

Fullness of Orthodoxy Implies Completeness of Eucharistic Hospitality

When we create a remembrance about the suffering, death and resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ we feel that this is a fullness that can't be lived by us alone, immersed in the resurrection of Christ. We understand that such an experience is possible only in the fullness of His Church. Thus, we are aware that we can bring to the Lord only our personal evil and our collective pride.

But, the main vocation of a Christian person is to be able to come with his history of infirmities and doubts and give them to the Lord in an imperfect community, and receive from Him the Kingdom. With our kindness, we do not differ from the "bad" world, and we saved not because we are "better"! We touch the redemption, because this is the role of the Eucharistic Liturgy, which is a gathering of those who are filled with hope in Christ and waiting to meet with Him. This waiting should be without fear, calculations and self-assurance, it should be with an open heart that loves, repents and trusts.

Our arrival and stay in the community of the Church, which celebrates the Liturgy on the altar, is the transition, indicated by iconostasis, from this world to the glorified Kingdom. Participation in the Eucharist is the transformation of the whole Church from the old to the new Jerusalem. Here the Church finds its primary nature of Christ's body and becomes it. Prot. Alexander Schmemmann says, "The Church enters the "grace", and "grace" means a new life, the Kingdom, the world to come".¹

In I Corinthians, chapter 11 (verses 17-34), Paul emphasizes to this transformation that we must endure when we are coming to the Lord's Supper. Abuses committed by the Corinthians, who were divided into separate groups for the Lord's Supper, indicates a problem of ritualization, and the lack of a sense of deep meaning of the Eucharistic Liturgy. To help Corinthians correct this misunderstanding, the Apostle Paul invites them to reflect on the meaning of those actions, and words of Jesus Christ, which they often repeat without understanding the consequences.

Corinthians didn't actually violate the liturgical rules, which normalized the celebration of the Supper. Their mistake was that they divided community at the time when ultimate unity was to appear. Thus are the following words of Paul (20): "When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's Supper". Paul's reminder regarding Lord's Supper shows that the Eucharistic Liturgy without brotherly communion, or even more in the context of division, is a betrayal of Christ, the denial of all that He wanted to express with His death, which He declared at the Last Supper.

Christians need to come to the Liturgical Eucharist from the world and with the world, to enter into God's peace in order to receive it, to be imbued by it – that is, for example, the meaning of blessing of a clergyman who introduces a shattered and broken man and a community of such people gathered in the Church to the unity and integrity of heaven and earth that Christ established.

Bread, holy oil, and wine, which are brought by people, indicate that the Eucharist of the Church is impossible without human component in general, without giving of this imperfect and sinful world by the person in community to God. That is the sense of Eucharist, so all that was created was also restored in God! So that that, which has lost its perfection became inspired again and renewed its full primary livelihood!

¹ Александр Шмемман. За життя світу: Таїнства і православ'я. Львів 2009. С. 55.

When we bring to God our contrasts – the unity and disunity, orthodoxy and heterodoxy, love and hate, openness and isolation – in some place, we have been aware that neither for our merits, or for the merits of the community as such, we give to God the well-pleasing sacrifice, and this sacrifice becomes acceptable and dear to Lord only because it is to be brought to Christ, in Christ and for Christ.

I have found Patriarch Pimen statement that says: “Liturgy! What a great symbol of the unity of believers in Jesus Christ and what an effective instrument of our real entry into the unity with the Body of Christ! There is no greater joy than the joy of feeling the Eucharistic fellowship, and there is no such a powerful incentive for the dissemination of this fellowship inside the realm of Church and even beyond it.”²

This is because Christ has already brought everything to the Father and for this completeness and perfection of His offering, our sacrifice in Him gains fullness of its original purpose. What we received from the Creator and what was devastated in us because of sin, we sacrifice it to Christ, and He fills it with His grace and makes sacrifice acceptable to the Father, and gives us this sacrifice, which is our renewed life, our revived Church, and our transfigured world.

Bringing our disunity for the healing in Christ is an effort that requires the Apostle Paul from the Corinthians. Communion, a shared meal at the Lord’s Supper was crucial because it pointed to the need for specific solidarity in the teachings of Jesus, and in a special way of the act made by Him in connection with His death. Upon this solidarity, a particular uniqueness of the community has been founded, that took its name from Him. Eating this supper together, which was largely provided only by wealthier part of Christians, was the way to satisfy the need of poorer Christians not in terms of charity, but solidarity, a sign that “they had everything in common”, it was a defining choice and feature of early Christian community. (Acts 2:44)

It is important to understand that now in the incarnated and undivided Church of Christ there are different groups of Christians who have different “degrees of ecclesiastical” one of the others. In addition, those that are properly and fully churching, bring not some defiled food for meal, and this does not give them the right to gather for the Lord’s Supper, isolating themselves from those who are “not quite churching and poor in faith”!

The importance of this issue for the Christian community is clearly evident from the fact that, according to the Apostle, those who participate in the Lord’s Supper without recognizing the “body”, that is Christ and/or community, which is His body (12:12), eat and drink their “condemnation.” This statement applies not only to individuals but to the community itself, which in the case of unfaithfulness causes their own destruction.

To avoid this condemnation, certainly today, the liturgical formalism is not enough, which is easily hidden by the canons and statutes for this, to hide mutual disinterest of Churches to become one solidary community of Christ on earth. Metropolitan Volodymyr (Sabodan) understood these important nuances when he wrote his master’s thesis: “whatever there is of the Church and whatever there is truly sacred, valuable and true, that is essentially orthodox, contrary to the general heterodoxy, yet still it remains within a heterodox church can not be rejected. Communication with those who broke away from the Church can be and is necessary when they return in some way to the Church. Moreover, the Church canons prohibiting communication with the excommunicated, in this case should not be understood in narrowly

² Митр. Владимир. Экклезиология, 440.

legal terms, not formally and juridically, but according to their spirit. [...] The dual approach to the heterodox persists in dealing with more general issues of hierarchy and sacraments outside the Church.³

What makes it a faithful and rewarding celebration of Supper is intense and personal exchange between individual people, who together in community are in the true journey of faith, in fellowship with other communities who also believe in the risen Lord. (I Cor. 1: 2) The way in which the Church celebrates the Eucharist is the touchstone on which is verified not only fidelity to Christ of Christian community and all its members, but also its impact on society. Christians who eat the same bread and drink from the same cup in time of the Lord's Supper proclaim His death to all those who are and aren't believers, they participate in the Eucharistic gathering (14: 23-24) also with those with whom they share most of their civil and professional life. Authentic Christian life that connects with its mission, the transformation of the world according to the dynamics of the kingdom of God, can only be the result of active participation in such opened Lord's Supper.⁴

Henri de Lubac raises the following question: "How does Christ embody our unity?" And he says: "The mystery of the Body of Jesus Christ is accomplished when all of its members bring themselves to the altar in Him and with Him". "In the Eucharist is given the full expression of the mysterious nature of the Church" and, therefore, it is in the Church, in her Catholic unity, hidden meaning of the Eucharist brings effective fruit".⁵

Only God's love is poured out upon us through our participation in the Eucharist, that love is able to transform our world into God's world, full of grace and for this reason our existence is unfolded in our action according to the original purpose after the creation of the world. God gives us His love and thus restores the Unity of everyone in Him, regardless of everything visually different. In God through Eucharist, the Church is again becomes the Church – one, holy, catholic and apostolic! Everything else is but a shadow of sin, which causes fear and creates more misunderstanding that reality is not from God, but from the world. Only Eucharist is able to open our hearts and eyes to the reality of God's world, where life is in its original and non-defiled form. It is not just a discovery; it is also a diving in!

John Zizioulas demonstrates the identity of the Church of Christ with the example of the Eucharistic prayer. Although the Church prays to the Father through the Son, it does not mean that the Son acts as a mediator between the Church and the Father. He writes: "in the Eucharistic Synaxis, the prayer of the community, which separated itself from Christ, would lead to the emergence of triple relations between the praying Church, the intermediary Son and the Father, who listens. These triple relations would not only distort the role of Christ, but also would make the prayer senseless and useless. When the Church prays, Christ is praying for her, so that her prayer becomes the prayer of Christ. He prays for us. The fact that the prayer of the Church community is no different that prayer of Christ should be understood only as a complete identification – at this point – Christ with the Church."⁶

It is important to keep in mind that the people who come to the temple, who are grouped around the altar, who have brought their gifts, their worlds, the prosphora, meaning bread and

³ Блаженнейший митр. Владимир (Сабодан). Экклезиология в отечественном богословии. Том, часть: 4. Киев 1997. С. 374-375

⁴ 1 Corinzi 11,23-26: La cena del Signore // http://www.nicodemo.net/NN/commenti_p.asp?commento=1%20Corinzi%2011,23-26.

⁵ Анрі де Любак. Роздуми про Церкву. Київ 2010. С. 123.

⁶ Мирослав Вольф. По подобию Нашему. Церковь как образ Троицы. Черкасы 2012. С. 121.

wine, they are the pilgrim people, leaving their world in order to ascent with Christ to the heavenly world and thus for Christ and in following of Christ transform our reality into a perfect reality. What happens to the prosphora on the altar also happens to us, because the Holy Spirit comes “upon us and upon these offered gifts”! Individually and collectively, we become those, which we should always have been and never could be!

Thus comes the fullness of life, which we receive as a gift just through shared growth of our hearts to Jesus Christ! Not through the mind, not because of righteousness, not because of canonicity, but as an offering of our imperfections and identifying gratitude for the new approach to God’s love and joy. This movement and inner sense of gratitude for “the righteous acts clear and unclear” opens the path to the coming age, makes us servants of holiness and thus – the saints and members of the Mystical Body of Christ, His United Church!

Mertopolitan Volodymyr (Sabodan) wrote: “The sacramental and hierarchical life of the Church is focused not on establishing a historical fact of the founding of Sacraments by Christ or Apostles, but on the living and active grace of Holy Trinity in the Church, which creates some forms of life”.⁷ “Therefore, having regard to the historical practice of the Church, we can conclude that Orthodoxy is possible outside the Orthodox Church as an organization.”⁸ Protopresbyter Sergei Bulgakov adds: “And this surrounding is internally united with him, having him as its center, since it has the power of Christ and the grace of the Holy Spirit. And it is not given to a man to declare them excommunicated from that or something other.”⁹

Only such experiences make us as Christians, which with Christ can “with one mind and one mouth” “praise and sing” to God the Father! This thanksgiving brings us back to the foundation of our holiness, i.e., Christ. We bring ourselves, our world, our sins, our patience, and our duality, which could be fulfilled only through the sacrifice of Christ: “Yours of Your own we offer you for all and for all (for all people and for all things)”!

For this, so that our bread and our worldview became acceptable to God, we have brought them out from our daily life and brought in an imperfect sacrifice for Christ. This is why we are ascended with Him, we trusted the Lord and became participants of the regeneration, in which Christ has filled us with Himself. Eucharist is Christ, who fills our whole life with Himself, transforms our bread into His Bread, our community into His Church! Then our world is already restored and able to act with God’s love, because it became God’s World!

Such a dynamic is eschatological, because it shows us the future age, which our church egoisms would not allow to touch. The Eucharist must lead us beyond our thinking, where the Spirit works! A world in Christ should become the world of Church, as it happens in time of Eucharist! Only the Church will be able to see the world through the Eucharist as it is and get out of its particularism, to enter the beyond, and she can call herself to be complete or universal!

Only the Church that humbly enters the mystery of the Mystery and goes beyond her secular logic of unity and gives herself up to the complete intercession of Jesus Christ can understand that it is not through her merits that the people became worthy to partake of the Communion, but a sense of inability and infirmity before the divine calls to unity brought about the humility, so they are able to receive a gift and positively respond to His only will, so that all came to Him!

⁷ Митр. Владимир. Экклезиологя, 401-402

⁸ Митр. Владимир. Экклезиологя, 376

⁹ Митр. Владимир. Экклезиологя, 377

The Church must be able to fully devote herself to the Lord, as the old man Simeon, who saw Jesus, understood that death for him is the fulfillment of expectations, the new dawn, and the beginning. Often the fear of the Church that she will be irrelevant as a separate organizational unit, would not allow giving birth to a new life that Christ always offers to the Church.

The Church will not be able to achieve new life if she will not believe that the world is sacramental, that the world created by God is good, and that through His creation God appeared to the world, and that God is present in life of every human being through His incarnation! God is united with the whole world, with all He created, and this is the value of the gifts that we bring to Eucharist, and which represent everything that was created!

When at the Eucharist we say “Yours of Your own, we offer to You for all and for all,” we bring everything human and everything created, so that Christ fills everything with Him. Only when we accept everything in the Liturgy, we can become members of the next century! We can not find the meaning of our existence and our “righteousness” in the act of the Church herself, but only in the Eucharist.

In addition, it is important to understand that the law of love of God and neighbor and not separate canonical prescriptions – how and who is to approach the Eucharist – must really guide the community, which through the Eucharist, each time, grows in her fullness of Christ’s Church! If the community is unable to sanctify the profane, heal the division, remove the curse, and include the supernatural into the natural, this becomes a great tragedy for her faithful, who cannot become the Church in her fullness, because she ceases to be an Event, where God, man and world communicate with each other and find harmony.

Therefore, our assumption is the following that there is no fullness of the Orthodox Church, which has limited the possibility of offering the universal sacrifice and hence has no Eucharistic hospitality. This is because there is a superimposed spirit of secularism and exclusivism, which denies the openness of the community of believers to the grace of God, and therefore to the Holy Spirit, who brings us truth, light and life.

The fullness of Orthodoxy is present there, where the entire community brings Thanksgiving. I will finish with the words of a famous Orthodox ecumenist Antoin Arjakovsky: “The most traditional practice of the Church allows Christians, who wish to participate in the Eucharist from one chalice, to discard the need of “proof”” and he continues: “for Orthodox theology participation in the Eucharistic life is neither property, which it can own, nor an individual experience. It is a commandment and also a gift from God, which calls for responsibility, and therefore to the decision, which must be personal...”¹⁰

¹⁰ Антуан Аржаковський. Очікуючи на Всеправославний собор: Духовний та екуменічний шлях. Львів 2013. С. 376-377.