

# Sacramental Guidelines: The Eucharist

The Eucharist, or Holy Communion, is the sacrament of sacraments in the Orthodox Christian Church. Orthodox Christians believe the Eucharist is truly the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, many of the sacrifices were not only offered to God but also shared with the offerers as a meal. For example, the Passover sacrifice was a young lamb without blemish (Exodus 12:5) that was to be killed, roasted, and eaten (Exodus 12:6-8). In Leviticus, we read about sacrifices such as the peace offering of thanksgiving that was also eaten by the priests and offerers (Leviticus 7:11-17). Jesus is the fulfillment of all of the Old Testament sacrifices, He is the "...a new Pascha [Passover], a living Sacrifice, the Lamb of God who beareth the sin of the world."<sup>1</sup> In the Old Testament, the sacrifices were completed when the offerers partook of their portion of the sacrifice. Jesus's once and for all sacrifice (Hebrews 7:27) on the Cross is made complete when we partake of His Body and Blood in the Eucharist. The Lord Himself stated,

Truly, truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink (John 6:53-55).

By receiving the Eucharist, we become truly joined to Christ Himself and He is joined to each and every one of us. Because of the solemnity and seriousness of this sacrament, all Orthodox Christians should be properly prepared to receive the Eucharist. The following guidelines for the sacrament of Holy Communion are presented here.<sup>2</sup>

1. Who is eligible to be a Communicant?
  - a. Only an Orthodox Christian in good standing.
  - b. Non-Orthodox Christians **may not** receive the Eucharist. This includes Roman Catholics, Melkites, Maronites, Eastern Rite (or Byzantine Rite) Catholics, and all Protestant denominations. While we Orthodox Christians love and respect other Christians, we do not have an "open chalice." For more information on this, please read the article posted [here](#).

- c. In cases of marital separation, Orthodox Christians should refrain from the Eucharist.
- 2. How should one prepare to receive Holy Communion?
  - a. One is to abstain from all food and drink from midnight on Saturday. *It's that simple!* Of course, there are exceptions for reasons of health, pregnancy, etc. These should be discussed with one's parish priest.
  - b. The whole Divine Liturgy is a preparation to receive Holy Communion. One should arrive on time and participate in the total service which culminates in receiving Holy Communion.
  - c. Upon arriving at Church, one should pray at least one, if not all, of the Prayers of Preparation before Holy Communion that can be found in the *Service Book*.
- 3. How often should one receive Holy Communion?
  - a. Orthodox Christians should receive as often as possible.
  - b. According to the guidance of one's father confessor (i.e. your parish priest) and his advice, one may approach the chalice.
  - c. In cases of divorce, one may receive the Eucharist only after being restored to the sacramental life of the Church after a minimum penance of six (6) months.
- 4. Incorrect notions about receiving the Eucharist. There are many "superstitious tales" about receiving communion. The following are **false** and are **not** the teaching of the Orthodox Church
  - a. You must fast for a period of 3 or 10 days before receiving Communion. See 2a above.
  - b. You can't brush your teeth on Sunday morning because you might accidentally swallow a drop or two of water and break the fast. This is silly legalistic nonsense. **PLEASE, for the sake of your brothers and sisters in Christ, brush your teeth before coming to Church.**
  - c. A woman cannot receive Communion if it is her period because the Body and Blood may flow right out of her. Unlike the medieval ages, we in the 21<sup>st</sup> century know that human anatomy is not comprised of a series of interconnected tubes wherein such a thing could happen. A properly prepared woman may, in fact, receive the Eucharist during her period.
  - d. A woman cannot receive Communion if it is her period because she is "unclean." Levitical (Old Testament) laws concerning ritual

impurity do not apply to the New Covenant. We are all washed and purified in the waters of Baptism. Human female physiology does not make one “impure.”

- e. One Confession – One Eucharist: This is also an erroneous teaching that one must go to confession every time they want to have Communion. This is not so. Of course, one should regularly partake of the sacrament of Confession with their parish priest. Guidelines for Confession can be found [here](#).

#### 5. How to approach the Chalice

- a. One should approach the Chalice in modest and appropriate attire.
- b. When the priest says, “The servant of God, \_\_\_\_\_” you should then state your baptismal/Christian name clearly, well enunciated, and at an audible volume.
- c. After receiving Holy Communion, the communicant steps away from the chalice and says, “Amen,” and makes the sign of the cross.
- d. Upon returning to one’s seat, you are encouraged to pray at least one, if not all, of the Prayers of Thanksgiving After Holy Communion that are found in the *Service Book*.

#### 6. How to partake of the Body and Blood of Christ.

- a. To insure that the Eucharist does not accidentally fall out of your mouth or off of the communion spoon one should:
  - i. Tilt one’s head back slightly
  - ii. Open one’s mouth wide
  - iii. One can receive communion by taking it directly off of the spoon or by allowing the priest to tip the spoon and drop it into one’s mouth.
- b. DO NOTS
  - i. Do not slurp the Eucharist off the spoon like it is soup.
  - ii. Do not use your upper front teeth or your upper lip to drag the Eucharist off of the spoon. When people do this, they tend to retract their jaw and tilt their head down which is a recipe for communion spillage.
  - iii. Do not tilt your head down. Gravity still works, even during Holy Communion.

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<sup>1</sup> 9<sup>th</sup> Ode of Paschal Orthros.

<sup>2</sup> Derived from the Clergy Guide of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 2011.