

Celebrating Our Faith

Byzantine Catholic Worship: Our Church, Its Customs and Rich Heritage

HE GLORIOUS FEAST of the Resurrection concludes with a feast also most glorious and great — and that is, the feast of Pentecost. After the Nativity and Resurrection of our Lord, this feast belongs to the greatest feasts in the Ecclesiastical Year. The Descent of the Holy Spirit is, as it were, the seal on the work of the salvation of the human race accomplished by the Son of God. On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit himself anoints the Apostles as preachers of the Good News of Christ. On this day the Church was born and began to function. The Holy Spirit ever guides, enlightens, sanctifies and preserves her on the path of truth.

“When the work the Father gave to the Son to do on earth was accomplished,” says the Vatican Council, “the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that He might continually sanctify the Church, and thus all those who believe would have access through Christ in one Spirit to the Father. The Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful, as in a temple. In them, He prays on their behalf and bears witness to the fact that they are adopted sons. By the power of the Gospel He makes the Church keep the freshness of youth. Uninterruptedly, He renews it and leads it to perfect union with its Spouse.” (Constitution on the Church, §4)

The holy and glorious feast of Pentecost deserves our special attention because of its history, liturgy, and significance.

*Heavenly King, Advocate, Spirit of Truth,
Who are everywhere present and fill all things,
Treasury of Blessings, Bestower of Life,
Come and dwell within us,
Cleanse us of all that defiles us,
And, O Good One, save our souls.*

Anthem of Pentecost



The Mother of God - Our Mother

THE MOTHER OF GOD is important today as she has always been in the past. However, when we consider what we know of her earthly life, we would almost come to the conclusion (as apparently many Protestants have) that she did not accomplish or achieve anything of significance to merit our attention and devotion to her. After all, there is not much mention of her in the New Testament, and even her own Son during His public ministry disassociated Himself from her. Mary, therefore, had no active role in Jesus’ three-year public ministry. Mary, as a matter of fact, led a completely hidden life. So then, why does Mary continue to merit our attention and devotion?



There are two times in her earthly life that are of unquestionable significance, and are the reasons that she is the Mother of God, and our Mother, and why she is undeniably important to and for all Christians. The first is Mary’s consent to become the Mother of God. Her consent was an eternal act, that is, operative for all times. When she consented, her consent was not merely an historical past event, but the act consenting to conceive and give birth to the *eternal* God who Himself actualized and continues to actualize her act to be an eternal reality. Because of her consent, she is unquestionably and truly *the Mother of God*. Because of this fact, she is always important to us.

The second and very significant time of Mary’s importance for us occurred at Golgotha. At the foot of the Cross, Jesus, the eternal Son of God, associated His mother Mary in full measure with Himself and His work of redemption when He said: “Woman, behold your son” (John 19: 26 - there is a deep and profound sense to these words). Whereas He previously disassociated her from His work, now at the foot of the Cross He associated and continues to associate her fully in His redemptive work. At the foot of the Cross, it was not only His hour of the work of redemption but also *her* hour. Jesus, therefore, willed that His mother be present at His Death, in order that His Sacrifice be the one same Sacrifice with her. She agonized and suffered to the same extent and fullness as He did - perhaps even more, being His very own mother. Thus, she is the “woman” prophesied in Genesis 3:15, the “woman” associated in the redemption of mankind. Even Jesus addressed her with that title on two separate occasions: at Cana, but particularly at the foot of the Cross because she is the **Woman**, and by God’s decree, she is intimately associated with her Son in our redemption. Hence she is vitally important to all of us.

Though Mary’s role during her earthly lifetime was rather minimal, from the moment at the foot of the Cross and now for all times, her role is one of working with her Son for our redemption. God willed it that way.

*“My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour,
because He has regarded the humility of His handmaid;
for, behold, from henceforth, all generations shall call me blessed.”*

(Luke 1: 46-48)

Our Duty to Strive for Holiness of Life

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST in our rite is called the Sunday of All Saints. This feast completes the cycle of movable feasts. On this day the Eastern Church pays particular veneration to all those who are the fruit of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.



We are obliged, not only to venerate the saints and to seek the assistance of the saints, but also to imitate their life and holiness. All Christians are called to holiness by virtue of the sacrament of Baptism. Every person, regardless of status and condition of life, can become a Saint and is duty-bound to strive after holiness of life. Our Lord Jesus Christ addressed all people without exception when He said: "Therefore, be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5: 48) St. Paul also reminds us of our duty to pursue holiness: "This is the will of God — your sanctification." (1 Corinthians 4:3)

What is holiness? Holiness is living according to the commandments of God and the Church; it is the daily fulfillment of God's will, constant fidelity to the duties of one's state, or more briefly — holiness is the Gospel translated into action. The Servant of God †Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky spoke beautifully of the significance of the Gospel for our life and holiness:

"In my opinion," he says, "the source of our failures and of all the plagues that afflict our church and national life, is our failure to apply ourselves seriously to living our Christianity and the teachings of the Gospel, and for this reason, we do not convey to others the aura of holiness. The Gospel is the road to heaven; it is a life without blemish, without reproach, without vice; it is a pure, innocent, holy life by which mortal man aspires to emulate the heavenly angels. The Gospel is the way of the cross leading to the hill of Golgotha. The Christian life is a life in which each person carries a cross, suffers, and follows in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. Life according to the teachings of the Gospel is the supernatural life of God's grace, a life of God's love and of the sacrifice for God or in a word: it is a life in which each person seeks and aspires to holiness of life."

The saints in heaven, then, are God's beloved and intimate friends; and our protectors, intercessors and benefactors; our guides and models on the path to virtue and sanctity.

*For all the saints who from their labours rest,
Who to the world by faith their Lord confessed,
Your name, O Jesus, be forever blest. Alleluia, alleluia!

You were their rock, their fortress, and their might;
You, Lord, their captain in the well-fought fight,
And in the darkness drear, their one true light. Alleluia, alleluia!*

Feast of the Most Holy Eucharist



THE DIVINE LITURGY, as the Unbloody Sacrifice, is the centre of worship and the spiritual life of the Catholic Church. The reason for this is that, at the Divine Liturgy, the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist — a sacrament which surpasses all other sacraments — is offered up to God. The Second Vatican Council in the dogmatic constitution on the Church calls the Eucharistic Sacrifice "the fount and apex of the whole Christian life." (§11) And in the decree on the "Ministry and Life of the Priests" it says: "the Most Blessed Sacrament contains the entire spiritual boon of the Church, that is, Christ Himself, our Pasch and Living Bread, by the action of the Holy Spirit through His very flesh vital and vitalizing, giving life to humankind..." (§5)

In the thirteenth century, the Latin Church instituted the feast in honour of the Holy Eucharist primarily to counteract the heresies which denied the Real Presence of Jesus Christ under the species of bread and wine. The celebration of this feast also influenced the Eastern Catholic Churches. In the course of time, the feast of Corpus Christi was adopted by the Syrian, Chaldean, Maronite, Armenian, Coptic, Melkite, and Italo-Greek Catholic Churches. By a decree of the Synod of Zamost this feast became obligatory also in our Ukrainian Catholic Church.

Good and praiseworthy are the various venerations of the Holy Eucharist, but the most praiseworthy is that which is best corresponds to the will of Christ our Lord, and which is compatible with the tradition of the Eastern Church and with the spirit of our rite; such a veneration is the love and appreciation for the Divine Liturgy and frequent Holy Communion. That is what Christ wants, this is what the Church encourages, this is what the needs of our soul demand.

Therefore the adoration of the Most Holy Eucharist as connected with the act of the Unbloody Sacrifice of the Divine Liturgy and Holy Communion, should, and must always, occupy first place in our Church. "There is no more holier, more majestic and more important act," said the Servant of God †Andrew Sheptytsky, "than the awesome Sacrifice of the Divine Liturgy. When the priest approaches the altar, his function exceeds, in significance and holiness, all the deeds of man recorded in human history." (1942)

As regards the significance of Holy Communion for our spiritual life, St. Pope Pius X declared: "Holy Communion is the shortest and surest way to heaven."

