

# Beginning

## Orthodoxy, Part I

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### Preparation to Baptism.

**O**ne should be prepared for baptism. First of all you have to find out if the church has a special class for the "catechumens" (those preparing to be baptized and studying the basics of the Orthodox Faith). If there is such class, one should attend it regularly. During the days before baptism one should read the Gospel and other books on Christian teachings, such as the the law of God. You should bear in mind that those days are special, so your

attention should not be distracted by other things, no matter how important they might be. Devote that time to spiritual and moral meditation, concentrate on the inner life of your soul. Avoid the fuss and fret, idle talk and TV watching. Shun entertainment, as what you are about to receive is great and holy, and all holy things granted by God are to be received with great awe and reverence. On the baptism day you must not eat, drink or smoke since morning. Spouses should abstain from matrimonial interaction at night on the eve of baptism.

Anyone approaching God's sacred things must be especially clean. To be baptized you should come to church extremely clean and neat. Women with a monthly flow of blood cannot approach the baptism font until those days are over. Besides, women should not wear ornaments or have cosmetics applied. You must be on time (before the baptism begins) for the baptism. If the great mystery of baptism is performed in your church on weekdays, it is not necessary to arrange it specifically for Sundays.

## Godparents.

Once I was helping a priest during baptism. When the mystery ritual was over a woman with a small boy entered the baptismal room accompanied by a man who looked Asiatic. The woman started asking to baptize the boy as they were leaving the town that day. The man introduced himself as a godfather-to-be. "Are you wearing a cross?" asked the priest of the man. "What for?" was the reply. "What do you mean — what for? Aren't you an Orthodox believer?" — "No, I am Muslim," — replied the man.

This anecdotal episode shows vividly how lightly people take the task of choosing godparents. A large majority of them do not comply with the minimal requirements of the Church: they do not know a single prayer or how to cross themselves, they did not read the Gospel, they do not wear a cross. Some godfathers think it proper to "have a glass for bravery" before coming to church, godmothers are sometimes dressed immodestly and overusing cosmetics. And almost nobody knows anything about what the role and responsibilities of godparents are, or what they should be at all.

According to the traditions of the Church an infant should be baptized on the 8<sup>th</sup> or the 40<sup>th</sup> day after birth. Clearly, to demand at this age faith and repentance — the two main requirements for unity with God — is impossible. Therefore, "godparents" have existed since ancient times — people, who according to their faith baptize the child. (In passing one must note that godparents are not necessary for those over 18 years of age.)

The godparent can only be an Orthodox believer, able to prove his faith. In fact a boy needs only a godfather and a girl — only a godmother. But due to an ancient Russian tradition both are usually invited to be godparents. Birth parents cannot become godparents of their child. Spouses cannot be godparents of the same child. Grandparents, brothers and sisters can surely be godparents of the baby.

After the baby is immersed in the font a godparent is to take it in his or her arms from the priest. That's why in Slavonic a godparent is called a "recipient." Doing so, a godparent assumes responsibility to bring the child up in the spirit of Orthodoxy and will be held accountable for the upbringing at the Last Judgment. To their last day, godparents pray for their godchildren, they teach them to be faithful and devout, and they introduce them to the

mysteries of the Church. That kind of connection between children and godparents is deeper and more everlasting than between birthparents and children. Both the destinies of the child and the godparent depend on how thoroughly those obligations are fulfilled by the godparent.

## **Behavior in church.**

**A**n Orthodox church is a special place of God's presence on earth. We must behave ourselves reverently in church, so as not to offend the dignity of the sacred place and not to call God's wrath on ourselves. We should come 5-10 minutes before the service begins. Coming into church we must make the sign of the cross and bow. On entering a church, men are to remove their headwear. Women should cover their heads, and dress according to their sex, there must be no lipstick left on their lips. We must be dressed appropriately and neatly. We should not speak loudly, keep our hand in pockets, or chew the gum in church. We should not wander around needlessly in church.

We must put candles and venerate icons so that we do not interfere with other people praying in church. Any conversation should be restricted to the very minimum. You can greet your acquaintances briefly and postpone talking to them for a later time. Having come to church with children you must prevent them from running, misbehaving and laughing. A crying child who cannot be calmed down, should be taken out of church by the parent.

We can join the singing chorus very softly. If the entire parish is singing, we must prevent "loud cries." While in church one can be sitting only due to illness or extreme fatigue. One should not sit with his or her legs crossed. If all the praying people kneel, you should join them. It is prohibited to smoke on a church-porch. Animals or birds are not allowed in church.

No walking or talking is allowed during Gospel reading or when the Cherubic hymn is sung, as well as while Eucharistic Canon (from "The Symbol of Creed" to "Our Father") is read. During that time it is also advised to refrain from putting candles and venerating icons. One can correct a fellow parishioner only in a soft and delicate manner. It would be better not to make any remarks unless a person behaves like an impertinent hooligan. Finally we should stay in church till the end of service. You may leave earlier only due to bad health condition or if a very serious matter requires it.

## **A Candle.**

**W**hat does a person entering church do first of all? In nine cases out of ten — he buys a candle. Our joining

the real Christian ritual begins with a small wax candle. It is impossible to imagine an Orthodox church without burning candles.

The interpreter of the Liturgy, the Holy Fool-for-Christ Simeon of Thessalonica (XV century), said that pure wax symbolizes the purity and innocence of people offering it. The wax is offered as a sign of our repentance for our obstinacy and willfulness. The softness and malleability of the wax speak of our readiness to obey God. The flame of the candle shows the warmth of love to God. We should not put up a candle just for the sake of the ritual, with our remaining cold. The outward action must be supported by a prayer, be it even a simple one expressed in your own words.

Candles are indispensable during church services. The newly baptized and those undergoing the mystery of marriage are holding candles. The burial service is read in the presence of many burning candles. Believers are forming a procession of the Cross holding candles and shielding the flame from the wind with their hands. There are no strict rules about the number of candles to be put or any definite place to put them. To buy a candle is a small sacrifice to God, a sacrifice which is voluntary and not burdensome. A big and expensive candle is not more gracious than a small one.

Those who come to church regularly usually put several candles: to the icon celebrated on that day — it is usually placed on the lectern in the center of the church; also to the icons of the Savior and the Holy Theotokos — in a prayer for the your living relations, to the Crucifix on a small rectangular table holding candles (canon) for the departed to rest in peace. If you wish you can put a candle to any icon of a saint or saints.

Sometimes there are so many burning candles on the candleholder in front of an icon that there is no room to put yours. You should not put out somebody else's candle for the sake of yours, it would be better to ask someone working in the church to put it there later. Do not be embarrassed by somebody putting out your candle when the service is over — the sacrifice has already been accepted by God. You should not listen to tales about the necessity to put a candle only with your right hand, about the misfortunes to happen if the flame of your candle went out, and that it is a deadly sin to melt the candle at the bottom in order to fix it better in the candleholder, etc. There are many superstitions associated with church and all of them are meaningless.

Your bees wax candle is pleasing to God. But He appreciates the burning ardor of your heart much more. Our spiritual life and participation in service cannot be limited to putting up a candle. The candle itself would not deliver us from sins, would not bring us closer to God, neither will it give us strength for resistance in the invisible battle. A candle is full of symbolic meaning, but we are saved not by a symbol, but by a real entity — God's grace.

## **Commemoration lists.**

**I**f you would like that a your commemoration list be passed to the altar be read with attention and not hurriedly, remember the following rules:

Write coherently, better — in block letters mentioning not more than 10 names in one petition.

Put the title at the top: "for the living" , or "for the departed."

Put the names into genitive case (answering the question "whose").

Use the full name even if you are petitioning for a child (e.g. not Seriozha, but Sergei).

Find out how to write the traditional church variant of the names (e.g. not Polina, but Appolinaria ; not Arteom, but Artemius, not Yegor but George).

Write the clerical title in front of the names of clergymen; you can write them in full or use understandable abbreviations (e.g. priest Peter or archb. Nikon).

A child under 7 is called a baby, from 7 to 15 — a youth.

There is no need to indicate last names, patronymics, positions and occupations of people in the petition, neither should we show what kind of relations those people are to us.

The words "soldier," "monk," "nun," "sick," "travelling," "the prisoner" are allowed to be mentioned in the petition.

On the contrary, we should not write "lost," "suffering," "angry," student," "mourning," "maiden," "widow," "pregnant."

In the petitions for the departed you should note "newly departed" (within 40 days upon death), "memorable" (the dead who are remembered on that day), or "murdered."

We do not have to pray for those whom the Church has sanctified (for example, Saint Ksenia, the fool-for-Christ).

We pray for the living who have orthodox names, but only for those departed who had been baptized in the Orthodox Church.

Most churches provide special printed slips of paper (usually located near the candle counter) for commemoration purpose. For longer lists of names commemorated regularly, it is recommended to use a booklet.

### **Commemoration lists can be submitted:**

during proskomediya — the first part of the Liturgy — for every name mentioned in the petition, some parts of special phosphors are taken out to be dipped in Christ's Blood with a prayer for forgiveness of sins of those

mentioned;

during the mass — which is a common name used by people when speaking of Liturgy in general and remembrance after it in particular — usually those petitions are read by priests and clergymen in front of the Holy Altar;

during the litany — remembrance made publicly and aloud. It is usually read by a deacon.

When the Liturgy is over, in many churches those petitions are read for the second time during other services for special occasions. Petitions can also be submitted for a *molieben* or a commemorative [funereal] service.

## How to Make a Sign of Cross Correctly.

"**M**ake the sign of the cross, sonny," said a middle-aged woman softly to a youth standing beside her, when the priest on the lectern made the sign of the cross with the Gospel over the parishioners in prayer. Together with his mother the boy started making the sign of the cross over himself. "In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit," the boy was whispering almost inaudibly, with the solemnly reverent expression on his face.

How happy we are to witness that! But very often unfortunately we would see something different. Some believers who have been attending church services for years would make the sign of cross utterly incorrectly. One would wave his hand around as if he is driving flies away, another put his fingers together as if not for making the sign of the cross, but for putting salt over himself. A third one would beat his fingers into his forehead with all his might as if he is driving nails into it. Needless to say that the most widespread mistake is when the hand does not go as far as the shoulder, but is reduced to a place closer to the neck.

Is that a trifle, an unimportant thing, a mere formality? No, by no means. Basil the Great wrote long ago, "Everything in Church is appropriately fine and has its rules." The sign of the Cross is a visible evidence of our faith. In order to find out if a person facing you is an Orthodox Christian, just ask him to make the sign of the Cross. Whether he or she would do it and how they would do it will make everything clear. Let's quote the Gospel here, "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much" (Luke 16:10).

The sign of the Cross is extremely powerful. There are many cases described in the Lives of Saints telling us how making the sign of the Cross over a human body, even once, dispelled the demon's bewitching. That is why those who make the sign of the Cross inattentively, listlessly and restlessly are simply making the demons rejoice.

So how should we make the sign of the Cross correctly?

We are to put together the first three fingers of the right hand, which symbolizes the Unity of the Holy Inseparable Trinity. The other two fingers should be bent towards the palm signifying the descent of the Son of

God to earth from Heaven (two fingers being the image of two natures of Christ). The fingers put together first touch the forehead — to sanctify the mind, then — the belly near the solar plexus — for sanctification of feelings, then to the right and finally to the left shoulder — to sanctify one's bodily strength. We bow only after the hand is dropped along the body. Why? Because we have just shown the Calvary Cross on ourselves and we bow to it. Incidentally, there is one more widespread mistake: a bow performed simultaneously with the sign of the Cross. We should not do that (break the Cross).

In many old textbooks on the law of God the lower end of the sign of the Cross is mistakenly proposed to be made at the level of the breast. In that case the Cross appears as if it is upside down (the lower part is shorter) and involuntarily it turns into a cross of the Satanists.

The sign of the Cross follows a believer everywhere. We make this sign when we get up and go to bed, going out of our house and entering a church; we make the sign of the Cross both over ourselves and the meal before eating. The sign of the Cross of Christ sanctifies all and everything, so when a believer is making this sign over himself it brings him closer to salvation and is good for his soul.

## The ringing of church bells.

**T**here are two kinds of ringing of the church bells: convocation ringing and ringing proper.

**Convocation ringing** is the striking of one big bell repeated at equal intervals. It is performed in the following way: first there are three slow lengthy sounds produced with longer intervals and then the strokes are made at equal intervals. The Convocation ringing is in its turn subdivided into two kinds: the common one (frequent) for which the biggest bell is used, and the Lenten one (rare) for which a smaller bell is used on the week days of the Great Lent.

The ringing proper is produced by ringing all the bells at the same time. It is subdivided into three types:

**The peal of bells** — the ringing of all bells repeated three times with short intervals (triple ringing). It takes place during all-night vigils and Liturgies.

**The double ringing** — the ringing of all bells repeated two times with short intervals (double ringing). It takes place during all-night vigils.

**The chimes** — alternating ringing of each bell (one or several strokes) beginning with the biggest bells and finishing with the smallest ones and repeated several times. It is performed on special occasions: on the week of the Veneration of the Cross, during the vespers of the Holy Friday before the procession of the shroud of Christ, during the matins of the Holy Saturday and on the day of the Elevation of the Cross. The chimes are also performed during the mystery of laying-on-of-the-hands.

**Ringings in turns** — a slow ringing of each bell in turns beginning from the biggest bell and finishing with the smallest ones; after ringing the biggest bell all the bells are struck simultaneously and the whole procedure is

repeated many times. Ringing in turns is also sometimes referred to as a funereal (burial) ringing, it expresses mourning over the departed. But at the end of the ringing-in-turns we would always hear the peal of bells, which symbolizes the Christian good tidings about the resurrection of the dead.

There is also an alarm ringing (tocsin) — very frequent ringing during the times of calamity.

## Holy Bread.

**B**read has special significance in our life. It is a symbol of food and of the work which is necessary to earn it. God told Adam, *"By the sweat of your brow will you eat your bread"* (Gen. 3:19).

There is religious symbolism in bread too. Lord Jesus Christ called himself *"the bread of life"* (Jn. 6:35); he also said, *"If a man eats of this bread, he will live forever"* (Jn. 6:51). And finally He blessed bread which by its content is very close to a human body to be transcended into His Body during the Great Eucharistic Mystery: *"Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to His disciples, saying, "Take and eat: this is my body"* (Mt. 26:26).

Made up of multitude of grains, bread embodies the Church — One Church made up of multitude of its members. In addition to the eucharistic bread the Orthodox Church has several kinds of holy bread.

**Prospora** (Greek for "offering") is the white wheat bread cooked with yeast and blessed water. The name is derived from the first Christian tradition to bring homemade bread for the Eucharistic ceremony. Nowadays prosphoras are made in eparchial bakeries. Prospora consists of 2 big layers signifying two natures of Christ. The Upper part is stamped with a four-pointed cross (the image of the Theotokos or of a saint is sometimes imprinted on monastery prosphorons).

During the Divine Liturgy a square part is cut out in a special way from one of the prosphora (which is called the Lamb prosphoron), it is called the Lamb and it is that part of the bread, which later in the Liturgy will transform into the Body of Christ. Other prosphoras that are smaller are cut into parts that commemorate members of the Church in Heaven and Earth; those parts are immersed into the Blood of Christ towards the end of the Divine Liturgy. Smaller prosphoras are to be taken by those who submitted the commemoration petitions.

The remaining pieces of the Lamb prosphoron are called antidoron (Greek "instead of a reward"). According to the Church Canon, antidoron is to be distributed among the faithful who have not taken the communion. Yet, usually that bread is taken by those serving at the altar.

**Artos** (Greek for "kvass bread") is the bread, which is sanctified on the Easter eve. On all of the days of the Bright Week, artos, the symbol of Christ's Resurrection, is kept on the lectern across from the King's gate of the altar and is taken out daily for the Easter Cross processions. On the Bright Saturday it is broken while a special prayer is read and distributed among the faithful. People revere artos and blessed Christmas water as a likely substitute for Sanctified Gifts for the dying people who cannot come to take the Communion.

Both prosphoron and antidoron as well as artos are to be taken on an empty stomach and while saying a prayer.

The blessed bread is to be kept in a clean container separately from other foods. According to the tradition artos is separated into small parts and eaten during the year from Easter to Easter.

There is another kind of sanctified bread, which is distributed among the faithful during the vigil on the eve of the great holidays. Earlier, the evening services lasted much longer than now, so Christians were given bread to keep their energy up. Even though the services are shorter now, the tradition remained.

## Great Blessing of Waters (Aguiasma).

**T**he word aguiasma in Greek means "a sacred thing." Water sanctified in a special rite is thus called. The blessing of water can be great and small: the latter taking place several times a year, while the former one — only on the day of Baptism of the Lord.

Russian people have a strange superstition: they believe that Baptism and Epiphany is not the same thing and that the water sanctified on the Epiphany Eve, on 18<sup>th</sup> of January, is the Epiphany water and the one blessed on the holiday itself (the 19<sup>th</sup>) is the Baptism water. This superstition is so strong that true believers try to store water on both days and keep them in different vessels lest they confuse one water for another. This is a meaningless superstition. Both on the Eve and on the day of Epiphany proper the water is blessed in the same way to commemorate our Lord Jesus Christ's entering the waters of Jordan.

The baptismal water has the special grace of God and people know (or feel) it. On those days churches are crowded with people. There is even a certain type of "parishioners" who come to church once a year — "to get the water."

So what do we pray for during the blessing of the water? The faithful are asking for the water to have the blessing of strength, and action, and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We are asking for the water to become a gift of sanctification, cleansing from our sins, healing of our souls and bodies. We pray for the water to be blessed as the waters of Jordan, for it to divert from us the harm caused by all visible and invisible enemies, for it to lead us to life eternal. We pray that upon drinking the blessed water and through manifestation of the Holy Spirit we could become worthy of the blessing too. It is a great prayer—as great as the sacred thing itself. The Lord's baptism made holy the very essence of water.

We should drink aguiasma on an empty stomach in the morning, but we can do that any time of day or night whenever we feel a special need in God's help. It should be kept in a separate place, preferably close to the home iconostas, (but by no means in a refrigerator). If you treat the blessed water with reverence it preserves freshness and good taste for a long time. You can apply it to your skin, use a little of it while cooking, sprinkle your house with it. People who cannot attend Communion due to penance take aguiasma as a spiritual consolation.

It is a pity that the miracle of great blessings of the water occurs only once a year and it is so rarely that we can hear the moving troparion, "The voice of the Lord is calling on the waters: come you all, receive the Spirit of

wisdom, the Spirit of mind, the Spirit of fear of God, Christ who came down..."

## The daily circle of church services.

**T**he Church Canon requires 9 various services (offices) to be performed during the day. Each of them has its history, symbolism and duration, but spiritually they form one whole thing called the daily circle.

The Orthodox service borrowed many things from Old Testament prayer traditions. For instance, a new day is considered to begin not at midnight, but at 6 p.m. Thus the first office of the daily circle is the **Vespers**. During Vespers the faithful are reminded of the main events of the Holy History of the Old Testament: the creation of the universe by God, the sin of Adam and Eve, the Law of Moses and the work of the Prophets. Christians thank God for the day just passed.

After the Vespers we are to serve **Compline**. This is something like common prayers for the coming night, which reminds us of Christ's descending to hell and freeing the righteous people from the power of the devil.

At midnight the third service of the daily circle is read, which is called **Nocturnes**. This service is to remind the faithful about the second coming of the Lord and the Last Judgment.

**Matins** begins before sunrise. It is devoted to the events of Christ's earthly life and consists of many prayers of repentance and thanksgiving. Matins is one of the longest services.

Around 7 o'clock a.m. we are to serve **the First hour**. This is the name of the short service during which the Church remembers Jesus Christ being judged by the high priest Caiaphas.

**The Third hour** (10 a.m.) takes us through holy recollections to the mount of Zion where the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles, and to the praetor's quarters of Pilate, where the Christ was sentenced to death.

**The Sixth hour** (noon) is the time of Christ's crucifixion, and **the Ninth hour** (3 p.m.) is the time of His death on the Cross. These offices are devoted to those tragic events respectively.

And finally, the main Christian service, a certain center of the circle of offices is **the Divine Liturgy**. This office not only reminds us of God, but also makes it possible actually to join Him in the mystery of Holy Communion. This office is to be served between the Sixth and the Ninth hour.

Contemporary worshiping practice has introduced some changes into the rules of The Church Canon. Thus, in parishes Compline is served only during the Great Lent, and the Nocturnes — only once a year, on the eve of Easter. The Ninth hour is served very rarely too. The rest of the six offices are combined into two groups, each consisting of three services.

In the evening Vespers, Matins and the First hour are served. On the eve of Sundays and Holidays this sequence of offices is called night vigil, which means staying awake all through the night. Ancient Christians were indeed

praying till sunrise. Contemporary vigils last generally about 2-4 hours in parishes and 3-6 hours in monasteries.

In the morning the Third hour, the Sixth hour and the Divine Liturgy are served consecutively. In churches with many parishioners on Sundays and Holidays two liturgies are served: and Early Liturgy and a Late Liturgy. Both offices are preceded by reading the Hours.

On the days when Liturgies cannot be served (as on Friday of the Passion Week), a short office of Typika is served. This service includes some Liturgical chants and can be said to portray the latter. But Typika does not have the status of a complete service.

## Services for Special Occasions.

**T**he situations in which people turn to God for help are so numerous that the Orthodox Church has introduced a whole range of prayers for the living, for the departed, for the blessing of things and food. Those prayers were called church rites for special occasions — as they are served by the request of a believer.

A fervent prayer for the living is called "a molieben" (prayer service). Moliebens can be common or private (ordered). Ordered moliebens are served by a priest as requested by the parishioners, while common ones are read every day after the Liturgy.

Moliebens for the dead include requiem and funereal office. They can be served only over baptized Christians. No requiems can be served for those who committed suicide, drunkards, non-Orthodox, dead as a result of an abortion, killed in a fight and those who had openly rejected God and Church throughout their lives.

Through those special prayer services the church sanctifies the whole domain of human life including the things used and the food eaten. Blessing of the food takes place on definite days, for example, Easter bread and eggs are blessed on the eve of Easter, while apples and other fruits are blessed on the Holy Transfiguration day.

There is a special prayer for blessing of houses and cars. One has to arrange personally with a priest about an appropriate time for those sermons. Military people would benefit from blessing their weaponry.

### **Molieben.**

Every day after the morning services Orthodox priests perform prayer services for special occasions. One of the most widespread services is Prayerful singing (molieben).

What is a molieben? It is a short, but diligent prayer about one's everyday needs. During the Divine Liturgy we hear a prayer for daily cares, but often we do not pay due attention to them because we are concentrated on the deeply mystical content of the Liturgy. The need to pray for something "small" (the way Ambrosius of the Optina desert taught us), "with a short, but fervent prayer" — is fulfilled by us through a molieben.

If we are sick, we will serve a molieben for the sick. If we start an important enterprise, we will ask God's help through a molieben. If we are about to go on a journey, we will listen to blessing for the road. If it is the day of the saint after whom we were named, and we want to pray especially ardently to that saint, we will order a molieben devoted to him or her. In the beginning of the school year when it is time for our children to go to school, we would order a molieben for blessing the youth to study. When we want to praise the Lord for hearing our prayers, we will order a molieben of thanksgiving.

Besides private moliebens there are common molieben prayers. The Church has many of those moliebens: for blessing of waters and New Year, for relief from bad weather and drought, for those obsessed by evil spirits and alcoholics, solemn moliebens on the first Sunday of the Great Lent (the triumph of Orthodoxy) and on Christmas (in memory of the victory of 1812)...

When singing moliebens, we turn to Jesus Christ, His Holy Mother and the saints. The moliebens of gratitude are addressed to the Lord. When ordering a molieben at the candle table we submit a petition with the names of those for whom or from whom the molieben is ordered. Sometimes the person who ordered a molieben, leaves the church before the molieben is performed, just leaving the petition there. The Lord accepts any sacrifice, but it is much better to pray together with the priest than to leave the latter to entreat God for us.

Occasionally the moliebens are accompanied by akathists and canons. Often a priest anoints the faithful with blessed oil and sprinkles blessed water over them.

The Lord grants us help according to our faith and very soon after the molieben. That is why we should not overuse this sacred procedure ordering several moliebens on the same subject (with the exception of moliebens for the sick and on vows).

## **"Brother," "Father," "Bishop."**

**A** person who enters a church for the first time has difficulty in finding an appropriate form of addressing people. Indeed how should we call a person selling candles — "woman," "madam," "misses"? How should we address a priest — "master," "mister," "comrade"? In fact it is easy. Christians are one family in which all of us are related to each other. Relatives do not have to observe ceremonies. "Brother" and "sister" are the best forms of address to laymen. We are all the children of one God and the descendents of Adam and Eve. "Father" is the title for all the clergy who perform the mysteries through which people are born to the spiritual life. Usually after the word father a name is added, for example: "Father Peter." A deacon can be address with "Father deacon" and the Father Superior (of a monastery) can be called "Father Superior."

We should not call our priests "holy father" like in catholic countries. Whether a person is holy or not becomes clear after his or her death. The wives of the clergy as well as old women should be addressed with a kind word "matushka" (mother).

We should address archpriests: bishops, archbishops and metropolitans with the word "Your Eminence" as they are endowed with church power.

Sometimes we need to send a written message to a priest. A priest should be addressed with "Your Reverence," bishops and archpriests — "Your Grace," archbishops and metropolitans — "Your Eminence."

Sects that do not have priests rebuke the Orthodox believers for allegedly violating the words of Christ: "*And do not call anyone on earth your 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven*" (Mathew 23:9). But it is clear that the word "call" means "worship" in this context, otherwise the words of the Lord can be turned into nonsense. As far back as in the 1st century John the Theologian addressing Christians in his letters, referred to them as "children." The response was obviously the respective one. The matter here is not as much in the word as in the internal attitude to it. Deacon Andrew Kuraiyev wrote well about it:

"Even the most convinced Baptist calls his parent "father" and does not mind hearing his own son call him "dad." This case is similar to that of an icon: we revere and worship only one God. But we should and must respect those through whom we received the gift of life.

### **"Father, bless."**

We are used to see a priest standing on the soleum proclaim: "May the Lord bless you" — and makes a sign of cross over the parishioners. The old grannies put their hand together prayerfully and for some reason press them to their chest in some unknown ritual. It is an obvious misunderstanding of how one should treat the priest and what Father's blessing means. Every faithful person considers it necessary to ask for a blessing when meeting a priest, but many do it incorrectly. There are naturally no strict canons concerning that, but the traditions of the Church and simply common sense prompt us how this should done.

Blessing has many meanings. The first one is a greeting. Only those equal in church title can shake hands with a priest, all the rest of us and even a deacon would receive a blessing from a priest. To do it we should put our palms together placing the right one over the left so that we can receive the blessing hand into our right hand and kiss the former showing respect to the clerical title. There is nothing else to it! No mystical meaning should be ascribed to the palms put together, no grace is "descending" into them as some old ladies teach us. We can get a priest's blessing not only when he is dressed in the clergy garments, but also when he is wearing civil clothes, not only in church, but also outside or in some public place. But you should not approach an unknown priest for a blessing outside the church.

In the same way every layman parts with a priest. If there are several priests standing together and you want to receive blessings from all of them, then you should first approach the priest of a higher title. The second meaning of the blessing is acquiescence, permission and parting counsel. Before carrying out some important and responsible task or traveling or under some hard circumstances we can ask the priest for advice and blessing, and kiss his hand.

Finally there is a blessing during the church services. Saying "Peace be to all," "May the Lord's blessing be upon you" and "the Grace of our..." the priest makes the sign of cross over the praying people. In response we bow our heads humbly without folding our hands — since we cannot kiss the blessing hand at that moment. If the priest makes the sign of cross with the sacred things: the Cross, the Gospel or the Chalice, we make the sign of the cross first and then bow.

One should not approach a priest for blessing in an inappropriate moment — when he is giving Communion,

burning incense in the church or anointing people. But we can do it after the Communion or at the end of the Liturgy. One should not come up to the same priest for a blessing several times a day. The word "Father, bless" should always sound joyously for a layman, we should not turn them into a mumbled saying.

## Church Hierarchy.

**E**very diocese has its own Bishop. Bishop is the highest title of dignity and every clergyman serving at this level (metropolitan, archbishop and bishop) can be called Bishop. The next lower level is occupied by the pastors (Presbyters). They are entitled to head the life of the parishes in cities and villages. Pastors are subdivided into priests and archpriests. The oldest priest of the parish is called the Archpriest.

The lowest level of clergy is the Deacon. They help Bishops and Priests to perform the mysteries, they do not do it by themselves. The older deacons are called archdeacons.

Monks (hermits) are called "black" clergy since they vowed not to marry (as opposed to the "white" clergy who are married). There are three stages of monastic life: ryasophor, mantle (or minor schema) and schema. Ryasophor means "the one wearing ryasa" (ryasa is an everyday long garment of monks with wide sleeves). Minor schema and greater schema ("form," "image") are higher levels. They are characterized by stricter vows.

All the archpriests are monks. Their titles when translated from Greek mean: "patriarch" — "forefather," "metropolitan" — "a person from the main clan," (Patriarchs or metropolitans are the heads of all church organizations in Orthodox countries.); "bishop" — "overseer," "archbishop" — "chief pastor" (bishops and archbishops, rarely metropolitans, are responsible for the church and administrative areas which are called diocese.

The monastic clergy are called archmonks, Father Superiors and archimandrites. Archimandrite ("the supervisor of caves") is the head of a big monastery or lavra (largest monasteries). Some monks get that title as an award for his long and fruitful service to the Church. Father Superior ("the leader") is the head of a usual monastery or a parish church. The monks who are priests vowed to schema are called archschemamonks, archfather Superiors and schemarchimandrites. Monks serving as deacons are called hierodeacons, the older ones — archdeacons.

## The censer of incense.

**T**he night vigil begins. Solemnly and slowly the choir is singing Psalm 103, which tells us about the creation of the universe. At that time the priest is going around the church with the censer. The aroma of incense is filling the

whole church.

The censer as well as the seven candleholder are indispensable parts of the Orthodox service (Levit 16:12). From the time of the Apostles the incensing is done during prayers. The aromatic resin of eastern trees is placed over the coals smoldering in a metal censer. When that resinous substance burns, it gives out a sweet smell — incense.

Burning of sacrifices before God can be traced back to ancient time. Suffice it to mention the sacrifice made by the righteous Abel. The Lord Himself told Moses to make a special place for ritual smoking of aromatic substances. The magi who came to worship Christ brought those resinous substances among other gifts for the newly born God. John the Theologian, one of the writers of the Gospel, in his Revelation saw an Angel in the Heavenly temple accepting a golden censer (Rev. 8:3-5).

The incense spreading in the church symbolizes the prayer of the faithful sent up to God and at the same time it is a symbol of the Grace of the Holy Spirit mysteriously embracing them.

Before every censuring a priest reads a secret (quiet) prayer: *"We offer unto Thee, O Christ our God, this incense for an odor of spiritual sweetness which do Thou accept upon Thy most heavenly altar, sending down upon us in return the Grace of Thy Holy Spirit."* Listening to this prayer we understand that the smoke visible to everybody denotes the invisible presence of the Lord's Grace, which is sanctifying the faithful.

The incensing during services can be complete when it covers the whole church, and minor, when the altar, iconostas and the people are incensed from the pulpit. Incensing of sacred things (such as icons and the church) is sent up to God praising Him appropriately. When the censer is turned to people, it testifies to the fact that the Holy Spirit is descending upon all the faithful, as the carriers of God's image within them. Traditionally we bow when censured.

There is no unanimous opinion on whether laymen can be incensing their homes while praying. Priests have diverse opinions on that definitely righteous procedure. One should consult his or her spiritual father.

## Catechumens.

**P**ray to God, ye, catechumens," — every day the deacon calls out during the Liturgy. And after this prayer — litany — he says, "Catechumens, depart!" For a person well versed in the language, this could sound harsh, indeed the dictionary of the Russian language by S.I. Ozhegov interprets the word "catechumen" as a person "who behaves unreasonably, loudly, weirdly." Should we let people like that into a church?

Yes, the meanings of some words do undergo curious changes. In ecclesiastic Slavic philology the verb "to catechumen" meant "to instruct well the basics of the faith," and the adjective "catechumen" meant "a student of Christian dogmas, somebody who desires to become baptized." Apparently some of those people left some peculiar trace in history, thus giving rise to a new meaning of the word...

In the ancient church not all of the people were baptized. The person coming up to the baptismal font had to understand clearly the essence of the Christianity, so that the answer to the question "Do you believe in Christ?" would come from all of the person's heart, "I believe in Him, my King and my God!" That is why those who did not get Christian upbringing as well as converts from among the Jews and the pagans had to learn the dogmas of the faith from bishops and presbyters or catechism teachers. Catechumens had to study for a long time, sometimes for several years. During that period the catechumens had no right to be present at the very essential part of the service — the Eucharistic Mystery together with the faithful. In order not to isolate them completely from communicating with Church, the authors of the liturgical prayers grouped together some of the songs of the instructional character as well as Scripture readings into the first part of the Liturgy and called it the "Liturgy of the Catechumens."

But when the instructional part of the service is over and there comes the sacred and awesome time of communion with God, people whose souls were not washed with waters of Baptism, must not witness the mystery. That is why the deacon first announces the Litany of the Catechumens and then urges them to leave. In the first centuries of Christianity this was not confined to words, they would go about and make sure that not a single non-baptized person would remain in church.

Now the canons have changed. Anyone can become a witness of the Holy Mysteries, even those who just dropped by out of idle curiosity. The very concept of Catechumens was lost long ago, but many clergymen deem it necessary to revive it. Why then are the words of the deacon and the prayer of the Church for Catechumens still preserved?

In pre-revolutionary Russia there was a book entitled "The Reference Book of a Clergyman" which states the following, "In many parts of the world many people turn to Orthodoxy, as well as there are converts to Orthodoxy from other Christian denominations. Our Church takes care of all of its children no matter where and prays before the One Who enlightens souls and bodies of all the Catechumens irrespective of the horrendous distances lying between them. Besides, there are children who got their Orthodox names through the ritual of Orthodox naming, but who have not been baptized yet... Due to that the Catechumen prayers will never lose their significance and role and will remain within the Liturgy as long as the Church of Christ is alive on the earth."

As far as leaving the church is concerned — you should not follow the example of some people just because your neighbor does this or that thing. Every non-baptized person should decide for himself or herself: so far I do not have the right to participate in Eucharistic Ceremony, which means I must leave.

## Preparation to Holy Communion.

**W**e must prepare ourselves to the Mystery of the Holy Communion by praying, fasting, humble Christian behavior and spirit as well as by confession.

**Home and church prayers.** A person willing to prepare oneself properly to the Holy Christ's Mysteries must prayerfully prepare himself to that at least 2-3 days before the Communion: to pray at home more and with

greater ardor, to read the Scripture, to attend church services. Before the Communion day one must attend the Vespers service on the eve. At home one should read the "Prayers in Preparation for the Holy Communion."

**Fasting.** During fasting periods we should control ourselves more strictly. On other days we must be moderate with food. We must be more concentrated, we should not watch television or listen to frenzied music.

**Confession.** If you want to receive Holy Communion you must sincerely repent all of your sins before the priest before or after the Vespers on the eve of the Holy Communion. You must wholeheartedly open up your soul not concealing a single sin. Before the Confession you must make peace with everybody who hurt you or whom you hurt, you have to humbly ask all of them for forgiveness. While confessing it is better not to wait for the priest's questions, but to tell him everything that is bothering your conscience, not justifying yourself and not blaming anyone else for anything. By no means you should judge anyone during confession or tell about other people's sins.

If it is impossible to confess in the evening, you must do it before the Liturgy, in any case it should be done before the Cherubic Hymn. Nobody except children before the age of 7 can receive Holy Communion without the prior Confession. There is a good tradition: after the Confession and before the Holy Communion we should not eat, drink or smoke. We must not do it after midnight in any case. We should come to the Holy Communion with nothing in our stomachs. We must also teach our children to abstain from food or drinks before the Holy Communion.

## How Often Should One Receive the Holy Communion?

*"Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (Jn. 6:53) .*

**T**he Church does not give an unambiguous answer to this question. The early Christians received Holy Communion every Sunday. With time the norms of righteousness changed and not always for the better. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century many Russian Christians received Holy Communion through the Great Lent. After the Russian Calvary of the 20<sup>th</sup> century many Russians began receiving the Holy Communion often, which is very good.

Somebody familiar with the Gospel would not need explanations of how great the sacredness of Christ's Holy Body and Blood is and why we cannot enter the Life Eternal without receiving the Holy Communion (this was mentioned by the Lord Himself in His conversation with the Jews, Jn. Chapter 6). But the Orthodox faithful know also that one can approach the Holy Communion only being prepared to it, trying to cleanse one's soul from sins and passions. A silent prayer of John Chrysostom's Liturgy says, "No one bound by the bodily passions and lust is allowed to approach or come close or serve Thee, King of Glory."

The church leaves the question of how often we can receive Holy Communion to be answered by the clergy and spiritual fathers. It is with your spiritual father that you must come to a conclusion about how often you can receive the Holy Communion and how strict your fasting should be before that.

At any rate one should try to receive the Holy Communion at least once during all long lent periods as well as on the day of one's Angel, that is on the day when the saint, whose name one is bearing, is commemorated. If there is no church where one lives, one has to find possibility to go to a place where one can receive Holy Communion at least once a year, otherwise one can be lost for the Church. People who try to make their lives closer to the Church are advised by their priests to receive Holy Communion once or twice a month. Sometimes spiritual fathers bless people for receiving Holy Communion more often.

### **At the Sacred Chalice.**

Not long ago in one of the churches of St. Petersburg during the Divine Liturgy the attention of the people taking Communion was attracted by a little fair-haired boy who was standing not far from the altar. He was watching attentively those receiving Communion and from time to time started laughing in a loud childish manner. He was asked to behave reasonably, but of no avail. The strange behavior of the boy stopped as soon as the Communion was over. His parents who had been very much surprised asked why he was laughing and this is what the boy replied:

"When I was looking at people approaching the Chalice, I suddenly noticed that a white dove flies up to some of them. Just at the moment when a man or a woman opens his or her mouth to partake of the Gifts the dove pecks the Gifts off the spoon and flies away. They do not see the dove, they close their mouths thinking that they have received the Holy Communion, but in deed they have just had an empty spoon. I thought that was very funny."

For a non-believer this story told by a child could appear as something imagined, and an Orthodox heart cannot but be overcome with awe having understood the meaning of the vision sent to a child. Indeed, it is frightening to realize that the Lord would not let some of us have the Communion because we approach the Sacred Chalice being unworthy and unprepared.

"For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the Body of the Lord, eats and drinks judgment on himself" (1 Cor. 11:29) — Apostle Paul tells us. There are rules which if followed would help us to accept the Sacred Gifts worthily: abstinence from matrimonial relations for the whole of that time, repentance, prayer, reading of the Scripture and attendance of church services — each one to be fulfilled as much as possible. One should confess before the Communion. Only when a person is taking Communion several days at a stretch as, for example at the end of the Great Lent, or during some of the Holidays, we can receive Communion with the permission of the Father and without going to confession again.

But supposing everything is done correctly. The Divine Liturgy is almost over and the partaker is ready to commune with Christ. The Gates are opened.

"In fear and with faith draw near..." — proclaims the deacon. Faith and fear of God — this is what should be imprinted in the heart of every person approaching the Sacred Chalice. We must not talk or fuss at that point. But in reality...

Haven't almost every one of us been a witness to how pushy people can get in front of the Sacred Chalice? People elbow their way trying to reach the Sacred Gifts earlier than others and paying no attention to what their Father is saying. But the unseemly behavior in front of the Sacred Chalice can destroy all of our hard efforts of preparation to Communion. And then instead of Life Eternal we would get condemnation and God's punishment.

To prevent that, every partaker should know and follow the rules of the Church concerning the way to approach the Sacred Chalice. They are:

- In front of the Sacred Chalice we have to bow. If there are many partakers, we must make the bow beforehand.
- When the Gates are being opened we must make the sign of the Cross and fold our forearms on the chest, the right arm forming a cross over the left one. When receiving Communion and walking away from the Chalice we should keep the arms in that position.
- The people serving at the altar are the first to partake, then — the monks, children and all the rest of the parish. We must give way to other people and by no means push each other aside.
- Women must wipe lipstick off of their lips.
- Having approached the Chalice one must pronounce his or her name loudly and distinctly. We must accept the Gifts, chew (if needed) and swallow immediately and kiss the lower part of the Chalice as it symbolizes the Lord's rib.
- We must not touch the Chalice with our hands or kiss the priest's hand.
- We must not make the sign of the Cross near the Chalice! When you are lifting your hand to make the sign of the Cross, you may push the priest and spill the Sacred Gifts.
- Having withdrawn towards the little table we should eat antidoron and drink the blessed wine.
- If the Sacred Gifts are distributed from several Chalices, each person can partake from only one of them. We cannot partake of Sacred Gifts more than once in a day.
- It is a rule that you do not kneel on the day of the Communion with the exception of the bows made in front of the Shroud of Christ on Great Saturday and praying on knees on the day of the Holy Trinity.
- Having returned home one should first of all read the gratitude post-communion prayers. If they are read in church after the service, you should listen to them there.

## Wedding Ceremony.

"**M**arriage is a mystery which takes place when in front of the priest and the Church the bridegroom and the bride of their own accord vow to be mutually faithful and their union is blessed as a symbol of the union of Christ and the Church and the grace of pure unanimity for bearing and rearing children in Christianity is asked to be

granted to them." (*"Orthodox Catechism,"* Metropolitan Philaret)

## **Church and canon rules preventing marriage.**

The marriage rules established by civil law and by church differ considerably. That is why not every civil marriage can be blessed by the Church.

The Church will not allow fourth or fifth marriage; it prohibits marriages between close relatives. The Church will not bless the marriage in which one of the couple (or both) declare themselves openly atheistic and who came to church only because parents or the spouse insisted on that. One cannot be married in church to a non-baptized person. The church will not perform a wedding ceremony if one of the persons to be married is already married to another person.

Relations in blood of the four generations cannot enter matrimony (that is one cannot marry one's third cousin). An ancient chaste tradition forbids marriages between godparents and godchildren as well as between two godparents of one child. Strictly speaking, there are no canonic rules prohibiting such a union, but at present the permission for such marriage can be given only by the head archpriest.

The church will not allow marriage of those who had previously taken monastic vows or had been ordained to priesthood by laying on of hands.

Nowadays the church does not investigate whether the following conditions are observed: the appropriate age, bodily and mental health of a bride and the bridegroom and whether the marriage was voluntary because those conditions are necessary to be fulfilled to perform a civil marriage. Of course it is possible to conceal some obstacles to marriage from the representatives of state offices. But one cannot deceive God, which is why the main obstacle for illegal marriage should become the conscience of the people planning to marry.

If the parents of the marrying couple do not give their consent, it is very sad, but if the couple is of complete age, the absence of such consent cannot be an obstacle to the marriage. Besides the atheistic parents are often against that very idea of church wedding, and in that case the parents' consent can be replaced with the priest's one or even better with the consent of a god parent of at least of one person of the marrying couple.

## **Wedding ceremonies are not performed:**

During all the 4 long fasts;

During the Meat Fast;

On the Bright Week (Easter).

During the period from Christmas (January 7) to Baptism (Jan.19);

On the eve of the 12 great feasts;

On Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays throughout the year;

On September 10, 11, 26 and 27 (due to strict fast on the day of commemoration of beheading of John the Baptist and the Elevation of the Cross);

On the eve of the church holidays (each church has its own days);

Under special circumstances exception from those rules can be made with the permission of the head archpriest.

### **Advice for the marrying couples:**

To make the wedding ceremony a holiday that will be remembered for the rest of your lives you must arrange everything beforehand. Firstly, agree upon the place and time of the wedding mystery. Many churches of St. Petersburg keep records of preliminary applications with the indication of the date and the time of the proposed wedding. This can be done by any relative. In that case the ceremony will be performed by the priest whose turn it is to serve the rite on special occasions. In the churches, which do not keep such ledgers, the marrying couple will pay for the ceremony on that same day at the candle table. But you would not know the exact time of the wedding as it will take place only after other rites on special occasions will be served first. But again, if you like, you can arrange for the particular priest to perform the wedding ceremony. In any case the church priest will ask you to produce the marriage license from the civil organs, therefore the marriage should be registered in the appropriate government office before the service.

If the marrying couple has any of the above-mentioned obstacles, they should turn to the appropriate church administration.

In the early centuries of Christianity wedding ceremonies were performed right after the Divine Liturgy. Now this does not happen, but it is extremely important for the marrying couple to go to the Communion together before the wedding. That is why the marrying couple should come to church before the service begins, having abstained from eating, drinking and smoking on the eve of that day beginning with midnight and, if the marrying couple is already having sexual relations, they should abstain from that on the previous night too. In church the marrying couple goes to confession, pray during the Divine Liturgy and partake of the Holy Mysteries. After that moliebens and requiems are going on for about an hour, which gives you time to change into wedding clothes (if the church has a room for that). We would advise a bride to put on comfortable footwear, and not high-heel shoes as it is difficult to stand in them for hours.

It is desirable that friends and relatives come together with the marrying couple for the Liturgy, but if it is not possible they can come to the wedding proper. Not all the churches would allow taking pictures and videotaping the ceremony.

The wedding rings should be given to the appointed priest beforehand for him to sanctify them by placing them on the Altar.

Bring a piece of white linen or a towel. The marrying couple will stand on it. The bride should by all means have a headwear; cosmetics and ornaments should either be removed or minimized.

According to the Russian tradition any marrying couple should have witnesses (the best man and a bridesmaid), who help to organize the wedding feast. They would come in handy at church too — they are to hold the crowns over the heads of the marrying couple. It is better to appoint two men to do it as the crowns are rather heavy.

The ushers should be baptized Christians. The Church canon prohibits marrying several couples at a time, but it does happen in life. It is quite understandable that each couple would want a separate wedding ceremony, but in that case the procedure will take very long time (one wedding takes about one hour). If the marrying couple agrees to wait till after all the others get married, they will not be refused a separate Wedding Mystery. In big churches separate wedding ceremonies cost double the usual price. On weekdays (Monday, Wednesday, Friday) the probability of many couples coming to church on the same day is much lower than on Sundays.

### **The ritual sequence.**

The Mystery of the Marriage consists of two parts: betrothal and wedding. In the past they were separated from each other with a period of time. Betrothal could be done at the time of engagement and could be later cancelled.

During the betrothal a priest gives lighted candles to the marrying couple, they symbolize joy, warmth and purity. Then he places the rings — first on the bridegroom's finger, then on the bride's, and then exchanges them thrice — in commemoration of the Holy Trinity. According to the Church rules the bridegroom's ring should be golden, while the bride's is made of silver. After triple exchange the bridegroom keeps the bride's silver ring and the bride has the golden ring of her bridegroom as a token of faithfulness. Other materials are permitted too.

After the betrothal the marrying couple go over to the center of the church. The priest asks them if they are marrying each other of their own accord and whether they had been betrothed to someone else previously. After that, three prayers are read in which God's blessing is asked to be granted to the marrying couple and the righteous couples of the Old and New Testaments are remembered. The crowns are brought out — the richly ornamented crowns similar to royal ones — and placed over the heads of the marrying couple. This crown is the image of the Heavenly Crown, but it is also similar to the crown of a martyr. Lifting his hands up to the Lord the priest exclaims three times: "O Lord, our God, crown them with glory and honor!" Then he reads excerpts from the Apostle's writings and the Gospel telling about how the Lord blessed the marriage in Galilean Cana.

A chalice of wine is brought — the symbol of the cup of earthly joys and sorrows, which should be shared by the married couple for the rest of their days. The priest gives the wine to the marrying couple three times. Then he joins their hands and leads them around the lectern three times while the choir is singing the wedding troparions. A circle symbolizes the eternity of the mystery performed, following the priest is the image of serving the Church.

In the conclusion of the ceremony of Wedding Mystery the newly wed stand at the gates and the priest is saying something for their edification. Then friends and relatives congratulate the new Christian family.

### **Superstitions associated with weddings:**

Old beliefs from the pagan past are reflected in various superstitions still preserved among people. Thus, there is a superstition that if a wedding ring is accidentally dropped or the flame of a wedding candle dies, it is a sign of various misfortunes, difficult married life or an early death of a wife or a husband. It is also a widespread belief that the one who steps on the towel first, would be the head of the family for the rest of their family life. Some people think that marriage in May would make you suffer for the rest of your life (the word suffer in Russian

sounds like May — "mayatsa"). One should not take those superstitions and imaginary things seriously — they were produced by an idle mind.

### **The rules on second marriage.**

The Church disapproved second marriages and accepts them only through lenience to human weakness. The prayers for those marrying for the second time contain two additional prayers on repentance while the questions about whether the decision to marry was made freely is not asked by the priest. This is done when both of the wedded had previous marriages. If it was only one of the couple, and the other person is marrying for the first time, then the usual procedure is performed. It is never too late to have the blessing of the Church.

In atheistic times there were many couples which got married without the church's blessing. Those spouses would be faithful to each other throughout their lives, would grow children and grandchildren in peace and unanimity. But for some reasons they would not have a wedding in church. The Church never refuses grace of the Mystery even if the couple is of older age. Some priests say that the attitude of elderly couples experiencing the Mystery is more serious than that of young people. With older couples the splendor and pomposity of the feast is replaced by the awe and trepidation before the grandeur of marriage.

### **Dissolution of the church marriage.**

The divorce can be effected only by the head archpriest of the area, where the wedding took place, if one of the spouses is unfaithful or if there are other serious reasons (for example the adultery sin, or a lie at the time of pronouncing the marital vows).

## **Holy Unction.**

**T**wo women were talking softly in church near the candle box. The younger one complained, "I am ill for a long time. I am visiting doctors, but almost of no avail. Now I decided to follow the advice of my acquaintances to receive extreme unction." Her interlocutor got frightened, "How can you, darling, you are married, aren't you?" — "Yes, I am" — "So you cannot receive extreme unction, you will have to give up sleeping with your husband after it."

Accidentally I overheard the conversation and thought it my duty to intervene. I began proving that there are no rules prohibiting marital relations between spouses after the extreme unction. My words seemed convincing and the older woman said, "We know nothing. And those old grandmas sometimes tell us such a lot of various thing that we get confused."

Indeed the Mystery of extreme unction is the one most misunderstood and surrounded with many superstitions.

Some elderly ladies who consider themselves experts of the Church canon rules would sometimes tell you incredible things! They say that one should not wash oneself after the extreme unction, that one should not eat meat, one should fast on Mondays; and moreover, that this Mystery can be received only by the dying. All that is not true.

The Mystery of extreme unction or anointing, as called in the sacred books, was introduced by the Lord, Jesus Christ. When reading Mathew's Gospel we learn that the Apostles preaching in Palestine, anointed the sick with oil and healed them. The essence of this mystery is most completely disclosed by the Apostle James: "Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church and pray over him and anoint him and with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven" (Jas 5:14-15).

So, the extreme unction is the Mystery of healing. An Orthodox writer of the 19<sup>th</sup> century E. Poselyanin wrote: "It was not mentioned anywhere that a person should be terminally sick or helpless. We should remember that in Christianity the suffering of the soul is also considered to be an ailment... Thus, if I am suffering spiritually because some one in the family died, if I am sorrowful, if I need some good impulse to pull myself together and shake the shackles of despair from myself, — I can resort to the extreme unction."

But in physical illnesses a person should also turn to God with prayer, not relying on the physician alone, as the latter is just a tool in the hands of God.

Usually the extreme unction is performed in the house at the bed of a sick person, but during the Great Lent extreme unction is exercised in churches too. In the course of the Mystery performed by several priests ("Sobor" — congregation), unction — plant oil — is blessed; 7 Apostles and Gospels are read, 7 prayers. After reading each of them Father anoints heads, chests, hands and feet of those receiving the extreme unction. The extreme unction is the image of God's mercy, love and compassion (remember the parable of the good Samaritan).

Besides healing from diseases the extreme unction grants us forgiveness of the forgotten sins (but not those that were concealed on purpose). Due to weakness of our memory we can remember not all of our sins during confession, that is why it is understood without saying that anointing is of great value to us. Physically healthy people can resort to the mystery of extreme unction only if permitted by the priest.

### **With Myrrh and Unction.**

One of the names of the Savior — Christ — means "the anointed one." Anointing a person with the unction (plant oil) in ancient times testified to the fact that the person had devoted himself to serving God, that he is connected to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Thus, Moses anointed Aaron and his sons, whom God assigned to become the clergy. (Exodus 40:15); Samuel anointed Saul as king (1 Samuel 9-10); Elijah anointed Elisha to succeed him as a prophet (1 Kings. 19:15).

After Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended upon the New Testament Church, extreme unction became accessible to all its members. Nowadays people are anointed in front of the baptismal font and during all-night vigils.

**Baptismal** anointing with the **myrrh** (*Chrismation*) of the forehead, chest, ears, hands and feet has several

meanings. Firstly, it denotes unity with Christ similar to joining of an uncultivated branch grafted to a fruitful olive tree; secondly, it speaks about the death to sin as earlier the dead people were given extreme unction; thirdly, it give energy and strength to fight sin by analogy with the ancient wrestlers who put oil on their bodies before fighting. While anointing the priest says, "The servant of God, (name) is anointed with the unction of joy in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and ever and onto ages of ages. Amen."

Anointing with holy oil during the **vigil** on the eve of a holiday is given to all the faithful as a blessing to them, their further good deeds. It is done with prayerful invocation to the one in whose honor the service is performed.

Distinction should be made between simple anointing and the Sacrament of **Holy Unction**, which is given to a sick person. In the latter case the oil is sanctified with a special prayer and the body of the suffering is anointed 7 times.

There is another anointing in the Church that is a mystical by essence — Anointing with sacred **myrrh**, which is an aromatic preparation made of many substances (plant oil, aloe, smyrna, rose oil, ground marble etc.). The abundance of components symbolizes the multitude of Christian virtues. According to the Church canon the Myrrh is to be sanctified by a bishop or several bishops. In church the sanctified myrrh is kept on the altar in the Sanctuary.

Anointing with myrrh takes place right after a person is baptized. The priest puts a drop of myrrh on the forehead, nostrils, lips, hands and feet of a newly baptized person each time saying: "The seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit. Amen." We receive this mystery only once in life, like baptism. It is only the God-anointed kings that were deemed worthy to receive it twice.

It is known that a layman would have the right to baptize only when it is a "matter of life and death." But if there is no more danger of dying and the person stayed alive, the performed procedure should be followed by myrrh anointing. The same mystery is practiced when a member of some other Slavic Christian confession is converted into Orthodoxy.

## The Problem of "Mini-Eldership"

### (Mlado-starchestvo)

Now, when the succession of true Orthodox spirituality, severed during the years of State atheism, is only beginning to be reestablished, one of the critical problems of Church life is the problem of spiritual guidance. In the excerpt presented below, from the speech of the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia Aleksiy II, sharp criticism is brought upon the phenomenon of so-called mini-eldership, to our great sorrow, widespread, these days.

Observing the pleasing process of the rebirth of church life in our country, when many people, artificially torn away from church tradition, are in the last decade coming to God, we cannot fail to see that the main difficulty lies in the loss of the ties of the present generation of Russian Christians with church tradition.

From the times of the apostles in Christ's Church, bishops, as the apostolic successors, give God's people the blessed gifts of the Holy Sacraments. "There is no Church without a bishop, — said the holy martyr-among-priests Ignatius the God-bearer, — where the bishop is, there the people must be, just as where there is Jesus Christ, there is the assembled Church" (see: To the Smyrnans, Chapter VIII).

In the most recent times our Church past is often presented in a distorted light, its bishops are used as objects of evil gossip. This, in babes of faith, gives rise to an erroneous idea about bishops. And this is done consciously — *"I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad"* (Mt. 26:31).

It is very sad to see how some clerics of our church, verbally loyal to their hierarchal leadership, behave like schismatics, pretending to be some kind of "elders." By criticizing their hierarchal leadership, they, in contrast to the Spirit-bearing fathers of the past, use this criticism to attract attention to themselves and create authority. As a rule, they declare as a necessary and only condition of salvation complete submission of those who come to them for guidance, turning them into some sort of robots, unable, without blessing of their "elder," to perform any deed, no matter how trivial it may be. The person, therefore, is deprived of that blessed freedom of will which is granted him by God. In affirming their correctness, they incorrectly quote the writings of the holy fathers, prophaning their great work and corrupting the very idea of eldership.

A true elder, first of all thanks to his high spirituality, behaves very carefully with every concrete person. With the strength of his experience and blessed gift he reveals the image of God in the person through those methods, which are in accord with his spiritual makeup and development. Separate modern "elders" (more truly we shall call them "mini-elders"), not having spiritual reason, place burdens on their enchurched *grievous to be borne* (Lk. 11:46), in their pastoral activities use stereotypes, disastrous for spiritual life; without basis apply to laymen, most often not spiritually strengthened, forms of spiritual guidance applicable only to monasticism.

Often as proof of their loyalty to themselves they demand those coming to them to sell their poor belongings, and as a result they, deprived of their belongings and living quarters, come under absolute dependence of such a shepherd. Such a distorted interpretation of the Savior's words *"sell all that thou hast... and ... follow Me"* (Lk. 18:22) coincides more with the practice of modern totalitarian sects flooding Russia in the last years, than with the spirit of the Gospel laws.

Through similar "elders" spreads the practice of performing marriages, in which people who are poorly acquainted or do not know each other at all are blessed for connubial life. Often this is combined with the instilling of the non-Orthodox view of this Sacrament, in which the reason for marriage is limited to bearing children. Such a view is completely at odds with the holy fathers' understanding of the Sacrament of Marriage as a school for growth in Christian love, as the mysterious unification of the spirits, souls and bodies of the married couple. Such a mini-elder interpretation of marriage narrows the fullness of spiritual life possible in a Christian family, reduces it to the expression of one human essence. It disrupts the establishment of the domestic churches, in which, according to one modern apologist, for the Russian Church exemplifies its future: "If its members learn to found domestic churches — the Russian Church will continue to exist, if not — the Russian Church will wither" (V. Rev. Gleb Kaleda. *The Domestic Church*. M., 1997.C.12).

The same mini-elders quite often do not allow access to the Eucharist for persons who have "not removed their crowns," that is, not dissolved Church marriages. As a result people, often at the ages of 60 — 70, many years ago divorced and not having any desire to enter a new marriage, besiege the Patriarchate with demands to dissolve their marriage. True, among them are sometimes people very young, already entered upon marriage a second time, for whom, condescending to their weaknesses, such a blessing is truly given, for this reason the corresponding rite of second marriages exists. But for those who are determined to use such a divorce only for more expansive traveling down the sinful path of adultery, such a blessing for divorce, naturally, cannot be given.

That overemphasized meaning, which is given in mini-elder parishes to the priest, is disastrously mirrored in church life. Its center becomes confession, which is surrounded by out-of-place ceremonies, turning an extremely personal Sacrament into a massive activity, about which I will say more a little later. The liturgy in such cases is performed with impermissible carelessness, sometimes with interruptions for continuing confessions.

In the sermons of these priests, in bringing attention to the importance of the Sacrament of Repentance to their parishioners, they do not reveal the fullness of the meaning of the Holy Eucharist as the Sacrament that creates the Church.

The unhealthy dependence of newly baptized on the mini-elder figure causes distorted forms of parish life. People go to church to meet "their priest," not Christ, to talk to their friends, but not to be in prayerful association with the Fullness of the Church. A characteristic lack of church consciousness among the enchurched, in which there is no room for an understanding of unity and universality of the Church, is supported by such priests, instilling in their children that salvation is possible only within the limits of their community, and as confirmation judging other priests, thus alienating people from them. This leads to self-isolation of these kind of communities from other parishes, from the bishop, and, in the final analysis, from the Church.

Self-isolation often results in impermissible politicization of such communities, when the "left" or the "right" political orientation is announced as the only one corresponding to an Orthodox worldly view. In such communities criticism of Church leadership, deadly for Church unity, is easily acclimated, which we have just mentioned. Not surprisingly, the sickly forms of communal life in these parishes sooner remind one of the sectal seclusion of schismatic communities or the isolation of protestant groups. Many similar communities arose in post-revolutionary years, and their sorry end is known to us. A community not headed by a bishop, cuts itself off from the Church, and thus, is already condemned to spiritual death.

The above-mentioned distortions of pastoral activity, liturgical and communal life have serious ecclesiastical consequences. Priests, in similar ways establishing their authority, in fact appropriate an honor for themselves which by right can only belong to a bishop. The destruction of church consciousness connected with this in them, as well as in their parish, forms in the Church an ideological and ecclesiastical trend, in essence, of a protestant type, in which is lost the Spirit which creates the theological and organizational forms of Orthodoxy, filling and enlivening them. And, as a result, people, finding "the road to the Church," turn away from it, notwithstanding the reestablishment of the outer gloriousness of the churches and their material well-being. And this, unfortunately, is not their fault, but of the various "elders" — false priests.

No less the formal attitude of priests toward their pastoral responsibilities repulses people from the Church.

It is extremely important to move as quickly as possible from the practice of formal execution of rites to reverent, thoughtful fulfillment of the Sacraments and rituals, beginning with baptism, confession, marriage and burial. Here are always necessary the sympathetic participation of the priest, catechization — preparation for the Sacrament

— and preaching, because at these important moments of a person's life it is particularly easy to find a contact with the heart of a person opening itself up to God's truth. In contrast, the formal or even "commercial" approach of a priest to those coming to the Church could for long, if not forever, alienate them from the church, instills contempt toward greedy priests. The Church — is not a store for spiritual wares, it is impermissible to "trade in grace." *Freely have you received — freely give,* — preached the Savior to us. He who turns his priestly service into a means of foul gain deserves the fate of Simon the magician. Better that such persons leave the boundaries of the Church and participate in business in the marketplace.

The way some priests perform the Sacrament of Confession calls for the heaviest reprimands.

Some priests, particularly among the white (married) clergy, often do not hear out those confessing. To some extent this is justified in large parishes with a greater attendance on holidays, though we have more than once required the assignment of a greater number of priests in such parishes to perform confessions.

The other extreme is no better, characteristic mainly in the monastic priesthood. A person, coming to confession, is told that he must remember and relate every sin to its every detail. And not only sin, but even thought. The result is worthy of tears: the person, leaving the confession, does not feel healed, and sometimes comes to complete despair, realizing the impossibility of remembering absolutely everything.

Such confessors should remember the original goal of the Sacrament of Confession. This does not demand great wisdom, one must only open the Book of Needs and see the questions, asked of the confessing during the confession. Originally this Sacrament was performed, when a person performed a deadly sin, through which he fell away from the Church.

In relation to the sins of desires, found in thoughts (battles of thoughts), those were revealed usually in the confession of thoughts, previously performed in monasteries. But the confession of thoughts was not tied to the Sacrament of Confession — the former was heard by an elder, sometimes one who was not a priest. During it, he gave directions, and, of course, did not read any releasing prayer, because this was a discussion.

During our time the so called mini-elders, not having a proper understanding of the Sacrament of Confession, turn the confession into a torture for the confessor, or into a discussion, lasting sometimes an hour with each person, regardless of the fact that there is a crowd of penitents waiting. The result, as a rule, is that the beginning of the Liturgy is delayed, and many who came for confession leave without it.

Some faithful, preparing for confession, make notes. This habit, healthy by itself, under an incorrect understanding of the meaning of the confession could have a negative impact on the soul of the penitent. In the approach that demands "relating everything to its most minute details" the faithful begin to approach confession as a report to God of permitted sins. During confession of such people it is easy to see their desire to read everything as quickly as possible (for lack of time) and more completely, so that they would not miss anything, sometimes without any penitent feeling. After the confessions of such people they often come up again, and again, saying that they have forgotten a sin. After the confession, as a rule, they ask the priest to tear up or burn their list, considering this act almost the most important moment of their confession.

Even worse, when the priest, taking such a list, reads it, or, not reading it, tears it up, and, not saying a word, reads the releasing prayer. In this manner he places himself in the position of director of God's judgment. Does such a priest remember what he says to the penitent, during the prayers before the confession: "You child, Christ is standing unseen, accepting your confession... I am only a witness." Does know his place during the

performance of the Sacrament of Confession? Does he know, that he is not a judge, but a witness and spiritual guide? To a person, giving a priest a written text and saying: "Read it yourself," one must explain, that the sin is confessed before God, that the priest is not interested in knowing, but if necessary, is only a witness and spiritual counsel, helping to heal the illness of sin. One must explain to the faithful, that confession — is not an account before God, and the more so before a confessor about performed sins, but a note — is a memo for the penitent himself. One must not, in search of cheap popularity, tear or burn such confession notes, but just the opposite, one must explain, that the tearing up of a paper has no sacramental meaning, but is, if not superstition, then Phariseism ("the sins of my writing tear asunder"). Unfortunately, we often look at the Sacrament statically, but one must observe it dynamically. One must explain to the faithful, that the main part of the confession — is not the words, but the realization of one's sinfulness, the falling away from God through sin, the desire to return to Him and to not repeat the mistakes of the past. One should concentrate the attention not so much on the forgiveness of the sins, as much as on the grace for battle with sin, given through this Sacrament, and on the responsibility of those receiving this grace. Here it would be fitting to remember the parable of the talents, to quote the words of the Book of Needs: "From these from now on you must beware, since you have been baptized with second baptism."

In these days of universal permissiveness many brochures have been published like "The Proper Sequence of Confession," "The Sacrament of Confession" and so on. Many are published without our blessing, even if on the first page is printed, "By the blessing of the Most Holy Patriarch Aleksiy." In them one can find questions by the confessor or examples of confessions for all sins, beginning with thoughts and ending with felonies. One example to illustrate the quality of several of these brochures. One may, for example, see a reminder of such a sin, unknown, however, against which law: "Did you spend much time on unnecessary clothes washing?" And this is offered as a preparation for confession to a worldly person, a woman, a housewife?! Does this mean — that doing nothing and walking around in dirt, is a Christian way of life? Not everyone today has the ability to buy an imported automatic washing machine. Did the writer of this brochure read the words of Apostle Paul: *But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel* (1 Tim. 5:8)?

It is sad, that some priests, mainly hieromonks, considering confession according to these brochures in-depth and exhaustive, actively use them when performing the Sacrament of Confession without taking into account age, sex, the place of the person in society. Can one imagine, how an innocent 15 year old girl feels, when, calling things by their names, she is asked questions about the sin of sodomy and the like, or a proper family woman, when this type of confessor begins to ask about intimate details of her married relations. And this is particularly characteristic of mini-elders and monastic priesthood. Will there be a desire to return to the Sacrament of Confession in these people, who have gone through such a "master" confession? I think not. Of course, these questions are partly mentioned in the Book of Needs in the usual sequence for confession. But there is also given a reservation, that the priest must give questions "with full reasonable trial depending on the difference in persons and, by that, making trial: differing for the clerical, differing for person, differing for monk, differing for layman, differing for young, differing for old."

It is apparent that for the modern person it is more applicable to follow the confession by the order of the ten words of Moses in the Christian interpretation, and the one confessing must have not a passive role, but an active one, in first order he must himself confess that which is on his conscience, and questions when necessary should be added as a reminder to the confessing of something forgotten.

Sometimes faithful are not permitted to partake of Communion without enough reason. One should be barred

from Communion only for a deadly sin or for unpreparedness. The igumen of one of the greater Moscow stavropigial monasteries two days before the feast day of the birth of Christ did not find it possible to permit a young woman to partake of Communion simply because she, modestly, within the family circle, not breaking fast, met the New Year and drank a little wine. On the feast day of the birth of Christ she was left without Communion of the Holy Mysteries of Christ. This igumen should read the fasting rules for Great Lent. Even in Great Lent wine is permitted on feast days, beginning with the first Saturday of Lent. In the Christmas Fast, the stricter part begins only on the next day, January 2 by the new calendar.

Formalism is contained in the approach to the Sacrament of Baptism. In many churches in the chase for earnings there is a "conveyor method," in which the first, main and last part of the preparation for baptism is the payment at the candle table, and the priest is put in the position of rite-performer. In each church it is necessary to set up at least one preparatory meeting with those asking about baptism.

The Baptism itself should be performed according to the rules and traditions of our Church, that is, through total immersion. It is impermissible to perform it in a small amount of water.

Those striving toward huge earnings should remember, that preparatory teachings, catechizations, even deferring the Sacrament of Baptism may bring greater earnings in the future. A person, accepting Holy Baptism formally, will not come to church again. A person, realizing its meaning, will begin to be a regular parishioner...

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<b>Edited by</b>	<b>Date</b>

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