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Saint Mary of Egypt and the Holy Communion



Saint Mary of Egypt struggled in desert for forty-seven years without receiving Holy Communion. As it is known, the saint retired to the wilderness to repent of her very desolate life.

On the one hand, we must take it as an extraordinary example of repentance; on the other hand, we must not forget to preserve this extraordinary character.

The Holy Bible about the Holy Communion

We will not abstain from the Holy Communion, and we will not commune ourselves without the blessing of our spiritual father, before whom we will investigate ourselves in the mystery of confession. Saint Paul says, “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup” (1 Cor 11:28). It

does not say “not to eat” but “to eat.” But “For he who eats and drinks unworthily eats and drinks damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body” (I Cor. 11: 28-29).

The Lord said of the mystery of communion: “This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19). So, it is not the Divine Liturgy as a service that we do to commemorate the Lord, but the Holy Communion.

The Lord also said, “Whosoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood, dwells in me, and I in him” (John 6: 54-56).

It should be emphasized here that what is translated by “He who eats” is actually a single word—τρώγων—which is the active participle of the verb “to eat.” So, it should have been translated with the “eater.” Just as “[the one who] drank [my blood]” would have translated “the drinker”—but, of course, these participles do not sound good in translation. It is very important to mention this fact because participles express a constant, repeated action for this purpose—a job, a profession: for example, if we sweep our room we are not professional “street sweepers.” If we crack some wood for the stove, we are not professional “loggers.”

The Divine Liturgy

Also, the Divine Liturgy is not a service for the glorification of God (of the seven praises)—even though, through the Holy Liturgy, God is glorified like nowhere else. The liturgy is part of the category of services with a specific purpose: baptism, wedding, funeral. The purpose of the Liturgy is to commune the people and the entire structure of the service shows this, having the priest’s communion in the center. If no one communes at the liturgy, it is as if we were to do the service of baptism and not to baptize anyone or the funeral service and to leave the deceased person out.

The canons about the Holy Communion

For these reasons, we have several canons of the Holy Fathers who express these things very clearly:

CANON 9, Apostolic:

> *“All the faithful who come in and hear the Scriptures, but do not stay for the prayers and Holy Communion, are to be excommunicated, as causing*

disorder in the Church."

CANON 2, Synod of Antioch:

> *"All who enter the church of God and hear the Holy Scriptures, but do not communicate with the people in prayers, or who turn away, by reason of some disorder, from the holy partaking of the Eucharist, are to be cast out of the Church, until after they shall have made confession and, having brought forth the fruits of penance and made earnest entreaty, they shall have obtained forgiveness."*

CANON 80. Council in Trullo:

> *"If any bishop, or presbyter, or deacon, or any of those who are enumerated in the list of the clergy, or a layman, has no very grave necessity nor difficult business so as to keep him from church for a very long time—but, being in town, does not go to church on three consecutive Sundays—three weeks—if he is a cleric, let him be deposed, but, if a layman, let him be cut off."*

Based on the above, the church today adopted the practice of Sunday communion, a practice that is best suited for the flock of Christ—this assuming an active spiritual life, including, of course, confession. The rare holy communion (for example, four times a year) is alien to the spirit of orthodoxy and experience shows that it leads to banalization and formalism, excluding the ascetic preparatory for the Holy Communion.

In extraordinary times (for example, epidemics), the priest can share in the porch of the church or even go home to people with the communion for the sick, taking into account the necessary protection measures and the fact that the Holy Gifts cannot transmit harmful diseases to the people for whom Jesus has sacrificed Himself.

In the images, the icons of Saint Zosimas who communes Saint Mary of Egypt (a two-part icon) and the cave of Saint Mary of Egypt.





— Source: asceticexperience.com