

# THE SIGNIFICANCE AND MEANING OF THE LITURGY FOR OUR DAILY LIVES

*Philip Kariatlis*

For many Orthodox Christians today, the divine Liturgy is simply another service that they attend in order to fulfil their Christian duty - it is the proper thing to do - without it necessarily having any particular meaning for their everyday life. It is not something that they long to go to because of a real sense of personal joy that it gives to their life empowering them to face the daily challenges that they might encounter. Unfortunately, for many of our faithful - even though they are well-intentioned - in their most honest moments, the Liturgy has become a 'joyless celebration'. It is often said, for example: "I don't get anything out of the Service" and for this reason they feel a sense of frustration. Still others, will argue: "I consider myself a Christian but I don't see why I need to go to Church every Sunday, if at all." In all this, there is a real sense that, over time, our faithful have forgotten not only what the Liturgy is essentially all about, but equally importantly the significance of this celebration for their everyday life. Even the phrase that is often used, "I attend the Liturgy" shows that over time it has become misunderstood. Far from the Liturgy being a theatrical performance between priest and chanters at which the faithful are simply present, from the very beginning, even in its most primitive form as can be witnessed in the New Testament, the Eucharist was something that the faithful *actively participated in*, and not simply passively attended, an event that was personally enriching and powerfully transformative for their life. We need to rediscover this early vision that the faithful had when they gathered together, as Church, to celebrate the Eucharist. It is this that this paper wishes to explore.

The Divine Liturgy - namely, that service in which the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist is celebrated - lies at the very heart of the Orthodox Church. And the reason for this, very simply, is that the Church believes that at every celebration of the Eucharist, the faithful are brought into another reality - into the very presence of the risen Christ. If the Church is nothing other than the miraculous presence of Christ here on earth, a graced communion or fellowship between the Uncreated God and the created realm, then it is within the context of the Divine Liturgy that the Church's communion with God is most *perfectly* expressed. It is for this reason that the Orthodox Church has given to the Eucharist the name 'communion' because it is in the Eucharist that God communicates with us, making himself present, it is here that *we* are given the opportunity to enter into

communion with him and it is here also that with enter into communion with one another and the entire created realm more broadly. More specifically, it is in the Eucharist that the mystical communion, between Christ and those who partake of the 'body' and 'blood' of Christ, is most tangibly expressed. The Orthodox Church claims that it is when the faithful gather together in one place [ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό] (Acts 2:1) to celebrate the Eucharist that they become the one body of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit - namely one body closely knit together (cf. Eph 4:16) - and consequently given access to God, their heavenly Father. Consequently, the significance of the Liturgy becomes clear: for the faithful it is within the Liturgy that they become something more than what they are as individual members - namely, the one body of Christ, and thus they too *together* are given the opportunity to experience Christ in the same way that the apostles did some 2000 years ago.

### **The Eucharist in the New Testament**

Contrary to what is often suggested that the Eucharist is a mere human construct with little or no relevance for the life of a Christian - since what is all-important, as is erroneously argued, is the reading of the Scriptures for example - it is critical to bring to the fore, albeit briefly, the New Testament evidence concerning the Eucharist. Already in the book of Acts, where the event of Pentecost is presented - and where we are given an insight into the New Testament Church in its most 'pristine' form - we see the importance that the early Christian community placed on the celebration of the Eucharist. In the second chapter, St Luke writes the following:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers [Ἦσαν δὲ προσκατεροῦντες τῇ διδασκίᾳ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ, τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου καὶ ταῖς προσευχαῖς] (Acts 2:42).

This passage is significant because it shows what the earliest Christian communities did immediately after they had received the permanent outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon them. More specifically, the early Church's response to the outpouring of the Spirit is concretely evidenced in *four key actions* which included: their daily reflection of the word of God, their apostolic fellowship, their celebration of the Eucharist and their communal prayer life: St Luke's use of the present participial form of the verb '*proskarterein*' is significant here in that it emphasised the Church's ongoing persistence to adhere firmly to, and put into practice, *on a daily basis*, the apostolic proclamation, the Lord's Supper, corporate prayer and fellowship which would have also

included the material collection of gifts and money for distribution to the poor and those in need. From this it becomes clear that St Luke was most concerned to underscore the importance of the Eucharist in the daily life of the first Christians. This passage alone from the book of Acts repudiates the claim that there is no Biblical justification with regards to the celebration of the Eucharist.

A question which justifiably arises is why St Luke placed such importance on the Eucharist. The answer to this question becomes clear when we turn to some other passages from within the New Testament. During his earthly ministry, Christ had told his disciples that, after his death and resurrection, He would return to his heavenly Father, but that He would not leave them orphaned; rather He would remain with them and that He would send the Comforter who would lead them to all truth. With the descent of the Holy Spirit access to the risen Christ was made possible since it was the Holy Spirit who led the faithful to Christ - and continues to do so. In St John's Gospel we read: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth [ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ ἐκεῖνος, τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας, ὀδηγήσει ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πάσῃ]" (Jn 16:3). The truth mentioned here is Jesus Christ himself since the Gospels make it clear that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life (cf. Jn 14:6). And so with the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the faithful within the Church would continue to be led to Jesus Christ.

Together with the presence of the Holy Spirit leading the faithful to Jesus Christ, and through him to God our heavenly Father, the early Church also believed that when they gathered together to 'break bread' that Jesus Christ would be amongst them since this is what He had promised during his earthly ministry. In the New Testament we read that Jesus Christ himself instituted the Eucharist emphasising that it would be through the celebration of this ritual that He would remain present in the Church. In the Gospel according to St Matthew, for example, Christ said: "Take eat, this *is* my body" (Mt 26:26). He continued, "Drink from it, all of you; for this *is* my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:27-28). In the 'breaking of bread' the resurrected Lord would be recognised as present since the 'institution narratives' - as they came to be called - make clear the reality of Christ's body and blood in no way implying that these were meant to be understood as mere symbols of his presence. In this way, the Orthodox Church teaches that in the consecrated gifts of bread and wine are truly Christ's Body and Blood. Elsewhere, in his correspondence to the Church in Corinth, St Paul also emphasised the importance of *repeatedly* gathering together in order to give thanks within the context of Eucharist: "Do this...

in remembrance of me [namely Jesus Christ] [τοῦτο ποιεῖτε... εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν]. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1Cor 11:25-26). Here again, just like in Acts, the present form of the verb *poieein* signifies a continuous action. Also scholarship today has shown that St Paul's letters were specifically addressed to concrete eucharistic gatherings.<sup>1</sup> In the same letter, St Paul again referred to the Eucharist in terms of a real sharing in the body and blood of Christ. He wrote:

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. (1Cor 10:16-17).

Accordingly, it is important to realise that in gathering together to celebrate the Eucharist, Orthodox Christians believe: firstly, that they are doing precisely what Jesus Christ commanded his followers to do; and secondly, that in this gathering, the divine mystery of God's life continues to be present amongst them in the world in a most intimate way.

### **Structure of the Divine Liturgy**

From the New Testament witness of the Eucharist there developed, in the early Church, a variety of eucharistic formularies. Even the New Testament itself clearly shows a great diversity in the celebration of the Eucharist within the early Church which included a variety of ritual acts within the different local communities.<sup>2</sup> However, beyond their differences, striking similarities are also noted: for example, all liturgical celebrations of the Eucharist included the breaking of bread followed by a proclamation that it was the body of the risen Lord. Moreover, there was the blessing over the cup which was declared to be the blood of the covenant poured out for all. Becoming fixed over time, these distinctive eucharistic formularies gave rise to different liturgical rites throughout the Christian empire by the fourth century. For the Eastern Churches, it would be the Byzantine rite (Buzantinov" Leitourgikov" Tuvpo") which united all liturgical practices in the Christian East thereby

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Eugene La Verdere, *The Eucharist in the New Testament* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 32: "The eucharistic tradition was part of Paul's gospel to all the churches, and it influenced every one of his letters. Since the letters were to be read in the liturgical assembly, Paul wrote them with that setting in mind. He adapted greetings, blessings, prayers, and hymns from the liturgical assembly and used them in his letters, giving the letters a unique, apostolic and eucharistic form."

<sup>2</sup> Cf. for example, 1Cor 11:23-25; Mk 14:22-25; Mt 26:26-29; Lk 22:19-20 and Justin Martyr's *First Apology* 66. Bradshaw also draws attention to the multiplicity of rites in the early church. Cf. Paul F. Bradshaw, 'The Evolution of Early Anaphoras', in *Essays on Early Eucharistic Prayers*, ed. Paul F. Bradshaw (Collegeville, Minnesota: A Pueblo Book, The Liturgical Press, 1997), 2.

giving rise to a uniformity - more or less - in the way these communities worshipped.<sup>3</sup> Today, it is specifically the Liturgy attributed to St John Chrysostom which is the most widely used eucharistic service in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Now, like all classical liturgical rites, the Eucharistic Prayer - or Anaphora - of St John Chrysostom was multi-faceted, made up of many parts organically linked together. Over time, as the prayers within the Divine Liturgy became fixed, it has been possible to identify distinct sections. Today, the following nine parts can typically be discerned: 1. Litany; 2. First Antiphon; 3. Second Antiphon; 4. Third Antiphon, known as the Little Entrance; 5. Scripture Readings; 6. Great Entrance; 7. the Great Eucharistic Prayer, known as the Anaphora; 8. Communion and 9. Dismissal.<sup>4</sup> Today, the numerous Litanies throughout the Service act as ‘pointers’ signalling the end and commencement of the different sections.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the Eucharistic prayer, which lies at the heart of the Liturgy, can be further divided in 6 distinct sections:

1. **The Thanksgiving** or *Sanctus* [Ἅγιος Ἅγιος Ἅγιος Κύριος Σαβαώθ]. This is what we now call the preface which states the particular reasons why we are offering thanks to God - namely for all his saving acts in the world. Part of the prayer reads: “You brought us from non-being into being, and when we fell you raised us up again, and left nothing undone until you brought us up to heaven and bestowed on us your kingdom to come. *For all these things we give thanks to you and your only-begotten Son and your Holy Spirit and for all the benefits known and unknown.*”
2. **The Institution Narrative** is based on the words that Jesus Christ uttered on the night He gave himself up when He said: “Take eat, this is my body...” and “Drink from it all of you, this is my Blood of the new covenant.” These words begin with a reference to the sacrifice and

---

<sup>3</sup> The Liturgy of St John Chrysostom, used in Eastern Orthodox worship, belongs to the family of eastern liturgical rites, which developed in the fourth century – specifically to the Antiochene liturgical tradition of which the Byzantine rite constitutes one group. Other liturgies within the Antiochene tradition include: a) the Western Syrian or Palestinian rite, b) the Eastern Syrian or Chaldean rites from Mesopotamia, c) the Malabar liturgical tradition of India, d) the Maronite liturgical rite and e) the Byzantine rite. Parallel to the Antiochene liturgical tradition, within the Eastern churches there was also the Alexandrian liturgical rites, and in the West there were the Roman, Ambrosian, Gallican, Mozarabic, Celtic and North African eucharistic formularies. Unlike the liturgical forms of the West, the Eastern rites were characterised by their set structural framework which did not change according to the various liturgical feasts of the ecclesiastical year. Now, these different families have been simply listed in order to emphasise the rich liturgical diversity which existed with regard to the celebration of the Eucharist despite the fact that by the end of the fourth century, the Byzantine rite (which included the liturgies of St Basil the Great, St John Chrysostom and the Pre-Sanctified liturgy) came to replace all liturgical rites in the Eastern Orthodox Church due to the political, cultural and religious importance of Constantinople as the imperial capital of the Byzantine Empire. Cf. Ioannis Foundoulis, *Liturgics* [in Greek] (Thessalonika: Aphon Kyriakides Publishing House, 1986), 65-105

<sup>4</sup> This division can be found in Stanley S. Harakas, *Living the Liturgy* (n.p.; Light and Life Publ. Co., 1974), 44-45.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p.42.

death of Jesus Christ and ends with the command to remember - “remembering then this commandment of the Saviour...”

3. **The Anamnesis.** In the liturgical tradition the act of remembrance is a powerful action which does not simply bring to mind those events mentioned, but makes them really present. The *anamnesis* in the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom reads as follows: “Remembering then this commandment of the Saviour and all that has been done for us, the cross, the tomb, the resurrection on the third day, the ascent into heaven, the sitting at the right hand, the second and glorious coming again.” The last phrase shows the extent to which time is transcended where even future events - which have not yet taken place - are made present.
4. **The Epiclesis.** In this prayer, the Father is asked to send down the Spirit upon the faithful and upon the gifts presented that they may be blessed and sanctified. The Liturgy of St John Chrysostom explicitly speaks of the Spirit ‘making’ the bread and wine the body and blood of the Lord. In this way, sharing in the bread and cup, the participants form a communion in the one Spirit.
5. **Intercessions.** The earliest versions of the eucharistic prayers did not always include intercessions. Yet these came to become an integral part of Liturgy as it importantly provided for an occasion for specific people and circumstances to be mentioned. Another reason for the ‘reading of names’ is for the local bishop to be named as an expression of ecclesial communion.
6. **Doxology.** The Eucharistic Prayer ends with the participants together offering glory and praise to God - indeed the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom states that this is to be done “with one mouth and one heart”.

Having mentioned the discrete aspects of the Liturgy, it ought to be remembered that the overall unity of the service must never be overlooked otherwise it will end up being reduced to concrete theological 'moments' devoid of ecclesial reality. Our attention is now turned towards presenting the theological understanding of the Liturgy.

### **Theological Reflection**

The Orthodox Church teaches that in the consecrated elements of bread and wine, not only is Christ present amongst his people in the world, but that we, too, are taken into Christ's eschatological kingdom. In other words, not only does Christ *descend*, but we also *ascend*. Moreover, not only are we taken up to God's heavenly abode and into his very presence, but we become united amongst ourselves as well, becoming, in this way, one body closely knit together. Regarding the unity, which

is realised amongst us, this is precisely the reason why the divine Liturgy begins with the petitions for peace, more specifically 'the peace from above'. Unless the faithful are at peace within themselves, one another and with God, they will not be able to become the one harmoniously united body of Christ, which is the Church.

Regarding the presence of Christ amongst his Church within the context of the Eucharist beyond the Pauline references already mentioned in the previous sections, there is also important information found in the Gospel according to St John. Indeed this Gospel sees the Eucharist as the Word's abiding presence within the Church throughout the centuries. The main purpose of the Evangelist throughout the entire gospel was to lead his readers to a deepened faith in, and commitment to, Christ who was no longer physically with them. Yet, even in such an 'absence' the gospel wanted to underline that the 'Word made flesh' was a permanent living reality and would continue to be so for future generations (cf. Jn 6:34-35) unto the end (cf. Jn 13:1). In contrast to the apostles who had the immeasurable privilege of 'seeing' and 'touching' the incarnate Logos in the life of Jesus of Nazareth (cf. 1Jn 1:1), the Johannine gospel wanted to impress upon its readers that future generations could 'eat the flesh' and 'drink the blood' of Christ enjoying the same communion as that of the apostles.

One of the most significant passages on the Eucharist can clearly be discerned in the story of the feeding of the five thousand where Jesus is presented as the 'bread of life' (Jn 6:1-71). Set within the context of a dispute that took place with the Jews over the issue of *manna*, Jesus is presented as the 'bread of life' (Jn 6:1-71), who would thus bestow a radically new mode of life upon the faithful and indeed the entire created order. More particularly, in this discourse, Jesus makes it unmistakably clear that, just as He was 'the bread of life' (Jn 6:35) who would nourish, in a way which infinitely surpassed their physical hunger, all those who had gathered within the synagogue in Capernaum, so too would He be present in the eucharistic bread bestowing the redemptive gift of *koinonia* to future communities gathering in his name to celebrate the Eucharist:

those who eat [τρώγων] my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them [ἐν ἐμοὶ μένει καὶ γὰρ ἐν αὐτῷ] (Jn 6:56).

Certainly, the eucharistic significance of these words is indisputable. From this, we see that the Eucharist was the means by which the faithful within the Church would continue to 'abide' or

'remain' in Christ – that is, they would have everything 'in common' with Christ, and indeed continue to dwell in and with Him forever.

A second important passage illustrating Christ's abiding presence through the Eucharist is that relating to Jesus' washing of his disciples feet during Supper. That the footwashing episode was meant to be understood as a reference to the Eucharist is seen by John's opening phrase, "and during supper" (Jn 13:2), indeed the final supper that Jesus was to have with his disciples before his passion. After vividly detailing the preparation for, and actual episode of, the foot washing, an exchange between Jesus and Peter is recorded which brings out Christ's presence. In response to Peter's emphatic rejection of Jesus washing his feet, the Evangelist offers an astounding revelation of the communal nature of such an action. Jesus is recorded as saying to Peter: "unless I wash you, you have no share with me [ἐὰν μὴ νίψω σε, οὐκ ἔχεις μέρος μετ' ἐμοῦ] (Jn 13:8)." Regarding the expression, to have a 'share with me', modern Biblical exegetes argue that this describes solidarity and fellowship, in this case Christ's fellowship with his disciples. As the depiction of the footwashing event continues, it becomes clear that the gospel was more concerned to highlight that the sign of Christ's presence within the community after his departure would be seen and expressed in the fraternal love displayed between the members of the *ekklesia*.

After describing the foot washing of the disciples by Jesus (Jn 13:1-11), the gospel, in Jn 13:12-20, specifically offers an interpretation of its significance in terms of being an 'example' [ὑπόδειγμα] for the Church after Christ's impending passion: "So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example [ὑπόδειγμα], that you also should do as I have done to you" (Jn 13:14-15). Christ remains present in the Eucharist when we strive to live the love with which He loved us to all those around us. From this we see that there is a necessary human element in the Eucharist – namely, we too as faithful within the Church need to strive to love one another because in this we are assured that Christ is amongst us. It is precisely for this reason that the Evangelist concludes his portrayal of the foot washing with the following: "if you know these things, blessed are you if you do them." (Jn 13:17). Therefore, the guiding principle for understanding St John's vision of the Eucharist is remembering that the basis of Christ's presence within the Church is seen when the members strive to love each other with the love that Christ loved us first.

Participation in the Eucharist not only allowed for a real sharing in the life of Christ, but also resulted in a unity amongst the faithful as well. Nourished at the same time by the Spirit-filled body and blood of Christ, the faithful within the Church also became intimately united with one another. That is to say, in partaking of the consecrated elements, the members of the Church also become the one united body of the Lord. Accordingly, in the Church, we are all one body, closely knit together and Christ is our head. Furthermore, a true sign that Christ is in our midst is when we, as an assembly of faithful, strive to live the love with which Christ loved us. In highlighting the double communal aspect of the Eucharist, St John of Damascus (d. 749AD) wrote:

We say *koinonia* and so it is for through it we have *koinonia* with Christ and partake of his flesh and deity, but through it we also have *koinonia* amongst ourselves and we are united with one another. Since we receive of one bread, we all become the one body of Christ.<sup>6</sup>

Consequently, in the Eucharist we live the joy of unity and love and become one with each other.

That the Eucharist was considered to be the bond of human fellowship in the early Church – and indeed continues to be so – is especially seen in the fact that the eastern Orthodox liturgies not only call upon the community to love one another, but also pray for civil authorities, the sick, those travelling and indeed for all people throughout the world. In the Liturgy of St Basil the Great, for example, there is an extensive list of different people who are remembered within the eucharistic *synaxis* and which wonderfully underscores the unity of the faithful. Part of the prayer is as follows:

Be mindful of all who have fallen asleep... who have offered you these gifts ... who do good works... and are concerned for the poor... Remember, Lord, those who live in deserts and mountains... those who persevere in virginity... those in authority... speak good to their hearts... Be mindful, o Lord, of the people assembled here, as well as those who are absent for good cause... fill their households with every good thing; sustain their marriages in peace and harmony; nurture their infants; train up the youth; support the elderly; comfort the fainthearted; gather in those who are scattered and lead back those who have strayed, uniting them to your holy, catholic and apostolic church... Sail with those who sail... plead for the widows, shield the orphans... hear the afflicted. O God, look after all those who are on trial... those who love us as well as those who hate us... Be mindful, Lord our God, of all your people and lavish on all your rich mercy, granting to all what leads to salvation. And if we have failed to commemorate anyone, whether out of ignorance or forgetfulness or because of the great number of names, You, o God will remember.’

---

<sup>6</sup> St John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith*, IV, 13. PG 94, 1153a.

In Orthodox circles today, the tangible expression of fellowship realised in the Eucharist has given rise to expressions such as 'the Liturgy after the Liturgy' precisely to underline the responsibility of the faithful to continue to live out the fellowship experienced within the eucharistic context. From all the above, it becomes very clear that the fellowship with Christ necessarily implies a unity of Christians with one another. Indeed, this gift of *koinonia*, which we receive at every liturgy, also necessitates our ongoing response to intensify and further this communal reality and to keep on doing this, until the very end of our life here on earth. As such, not only is the Eucharist a gift of God's presence, but equally important, a movement and progression towards heaven as well.

In this way, not only does the Eucharist signify a descending action on the part of God, but also an ascending response of thanksgiving on the part of the faithful back to the Trinitarian God. In every celebration of the Eucharist, we are literally taken up to the gates of heaven, into the very presence of God's kingdom. The beginning of the liturgy, 'Blessed is the kingdom of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and ever and to the ages of ages' shows precisely the destination of the journey we embark upon at every liturgy, namely the kingdom. Just before the chanting of 'Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Sabaoth heaven and earth are full of your glory...' we are told by the priest to lift up our heart to the Lord and we are taken into another reality – to the very heavens where we behold the 'Archangels and myriads of Angels... the Cherubim and the Seraphim, six-winged, many-eyed, soaring aloft on their wings.' From this it can be seen that each time we gather to celebrate the Liturgy, we ascend towards the kingdom; we are brought into the presence of the heavenly table of Christ in the kingdom to come.

To this day, the Church's ascent and entrance into the heavenly realm continues to be emphasised, more often than not in nuptial categories, namely, as the entrance of the bride of Christ – that is, the Church – into the nuptial chamber – i.e. the kingdom of the bridegroom, Christ. In a communion prayer recited by the faithful before partaking in Holy Communion, an expression of unworthiness in entering the heavenly bridal chamber is acknowledged by the faithful and therefore God's forgiveness is besought. But the point of significance is the prayer's emphasis that the faithful enter God's heavenly kingdom:

Into the splendour of your saints, how shall I the unworthy one enter? For if I dare to enter the bridal chamber, my clothing betrays me, for it is not a wedding garment... cleanse the defilement of my soul, Lord, and save me in you loving kindness.

From all that has been said thus far, it becomes clear that the Eucharist is salvific. Indeed, in celebrating the Eucharist, we, in the Church, are journeying together towards immortality. In the Church there is no death, but life eternal; life without end. Indeed, our biological death becomes the bridge for our entrance into eternity. St John wrote: 'Whoever keeps my word will never taste death' (Jn 8:52). For this reason, one will rarely find abstract speculations on the Eucharist, as for example, how the bread and wine could change into 'body' and 'blood'. Rather, the Eucharist in Orthodox theology has always been seen as God's saving act and continued presence in the Church. And so, it is for this reason that the Eucharist has been attributed with titles such as 'medicine of immortality', 'cup of the synthesis', 'antidote for not dying', 'the sacrament of sacraments', 'the final mystery' and 'the recapitulation of the whole economy of salvation.' St Maximus the Confessor (b. ca 580AD) connected the Eucharist with deification when he described it as:

the sacrament, which transforms ... so that they also can be called gods by adoption through grace because all of God entirely fills them and leaves no part of them empty of his presence.”

Consequently, the Eucharist, in Orthodox theology is seen as the pinnacle of all sacraments, specifically in that it manifests the presence of God to believers on earth, but also signifies the presence of the faithful before God in his heavenly kingdom.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Accordingly, from all that has been said, it has become quite clear that each time we enter the Church we encounter God since within the Church God is active and present amongst His people. In this way, the mystery of communion between God and the entire created realm takes place within his Church. Furthermore, we saw that the Church is not only the very presence of God here on earth, but also a foretaste of His kingdom throughout the ages. It is for this reason, that the Church is able to fill our everyday mundane moments with the very presence of eternity already here on this earth since it is an earthly Paradise. And all this takes place especially within the context of the Liturgy in which the faithful also become organically the one body of Christ united as one. It remains for us to want to become part of this eternal and miraculous vesture of God, which is his Church – *the place par excellence* of his presence and glory.

