

HOMILY

The Holy Mysteries of Christ

First of all, it must be said that the prayer life of the Christian is manifest in the experience the Holy Mysteries of Christ. For his followers, Christ is not a distant God, unapproachable by any means. He – the unfathomable God – becomes a man, to be close to humanity, (those who fled, hearing the voice of God in the garden of Eden). In this way God himself becomes our mediator, *“For there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus, himself human, For there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself as ransom for all.”* (1 Tim. 2: 5-6). This condescension of the God-Word in the person of Jesus Christ is the revelation of the mystery of our salvation, which the church professes, singing out on Nativity of Our Lord: *“I contemplate a divine and marvelous mystery: heaven has become a cave, the throne of Cherubim – a virgin, and the manger - an honorable place in which lies Christ God the incomprehensible.* By means of his birth, life, passion, death, and resurrection has accomplished and revealed to us the plan of salvation. In the Old Testament this unfathomable intention of God to save us is called a mystery.

The apostle Paul also uses the word mystery in the Old Testament sense. For him the term “mystery” refers to God’s plan for the salvation of human race and the world, hidden in God’s wisdom, and revealed to those who are ready to receive it. It is not connected to some special ritual, but to the mystery of Christ – His saving grace in the world. God’s plan of salvation was born in the depths of the divinity, and revealed in Christ and His Gospel. The church has retained this sense of mystery, as part of tradition. Relating to the Liturgy, the church acknowledges: *“The wonderful works of God among the people of the Old Testament were but a prelude to the work of Christ the Lord in redeeming mankind and giving perfect glory to God. He achieved His task principally by the paschal mystery of His blessed passion, resurrection from the dead, and the glorious ascension, whereby “dying, he destroyed our death and, rising, he restored our life”.* (Constitution on the Liturgy, 5) Manifesting the mystery of salvation through His incarnation, Christ fulfills in the resurrection, his victory over death.

On account of the wonderful mystery of Christ, our prayer becomes significant in the eyes of God, due to our participation in divine nature of His Son, we can call God our Father. In this manner, the person of Christ becomes a mystery, a “sacrament” being united with Christ, by glorify the Father we are saved, and on account of our salvation God is glorified. Since the salvation of the world is the glorification of the Father, the prayer of a Christian is above all a prayer of thanksgiving, a Eucharistic prayer. In this manner the Eucharist is fulfillment and culmination in the liturgical life of the church. Every prayer of the church should conclude in thanksgiving.

Mystery of the Church

The mystery of our salvation, and the perfect glorification of God which are fulfilled in Christ and revealed by the Holy Spirit also include the Church – the faithful - through their faith in Christ the Savior and by the participation in His death and resurrection become one with Him, they make up His mystical body. Being a member of the glorified body of Christ, the Church lives the Paschal mystery of Christ, which from the very beginning of its existence is the source from which life-giving water flows - filling, completing, enlivening the lives of believers. By His very presence

Christ enlivens the Church, and thus the realization of this presence is the foundation of the multidimensional aspect of Christian prayer. The mystery of Christ, his life-giving presence in the world from the time of the beginning of the church is revealed in the variety of liturgical services. The church teaches that “Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of His minister, ‘the same now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross’, but especially under the Eucharistic species. By His power He is present in the sacraments, so that when a man baptizes it is really Christ Himself who baptizes. He is present in His word, since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church. He is present, lastly, when the Church prays and sings, for He promised: ‘Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them’ (Matt. 18:20). Christ indeed always associates the Church with Himself in this great work wherein God is perfectly glorified and men are sanctified. The Church is His beloved Bride who calls to her Lord, and through Him offers worship to the Eternal Father.” (*Constitution on the Liturgy* 7)

Although the person of the risen Christ may be hidden from our eyes, we can nevertheless see him in the matter of sacramental signs. We can see the bread and the wine, and icons. We hear the voice of Christ in the voices of the deacon and priest, as they read the Holy Gospel. When we pray during the Liturgy, Christ prays along with us. The celebration of the liturgy is performed by Christ and the Church. Our prayers are useless without Christ, He continually intercedes for us creatures. When we gather in the Church, the mystery of our salvation takes place – we pray to God the Father, united with Jesus Christ, we are members of the Body of which He is the Head. In the ancient Western liturgy there was a beautiful liturgical expression before communion: “accept that which you are, and become that which you receive, the Body of Christ.” The Church is often called a mystery. Every time the Church gathers for prayer, a mystery takes place. Christ offers himself not simply in the Eucharist, but every time when we recite the creed, He is present with us, and this means that He is also present every time we gather in pray.

Dimensions of the Mystery of the Church

The life-giving strength of Christ’s presence pulses through every liturgical service, permeating our whole life. The culmination of the liturgical life is the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist – the thankful celebration of union with Christ in His mystical body. The whole liturgical life of the Church is directed to this basic mystery of participation in His Body and Blood. However the liturgical celebration of the Body and Blood does not exhaust the sacramental manifestation of the mystical life of the Body of Christ. As manifest in the text of the *Constitution on the Liturgy*, Christ works in the Church in many different ways. Gathered together in one church, bearing witness to the one life-giving Christ, the faithful also experience Him working through individual members. This experience of liturgical prayer for the welfare of the individual members of the church is called the administration of the sacramental mysteries. They originate from the Eucharistic unity of the whole Church for the welfare of its individual members. Thus the mysteries of Christian initiation: baptism, confirmation, Eucharist – are conferred on individual persons, according to church tradition for the spiritual growth of its members. Some are received but once as those who have been baptized need not be baptized again. Similarly, the mystery of reconciliation – confession and anointing of the sick, while they are mysteries, which individual members receive, they are also mysteries of the whole body of Christ, which suffers along with its sick members. The mysteries of service: Marriage and Ordination – especially the mystery of being an icon of Christ and His love,

which also originate from the Church united in the Holy Spirit, through Christ offers a eternal, perfect, spiritual song to the Heavenly Father.

The experience of Christ's prayer of thanksgiving extends throughout every minute of our lives. Through His incarnation, life, death, and resurrection Christ brings humanity beyond ordinary time to a new dimension – sanctity. In other words, Christ gives the course of temporal time a new aspect, its transformation into liturgical time. God does not exist in time, however He is present in time, He sanctifies it, and transforms it into the time of salvation. On account of this, the liturgical commemoration of various historical events of salvation are not simply events of the past, nor of the future, rather they sanctify the present. After the Event of Pascha, we now reside in the Eight never-ending day, awaiting the blessed second coming of the Lord. This period of waiting is denoted by the holiness of the resurrected Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Church. Every service of the liturgical daily cycle: vespers, compline, midnight service, matins, the hours – were composed and became part of the life of the church for one reason to give the faithful the opportunity to experience the saving, life-giving presence of Christ. *“O Christ, great and sacred Pasch, Wisdom, Power, and Word of God, grant that we be with You in Your kingdom on the never-ending day.”* – this is the reason for every liturgical celebration of the Church after the resurrection of Christ. Every liturgical celebration of the church expresses thankfulness for the possibility to partake in the Death and Resurrection of the Lord.

The celebration of the mystery of Christ's resurrection is also the source of the liturgical services of the weekly and yearly cycles. As the planets circle the sun, so do the liturgical celebrations of the various days circle the weekly commemoration of the Resurrection each Sunday. The exaltation of the Lord's cross, the Blessed Mother, the Angels, the Forerunner, the Apostles, and all the feasts of the church – all these commemorations have their origin in the Paschal mystery and also bring us back to it.

Just as in the liturgical year, regardless of the cycle of feasts we celebrate, the nativity, the feasts of our Lady, or the saints – they all have their foundation, and lead us back to the Paschal Mystery of Christ and His Church. *The Constitution on the Liturgy* reminds us that the yearly celebration of the liturgical cycle of the Church *“she unfolds the whole mystery of Christ, from the incarnation and birth until the ascension, the day of Pentecost, and the expectation of blessed hope and of the coming of the Lord. Recalling thus the mysteries of redemption, the Church opens to the faithful the riches of her Lord's powers and merits, so that these are in some way made present for all time, and the faithful are enabled to lay hold upon them and become filled with saving grace.*

In celebrating this annual cycle of Christ's mysteries, holy Church honors with especial love the Blessed Mary, Mother of God, who is joined by an inseparable bond to the saving work of her Son. In her the Church holds up and admires the most excellent fruit of the redemption, and joyfully contemplates, as in a faultless image, that which she herself desires and hopes wholly to be. The Church has also included in the annual cycle days devoted to the memory of the martyrs and the other saints. Raised up to perfection by the manifold grace of God, and already in possession of eternal salvation, they sing God's perfect praise in heaven and offer prayers for us. By celebrating the passage of these saints from earth to heaven the Church proclaims the paschal mystery achieved in the saints who have suffered and been glorified with Christ; she proposes them to the faithful as

examples drawing all to the Father through Christ, and through their merits she pleads for God's favors.” (Constitution on the Liturgy 102-104)

They Mystery of the Christian Life

The mystery of Christ, and the mystery of the life of the church have the same aim, a productive (fruitful) spiritual life for every Christian. Every believer, drawing on the Paschal Mystery of Christ and according to one's depth (measure, fathom) in the mystical life of the church has to be transformed by this mystery. In one of his sermons at the beginning of the school year at the Ukrainian Catholic University, Bishop Sophron Mudryj said: “The Christian is the visible sign of the invisible grace of God.” Truly, the mystery becomes a reality only when Christ begins to act in every person. Entering the life of that person, Christ actualizes the mystery of salvation. Transformed by Christ, the individual is the expression of the invisible grace of God. The mystery is how the person is transformed in Christ. A person may not always understand the reason for one's actions, but they can announce the good news of Christ for the salvation of the world. The basis of a Christian life is not action, but allowing Christ to act through one's life, not to cause salvation, but to be a co-worker. When a person allows Christ to live in one's self, so that one's cooperation is harmonious, then that person becomes a mystery, a mystery of salvation, the mystery of the actual incarnation of divine love.