

On Frequent Holy Communion, Part One

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Until the 1970s, the Orthodox did not practice frequent Communion for many reasons, including the liturgical stagnation caused by a long history of continuous persecution. Education ceased and ignorance prevailed, so the prevailing concept was to limit participation in the holy things to a few times a year, such as great feasts. The believers were convinced that man is not worthy to partake of this fearful mystery.

There is no doubt that this conviction among the believers stemmed from their intense reverence for the divine mystery and the realization that they were sinners. The personal piety that the believers had in the last century or so contributed to their conviction that they were unworthy. This prompted the believers to prepare with utmost seriousness to participate in the Holy Sacrament. Since the believers cannot carry out such preparation continuously, they refrained from approaching the holy chalice, rather than approaching when they were not properly prepared.

Added to this is ignorance of the mystery of the Eucharist and its place in the life of the faithful and their spiritual journey, in addition to general ignorance about the church, the community of believers.

In the second half of the 20th century, the understanding of the Holy Eucharist started to deepen under the influence of education and preaching, especially from theologically educated clergy. We have now witnessed a more frequent participation in Holy Communion among believers. But we are also witnessing great complacency in preparing for the great mystery.

There is no doubt that moving the faithful from one practice to another required enormous efforts, but unfortunately, these efforts did not emphasize the importance of preparedness. The focus was placed on the sound ecclesiastical understanding of frequent communion without paying much attention to the importance of the personal preparation and the effort it deserves.

The new teaching gave all attention to the theological aspect of frequent Communion, citing its necessity, based on the theology of the Eucharist and the texts of the Divine Liturgy which declare that the sacrifice is offered for the sake of everyone present. Living a life of repentance was neglected, and now we see

crowds coming forward to receive Communion at every liturgy, even though the vast majority of them do not practice the sacrament of Confession at all, even once a year.

There is a necessary distinction between theoretical teaching and the practical methods to apply this teaching in the person's life. Having knowledge of something does not mean living it on an existential level. Knowing, for example, what the Bible says about forgiveness does not mean that I have practiced forgiveness. The same applies to all other virtues. I must then gradually train myself until I reach the level of Christian forgiveness.

Many of us have neglected or forgotten the importance of practical education. We say that we are children of God and that we are free in Christ, and this is a true gospel teaching. But the love of God that we are discussing did not lead us to act as children of God Almighty, as we exclude the fear of God from our hearts with no deterrent to sin that prevents it from taking hold of us. Therefore, today we are witnessing a decline in morals and the collapse of the home.

The Apostle Paul says: "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways" (1 Cor. 13:11). Neglecting this basic verse in our churches has led us to superficial spirituality, to the point where we now know how to talk about virtue, but we are indifferent on how to practice it.

No one possesses virtues simply by knowing them theoretically. And practicing repentance is no exception to this rule. We must be vigilant to the importance of preparing our souls and bodies to fully participate in the Eucharist. This preparedness relates to each person's life of repentance. There is no set of rules in this regard that applies to all faithful everywhere, but it is rather related to the personal spiritual life of the believer. The mystery of repentance and confession plays a great role here.

The spiritual father of each believer determines when the spiritual child should or should not approach Communion. This spiritual father may sometimes resort to disciplining the believer by withholding the Eucharist for a period of time in order to raise the believer's spiritual awareness, help him to recognize his sins, and urge him to repent. The father confessor may prevent the believer because he is indifferent to his sin, he does not obey the gospel commandments, etc. Therefore,

there is no standard set of rules that applies to everyone. Rather, rules are exercised pastorally in the relationship between the spiritual father and the believer.