



CATECHETICAL SERMON ON THE DIVINE LITURGY 12 – THE HOLY COMMUNION

As said repeatedly, there are stages in banquets: welcoming guests, perhaps bringing in the bridal party, a grace before the meal, the bringing in of a birthday cake with a round of Happy Birthday and then making a wish and blowing out the candles, or cutting the wedding cake, perhaps the presentation of awards, etc., and even taking time to say goodbye to someone who must leave early. The Divine Liturgy unfolds just like that, and one segment may not always flow smoothly from another. At this point in the Liturgy an array of little rituals will follow, some out of their original place or seemingly awkward because their meaning is now obscured, perhaps added later in a somewhat clumsy manner and perhaps due for revision, but all of them are components of this Mystical Banquet.

Without another greeting (“blessing”) as such and, in anticipation of the deacon’s call to attention, the priest prays to Christ asking him come to us in this Holy Mystery. Then he lifts the Holy Bread and proclaims, Holy (things) to the holy (ones)! This was the original invitation to Holy Communion in an earlier era, with the people responding, “One is holy; one is Lord, Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father; Amen!” Saint Maximos the Confessor says, “The blessed invocation of our great God and Father (i.e., the epiclesis), and the proclamation, ‘One is Holy . . .’ and the partaking in the holy and divine Mysteries, all signify what will come through the goodness of God in every way to all those worthy: adoption, union, familiarity, likeness to God and deification . . . and by this means God himself will be ‘all in all;’ equally in all those saved: something beautifully resplendent working in those who are resplendent along with him in grace by virtue and knowledge.”

Keeping in mind that in the development of the Liturgy many an action came to be accompanied by a psalm (a single verse or a whole psalm, depending) or a hymn, and then completed by a prayer, we need to proceed very carefully. Originally a psalm was chanted while the preparation of the Communion was finished and the sacrament distributed. Today, however, only the opening verses of the appointed psalm—or psalms, if there is a concurring feast—are sung as the kinonicon (Greek, prychasten, in Slavonic) i.e. Communion antiphon, with alleluia as the refrain because with the passage of time other acts, usually simple necessities, such as the breaking of the Bread into smaller pieces (the melismos), the dropping of a piece of the Bread into the Cup (the frumentum), the adding of hot water to the Cup (zeon in Greek, teplota in Slavonic) and finally--much later--the mixing together of Bread and Cup. In its own way, the development of more elaborate rituals for simple actions testifies to a growing awareness of the depths of this Mystery by the Church.