

There are many books by leading Orthodox theologians and scholars on all aspects of the Orthodox Church and this leaflet series provides some basic information in the hope that it might prompt further enquiry.

LEAFLETS IN THIS INTRODUCTION TO ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY SERIES:

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All text in these leaflets is mine except where indicated, therefore any errors of fact or in grammar are mine. I should be grateful to have those errors pointed out so that corrections can be made.

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"The Orthodox Church.....has preserved unadulterated the first and most ancient ecclesiastical tradition and teaching, has avoided innovations and personal interpretations of the Holy Scriptures and dogmas of the faith, and is administered according to the ancient synodical system under local bishops in collaboration with the faithful and successive groups of both local and broader episcopal synods, of which the highest is the Ecumenical Synod, that of the Orthodox worldwide. The basic administrative canons, the details of which are regulated according to local needs, have been determined by the seven ecumenical synods. The Church is not managed by regional states in which it resides, although it collaborates in good works when asked to do so.

Within the entire Orthodox Church there is absolute cooperation in goodwill and mutual respect. Perchance minor human problems are addressed successfully through the application of the evangelical spirit."

*Bartholomew, Patriarch of Constantinople, from
"Encountering the Mystery."
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Orthodox Community of Archangel Michael
and Holy Piran, Cornwall.
www.orthodoxincornwall.org.uk

In the Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain.
Exarchate of Western Europe and Ireland.
www.thyateira.org.uk

Ecumenical Patriarchate.
Οικουμενικόν Πατριαρχεῖον.
www.ec-patr.org



Agia Sophia (Holy Wisdom) Constantinople.

Introduction to Orthodox Christianity: Holy Communion. Eucharist.



Icon of the Mystical Supper.

Of your Mystical Supper, Son of God, receive me today as a communicant; for I will not tell of the Mystery to your enemies; I will not give you a kiss like Judas; but like the thief I confess you: Remember me, Lord, in your Kingdom.

A prayer used before receiving the Holy Gifts.

A Holy Mystery (sacrament) can never be fully explained yet can be entered into without that full understanding our human reason so often demands. We can experience mystery with all its blessings through the Divine grace by participating in the life of the Church. Intellect alone cannot provide what man needs but through faith and the divinely instituted practices he is aided on the path to salvation.

Which New Testament texts convince us of this sacrament of sacraments?

The Holy Gospels: Matthew chapter 26; Mark chapter 14; Luke chapter 22; John chapters 6 and 13. Also the Acts of the Apostles chapter 2; and Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians chapter 11 from which the following is taken:

"For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which he was betrayed took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of me,' In the same manner he also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till he comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord."

What the evangelists recorded and the Holy Apostle Paul confirms is indeed a great mystery. It is abundantly clear that what the Lord had revealed and decreed should be observed was faithfully followed by the Apostolic Church. This is further confirmed by subsequent writings such as the following from the second century Holy Martyr Justin and the fact that over succeeding centuries and in the present age the command and actions have been fulfilled in Orthodoxy:

"No one may share the Eucharist (thanksgiving) with us unless he believes that what we teach is true, unless he is washed in the regenerating waters of baptism for the remission of his sins, and unless he lives in accordance with the principles given us by Christ.

We do not consume the eucharistic bread and wine as if it were ordinary food and drink, for we have been taught that as Jesus Christ our Saviour became a man of flesh and blood by the power of the Word of God, so also the food that our flesh and blood assimilates for its nourishment becomes the flesh and blood of the incarnate Jesus by the power of his own words contained in the prayer of thanksgiving.

The apostles, in their recollections, which are called gospels, handed down to us what Jesus commanded them to do. They tell us that he took bread, gave thanks and said: *Do this in memory of me. This is my body.* In the same way he took the cup, he gave thanks and said: *This is my blood.* The Lord gave this command to them alone. Ever since then we have constantly reminded one another of these things. The rich among us help the poor and we are always united. For all that we receive we praise the Creator of the universe through his Son Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit.

On Sunday we have a common assembly of all our members, whether they live in the city or the outlying districts. The recollections of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as there is time. When the reader has finished, the president of the assembly speaks to us; he urges us to imitate the examples of virtue we have heard in the readings. Then we all stand up together and pray.

On the conclusion of our prayer, bread and wine and water are brought forward. The president offers prayers and gives thanks to the best of his ability; the people give assent by saying "Amen". The eucharist is distributed, everyone present communicates, and the deacons take it to those who are absent.

The wealthy, if they wish, may make a contribution, and they themselves decide the amount. The collection is placed in the custody of the president, who uses it to help the orphans and widows and all who for any reason are in distress, whether because they are sick, in prison, or away from home. In a word, he takes care of all who are in need,

We hold our common assembly on Sunday because it is the first day of the week, the day on which God put darkness and chaos to flight and created the world, and because on that same day our Saviour Jesus Christ rose from the dead. For he was crucified on Friday and on Sunday he appeared to his apostles and disciples and taught them the things that we have passed on for your consideration."

The Divine Liturgy or Eucharist is the service within which the simple gifts of leavened bread baked by members of the congregation, wine and water, are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. Orthodox do not use the word 'transubstantiation' nor affirm that the Body and Blood are merely intellectual or psychological symbols.

Following baptism and chrismation, in the same service, children receive the eucharistic gifts with no "tests" to be undergone at a later age. God's love and rich gifts are available regardless of age or intellectual ability and all who are Orthodox are united in the sacred meal.



Stand upright. Having received the divine, holy, pure, immortal, heavenly, life-giving and dread Mysteries of Christ, let us give worthy thanks to the Lord.

First petition in the final litany in the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.