

PART SIX

THE HOLY MYSTERIES

**AS WAYS OF DIVINE GRACE, WHICH INCORPORATE US IN
GOD'S KINGDOM**

CHAPTER ONE

THE HOLY MYSTERIES AS THE MEANS OF DIVINE GRACE

The work of **Grace** is accomplished in all sinners who do not oppose its action, through certain ways, which were instituted by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and His **Holy Disciples and Apostles**. These ways **comprise** the **channels** through which the Holy Spirit transmits the necessary supernatural support and strength to create the **Regeneration and the new Creation within those who receive them, and which enables them to progress even more in the newness of Life in Christ**.

Without disregarding the power and necessity of prayer, as well as the preaching of the **Divine Word**, we do not include them in the special ways **by means of** which **Divine Grace** is transmitted and which are the only **God-instituted Mysteries**.¹ Prayer and the hearing of the **Divine Word** are part of the preparation **Grace** and the future growth of the newness of **Life in Christ, but** the transmission of this life and the creation of the new **Creation in Christ takes** place through the Holy Mysteries.

These Holy Mysteries draw their saving **Power** from the death on the Cross of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God. They are not **as common as prayer** and the knowledge of the **Divine Will**, but are the actions of the Holy Trinity within the Holy Orthodox Church. And in the Old Testament the Holy Mysteries were prefigured but **lacked Grace** or any other **Supernatural substance**. On the contrary the Holy Mysteries of the **Divine Economia** in Christ are performed within the Holy Orthodox Church as the **main, common and necessary channels of Divine Grace**, which have within them **the Power that** makes them active and effective even in situations **when those partaking of them, do not resist them**. Even more **so**, without the participation in these Holy Mysteries, the work of prayer and **Divine Word** remains incomplete because only through the Holy Mysteries **is one** incorporated into the **Mystical Body of Christ** and becomes **a partaker of the Redemption in Christ**.

1. The Ways of Divine Grace are God-instituted Rites

The term “*ways of Grace*” is not found in Holy Scripture but **generally prevails in Christian Theological literature** signifying the **God-instituted Rites**, which as **Divine Gifts** lead towards piety and the newness of **Life in Christ**. Through these **Rites Divine Grace** is transmitted to the faithful, which regenerates them and makes them grow “*to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*.”² These Mysteries are characterized as being **God-instituted** because they were instituted by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, **Who is the Leader of the Orthodox Church**. **From Him and His Sacrifice on the Holy Cross**, they received **Supernatural and Sanctifying** attributes.

And it is true that only **two of the** Holy Mysteries, that of Holy Baptism and Holy Eucharist, were instituted directly by our Lord and Master. **However**, taking into consideration that the rest of the Holy Mysteries were passed down to the Church by the **Holy Apostles, once again** their institution **is attributed** indirectly to the same Lord, since His

¹ Cf. Damalas, *Catechesis*, pp. 78-82. Mitsopoulos, *Themata*, pp. 88-89.

² Ephes. 4:13.

Disciples, in organizing the Church, always had as their guideline the inseparable Teachings of Christ, to Whom they always wanted to prove themselves as faithful co-workers, stewards and guardians.

Besides, in the words and actions of our Lord, we find the central core around which all Holy Mysteries were formed through the Enlightenment of the Holy Spirit Who guided the Holy Apostles to complete understanding of the Teachings of the departed Master. Thus, in the words of Christ concerning the insoluble marriage,³ the Authority of the keys of Heaven⁴ with which He vested His Apostles and the practice of the “*anointing with oil* (of the sick) *in the Name of the Lord*,”⁵ we find the Divine foothold and the Holy Mysteries of Marriage, Confession and Repentance, Priesthood, Chrismation and Unction.

When we assign the Institution of the Holy Mysteries to the Lord, we must keep in mind that this Institution comes down to the determination of the details of the order of the Mystical Rites. Nonetheless, if we then accept that the Lord promised the Apostles the Grace of the Holy Spirit through a certain relationship, leaving the Guidance of the Helper Who alone would remind and teach them ‘all’ the saving Truth in order to organize the visible part of certain Mysteries, once again the Divine Institution of the Holy Mysteries remains unassailable.⁶

According to the above, since the Holy Mysteries were instituted by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and were determined by Him as ways of granting and transmitting Divine Grace, it is obvious that the use of these Mysteries is necessary and absolutely essential.

And assuredly, we cannot say that the Holy Spirit is limited by these Mysteries to the extent that in extraordinary situations He cannot grant His Gifts and Graces without them. On the contrary, it is accepted that the Holy Spirit is the Ruler of all and even without these Mysteries He can act. This is manifested when the Holy Apostles were Regenerated and finally Ordained by the descent of the Holy Spirit upon them on the Day of Pentecost, thus proving that “*the Saviour baptized the Apostles in the Holy Spirit and fire*,”⁷ when “*suddenly there came a sound from Heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind*.”^{8,9} This is also manifested in the case of Cornelius the centurion¹⁰ and all those in his house: “*while Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the Word*.”¹¹ Even in the Tradition of the Orthodox Church, at the time of Martyrdom when a Catechumen was not yet received in the Church through the Holy Mystery of Baptism, by the calling upon the Name of the Holy Trinity as their blood was flowing, they were Baptized with their own blood. This type of Baptism is called the ‘*Baptism of Martyrdom*’ and is considered as the most perfect and honorable way of Baptism, as imitating the Baptism of Christ on the Cross.¹² There is also a “*Baptism in the air*” which is still in use within the Orthodox Church, according to which new born babes who are in danger of dying are Baptised if no Priest is

³ Matth. 19:6.

⁴ Matth. 16:19; 18:18. John 20:22-23.

⁵ James 5:14.

⁶ Androutsos, *Dogmatique*, p. 296.

⁷ Matth. 3:11.

⁸ Acts 2:2.

⁹ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis*, III, § 9, in Migne, *P.G.*, 33, 440.

¹⁰ Acts 10:1-48.

¹¹ Acts 10:44.

¹² Matth. 20:22-23.

available. The Orthodox parents or doctor or nurse or any layman regardless of age or sex, may Baptise the new born by raising it up and down three times in the air, calling upon the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. These extraordinary ways of Baptism reveal that the Holy Spirit is not restricted by any typical orders.

Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit uses these Mysteries according to the Divine definition and institution, as ways to transmit Divine Grace, which regenerates and creates the new Creation. Thus they are essential and necessary for the incorporation of all men into the spiritual Body of Christ, in order to progress and grow in the newness of the Life in Christ and to be Sanctified within the Church. Thus, the Holy Mysteries are the main channels and means of Divine Grace.

2. Prayer and the Preaching of the Word as Secondary Ways

Concerning prayer, we shall note that no one is allowed to ignore its importance and power since our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, urges us to: *“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened”*¹³ and *“how much more will your Father Who is in Heaven give good things to those who ask Him?”*¹⁴ Even the major part of the Holy Mysteries consists of prayer but it is obvious, as in the case of the centurion Cornelius, that prayer prepares the soul at first to receive the work of Divine Grace, guiding it to the Faith, the Saviour and the Baptism. When the faithful through Baptism and the Mysteries of Holy Chrismation and Eucharist are incorporated into the spiritual Body of Christ, they receive through it the special Power, of which our Lord assured us, that *“in that day”*¹⁵ when the Holy Spirit, through His descent will inaugurate the New Age of Grace by which we will participate through the Holy Mysteries, *“you will ask in My Name”*¹⁶ and *“the Father Himself Who loves you”*¹⁷ *“will give you in My Name, because you have loved Me, and have believed”*¹⁸ in Me. As the prayers and alms of Cornelius could not assure him Salvation in Christ without receiving Baptism, likewise for every man prayer prepares him to receive Divine Grace, which transmits Adoption and Regeneration to him by receiving the Holy Mysteries.

The same can be applied to the preaching of the Divine Word. No one can deny that the Grace of the Holy Spirit influences the hearing of Divine preaching, stimulating their interest and enlightening them with the understanding of the Teachings, as in the case of St. Lydia, the *“seller of purple from the city of Thyatira”* when *“the Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.”*¹⁹ St Paul declared that *“faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”*²⁰ Hence the questions: *“How then shall they call on Him in Whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of Whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?”*²¹ St Peter also assured us that the Orthodox Christians *“having been born again,*

¹³ Matth. 7:7-8.

¹⁴ Matth. 7:11.

¹⁵ John 16:23.

¹⁶ John 16:26.

¹⁷ John 16:27.

¹⁸ John 16:23.

¹⁹ Acts 16:14.

²⁰ Rom. 10:17.

²¹ Rom. 10:14-15.

not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the **Word of God** which lives and abides forever.²² **St. James**, the Brother of God, urged us: “Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted **Word**, which is able to save your souls.”²³ The Epistle to the Hebrews presents “the **Word of God**” to be “living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”²⁴

The **Word of God** spread through preaching into the hearts of those who listen, remains fruitless if the action of **Divine Grace of the Holy Mysteries is not added** to the advice given by the preaching. For **without participation** in them, no matter how much man is moved by the hearing of the **Divine Word**, he will remain alien to Christ and the **Salvation through His Blood**.²⁵ The preaching of St Peter on the Day of Pentecost **clearly** informs us of this. Those who “were cut to the heart” were urged by St Peter and the rest of the **Holy Apostles**, to “repent, and let every one of you be Baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the Gift of the Holy Spirit.”²⁶ **After Baptism** they **received forgiveness of their sins and the Gift of the Holy Spirit**. It is obvious then, that, if they had not been Baptised, the hearing of the **Divine Word of God** would not have had any **effect** upon them.

No one should misuse the case of Cornelius, according to which as St Peter spoke, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the Word of God, **because** this case is **particularly** extraordinary. It is very important to **realise** that even after the descent and the outpouring of the Gift of the Holy Spirit, St Peter did not consider it unnecessary to Baptise **them all as he** “commanded them to be Baptised in the Name of the Lord.”²⁷

On the one hand the hearing or reading of the **Divine Word of God** influences **mankind** according to the skills of **those** who **preach** or the writers who **interpret the Word**; whereas, on the other hand, **it influences them according to their** capability of **receiving, hearing or reading** the Word of God and their willingness to accept and practice it. The preachers are not always the **leaders** of the Apostles, **nor** is it the work of all to become preachers. Nevertheless, Divine Grace, which is granted through the Holy Mysteries, is not influenced **by moral** status or worthiness of the officiator because at that moment God Himself is the One Who is celebrating the “*Mystagogia*.” In addition, the effectiveness of the Mysteries is manifested not only to those intellectuals who participate in them, but **to infants as well**, and generally speaking, **to all those** who do not oppose the Grace of God. **This, however, does** not apply to the hearing of the **Word because** only those who are in a position to follow it, can benefit from it.

²² 1 Peter 1:23.

²³ James 1:21.

²⁴ Heb. 4:12.

²⁵ Androutsos, *Symbolique*, p. 282. Leeming, *Principles*, p. 5.

²⁶ Acts 2:37, 38.

²⁷ Acts 10:48. Cf. St. John Chrysostom, *To Acts*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 60, 183 and 184.

3. The Holy Mysteries as Gifts

According to the **above**, the **Word of God** can be considered only as secondary and to be numbered **generally** among the ways of **Divine Grace**. **The Divine Mysteries instituted by Christ Himself and His Holy Apostles, are the only methods of Sanctification within the Church.**

Truly, prayer and preaching of the Word of God are found in the Old Economia. **Prayer** was exercised not only in the public worship of the Synagogue, but **also** in private and was addressed by all the **God-lovers** and all levels of **the** faithful. The Book of Psalms is a book of prayers. The Word of God appears to be preached by **God-called** and **God-inspired** men, **Patriarchs** and **Prophets** - all those who appeared from the time of Noah and Moses **until** Malachi - and was read in the Temple of the Lord and in the Synagogues.

The Divine Mysteries are **the** exclusive inheritance of the New Economia of the **Divine Grace**, according to which, after the Death, Resurrection and Ascension into Heaven of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Holy Spirit was sent into the world.

The Mysteries in the Old Testament **are** mentioned as such: the **Circumcision**, the Paschal **Lamb**, the **Bread of Prothesis**, the **Rites of Cleanliness** and **Purification** and the **Sacrifices of Atonement**. All these can be characterized only as types and shadowy prefigurations of the Holy Mysteries of the New Testament, which have real and **Divine** effectiveness and **which are more elevated than the prototypes.**²⁸

Thus, the Jewish Rites of Purification through the washing with water could not free any one from sin, but only **from** the stains of the body **and** for the cleanliness of the flesh,²⁹ **not** Sanctifying spiritually. On the contrary, our Baptism is much greater, **filled** with **Divine** Grace, for it **frees** one from sin and cleanses the soul through the Gift of **the** Holy Spirit. Circumcision prefigures the "*Circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the Circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in Baptism.*"³⁰ The Circumcision of the Old Testament worked towards the putting aside of the flesh, whereas **Baptism** is the putting aside of sins, while the anointing through Holy Chrismation **that** Orthodox Christians receive, **is the symbol according to which, in the Holy Scriptures, kings and Prophets were anointed. Although for them it worked typically, for Orthodox Christians it works truly because we are actually anointed by the Holy Spirit.** In the Old Testament there was also the **Bread of Preparation** or **Prothesis**, **but it came to an end, whereas according to the New Testament the Heavenly Bread and the Saving Cup Sanctify the soul and body.** The basin **that** was in the Temple **also** symbolised Baptism. **So how** can they be compared to our **Divine Mysteries**? **Consider** the differences **that** separate the Passover of the Old Testament to that of the Lamb of God, **Who** takes up the sins of the world, and **Whose** Sacrifice on the Cross was offered once and for all as an **Everlasting Sacrifice.** **Our** Passover³¹ **consists** of "*.... Christ, our Passover [Who] was Sacrificed for us.*"³²

²⁸ St. Augustine, *In Psalm LXXIII*, 2, in Migne, *P.L.*, 36, 931. Bartmann, *Theologie Dogmatique*, v. II, p. 267.

²⁹ St. John Chrysostom, *To the holy and saving Baptism of our Saviour Jesus Christ*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 49, 366.

³⁰ Col. 2:11-12. Cf. Rom. 2:25-29; 3:1, 30; 4:9-12; 15:8. 1 Corinth. 7:19. Gal. 2:7-9, 12; 5:6, 11; 6:15. Ephes. 2:11. Phil. 3:3-5. Col. 3:11.

³¹ St. Ecumenius, *To Hebrews* 9, 13, in Migne, *P.G.*, 119, 337. Kalogeras, *Maria*, 2, 406. St. John Chrysostom, *To the holy and saving Baptism of our Saviour Jesus Christ*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 49, 366. *Ibid*, *To Genesis*, Homily 39, § 5, in Migne, *P.G.*, 53, 368. St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis*, XXI, § 6, in Migne, *P.G.*, 33, 1193 and 1100. *Ibid*, *Catechesis*, III, § 5, in Migne, *P.G.*, 33, 433.

³² 1 Corinth. 5:7.

4. The Holy Mysteries Receive their Power from Christ' Sacrifice

It was necessary to present the Sacrifice offered for us by the Lamb of God and then to receive the Gift of the Holy Spirit. Before Christ was Crucified and Ascended into Heaven “*the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*”³³ It was to be poured forth from on High after the Cross because before then, we were enemies,³⁴ having sinned and consequently, were deprived of the Gift of God. When the Sacrifice was offered for us, not only did we receive the Enlightenment of the Holy Spirit as did the Prophets of the Old Testament, but He now dwells and abides within us causing us to become temples of God contrary to the Prophets, of whom none ever became a temple of God.³⁵ Consequently, the Source from which the Divine Mysteries of the New Testament receive their supernatural Power, which is distributed to those who partake of them, is the Sacrifice on the Cross of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Who reconciled us to God the Father³⁶ and Who became the reason for sending the Holy Spirit into the world, by Whom we were “Anointed” and “Sealed” giving “*us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.*”³⁷

This Truth was proclaimed by St Irenaeus who observed that if Christ did not truly suffer, He would have no Grace, due to that lack of suffering.³⁸

St John Chrysostom, interpreting the supernatural Event of the piercing of the Lord’s “*side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out,*”³⁹ observed that “*not only these fountains accidentally came out, but because from these two the Church was composed, and those who participate in the Mystagogy are healed being Regenerated through water, and being fed through (His) Blood and Flesh. Hence the Mysteries receive their beginning.*”⁴⁰

Earlier than this, the great Father of the Orthodox Church, Methodius of Olympus referred to the Church as the Lord’s “*Wife.*” He presents her as being created from His Side, just as Eve was once created from the side of Adam,⁴¹ and receiving from His Side some kind of Power enabling the growth of all those who are formed in her.⁴²

St Augustine speaking of Baptism, observed that this is the Saving Water because it is Sanctified through the Name of Christ Who shed His Blood for us from this and through His Cross, the Water is Sealed.⁴³

St Cyril of Jerusalem accepts that the outpouring of the Blood and Water from the Side of Christ are symbols of the Saving Baptism and from which the Church was born. And “*as Eve was made from the side of Adam, likewise are we from the Side of Christ.*”⁴⁴

³³ John 7:39.

³⁴ Rom. 5:10.

³⁵ St. John Chrysostom, in Migne, *P.G.*, 59, 284. St. Cyril of Alexandria, in Migne, *P.G.*, 73, 757.

³⁶ Rom. 5:10. 2 Corinth. 5:18-20.

³⁷ 2 Corinth. 1:21, 22.

³⁸ St. Irenaeus, *Heresies*, book III, ch. 18, § 6, in Migne, *P.G.*, 7, 936. Cf. *Ibid*, in Hadjephraimides, p. 242.

³⁹ John 19:34.

⁴⁰ St. John Chrysostom, *To John*, Homily 85, in Migne, *P.G.*, 59, 463. *Ibid*, in Migne, 51, 229.

⁴¹ Gen. 2:21-22.

⁴² Methodius, *Symposium*, III, 8, in Migne, *P.G.*, 18, 73.

⁴³ St. Augustine, *Sermo* 352, § 3, in Migne, *P.L.*, 39, 1551.

⁴⁴ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis*, XII, § 11, in Migne, *P.G.*, 33, 788.