03/11/2021

AT THE HEART OF THE DIVINE LITURGY LIES THE GREAT MYSTERY OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST



In the previous sermon, we established that the believer is united with the resurrected Body of Christ by partaking of the Holy Body and Blood of the Lord in the Divine Eucharist. By this the words of the Lord are fulfilled: “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him” (John 6:56). In order to fully understand the broader dimensions of the Great Mystery of the Eucharist, it is necessary to answer the following question:

Why is it called the Mystery of Holy Eucharist?

According to the Holy Evangelists, it was during the Last Supper that Jesus took the bread, offered a prayer of thanksgiving, divided it and then gave it to His Disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.” Then He took the cup and, after saying a prayer of thanksgiving, gave it to them, saying: ”Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26: 26-28). We hear these same words repeated by the Priest in every Divine Liturgy. Because the Last Supper was preceded by a Prayer of Thanksgiving

by Jesus, the same thing is done by the officiating priest when the great prayer of the “Anaphora” or the “Eucharistic Prayer” begins. For this reason it is called the “Mystery of the Divine Eucharist”, which in the Greek means ”Divine Thanksgiving.”

This is not the only reason, however. The whole Mystery of the Divine Eucharist is a way of GIVING THANKS TO GOD. The individual Christian, as well as the whole Church, offers Gifts of gratitude to the Man-loving God for the innumerable good things – both known and unknown – that He has bestowed and continues to bestow upon us. This, among other things, is emphasized in the Offertory Prayer, which the Priest prays after the Great Entrance, when the Holy Gifts (the Bread on the Holy Diskos and the Wine in the Holy Chalice) are brought up to the Sacred Altar. The Priest exclaims: ”Lord God Almighty… Enable us to offer You gifts and spiritual sacrifices… Deem us worthy… that the good Spirit of Your grace may rest upon us and upon these gifts presented and upon all Your people.”
The moment of the “eucharistic sacrifice” of the Holy Gifts is approaching when the Priest, raising the Holy Diskos with the Bread, and the Holy Chalice with the Wine, exclaims: ” Your own of Your own we offer to You, in all and for all.” That is: Lord, we wish to offer to You these gifts of gratitude for the infinite good things that You have given us and continue to give us, as we have nothing of our own. That is why we have chosen Bread and Wine, which are Your creations, to be brought to You as Gifts of Thanksgiving. We offer them for everything that You have done for us from the beginning of Creation until this very day, and in every place of Your dominion.
At this point the Mystery of the Divine Eucharist reaches its climax, as the Priest asks God the Father to send the Holy Spirit on the Holy Gifts in order to accomplish the Mystery: ”Make this bread the precious Body of Your Christ and that which is in this Cup, the precious Blood of Your Christ.” Truly, at this very moment a Miracle that is inconceivable to the human mind has taken place. With the transformation of the bread into the body of the Lord, the sacrifice is completed. On the Holy Altar we now have the Crucified and Risen Christ, and together with the Twelve Disciples in the celestial hall of Zion, we participate in the Supper. This supper of Gratitude and Thanksgiving differs in no way from the original Last Supper of Holy Thursday. The Holy Altar has become the Table of Oblation; it has become Calvary. This is so, because the Mystery of the Eucharist is an image of the sacrifice on Calvary. In the Divine Eucharist, as on Calvary, Christ is sacrificed. After Calvary we reach the Resurrection. The Eucharist is the uninterrupted Easter of the Church, and assures us of the joy of the Kingdom to come.
Let us spend a little more time on the concept of the Eucharist as a sacrifice.
First, this aspect is evident in the words of the Lord, when he delivered the Mystery to His Disciples: “Drink from it, all of you. This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26: 27-28). The Lord

speaks clearly here of the sacrifice of His Blood, which is ”poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” It is indeed remarkable, that the Lord, when speaking of the sacrifice of His Blood, has not yet been crucified. Nevertheless, He uses the word “poured out” in the present tense. He does not use the future tense and say for example: this is my blood that “will be poured out”, but my blood which “is poured out”. What is the meaning of this? The enlightened Fathers of the Church reveal to us the following: The Lord shed His Holy Blood only once on Calvary for the life and salvation of the world, for all who have lived since Adam and will live until the Second Coming. In the Divine Liturgy the common understanding of time, which is divided into days, years and centuries, becomes irrelevant. For God, as we know, there is no present, no past and no future. Everything before Him is an eternal present. In a similar way, at the time of the performance of the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist “liturgical time” applies, through which everything is transformed into the present, so that humans of every age can have the opportunity to approach the Mystery with the Twelve Disciples in Jerusalem and benefit from it.

We will continue – God willing – with this topic next Sunday.