

On Holy Communion (Metropolitan of Gortyn and Megalopolis, Ieremias)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



The Holy Gospel we heard today, my Christian brothers and sisters, tells us, in the form of a parable, about the Supper of Holy Communion. Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ. This Supper, which we enjoy at every Divine Liturgy, is called 'great' in today's Gospel. And this Supper really is 'great, the 'greatest', incomparably greater than any other prepared by royalty or magnates, because this Supper of the Church presents us with Christ Himself. His all-holy Body and His spotless Blood. Christ said this clearly when He gave His disciples communion on the evening of Great Thursday: 'Tale, eat, this is my body'; and 'All of you drink of this, this is my blood'. And what the priest gives the faithful at communion really is the Body and Blood of Christ, not bread and wine as some ignorant people believe. Of course, to our eyes, it looks as though what we're partaking of is bread and wine, but in reality it's the Body and Blood of Christ.



But let's ask: 'Why does what we consume at communion appear to be bread and wine, and not Body and Blood, as we believe it to be?'. Listen: if the priest stood at the royal doors holding pieces of meat and blood in the holy chalice, nobody would go to communion, because nobody eats raw meat and drinks fresh blood. People eat bread and drink wine. But Christ really is given to us in what we eat and drink. In the form of bread and wine.

Pay careful attention to what I've just said, my Christian brothers and sisters. What we take at communion is the real Body and the real Blood of Christ. They don't symbolize the Body and Blood, they actually are them. 'This is my body; this is my blood, Christ said. Is. Not symbolizes, but is. If we say that communion symbolizes the Body and Blood but isn't actually those things, then we've become heretic Protestants. Protestants really do believe, erroneously, that Holy Communion symbolizes Christ Himself but is not, in fact, Him.

When we partake of Holy Communion, the Body and Blood of our Lord, we're united to Him. That's what 'communion' means. It means union with what we've taken. But now let me tell you something really important. Saint Gregory Palamas and all the holy Fathers say that God can do everything, except one thing: He can't unite with the impure. The holy fathers tell us that to achieve our union and communion with God, we must first cleanse our heart of our sinful passions. When we take communion without any sense at all of our sinfulness, without sighing over it, then there's no 'communion' with Christ when we 'take communion'. This is why we need confession before communion; why we need some days of preparation, with fasting and prayer, so that we can take communion, the Body and Blood of Our

Lord Jesus Christ, consciously. Of course, whatever we do we'll never be completely worthy of Holy Communion. Nor is Holy Communion given as a reward for the sanctity of the faithful. When the priest gives communion to one of the faithful he says, 'for the forgiveness of your sins'. And we partake of Holy Communion in order to receive the medicine we need for our struggle against our passions. Because without Holy Communion we can't engage in the struggle. But it also requires spiritual cleansing on our part, insofar as this is possible, if we're to take Holy Communion.

Something else that's necessary for Holy Communion is the command of the priest: 'With fear of God, faith and love draw near'. 'With fear' means that we ought to have a self-effacing and humble spirit when we come to take Holy Communion. The attitude felt by the Prophet Isaiah when he saw the theophany he describes in chapter 6 of his book: 'Woe is me, for I am pricked to the heart'. This is the contrition we should feel when we pray and, even more so, when we take communion. The Hebrew [Masoretic] text, has 'doomed' rather than 'pricked to the heart'. Why doomed? He explains: 'because I, a man with unclean lips, living among a people with unclean lips, have seen with my own eyes the King, the Lord of hosts' [Complete Jewish Bible]. This is how we should feel when we take communion.



'With faith', which the priest also enjoins, is that we, like Saint Peter, should confess that Christ is the Son of the Living God, that He is God. This is why, before Holy Communion, we say the prayer: 'I believe, Lord, and I confess that You are the

Son of the Living God...'. That is, precisely the words of Saint Peter, which pleased Christ so much that He called him blessed. But before Holy Communion we have to have another, special belief, which I've already mentioned in my sermon today: we have to believe that this 'bread' is the Body of Christ and that this 'wine' is His blood. This is why we confess, before Holy Communion, that: 'Again I believe that this (the 'bread') is Your precious Body and this (the 'wine') is Your precious Blood'.

And finally 'and love' means that those who take communion have to have love towards everyone, even their enemies. Holy Communion is a sacrament of unity. Unity with God and with all our Orthodox brothers and sisters. This is why we should have love, not enmity between us. All Orthodox Christians are linked together, not merely because we have the same faith, but first and foremost because we consume the same Blood, the Blood of Christ. Because we all have Jesus Christ within us, as we partake of Him in Holy Communion at the Divine Liturgy.