

"The Long Life"

by Deacon Emmanuel Stamatou

Thoughts on life style issues of today, being Orthodox and receiving Holy Communion

I clearly remember the service of the Divine Liturgy held on the Saturday morning of Holy Week last year. There were quite a few people in the Church that morning but nothing could have prepared me for the crowd that was to appear close to the end of the service. Why such a big crowd? A long and seemingly endless line had formed. How long was this line? The line started from the steps below the Royal Doors at the front of the Church and continued all the way to the rear spilling outside along Parker Street around the corner to Francis Street, past the rear of the Church and beyond. Inside the Church there were two lines where Holy Communion was offered by Father and myself.

So many not seen before

So many people we had never seen before and they were present to receive the Holy Body and Blood of Christ...with little or no preparation at all! The crowd was big but how many of these people should have presented themselves to receive Holy Communion?

If you are not Orthodox, you cannot receive Holy Communion, under any circumstances. You cannot receive Holy Communion even if you have been married in the Orthodox Church. You can only receive Holy Communion if you have been Baptised and Chrismated Orthodox. If you do wish to become Orthodox then you must undergo at least 6 months of Catechism classes before you can be Baptised and Chrismated. Only by this means do you become a member of the Orthodox Church. Your marriage to someone Baptised Orthodox does not entitle you to receive Holy Communion.

If you are Orthodox

If you are Baptised Orthodox and have married outside the Orthodox Church, be it through a registry office, garden-park setting, non- canonical Church, or any Christian denomination Church, your legally recognised marriage is not recognised by the Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church requires you to have undergone the Sacrament of Marriage in a canonically recognised Orthodox Church. If you have not been married in the Orthodox Church you cannot receive Holy Communion, even if you have been Baptised Orthodox and irrespective of how prepared you may think you may be to receive the Holy Body and Blood of Christ.

If you have been Baptised Orthodox and are living with someone (or have done so in the past), even if this someone is Orthodox, you cannot present yourself to receive Holy Communion unless you have confessed your sin to the Spiritual Father and he has

allowed it that you receive Holy Communion. You cannot present yourself for Holy Communion in any situation where you have been involved in sexual relations that have occurred outside of Marriage in the Orthodox Church. Unless that is, you have confessed your sins to a Spiritual Father of the Orthodox Church and he has granted you permission to receive Holy Communion.

Those who have been Baptised Orthodox and have received the blessing of an Orthodox Marriage but have committed an adultery, cannot present themselves to receive Holy Communion unless they have sought the forgiveness of their sins through the Sacrament of confession by a Spiritual Father of the Orthodox Church and he has granted you permission to receive Holy Communion.

Persons involved in any casual sexual relationships cannot present themselves for Holy Communion unless they have confessed their sins to a Spiritual Father of the Orthodox Church and He has granted them permission to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. Even when attending Confession you may be excluded from receiving Holy Communion until such time as proper penance has been made under the guidance of the Spiritual Father,

Holy things for Holy People

St Paul warns us not to partake of Christ's Body and Blood lightly.

"Whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner" says St Paul "will be guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord."(1 Corinthians 11:27)

If we come to receive Holy Communion in an unworthy manner we effectively approach the Lord with inner immorality which is known to God and for which we must give a full account at the Last Judgement of the Second Coming of Christ. We cannot be seeking forgiveness of sins at the Last Judgement. By then it will be too late. Now is the time to seek God's mercy and forgiveness which is all love. Now is the time to prepare to receive Him by examining ourselves and reconciling ourselves with one another and with God. "I observe many partaking of Christ's Body lightly and incidentally, from custom and ordinance" said St John Chrysostomos, "rather than from consideration and understanding. When one says, "The holy season is at hand, whatever sort one may be, he partakes of the mysteries..." "But this is not the occasion for Communion, for neither Theophany (the revealing of God) nor Lent makes us worthy to come forward, but sincerity and purity. With these, come forward always, without them, never."

St John further alerts us not to draw near unprepared to receive the Sacrifice of Our Lord at which "the very angels tremble."

"And how shall you stand before the judgement seat of Christ, you who dare to receive His Body with polluted hand and lips? You would not presume to kiss a king with a foul-smelling mouth, **but you kiss the King of Heaven with a reeking soul? This is an outrage.**" (4th Century, Daily readings from the writings of St John Chrysostomos ed. Fr Anthony M. Coniaris, Light and Life pub. Pp. 26)

How long the line?

How long will the line of Saturday Holy Week be this year? Yes Christ died on the Holy Cross for our sake, He offers Himself for us, He grants us forgiveness of sins, but are we interested? We do not fathom the preciousness of His Holy Gifts. Rather we approach without fear or self-examination, pride and the cares of the world have overtaken us. We are spiritually unconscious to the illness of our soul. We are without prayer and full of personal customary tradition which bears no relationship to the Church and Holy Tradition. When will we stop and listen? When will we prepare ourselves for Christ? When will we shed a tear for our sins?

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