
- ✠ Sacrament of Thanksgiving
- ✠ The Lord's Supper
- ✠ The Mysterious Supper
- ✠ Sacrament of Community

The Meaning of the Eucharist

The Sacrament of Communion is a Holy Sacrament by which the believer eats the Holy Body and Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, presented by the Bread and Wine. This Sacrament has the greatest importance among the Seven Church Sacraments. It is sometimes called the 'Mystery of Mysteries' or the 'Crown of Sacraments'; for all the Sacraments are crowned by the Eucharist :

- ✠ The person baptised must receive Communion directly after Baptism.
- ✠ The repentant person must receive Communion after having confessed.
- ✠ The person who marries must receive Communion after the wedding, (which must take place between the Matins and Holy Mass), according to the original Rite of Matrimony. Also, whoever is ordained with any priestly rank must receive Communion following the Holy Mass of his ordination.

Its Institution



The Lord Jesus instituted the holy Eucharist on Covenant Thursday, in the Upper Room of Zion, shortly before His arrest and trial. After He celebrated the Rite of Passover of the Jews, He rose and washed the feet of His disciples, as a sign of repentance and preparation, then sat down and instituted the Passover of the New Covenant, which is the Sacrament of Holy Communion. ***“He took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat, this is My Body’, then He took the cup and gave thanks, and gave it to His disciples saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you, for this is My Blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins’”*** (Matthew 26:26-28), and our teacher St Paul repeats the same words in 1 Corinthians (11:23-25).

The Benefits of Holy Communion

The Sacrament of Holy Communion has many benefits, such as :

1. Abiding in Christ according to His precious promise: ***“He who eats My Flesh, and drinks My Blood abides in Me, and I in him”*** (John 6:56). By receiving this Sacrament we become members of His Body, of His Flesh and of His Bones (Ephesians 5:30), and we also become partakers of the Divine Nature, (2 Peter 1:4).

2. It gives us the promise of eternal life : ***“Whoever eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood has eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day. He who eats this Bread will live forever”*** (John 6:54,58).
3. It provides growth in the Spirit and spiritual perfection and life in Jesus Christ, for He said: ***“For My Flesh is food indeed and My Blood is drink indeed As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me”*** (John 6:55,57).

As food develops the body and keeps it healthy, so too the spiritual food, which is the Holy Body and Blood of Christ, strengthens the soul so that it may grow continually in grace.

4. It provides remedy to the soul, body and spirit, as we say in the Offertory Mystery : ***“That they (Holy Body and Precious Blood) may become to us all for participation and healing and salvation for our souls, bodies and our spirits”***.

Partaking of the Communion without worthiness causes weakness, sickness and death, for as St Paul said : ***“For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep”*** (1 Corinthians 11:30).

Also Communion received worthily and with preparation results in health, and strength for our bodies and souls. Our holy church fathers called Communion ‘the remedy for the death of sin’.

5. Communion results in our salvation and remission of sins; as mentioned in the final ‘Confession’ in the liturgy : *“Given for our salvation, remission of sins and eternal life to those who partake of Him”*.

By repentance and Confession before the priest we are granted the remission of the sins we have confessed, but in Communion we are granted remission of sins that we are unaware of, including the sins of lust that we are not conscious of. Communion is the washing and cleaning of the repentant’s heart from all sins, as we read in the Book of Revelation about those redeemed and saved who are, ***“The ones who come out of the great tribulation and washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb”*** (Revelation 7:14).

6. Communion gives a person immunity against sin. Material food gives him health and immunity against bacteria and viruses that attack him. Likewise, partaking of the Holy Body and Blood of Christ gives the spirit immunity and inaccessibility against the viruses of sins, Satanic warfares and bodily lusts, so the person lives in victory in his spiritual struggle. The Psalmist says : ***“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies”*** (Psalm 23:5). This verse was a prophecy about the table of Communion and its benefits for victory against our enemies.
7. The introduction to the Litanies is as follows : *“We ask You O our Master, to partake of Your holies for the purification of our souls, our bodies and our spirits. That we may become one body and one spirit, and may have a*

share and an inheritance with all the saints who have pleased You since the beginning...

We find many benefits of Communion in this prayer :

† It gives purification for our souls, our bodies and our spirits. St Paul advises us, ***“Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God”*** (2 Corinthians 7:1).

† It provides the unity of the body and spirit, as St. Paul our teacher says : ***“For we being many, are one bread and one body, for we all partake of that one body”*** (1 Corinthians 10:17).

As the bread that is transubstantiated to the Body of Christ was previously grains of wheat having become bread after much grinding, kneading and baking, and the wine that is transubstantiated to become the Blood of Christ was previously many grapes pressed to become liquid, so too all the community of believers, partaking of the Holy Body and Precious Blood, become one in Christ. For this reason, in the Gregorian Mass we pray, *“May the unity of heart that is for love, be rooted in us,”* and this is achieved through partaking of the same Body and Blood of our Lord.

† It gives us an eternal inheritance with all the saints who have pleased the Lord by their good deeds, and this is our greatest longing and aim of our struggle; to please the Lord and granted an inheritance amongst His saints. Communion helps us achieve this goal.

DUTIES OF THE PRIEST TOWARDS THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION



The priest who serves the Mass and sanctifies the sacrifice is completely responsible for it before God, just like the Cherubim that God appointed at the East of the garden of Eden, holding a sword of fire to guard the way to the tree of life (Genesis 3:24). The sword in the priest's hand is the authority of priesthood given to him by God, to give the Communion to the worthy repentant and forbid it from those who are unworthy. On his day of ordination, the Bishop advises the new priest saying :

“You must be watchful when you distribute the living Lord’s mysteries, more than all the ecclesiastical commandments and better than all other Apostolic orders. Do this seriously, actively and diligently. Be sure that the Seraphim and Cherubim are standing in awe and reverence. Be well knowledgeable of the sublime value of the sacrifice between your hands. He is Christ Emmanuel who sacrificed Himself for you. Know, without doubt, that you divide the Human Members, and carry in your hands the one whom Simeon the priest carried in reverence and awe” (Luke 2:28).

“This Chalice is His Blood shed for our sins, by which He saved from Hades all the imprisoned souls. What a sublime hidden Mystery! This is the Holy Body and precious Blood

*given for the salvation of humankind. This is the Lamb of God who lifted the sins of the world and led them to the light of truth. My son, take care of yourself and guard this valuable jewel as the Cherubim guarded the tree of life. Be alert about these Mysteries and treat them with caution to rid yourself from crisis. Do not give them except to the righteous, good and pure. Forbid whoever is an evil doer, so he does not bring upon himself condemnation, and you become the reason of guilt, sharing in the sin he committed by receiving Holy Communion in an unworthy manner. Hence you also will be guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord and will be punished. The Apostle says : “**Do not share in other people’s sins**” (1 Timothy 5:22). Be cautious and not neglectful, for the whole world is worth nothing.”*

The Measuring Reed

In the book of Revelation, St John says, **“Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying: “Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there”** (Revelation 11:1). The reed given to St John symbolises the authority given to Christ’s ministers to ‘measure’ (assess) the believers.

They absolve the person who deserves absolution and bind the persons who deserve binding. They give the Sacrament of Communion to those whose measure they consider lawful, and forbid those whose measure they consider deficient. So if a person approaches Communion and the priest forbids them, it is not appropriate to complain and lose temper, but rather listen to the advice and accept the instructions of the priest. The priest is

given authority to refuse giving the Communion to the unrepentant and anyone else he feels unworthy of Holy Communion. Also, he is authorised to forbid his son or daughter in confession to receive Communion for a certain time as a means of chastisement for a certain confessed sin. However, the priest has no right to forbid a believer to receive Communion in another church from another priest, this is only the authority of the bishop.

A priest and a bank teller

As the bank teller is responsible for every dollar going out from the bank's safe, and must be accountable for every document by which he withdraws any amount from the safe, so too is the priest, Christ's minister, who is responsible before God to ensure that every one who approaches the Holy Communion is worthy and ready, otherwise he will be condemned by God for his negligence in giving Communion to those who are unworthy : ***“He who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks Judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's Body”*** (1 Corinthians 11:29).

Here a question arises: What is the meaning of worthiness of Communion from the Holy Body and Blood of the Lord, and when is a person worthy of this great grace and receive it without falling into condemnation?

Worthiness has various meanings :

1. True Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ: as the person who approaches the Holy Communion must be a Christian

Orthodox believer, baptised in the Orthodox Church, and strongly believes in the transubstantiation of the Bread to the Body of Christ, and the mixture into the Precious Blood of Christ, and that the Communion is the actual Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus.

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

True faith and pure repentance are the beginnings of life with Christ, as St. Paul says: ***“The elementary principles of Christ, the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith towards God”*** (Hebrews 6:1).

3. Reconciliation with others: anyone who approaches the Communion must be first reconciled with others, for the Lord’s advice is clear: ***“Therefore if you bring your gift to***

the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23,24).

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

4. He must not deal with Communion as if ordinary food, or partake of it for blessing only, but he must know the greatness of the Holy Body and Blood of the Lord, for Communion is like a live coal which the Seraphim presented to Isaiah the prophet after he confessed his sins: “*Then I said, ‘Woe to me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips’ ... then one of the Seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it and said, ‘Behold this has touched your lips, your iniquity is taken away and your sin is purged’”* (Isaiah 6:5-7).

The Seraphim denotes the priest who is the Minister of the Sacrifice, and the tongs denotes the fingers of the priest by which he takes the jewel, which is the Holy Body (represented by the live coal) from the paten on the altar and places it into the mouth of those receiving Communion.

5. Worthiness is feeling unworthy and sinful, and knowing that the holies are for the holy person, and that no person has

reached this holiness but struggles to attain it. Even if the person is contrite, repentant and confesses, they must believe in what our teacher St. Paul said: ***“For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this”*** (1 Corinthians 4:4).

The priest says: *“Make us all worthy to partake of Your holies”*, and he also prays in the Prayer of the Veil: *“We pray and entreat Your goodness, O Lover of Mankind, that this Mystery which You have appointed unto us for salvation may not be unto condemnation unto us or unto any of Your people, but for the washing away of our sins and the forgiveness of our negligence.”* The deacon says: *“Pray for the worthy Communion of the immaculate heavenly and holy Mysteries,”* so the partakers may take blessing and grace and the Mysteries affect their lives spiritually. There is an old script, which is still used in some countries. Its words are powerful and effective :

“Amen. Amen. Amen. I believe. I believe. I believe, and confess that this is true indeed, Amen. Partaking of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God who came into the world and said, *“I am the Bread of Life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. He who eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood abides in Me, and I in him. For My Flesh is food indeed, and My Blood is drink indeed. He who eats Me lives by Me and I will raise him up at the last day.”*

Whoever approaches this Holy Body and Precious Blood in an unworthy manner, becomes like Judas the cursed, who was cast away from amongst the Disciples. He who is pure,

let him approach. He who has any trace of hatred, let him escape, otherwise he will be burnt by the fire of the Divinity. He who has ears to hear, let him hear! Sing a hymn. Alleluia. Pray for the worthy Communion of the immaculate heavenly and holy Mysteries for the remission of sins. Lord have mercy!”



Necessary Physical Purity For Communion

We spoke previously about spiritual conditions necessary for receiving Holy Communion like having true faith, pure repentance, reconciliation with others, not approaching the Communion without preparedness, and the importance of feeling contrite and unworthy at the time of Communion. Holy Communion should be approached with the same eagerness as a patient seeking medicine to be cured of all illnesses. Hence, Holy

Communion gives us the healing and immunity against all evil viruses of sin.

There are also some necessary physical preparation before receiving the Holy Communion, such as:

- † Control over all physical senses so that no obscure sins may enter the heart.
- † Cleanness of body and clothing; respectable clothes should be worn, as you are going to Church to meet the King of kings and Lord of lords.
- † The faithful must be fasting and eat light food on the eve of Communion.
- † Sexual relations between married couples should not take place either on the eve of Communion, as well as on the day of receiving the sacrament.
- † If a person is in a state of impurity, accompanied by a dream or otherwise, he must not approach Holy Communion as this is considered breaking the fast. St Severus Bin Moqufaa said, “*Sexual impurity is fast breaking, and who breaks the fast cannot be forbidden from praying, or entry of the Church or attendance of the Mass (after a complete physical cleaning of course), but only forbidden from partaking of the Mysteries.*”
- † Period of abstaining from food must be nine hours for adults, according to the number of hours of suffering of

the Lord Christ during His Crucifixion, (from the Third Hour (9 am) until His sentence at the Twelfth Hour (6 pm)). For children, the period of abstinence is six hours, and the duration of the Mass (three hours), for weaning infants (three hours is also the usual time between feeds). If the child's health is not the best, the priest can lessen the period of abstinence. A common mistake amongst some churches which distribute the general Korban (holy bread) early, is that some mothers feed their children from the Korban before going to receive Holy Communion. It is important therefore, for Churches to distribute the Korban after the Mass has finished only.

In the past, some Churches would arrange for an 'Agapi' meal after the Mass, where the poor, together with guests and strangers, would sit together and share a meal in love. When churches no more had the 'Agapi' meal, the Korban was distributed in its stead.

† Before Communion, it is important not to brush your teeth or gargle water, in case water may accidentally be swallowed. St. Severus Bin Moqafaa says, "*Many gargle their mouth by water then partake in the Communion and this is wrong. The mystery of God's words to His servant Moses about the Passover lamb, who was an example of the Body of Christ, was to be eaten with bitterness, meaning bitterness of the mouth.*"

† Women should not partake of the Holy Communion when they are menstruating.

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

- † It is not preferable for a person to walk barefoot, or for a man to shave, directly after Communion. This is to avoid any wound occurring which may bleed. If, however, bleeding does occur unintentionally, the blood must be wiped with a piece of cloth or cotton, then burned in fire.

- † If anyone comes to church late, that is, after the Bible reading, they have no right in partaking of the Holy Communion. The Bible reading and the Prayer of the Mass are performed before Holy Communion in order to sanctify the soul and body, and provide spiritual and mental preparation for partaking of the Holy Communion.

- † After receiving the Holy Communion, it is important for each person to read the 'Prayer After Holy Communion', and offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the wonderful grace received.

- † It is advisable that the remainder of the day be spent relaxing, rather than mingling with others. Reading spiritual books and spending the day in peace is a great way to feel the existence of God inside you, after having received the Holy Communion.

I have already written three books concerning the Rites of the Sacrament of Holy Communion, and the Divine Mass, and therefore I will not expand on this further. I hope, dear reader, you may be able to read these three books :

- Spirituality of the Rite of the Holy Liturgy in the Coptic Orthodox Church
- How to benefit from the Holy Liturgy
- Study and Contemplation on the three Masses

The books include all the Rites of the Liturgy, specifying what concerns the priest, the deacons, and the congregation.

May God help us to be ready and worthy always to partake in the Divine Mysteries, so that we may abide in Christ, and He may abide in us, so that we may be granted the gift of Eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Due to its importance, I would like to mention here the Rite of Sanctification of the Chalice, as mentioned in the Liturgy books.

¹RITE OF SANCTIFICATION OF THE CHALICE

- ✠ If the Chalice is accidentally exposed to substances other than wine, such as vinegar or oil, it must be emptied and the chalice properly cleaned, after covering the bread that has been chosen to be the Body and placing it on the right side of the altar. A priest or

¹Liturgical Book of the Three Masses by Elmoharraq Monastery, Page 34-42.

deacon stands near the Body to watch over it, with a lit candle in his hand.

† The ministering priest wraps his hand with a linen veil in which he receives the decanter of wine after testing it well. The priest holds the decanter in his left hand and makes the sign of the cross over it three times, before pouring it into the Chalice and mixing it with about a third water (two thirds wine, and one third water). The deacon then follows with the deacon's response.

† The priest says the Thanksgiving Prayer, then covers the Chalice with the Prospharine, raises the incense after placing five spoonfuls of incense, and says the first Pauline Mystery: "*O God the great, and the eternal....*". He offers incense in the censor, without proceeding around the altar, or descending from the sanctuary.

† The congregation sings the hymn "*Censer of Pure Gold*", as well as any other hymn according to the season or rite. A deacon reads the Pauline Epistle to the Corinthians, which speaks about the Holy Communion being the Holy Body and Blood of the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:23-27).

† The hymn of "*Holy God*" is sung before the Prayer of the Gospel. "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil, my cups runs over" (Psalm 22:5), followed by the Gospel according to St Matthew (26:26-29), which speaks about the institution of the Holy Communion.

- † The priest says the Litanies of Peace, the Fathers and the congregations, then the Apostolic Creed.

- † The priest then says the Prayer of Reconciliation: *“O God, and lover of mankind, purify us from all blemish, all guilt, all hypocrisy all malice and the remembrance of evil entailing death. Make us all worthy to greet one another with a holy kiss, to become one body and one spirit by the bond of perfect love and peace which is Your only Begotten Son, our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ. Through whom is all glory, and honour ...”*

- † The deacon responds, *“Greet one another with a holy kiss.”* During the congregational response, the priest lifts the Prospahrine.

- † During the Consecration of the wine, the priest says, *“Likewise also the cup after supper He mixed it of wine and water, and, He gave thanks, Amen. He blessed it, Amen. And He sanctified it, Amen.”*

The priest continues: *“He tasted, and gave it also to His own holy Disciples and saintly Apostles saying: **“Take, drink of it all of you. For this is My Blood of the new Covenant which shall be shed for you and for many, to be given for the remission of sins. Do this in remembrance of Me.”***

The priest then prays on the Chalice, saying the following fractions:

“O Lord Jesus Christ the only begotten Son, the Logos of God the Father, who was incarnated for us without alteration, by His own will, who suffered in Body, while as a God was not suffering. Who gave us the spring of life from His pure side, we ask and entreat Your goodness O Lover of Mankind, for this mixture which is in this Cup, may You bless it, sanctify it, and manifest it as the Holy Blood of Your Holy living Body.”

“That which preceded and was sanctified and perfected to become One with it, for every one to partake and be pure in soul and body and spirit, to be worthy of the remission of sins.”

“Glory be to Your holy name, with Your good Father, and the living Holy Spirit. Make us all worthy to dare, without fear, O God the Pantocrator who is in heaven to say: ‘Our Father who art in heaven.’”

† Then the priest takes the paten which holds the holy Body, and places it on the altar after having carefully lifted the veil which covered the holy Body, and says the Submission Prayers: *“Yes we ask You, O good Father ... The grace of the beneficence of Your only begotten Son, our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ are now fulfilled.”*

- † Followed by the Absolution: *“O Master, Lord God the Pantocrator, healer of our souls, our bodies and spirits...”*
- † The priest then says the introductions of the Three Litanies:
- *“Remember O Lord, the peace of Your one, holy, universal, and Apostolic Church...”*
 - *“Remember O Lord, our Patriarch, the honoured father, Pope ... , and his brother(s) in the apostolic ministry ...”*
 - *“Remember O Lord, our congregations, bless them.”*
- † The deacon says, *“Saved, Amen. And with your spirit. In the fear of God, let us attend. Amen.”*
- † The congregation responds, *“Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy.”*
- † The priest lifts the “Spadikon” (central part of the holy Body) and makes the sign of the cross with it on the blood, then places it in the Chalice, saying, *“The holies are for the holy people. Blessed be the Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God, the sanctification of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”*
- † The congregation responds, *“One is the Holy Father, One is the Holy Son, One is the Holy Spirit, Amen.”*

- ✠ The priest lifts the Chalice in his hands and says the Confession.
- ✠ He then kneels before the altar and prays silently, *“That every glory, honour, and worship all the time is due to the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit ... now and at all times...”*. The congregation then sings Psalm 150, *“Praise the Lord”*, which is the Communion Psalm.
- ✠ The priest then distributes the Holy Mysteries, which are the living Body and precious Blood of the Lord.
- ✠
- ✠ The Bishop is responsible for ensuring that the priests distribute the Holy Communion according the holy Church canons, and penalise those who are negligent.

NOTES:

Rite of Sanctification of the Chalice is done, only if at the end of the Mass it was noticed that the precious Blood had seeped from the Chalice, due to a fracture of the Chalice (if it was made of glass or similar), or if accidentally, what was placed in the Chalice was not wine but some other substance. If, however, either of these cases were discovered before transubstantiation, then it is possible to change the Chalice (in case of a fracture), or pour the contents of the Chalice which is not wine, into a container, then wash and wipe the Chalice thoroughly, before continuing with the Holy Mass, without the need for performing the Rite of Sanctification of the Chalice.