

The Sacrament of Holy Eucharist – Some Canonical Remarks

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Abstract

According to the Orthodox Church, the Eucharist is not just a reminder of Christ's sacrifice or of its enactment, but it is a real sacrifice. On the other hand, however, it is not a new sacrifice, nor a repetition of the Sacrifice of the Cross upon Golgotha. The events of Christ's Sacrifice – the Incarnation, the Institution of the Eucharist, the Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension into Heaven, are not repeated during the Eucharist, yet they become a present reality. Acceptance of one's baptism and chrismation in the Church, responsibility for the Church's faith and life, the struggle to put the faith fully into practice, accountability for one's personal belief and behavior, constant and continual repentance, and peace with all people in the union of love commanded and given by God in Christ and the Holy Spirit -- these are the requirements for participation in holy communion in the Orthodox Church. They are, ultimately and essentially, what Holy Communion itself is all about. The knowledge and observance of the canonical ordinances and norms of the Orthodox Church, as well as the canonical-liturgical guidance and teachings regarding the administration of the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist, is a canonical obligation of every priest of our Church.

Keywords

Holy Eucharist, communion, intercommunion, sacrifice, canonical ordinances, repentance.

I. Introduction

Holy Eucharist is the most sublime Sacrament of our Church, the Mystery of Mysteries, the Sacrament of Sacraments. It is the eternal Sacrament whose value is incomprehensible and incalculable, and whose position in the worship of our Church is unique. The Eucharist is the centre of the Church's life. It is the completion of all of the Church's sacraments, the source and the goal of all of the Church's doctrines and institutions.

In every other Sacrament we invoke God's blessings on some material element and ask that it be sanctified. This element could be water, oil, etc. Only in Holy Communion do we invoke God's blessing upon the material elements of bread and wine and ask God not only to sanctify them, but also to change them. We ask God to change what the bread and the wine are by nature into the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

As a result, when we receive Holy Communion, we receive Jesus Himself into us. So great is this mystery that we are left without any possible response which could express what God has done for us. Therefore we offer the only response we can: thank you. As a word, the term "Eucharist" means thanksgiving.

The Christian Church has always regarded the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist as the supreme act of worship. Prefigured in the Old Testament (Genesis 14, 18), instituted in the New Testament by our Savior, Jesus Christ, the mystery of the Holy Eucharist shares the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

From the beginning, the Church has arranged the way in which the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist must be performed, setting liturgical and canonical norms, whose observance has been strictly requested. On these ordinances set by the Church, of canonical-liturgical character, the Fathers of the Church testify to us.

According to the teaching of the Fathers of the primary Church, can receive the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist only

“the man who believes that the things which we teach are true, and who has been washed with the washing that is for the remission of sins, and unto regeneration, and who is so living as Christ has enjoined. For not as common bread and common drink do we

receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Saviour, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh”¹.

The entire written and unwritten tradition of the Christian Church has always recorded the indispensable presence of the Eucharistic elements in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. This condition was the basic criterion for the validity of the Sacrament. Ever since Pentecost, when the Christian Church comes into being, the Eucharistic elements have been bread, wine and water. Basing himself on ancient tradition, Saint Justin, in his First Apology, states: “bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability”². The mixing of water with wine was part of the very basic ritual of the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Introducing us to the practice of the second century, Saint Justin the Martyr and the Philosopher testifies to us that, according to the ordinance left by the Holy Apostles,

“There is then brought to the president of the brethren bread and a cup of wine mixed with water; and he taking them, gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and offers thanks at considerable length for our being counted worthy to receive these things at His hands. And when he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all the people present express their assent by saying Amen”³.

¹ JUSTIN MARTYR, “First Apology”, LXVI, in: Philip SCHAFF (ed.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. I. *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, trans. by Alexander Roberts and James Ronaldson, W. M. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2001, p. 290.

² JUSTIN MARTYR, “First Apology”, LXV, in: Philip SCHAFF (ed.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. I. *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, p. 291.

³ JUSTIN MARTYR, “First Apology”, LXV, in: Philip SCHAFF (ed.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. I. *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, p. 289.

II. Canonical norms regarding the material elements used in the Holy Mystery of Eucharist

According to the norms established by the canonical legislation of the Orthodox Church, the Eucharistic elements – bread, wine and water – must fulfill the following conditions:

- a. the bread must be leavened, of wheat flour, and pure;
- b. the wine must be produced from grapes, naturally fermented. As for the color of the wine, the Church has determined that it, preferably, is red in order to correspond to the blood. In the absence of red wine, white wine can also be used, but what is absolutely necessary is that the red or white wine have the natural taste of the wine from the vine and not be aged. According to the provisions of the canons, especially of canon 28 of Synod in Trullo, if “consecrated ministers would not use at the Holy Eucharist clean wine, will be subjected to the punishment of the deposition, as one who “would act contrary to these commands”⁴. The 3rd Apostolic canon provides in this regard, that “If any bishop or presbyter offer any other things at the altar, besides that which the Lord ordained for the sacrifice, as honey, or milk, or strong-made drink instead of wine, or birds, or any living things, or vegetables, besides that which is ordained, let him be deposed”⁵.

In the conditions in which the celebrant priest would not have handy wine according to the required quality, grapes can be used, which will be squeezed and carefully strained. This preparation must be done shortly before the Holy Liturgy so that it does not begin to ferment, since with the must it is not allowed to perform the Holy Eucharist.

The strict observance of the canonical provisions regarding the administration of the Holy Eucharist was a canonical concern of each local Orthodox Church. In our Church, for example, many books of instruction have been written in order to train priests on the proper administration of the Holy Sacraments and especially the Holy Eucharist.

⁴ George NEDUNGATT and Michael FEATHERSTONE (eds.), *The Council in Trullo Revisited*, Pontificio Istituto Orientale, Roma, 2014, p. 103.

⁵ 3th apostolic canon, in Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church*, in Philip SCHAFF and Henry WACE (eds.), *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. XIV, WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1983, p. 594.

In the liturgical-canonical prescriptions of the Liturgicon⁶, it is mentioned, moreover, that “the matter of the Blood of Christ is the wine from the fruit of the vine, that is, squeezed from the grapes of the vine. This wine must have its natural taste and smell, be good to drink and pure, not mixed with any other beverages or spices”⁷. Therefore, “if anyone dares to serve with another must, other than vine wine, or mulled wine, or mix it with something, this priest will not be able to perform the Mystery and will be deprived of the priesthood, as a violator of the Church’s settlements”⁸.

- c. The canons of the Church make express mention also of the other Eucharistic element, the water (can. 91 of St. Basil the Great)⁹, which must be mixed – at the Proskomedia or at the Liturgy of preparation and after the consecration of the gifts – according to the canonical teaching of the Church. The water that mixes, at the right time, with the wine, must be fresh and clean, so as not to spoil the natural taste of the wine. At the proper time, when the priest pours water into the cup, in the image of the Holy Cross, saying the words: “Blessed is the fervor of Your Saints always, now forever and to the ages of ages”, he must take care that the water is warm, in order to warm the Saints. In canon 13 of St. Nicephorus the Confessor, it is pointed out, in this regard, that “A Priest must not celebrate the Liturgy without *zeon*, or hot water, unless it be under the stress of great necessity, and when there is no hot water available there”¹⁰. According to the provisions of the canons, those who do not strictly abide by this ordinance handed down by Christ and the apostolic tradition are subject to the punishment of deposition. Canon 37 of the Synod of Carthage clearly and categorically states that “In the sacraments of the body and blood of the Lord nothing else shall be offered than that which the Lord himself ordained, that is to say, bread and wine mixed

⁶ *Liturghier*; Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2012.

⁷ *Liturghier*; p. 499.

⁸ *Liturghier*; p. 500.

⁹ D. CUMMINGS (ed.), *The Rudder (Pedalion) of the Metaphorical Ship of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Orthodox Christians*, The Orthodox Christian Educational Society, Chicago, Illinois, 1957, pp. 853-856

¹⁰ Can 13 of St. Nicephorus the Confessor, in D. CUMMINGS (ed.), *The Rudder (Pedalion)*, p. 965.

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with water”¹¹. Strengthening the disposition of the Synod of Carthage, the Fathers of the Church, who participated at the Synod in Trullo, also make mention of the tradition handed down by the Lord and the Holy Apostles, deciding, by canon 32, that “In the holy Mysteries nothing more should be offered than the body and blood of the Lord, as the lord himself has handed down, that is, bread and wine mixed with water”¹². Moreover, by the same canon, the Fathers ordered the punishment of deposition¹³ to all those who would dare to bring the Holy Sacrifice without respecting the prescribed ordinance, because according to canon 28 Trulan “the bloodless sacrifice of communion... is given to the people for their vivification of their souls and the remission of their sins”¹⁴.

Failure to follow these ordinances entails both the ineffectiveness of the sacrifice and the introduction of innovations into the Christian cult.

“If any bishop or priest – it is stipulated in canon 32 of the Synod in Trullo – shall not perform the holy action according to what has been handed down by the Apostles, and shall not offer the sacrifice with wine mixed with water, let him be deposed, as imperfectly shewing forth the mystery and innovating on the things which have been handed down”¹⁵.

As the Holy Fathers of the Synod in Trullo recall, through canon 32, mixing wine with water, performing the bloodless sacrifice, symbolizes “the mingling of the blood and wather which for the life of the whole world and for the redemption of its sins, was poured forth from the precious side of Christ our Redeemer”¹⁶. Strengthening by canon 81 Trulan “the things

¹¹ Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 378.

¹² George NEDUNGATT and Michael FEATHERSTONE (eds.), *The Council in Trullo Revisited*, p. 109.

¹³ George NEDUNGATT and Michael FEATHERSTONE (eds.), *The Council in Trullo Revisited*, p. 109.

¹⁴ George NEDUNGATT and Michael FEATHERSTONE (eds.), *The Council in Trullo Revisited*, p. 103.

¹⁵ Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 380.

¹⁶ Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 380.

which were formerly piously established by our holy Fathers”¹⁷, the Synod in Trullo showed that “if indeed he who has transgressed is of the sacerdotal order, we command that he be deprived of his priestly dignity, and if he be a layman or monk be cut off”¹⁸.

In this sense, art. 29, §16 of the *Regulation for the Canonical Disciplinary Authorities and for the Judicial Instances of the Romanian Orthodox Church* stipulates:

“The clergy who does not mix the wine with water, for the Holy Eucharist, are sanctioned with the fulfillment of a canon of fasting and repentance at the monastery; and if he persists in his negligence and idleness, and in his disorderly conduct, he will be deposed”¹⁹.

The use by the Roman Catholic Church of the unleavened bread is a departure from those which have been handed down by the apostolic and ecumenical Church. According to the Orthodox teaching, “the unleavened bread, even though it is made of pure wheat, cannot be the matter of the Body of Christ in the one, holy, and apostolic Church and for this reason no one should use it in the Eucharist”²⁰. In the language of the apostolic canon 3, the Roman-Catholic practice is completely “besides that which the Lord ordained for the sacrifice”²¹. With the same care, always, to keep this order handed down by the Lord, the Orthodox Church teaches that “the matter of bread for the Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ is the bread made from pure wheat flour, mixed with a some fresh water and baked well, leavened, not too salty, fresh and pure, having a good taste and good to eat”²².

As can be seen, the canonical provisions and norms sanctioned the liturgical order kept by the Orthodox Church, since this was identical to that handed down by the Lord and Holy Apostles from the beginning

¹⁷ Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 400.

¹⁸ Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 400.

¹⁹ *Regulamentul autorităților canonice disciplinare și al instanțelor de judecată ale Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2015, p. 42.

²⁰ *Liturghier*, p. 500.

²¹ Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 594.

²² *Liturghier*, p. 499-500.

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of the Christian Church. By canon 56 of the Synod in Trullo "... it was decided that the whole Church of God which is in all the world should follow one rule"²³, that is to say, the one handed down and established by the Orthodox Church. With the help of these canonical provisions, some foreign practices and innovations were removed from the Church's ordinance, or by the word of the apostolic canon 3, "besides that which the Lord ordained for the sacrifice"²⁴. Canon 28 of the Synod in Trullo condemned such practices and innovations, even though they claimed "a custom which has long prevailed". According to the disposition of this canon, the ministers who "would act contrary to these commands", mixing the grapes brought to the altar with the "unbloody sacrifice of oblation", in order to "distribute both at once to the people ... let them be deposed"²⁵.

In the spirit of this canonical legislation of the Orthodox Church, our Church considers the neglect of the ritual prescribed for the celebration of the Holy works and the introduction of cultic innovations as *pastoral-liturgical deviation*²⁶ and punished as such. The article 28, §§1-3 of the *Regulation for the Disciplinary Canonical Authorities and for the Judicial Instances of the Romanian Orthodox Church* stipulates that:

"The clergy who do not perform the Holy Sacraments with all the suitability, in accordance with the liturgical ordinances and with the observance of the typical provisions, shall be sanctioned with hierarchical reprimand or disciplinary removal from office, in case of disorderly conduct. The clergy who serve the holy ones together with the heretics or the schismatics are sanctioned with hierarchical reprimand (in case of ignorance) or with dismissal from the clerical ministry; in case of recidivism, he will be deposed. The clergy who resort to non-pagan practices («riddle» by opening the holy book, «witchcraft» by using the holy ones in magic spirit as opposed to the holy canons and typical worship ordinances) are sanctioned, according to the gravity of the deed, with one of the sanctions without the right to contest, and in case

²³ Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 391.

²⁴ Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 594.

²⁵ Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 378.

²⁶ *Regulamentul autorităților canonice disciplinare și al instanțelor de judecată ale Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, p. 38.

of recidivism, with the dismissal of the clerical service or will be deposed”²⁷.

Therefore, according to the same *Regulation* “The clergy who do not perform the Holy Sacraments with all the suitability, in accordance with the liturgical ordinances and with the observance of the typical provisions, shall be sanctioned with hierarchical reprimand or disciplinary removal from office, in case of disorderly conduct”²⁸. Therefore, the only Eucharistic elements, about which the apostolic canon 3 stipulated, are “besides that which the Lord ordained for the sacrifice”, bread and wine, which at the right time is mixed with water.

III. Canonical norms regarding the celebrants of the Holy Eucharist

According to the canonical teaching of the Orthodox Church, the celebrants of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist are only bishops and priests (3th Apostolic canon), who, according to canon 1 of the Synod of Ancira, have the right “to perform any act of sacerdotal function”²⁹. According to the canonical disciplinary ordinances, the priest has the right to perform the holy ones only in the parish where he was ordained. With the canonical and legal approval of those in law, and with the resignation of the respective priest, the priest can perform the Divine Liturgy in a foreign parish. Failure to comply with these provisions, however, entails the punishment of “... hierarchical reprimand and the maximum the penalty of disciplinary removal”³⁰. The provision of article 28, paragraph 1, of the *Regulation of the disciplinary canonical authorities of our Church* is in fact a permanentization and updating of the provisions and ordinances inscribed in the canons of the Ecumenical Church (Apostolic canon 15; can. 16 of the First Ecumenical Synod; can. 13 of Neocaesarea). The canon 6 of Chalcedon stipulates that:

²⁷ *Regulamentul autorităților canonice disciplinare și al instanțelor de judecată ale Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, pp. 38-39.

²⁸ *Regulamentul autorităților canonice disciplinare și al instanțelor de judecată ale Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, p. 38.

²⁹ Henry R. PERCIVAL, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 63.

³⁰ See art. 28, parag. 1, in *Regulamentul autorităților canonice disciplinare și al instanțelor de judecată ale Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, p. 38.

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“Neither presbyter, deacon, nor any of the ecclesiastical order shall be ordained at large, nor unless the person ordained is particularly appointed to a church in a city or village, or to a martyr, or to a monastery. And if any have been ordained without a charge, the holy Synod decrees, to the reproach of the ordainer, that such an ordination shall be inoperative, and that such shall nowhere be suffered to officiate”³¹.

The article 29, §20 of the *Regulation for the Canonical Disciplinary Authorities and for the Judicial Instances of our Church* also mentions the case of exception, when a priest can administer the Holy Communion in a foreign parish, without the force agreements. According to the provision of this article “the administration of the Holy Sacraments – of the Confession and of the Holy Eucharist – in case of illness or necessity, in a foreign parish, cannot be imputed to the clergy who perform it, if it informed the superior church authority”³².

According to the provision of the 8th Apostolic Canon, the priest or bishop, together with the clergy present, are obliged to partake:

“If any bishop, presbyter, or deacon, or any one on the sacerdotal list, when the offering is made, does not partake of it, let him declare the cause; and if it be a reasonable one, let him be excuse; but if he does not declare it, let him be excommunicated, as being a cause of offence to the people, and occasioning a suspicion against the offerer, as if he had not made the offering properly”³³.

As can be seen, the canons admit of a single allowance from the obligation of partaking with the Body and Blood of the Lord, that is, only if a clergyman had a blessed cause for which he asked forgiveness of the protos of the respective Church. This canonical provision was, in principle, also sanctioned in the legislation of our Church. According to article 29, §19 of the *Regulation for the Disciplinary Canonical Authorities and for the Judicial Instances of the Romanian Orthodox Church*:

³¹ Henry R. PERCIVAL, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 271.

³² *Regulamentul autorităților canonice disciplinare și al instanțelor de judecată ale Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, p. 43.

³³ Henry R. PERCIVAL, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 594.

“the clergy who do not partake in the Holy Liturgy, are sanctioned by stopping from celebration all the holy Mysteries until 30 days or with disciplinary removal. The clergy, who cannot celebrate for well-founded reasons, will attend the Holy Liturgy carrying on the epitrachelion”³⁴.

The non-partaking of the Eucharist of the clergy, without any blessed cause, and without the notice and forgiveness previously acquired from the protos of the Church, entails the punishment of the excommunication of the respective clergy from the Church. Although the Eucharistic communion is no longer made daily, as in the primary Church, the testimony of this custom remains worthy of mention and to follow, as our father Basil the Great taught us, who said: “It is good and beneficial to communicate every day and to partake of the Holy Body and Blood of Christ”³⁵. St. John Chrysostom said:

“Many partake of this sacrifice once in the whole year, other twice; other many times. Our word then is to all; not to those only who are here, but to those also who are settled in the desert. For they partake once in the year, and often indeed at intervals of two years. What then? Which shall we approve? Those who receive once in the year? Those who receive many times? Those who receive few times? Neither those who receive once, nor those who receive often, nor those who receive seldom, but those who come with a pure conscience, from a pure heart, with an irreproachable life”³⁶.

³⁴ *Regulamentul autorităților canonice disciplinare și al instanțelor de judecată ale Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, p. 43.

³⁵ St. BASIL THE GREAT, “Epistle 93”, in: Philip SCHAFF and Henry WACE (eds.), *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. VIII: *St. Basil, Letters and Selected Works*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1978, p. 179.

³⁶ St. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, “Homily XVII, 7 on Hebrews”, translated by rev. Frederic Gardiner, in: Philip SCHAFF (ed.), *A Select library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. XIV, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1978, p. 449.

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Saint Athanasius, Patriarch of Antioch (4th century), urges us to say the same thing, stating that before receiving the Holy Eucharist:

“Seek mercy, seek forgiveness, seek remission of past sins and deliverance from future sins, so that you may approach the Mysteries worthily, so that you may partake of the Body and Blood with pure conscience, and so that it may be for you unto purification and not unto condemnation”³⁷.

According to the provision of canon 2 of the Synod of Antioch, those who “do not communicate with the people in prayers, or who turn away, by reason of some disorder, from the holy partaking of the Eucharist, are to be cut out of the Church”³⁸. According to the canon 8 of Timothy of Alexandria: “Fasting was devised in order to humble the body. If, therefore, the body is already in a state of humbleness and illness or weakness, the person ought to partake of as much as he or she may wish and he able to get along with food and drink”³⁹. According to the canonical order established by the Fathers of the Synod in Trullo by canon 101:

“... he who has achieved heavenly rank through the Passion of the Saviour, eating and drinking Christ, is made fit forever for the life everlasting, sanctified in soul and body by his participation in divine grace. Thus, if anyone desires to partake of the immaculate body during the service and to become one with it through participation, he shall hold his hands in the form of cross and in this wise approach and receive the Communion of grace”⁴⁰.

Therefore, according to the canonical order of the Church, which remains in force today, the communion with the Holy Body and Blood of Christ is an act of personal will and a communion with Christ, who makes him the one who becomes the temple of the Lord. The soul and

³⁷ St. ATHANASIUS, “Oratio de Sacra Sinaxis et de non iudicando, deque injuriarum oblivione”, PG 89, 834C.

³⁸ Henry R. PERCIVAL, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 108.

³⁹ D. CUMMINGS (ed.), *The Rudder (Pedalion)*, p. 894.

⁴⁰ See George NEDUNGATT and Michael FEATHERSTONE (eds.), *The Council in Trullo Revisited*, p. 181-182.

body cleansing thus appears as a corollary of the free and personal will of the one who wishes to receive the Communion of Grace. This is precisely the synergistic act of human collaboration with Grace. The Communion with the Body and Blood of the Lord therefore requires a living in both soul and body cleansing. Therefore, a certain restraint from food and drink is required⁴¹, at least from midnight, because when we partake with Christ, there will be no more recently digested food with which these could come in contact with the Holy Eucharist.

Therefore based on the provision of canon 41 of the Synod of Carthage: “The Sacraments of the Altar are not to be celebrated except by those who are fasting”⁴². The same thing reinforces it and confirms the Fathers of the Synod in Trullo, who by canon 29 decree: “that the Apostolic and Patristic tradition shall be followed”⁴³.

In article 29, §18 of the *Regulation for the Disciplinary Canonical Authorities and for the Judicial Instances of the Romanian Orthodox Church* is stipulated the following: “The clergy who performed the Holy Liturgy without having fasting before the service, are sanctioned by stopping from performing the holy ones up to 30 days or fulfilling a canon of fasting and repentance at the monastery; in the case of disorder, he will be deposed”⁴⁴. The drastic measure that the *Regulation* apply to the clergy who smoke before celebrating the Holy Liturgy, is in accordance with the general canonical prescriptions, regarding the preparation of the clergy, even if this measure is not found in the canons, for an understandable reason, that is, the non-existence of the practice of smoking when the Holy Fathers have issued these canonical norms of the Ecumenical Orthodox Church. On the basis of article 29, §17 of the *Regulation for the Canonical Disciplinary Authorities and for the Judicial Instances of the Romanian Orthodox Church*:

“the priest who performs the Holy Liturgy without Proskomedia, as well as the one who, by performing the Proskomedia and the Holy Liturgy, intentionally or negligently leaves the Holy

⁴¹ *Liturghier*, p. 501.

⁴² Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 461.

⁴³ Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 378.

⁴⁴ *Regulamentul autorităților canonice disciplinare și al instanțelor de judecată ale Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, p. 43.

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Mysteris unconsumed, is sanctioned by fulfilling a canon of fasting and repentance at the monastery; in the case of disorder, he will be deposed”⁴⁵.

IV. Canonical provisions regarding the recipients of the Sacrament of Holy Eucharist

With regard to the faithful, the canons stipulate that the communion with the Holy Eucharist can be administer to all Christians, who received the valid baptism (can. 13 of the First Ecumenical Synod; 6 of the Synod of Ancyra; 7 of the Synod of Carthage, etc.) and have prepared for it through the Holy Confession, and have permission from the spiritual father to receive it. Canon 18 of the Synod of Carthage forbids “the administration of the Holy Eucharist to the bodies of the dead”. Those on their deathbed should be given Holy Communion even if they are under epitimia or penance (can. 13 of the First Ecumenical Synod; can. 2 and 5 of St. Gregory of Nyssa; can. 25 St. John the Faster), so they may not lack “the food for the journey”⁴⁶. According to the Canon 9 of St. Nicephorus the Confessor: “A priest must administer Communion to a person in danger of dying even though it be after the person in question has eaten”⁴⁷. The stopping of Holy Communion, that is, excommunication (can. 28 St. Nichephorus the Confessor; can. 132 of the Synod of Carthage; can. 34 of St. Basil the Great, etc.) or the exit from communion with Christ and His Church, is the punishment which the Church has given through her spiritual father, for some canonical offenses, in the short or longer term, until rectification. The receiving of those who were excommunicated (can. 95 Trulan) is also done by the administration of the Holy Eucharist, as a manifest act of reintegration into the communion of the Church of Christ.

In the Orthodox Church, the Holy Communion is given to the communicants under the both pieces, that is, bread and wine, like the clergy, from the Chalice, as opposed to the Roman-Catholic Church, where according to canon 925: “Holy Communion is to be given under the

⁴⁵ *Regulamentul autorităților canonice disciplinare și al instanțelor de judecată ale Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, p. 42.

⁴⁶ D. CUMMINGS (ed.), *The Rudder (Pedalion)*, p. 875.

⁴⁷ D. CUMMINGS (ed.), *The Rudder (Pedalion)*, p. 965.

species of bread alone or, in accordance with the liturgical laws, under both species or, in case of necessity, even under the species of wine alone”⁴⁸. Until the 12th century, in the Roman Catholic Church both the clergy and the faithful received the Holy Communion under the both pieces bread and wine.

In connection with the partaking of the believers, the conditions involved in receiving this Holy Sacrament, a special role belongs to the spiritual father, who should not exaggerate the punishments, but rather proceed according to the instructions given by the Fathers of the Church. For St. Basil the Great (can. 5) and for the Holy Fathers of the Synod in Trullo (can. 102), the Holy Eucharist is the food of eternal life, which was received daily in the primary Church. The spiritual father is not allowed to refuse the communion of a Christian, in the case of death, even if he was stopped from communion all his life, because from repentance no one can be denied. According to the exhortation of Saint Basil the Great, in canon 84, the spiritual father “must not judge these matters in every case with reference, but is wont to pay attention to the matter of repentance”⁴⁹.

In principle, Holy Communion is not given to those who lack the conscience, that is, they cannot confess their desire to partake. However, if close relatives testify to the one who lacks consciousness, that he has always wanted to receive the Holy Communion, the priest does not make a mistake, to give it. In canon 9 of Saint Nichifor the Confessor is ordered the following: “A Priest must administer Communion to a person in danger of dying even though it be after the person in question has eaten”⁵⁰. Applying this canonical provision, the article 29, §15 of the *Regulation for the Disciplinary Canonical Authorities and for the Judicial Instances of the Romanian Orthodox Church* provides:

“The priest who, requested for the performance of his duties, by negligence, left an sick patient to die, is sanctioned with hierachical reprimand, with the fulfillment of a canon of fasting and repentance at the monastery or with the disciplinary

⁴⁸ See *The Code of Canon Law in English translation*, Prepared by the Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland in association with The Canon Law Society of Australia and New Zealand and the Canadian Canon Law Society, Collins William B. Eerrdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1983, p. 169.

⁴⁹ D. CUMMINGS (ed.), *The Rudder (Pedalion)*, p. 839.

⁵⁰ D. CUMMINGS (ed.), *The Rudder (Pedalion)*, p. 965.

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removal; and if he persists in his negligence and idleness, and in his disorderly conduct, he will be deposed”⁵¹.

Being administered together with Baptism and Chrismation, the Holy Eucharist is granted, according to canon 110 of the Synod of Carthage, to the children. In canon 18, Timothy of Alexandria foresees the age of 10-12 years, as the age from which sins are judged by God, but adds that “depending on the knowledge and prudence of each human being”⁵². From the age of seven, Holy Communion is granted according to the Sacrament of Confession (can. 2 of the Synod of Antioch; Apostolic Canon 9), considering that from this age an understanding of the importance of the acts can take place and therefore a responsibility for the sins committed. We must not forget, however, that according to the canonical provisions and norms of the primary Church, the Communion with the Holy Eucharist is recommended to all Christians at every Divine Liturgy. The faithful who, according to canon 2 of the Synod of Antioch,

“enter the Church of God and hear the Holy Scripture, but do not communicate with the people in prayers, or who turn away, by reason of some disorder, from the holy partaking of the Eucharist, are to be cast out of the Church, until, after they shall have made confession, and having brought forth the fruits of penance, and made earnest entreaty, they shall have obtained forgiveness”⁵³.

According to the practice established by the Orthodox Church, only the three degrees of the sacramental hierarchy – bishop, priest and deacon – have the right to partake in the altar, as the ones who received the ordination in the altar. The faithful partake outside the altar, as the provisions of canons 19 and 44 of the Synod of Laodicea actually provide. Canon 19 of the Synod of Laodicea, for example, stipulates that “it is lawful to the priesthood alone to go to the Altar and there communicate”⁵⁴. Of course,

⁵¹ *Regulamentul autorităților canonice disciplinare și al instanțelor de judecată ale Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, p. 42.

⁵² D. CUMMINGS (ed.), *The Rudder (Pedalion)*, p. 900.

⁵³ Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 108-109.

⁵⁴ Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 136.

this is all the more forbidden to women on considerations independent of their will, but inherent in their nature. In this sense canon 44 of the Synod of Laodicea categorically states that “women may not go to the altar”⁵⁵. From this ordinance, the prohibition of the entrance of the laity into the altar made exception “the imperial power and authority”, which, prevailing from the anointing received on the occasion of ascending the throne, was considered worthy to partake in the Holy Altar. In this regard, the disposition of canon 69 of the Synod in Trullo remained the general norm for the whole Church, which is observed with *akriveia* or exactness until today.

“Absolutely no one from amongst the laity – stipulates this canon – shall be allowed to enter within the holy sanctuary, though the Emperor’s Majesty and Authority shall in no wise be hindered from doing so, whenever he desires to offer the gifts to the Creator, in accordance with a most ancient tradition”⁵⁶.

According to the hierarchical principle existing and observed in the Orthodox Church, the priests administer the Holy Eucharist to the lower ones, that is, the bishop to the priest and the priest to the deacon. Those of the same rank cannot administer the Holy Eucharist, that is, the bishop does not give to the bishop and the priest does not partake the priest, in order to respect the principle of equality in their power. Deacons are not allowed to partake themselves, but by the serving priest or bishop. The violation of this order and hierarchical status was severely sanctioned by the Holy Fathers of the Church who have participated in the First Ecumenical Synod in Nicea (325), by canon 18. The observance of this order and hierarchical status is in accordance with what

“the canon and custom that prevailed for a long time, that it is not allowed the Body of Christ to be given to one who has the power to offer it by someone who does not...Consequently, let the deacons receive the Eucharist according to their order after

⁵⁵ Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 153.

⁵⁶ George NEDUNGATT and Michel FEATHERSTONE (eds.), *The Council in Trullo revised*, p. 151. See also Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The seven Ecumenical Councils*, p. 396.

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the priests, whether it be the bishop or the priest who gives it to them”⁵⁷.

As can be seen, in the Orthodox Church the canonical principle was respected according to which the precedence results from the Sacrament of Holy Orders and not from jurisdiction. Canon 18 of the First Ecumenical Synod, can. 20 of the Synod of Laodicea and can. 7 of the Seventh Ecumenical gave expression to this principle. According to this canonical principle in the Church “the orders of the sacramental hierarchy are more important than any function by which church administrative actions are exercised”⁵⁸. The Roman Catholics did not respect this order, according to which those who do not have the sacramental power to offer the Sacrifice, cannot even give the Body of Christ. In the Roman Catholic Church, deacons are allowed in so-called “in extremis” cases to partake the believers. According to the canonical doctrine of the Catholic Church, clergy exercising church administrative actions have priority in receiving the Holy Eucharist, if they are ministering together. By canon 350, §6 of the Code of Canon Law recognizes cardinals – regardless of whether they are deacons or priests – the right of precedence over all Catholic priests, including patriarchs: “A Cardinal who by choice transfers from the diaconal to the presbyteral order, takes precedence over all Cardinal priests who were promoted to the Cardinalate after him”⁵⁹.

V. Canonical provision regarding the administration of the Sacrament of Holy Eucharist

The canonical doctrine of the Orthodox Church has inscribed at the forefront other canonical principles regarding the administration of the Holy Eucharist.

⁵⁷ Archbishop Peter L’HUILIER, *The Church of the Ancient Councils. The Disciplinary Work of the First Four Ecumenical Councils*, St. Vladimir’s Press, Crethood, New York, 2000, p. 76-77. See also Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 38.

⁵⁸ Prof. dr. Iorgu D. IVAN, “Abaterile papalității de la organizarea canonică a Bisericii”, in: *Ortodoxia*, VI (1954) 4, p. 495.

⁵⁹ *The Code of Canon Law*, p. 61.

Celebrating only within the framework of the Holy Liturgy, the Holy Eucharist is performed in principle, only in the Church. In the early centuries, when the Church put the Holy relics at the foundation of each Church and especially in the Holy Table, the Liturgy was performed without antimimension⁶⁰. After the practice of introducing the fragments of Holy Relics into the Antimension was established, the Holy Liturgy could be performed anywhere on the Holy Antimension. About the existence of the Holy Relics or of the Antimension with holy relics, in the altar, the holy canons make express mention to us. In this sense, canon 83 of the Synod of Carthage stipulates the following:

“It seems good that the altar which have been set up here and there, in fields and by the wayside as Memories of Martyrs, in which the no body or reliques of martyrs can be proved to have been laid up, should be overturned by the bishops who rule over such places, if such a thing can be done”⁶¹.

The Holy Fathers of the Church gathered at the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 787 also sanctioned this ordinance through a special canon:

“We decree therefore – stipulates the canon 7 of the same Synod – that relics shall be placed with the accustomed service in as many of the sacred temples as have been consecrated without the relics of the Martyrs. And if any bishop from this time forward is found consecrating a temple without holy relics, he shall be deposed, as a transgressor of the ecclesiastical traditions”⁶².

⁶⁰ An antimimension is made of good-quality cloth, cut in a rectangular shape, and imprinted with the icon of the burial of Christ. The antimimension is consecrated, and is the Holy Table, by anointing it with holy myrrh and holy water. In some Orthodox traditions (notably, in the Slavic and Romanian tradition) the antimimension contains small fragments of the relics of the saints, while in the Greek tradition those relics are planted in the Holy Table. The antimimension carries the signature of the ruling hierarch and is the proof of his canonical permission to perform Divine Liturgies in that church”, in: Fr. Vasile MIHAL, *Orthodox Canon Law, Reference Book*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline, Massachusetts, 2014, p. 51.

⁶¹ Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 482.

⁶² Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 560.

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In the *Orthodox Liturgicon* on how the Holy Communion should be performed in the Church, it is said that “The Eucharist, that is, the offering of the bloodless sacrifice of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ is performed nowhere except the sanctified Church, because it is a great sin”⁶³.

According to the canonical tradition and the ecclesiastical order, it is therefore forbidden to perform the Holy Eucharist, outside the Church, in private houses or even in oratories, without antimension and without the prior consent of the local bishop. In the Apostolic canons 31; can. 18 of Chalcedon; cann. 34 and 59 of the Synod in Trullo; cann. 7 and 10 of Seventh Ecumenical Synod; can. 6 of Gangra; can. 5 of Antioch; can. 58 of Laodicea; can. 10 of Carthage drawn up by the Holy Fathers, as well as in canon 31 of the Synod in Trullo is provided that “clerics who in oratories which are in private houses offer the Holy Mysteries or baptize, we decree ought to do this with the consent of the bishop of the place. Wherefore if any cleric shall not have so done, let him be deposed”⁶⁴.

Therefore, only communion of the ministering priest with the altar consecrated by the bishop, justifies him to perform the sacrifice of the bloodless one. This communion with the altar consecrated by the bishop of the place, proves that the respective church was integrated in the “ecumenical unity” (can. 68 of Carthage) of the “Catholic Church” (can. 69 of Carthage), “which has been conspicuous for so long time” (can. 93 Cartagina). To be and to remain in this unity means to be under the canonical, permanent obedience of each “Catholic bishop” (can. 68 Cartagina) of the Orthodox-Catholic Church. By celebration the Holy Eucharist, the Christians with their pastor confess the real and sacramental, substantial and eucharistic presence of Christ and the reality of renewing his sacrifice. The priest, with the sacramental power with which Christ was invested him, through the act of ordination by the bishop, performs on the altar “the *Sacramentum Sacramentorum*”, which is the central act of the supreme worship of God - the bloodless sacrifice of Golgotha. This spiritual nourishment of the Christian souls is only in the possession of that Church which has kept precisely those handed down by the Lord and

⁶³ *Liturghier*, p. 506.

⁶⁴ Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 379. See also George NEDUNGATT and Michael FEATHERSTONE (eds.), *The Council in Trullo Revisited*, p. 106.

His Apostles. Remaining in this tradition and continuing this apostolic succession, through the bishops of the respective Church, are the only criteria for the preservation of the “Eucharistic communion” (can. 66 of Carthage) and of the ecumenical unity. Canon 58 of the Synod in Trullo sanctions this principle, noting that

“None of those who are in the order of laymen may distribute the Divine Mysteries to himself if a bishop, presbyter, or deacon be present. But whose shall dare to do such a thing, as acting contrary to what had be determined shall be excommunicated for one week and thenceforth let him learn not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think”⁶⁵.

Canon 10 of the Synod of Carthage decrees the punishment of the priest who would dare “to offer sacrifices to God separately (from the authority of the bishop) or has believed it right to erect another altar, contrary to ecclesiastical faith and discipline, such should not get off with impunity”⁶⁶.

Given the mandatory applicability of these canonical ordinances, article 40, §1 of the *Regulation for the Disciplinary Canonical Authorities and for the Judicial Instances of the Romanian Orthodox Church* provides the following:

“The performance of liturgical services in another parish without the approval of the parish priest, the establishment of oratories which are in the private houses or the celebrating of the Holy Liturgy, in the private oratories without the written approval of the local bishop, shall be considered disobedience of the church authorities and weakening of the liturgical unity and sanctioned, according to the gravity of the deed, with a written complaint or dismissal from the clerical service”⁶⁷.

By performing the Holy Eucharist according to the order of the Church, “*Sacra synaxis seu congregatio populi in unum convientis, praeside*

⁶⁵ Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 392.

⁶⁶ Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 447.

⁶⁷ *Regulamentul autorităților canonic disciplinare și al instanțelor de judecată ale Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, p. 54.

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priests, ad memorials Domini celebrandum ...” is performed. According to canon 11 of the Synod of Carthage:

“If any presbyter shall have been corrected by his superior ... and ... puffed up with pride, he shall have thought it proper to separate himself from the communion of his bishop, and separately shall have offered the sacrifice to God, and made a schism with certain accomplices, let him be anathema, and let him lose his place”⁶⁸.

In spite of these canonical provisions, for those who go beyond the canonical obedience of their bishop, and implicitly lose their status as members of the Church, the Orthodox Church has adopted over the centuries a patient attitude towards the sons returned from the altar once. According to the Christian history, the Orthodox Church proceeded with the heterodox as the word of the Apostle said: “With modesty admonishing them that resist the truth: if peradventure God may give them repentance to know the truth, and they may recover themselves from the snares of the devil, by whom they are held captive at his will” (II Timothy 2, 25-26). The disposition of canon 66 of the Synod of Carthage, which was the basis of the whole attitude of the Orthodox Church to receive those who split from the Body of Christ, actually sanctioned the principle of the treatment of heterodox.

“When all things had been considered and treated of which seem to conduce to the advantage of the church – is mentioned in this canon – the Spirit of God suggesting and admonishing us, we determined to act leniently and pacifically with the before-mentioned men, although they were cut off from the unity of the Lord’s body...”⁶⁹.

This principle remains the visible act of communion with the Orthodox Church. The guidance left by the Fathers of Carthage – regarding the reception of clerics and believers split from the Eucharistic communion of the Ecumenical Orthodox Church – is still current today. After their

⁶⁸ Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, pp. 447-448.

⁶⁹ Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 475.

understanding is straightened out, and they want to move to “ecumenical unity” – it is said in canon 68 of Cartagina - clergy and Christians who once partaked in the same cup with the Orthodox community, “if it seem good for Christian peace, they be received with their honours”⁷⁰.

The Eucharistic inter-communion, after which, in the current ecumenical climate, the ecclesiologists of the Christian Churches are increasingly encouraged, thus takes into account “the peace and prosperity of the Church” and the “ecumenical unity”⁷¹. According to the guidance given by the Fathers of Carthage, we, today’s, are obliged to enter into a dialogue with all our brethren divided by the One, Holy and Apostolic Church, the Eastern Orthodox-Catholic Church. Through intertheological or inter-Christian dialogue, it is said in canon 69 of the Synod of Carthage, we proclaim “the peace and unity, without which Christian salvation cannot be attained...”⁷². Through its legates, the Orthodox Church “should direct the attention to all that - those who have split up – they have no just objection to urge against the Catholic Church. And especially that this be made manifest to all by the municipal acts what they themselves had done in the case of their own schismatics. For in this case it is shewn them by divine grace, if they will but heed it, that their separation from the unity of the Church is as iniquitous as they now proclaim the schism ... from themselves to be”⁷³. Therefore, the principle of intercommunion⁷⁴ is based, first of all, on the “necessity of peace” in the Church of Christ.

Regarding the administration of the Holy Eucharist, there are also some canonical norms and prescriptions whose observance is particularly relevant to the celebrant. For example, based on the provision of canon 23 of the Synod in Trullo:

⁷⁰ Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 476.

⁷¹ Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 476.

⁷² Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 477.

⁷³ Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 477.

⁷⁴ On the principle of intercommunion, see also Pr. Prof. Dr. LIVIU STAN, “Iconomie și intercomuniune”, in: *Ortodoxia*, XXII (1970) 1, pp. 5-19; Herve-Marie LEGRAND, “Communion ecclésiast et eucharistie aux premiers siècles”, in: *L’Année Canonique*, XXV, 1981; Arhim. E. THEODOROPOULOS, *Thèmes canoniques et ecclesiologiques*, Athens, 1987; Patrick VALDRINI, *Droit canonique*, Précis Dalloz, Paris, 1989; Patrick VALDRINI, *La Droit Canonique*, in: vol. I: *Introduction a l’étude de la théologie. Manuel the Théologie*, sous la direction de J. DORE, vol. III, Paris, 1992.

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“No one, whether bishop, presbyter, or deacon, when giving the immaculate Communion, shall exact from him who communicates money or any payment whatsoever in return for this Communion. For grace is not to be sold, nor we give the the sanctification of the Holy Spirit for money; but to those who are worthy of the gift it is to be communicated in all simplicity. But if any of those enrolled among the clergy make demands on those he communicates let him be deposed, as an imitator of the error and wickedness of Simon”⁷⁵.

Canon 14 of the Synod of Laodicea forbids the priest to send “the holy things into other diocese (parishes)”⁷⁶. On the basis of this canonical provision, the priest is not allowed to send the Holy Eucharist outside the territorial boundaries of his parish. Canon 10 of the local Synod of Constantinople - named first and second – “forbids the servant of the altar to purloin for their profit, or to misuse for some unsacred purpose the holy Chalice, or the sacred and holy vessels, or utensils in the sacrificial altar, or of the vestments, or the patten, or the tongs, or the venerable tablecloth, and so-called “air”⁷⁷. “And it is plain that those who do such things not only incur liability to deposition from office, but even become subject to charges of committing to worst kind of ungodliness”⁷⁸. Based on the provisions of canon 103 of the Synod of Carthage, in the Church, and especially in the Liturgy, “only those prayers which had been approved in synod should be used by all, whether prefaces, commendations, or laying on of the hand, and that others contrary to the faith should not be used by any means, but that those only should be said which had been collected by the learned”⁷⁹. Therefore, at the act of the Holy Eucharist should only be read the revised and published prayers for church use, with the approval of the Holy Synod.

Bearing in mind that the ministers lead a clean life, compatible with the holy missions, the canons command those who assist at the divine altar

⁷⁵ Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 376.

⁷⁶ Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 132.

⁷⁷ D. CUMMINGS (ed.), *The Rudder (Pedalion)*, p. 467.

⁷⁸ D. CUMMINGS (ed.), *The Rudder (Pedalion)*, p. 467.

⁷⁹ Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 494.

“should be absolutely continent”⁸⁰ themselves at all times when they serve the holy ones

“... so that what has been handed down through the Apostles and preserved by ancient custom, we too likewise maintain, knowing that there is a time for all things and especially for fasting and prayer. For it is meet that they who assist at the divine altar should be absolutely continent when they are handling holy things, in order that they may be able to obtain from God what they ask in sincerity”⁸¹.

As stated in canon 13 of the Synod in Trullo, this absolutely continent is not understood in the sense of perpetual asceticism⁸², and beyond the natural powers, but at that time (can. 29 of the Sinod in Trullo; can. 41 of the Synod of Carthage), because the married priest administers the Holy Eucharist validly. Canon 4 of the Synod of Gangra anathematizes all those who do not recognize the marriage of priests as a legal act, stating that “if any one shall maintain, concerning a married presbyter, that is not lawful to partake of the oblation when he offers it, let him be anathema”⁸³.

According to the canonical prescriptions of the Holy Fathers (Epis. 93 of St. Basil) in times of distress and in case of great need, when no priest is found, the Christian⁸⁴ can partake with his own hand, “for when once the

⁸⁰ Canon 13 of St. Timothy of Alexandria forbids the priest’s natural relations with his wife “on Saturday and Sunday, on account of the fact that on these days the spiritual sacrifice is being offered to the Lord”, in D. CUMMINGS (ed.), *The Rudder (Pedalion)*, p. 897

⁸¹ Canon 13 of the Synod in Trullo, in Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 371.

⁸² The 51st Apostolic canon punishes the clergy by deposition and the laity by excommunication who abstains from wine and implicitly refuse to receive the Holy Communion: “If any bishop, presbyter, or deacon, or any one of the sacerdotal list, abstains from wine, not by way of religious restraint, but as abhorring them, ... let him be corrected, or else be deposed, and cast out of the Church. In like manner a layman”, in Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, p. 597.

⁸³ Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. XIV, p. 93.

⁸⁴ Canon 58 of the Synod in Trullo stipulates the following: “No one from amongst the laity shall give himself the divine Mysteries if there is a bishop or presbyter or deacon present”, in: George NEDUNGATT and Michael FEATHERSTONE (eds.), *The Council in Trullo Revisited*, p.138.

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priest has completed the offering, and given it, the recipient, participating in it each time as entire, is bound to believe that he properly takes and receives it from the giver⁸⁵. The Fathers of the Church draw particular attention to the priests on the internal state and the external attitude at the time of the Holy Eucharist.

On the basis of the same canonical prescriptions left by the Holy Fathers, the priest is not allowed “to concelebrate with those whom the canons reject”⁸⁶. The priests also have the canonical obligation to personally know those who partake them⁸⁷, and not to administer the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist “to those who the divine canons have excluded, for they are counted among the pagans, and woe to those who give it to them before they return to the Church”⁸⁸. Saint Basil the Great asks the priest to remember that “out of his negligence, a mouse or something else to touch the Holy Sacraments, or to moisten, or smoke, or handle those who are not consecrated and unworthy”⁸⁹. Canon 11 of Saint Nikephoros the Confessor states: “One is not sinning if perchance he offers a single offering on behalf of the three persons”⁹⁰, and canon 12 of Saint Nikephoros the Confessor stipulates that “a priest must not make a seal in the holy Chalice during the prayer of the sacristy”⁹¹. The canons, therefore, take care that each gesture of the ritual acquires its liturgical-dogmatic significance. Failure to observe the Eucharistic ritual and its symbol thus invalidates the act of administering the Mysteries themselves. According to the 10th canon of Nicholas of Constantinople, “those who are prohibited from communion,

⁸⁵ Sfântul VASILE CEL MARE, *Letter 93*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. VIII, p. 179

⁸⁶ *Canoanele Bisericii Ortodoxe*, vol. III. *Canoanele Sfinților Părinți, Canoanele Întregitoare și Prescripțiile canonice*, Studiu introductiv, introduceri, note și traducere de RĂZVAN PERȘA, Editura Basilica, București, 2018, p. 309-310

⁸⁷ Saint Basil the Great draws attention to the priest through the words: “Be careful to whom you give the Eucharist ... and do not give the Son of God to unworthy hands”, in: *Canoanele Bisericii Ortodoxe*, vol. III. *Canoanele Sfinților Părinți, Canoanele Întregitoare și Prescripțiile canonice*, p. 311.

⁸⁸ *Canoanele Bisericii Ortodoxe*, vol. III. *Canoanele Sfinților Părinți, Canoanele Întregitoare și Prescripțiile canonice*, p. 311.

⁸⁹ *Canoanele Bisericii Ortodoxe*, vol. III. *Canoanele Sfinților Părinți, Canoanele Întregitoare și Prescripțiile canonice*, p. 311.

⁹⁰ D. CUMMINGS (ed.), *The Rudder (Pedalion)*, p. 965.

⁹¹ D. CUMMINGS (ed.), *The Rudder (Pedalion)*, p. 965.

such person are also prohibited from eating elevated offerings”⁹². The canons forbid the clergyman to bring the Holy Sacrifice in the presence of the heretics, “unless they promise to repent and to leave the heresy” (can. 9 of Timothy of Alexandria)⁹³. Based on the disposition of the canon 16 of Timothy of Alexandria, “swallowing the water involuntarily, before the Divine Liturgy, does not stop the communion”⁹⁴. To complete the catalog of these provisions we mention canon 13 of the Synod of Sardica, which sanctioned the ordinance according to which “the bishop or priest who will admitts to communion, that is, to the Holy Eucharist, to the one who take refuge with another bishop who knows him and who is aware that he has been removed from communion by his own bishop ... he must present himself before an assembly of bishops and give account”⁹⁵.

In connection with the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, in the Roman Catholic Church there appeared a foreign practice (according to the Orthodox teaching) which has been handed down by our Savior, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Apostles, namely the *bination* or *trination*, that is, the celebration by a priest of two or three Masses on the same time. According to the canon 905, §1 of the Code of Canon Law, priests are forbidden to celebrate or concelebrate the Eucharist more than once a day except when the law permit it: “Apart from those cases in which the law allows him to celebrate or concelebrate the Eucharist a number of times on the same day, a priest may not celebrate more than once a day”⁹⁶. The Law permits priests to celebrate three Masses at Christmas and two at Easter. The local Ordinary may permit priests to celebrate twice or three times on Sundays and Feasts of Obligation when there is pastoral need. In this sense, the canon 905, §2 stipulates the following: “If there is a scarcity of priests, the local Ordinary may for a good reason allow priests to celebrate twice in one day or even, if pastoral need requires it, three times on Sundays or holydays of obligation”⁹⁷.

According to the tradition and the liturgical and canonical ordinances (can. 47 of the Synod of Carthage; cf. 29 of the Synod in Trullo; can. 1

⁹² D. CUMMINGS (ed.), *The Rudder (Pedalion)*, p. 974.

⁹³ D. CUMMINGS (ed.), *The Rudder (Pedalion)*, p. 894.

⁹⁴ D. CUMMINGS (ed.), *The Rudder (Pedalion)*, p. 899.

⁹⁵ Henry R. PERCIVAL (ed.), *The Rudder (Pedalion)*, p. 427.

⁹⁶ *The Code of Canon Law, In English translation*, p. 166.

⁹⁷ *The Code of Canon Law, In English translation*, p. 167.

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of Sf. Basil the Great, etc.) of the Orthodox Church, only one Liturgy can be performed in a single day, regardless of the number of the celebrants or the churches where they celebrate. Not even two priests can perform two Liturgies on the same Holy Altar on the same day or on the same antimension. In churches that have two altars, two liturgies can be performed, but not at the same time. The Orthodox Church does not practice the bination. The bination, and at the same time the trination, is considered an uncanonical practice in the Orthodox Church, known and allowed only in the Roman Catholic Church. Another uncanonical practice, introduced by Roman Catholics, is the use of unleavened bread in the ritual of the Holy Eucharist, starting with the eighth century. Roman Catholics do not consider that the Lord's Supper was not a Jewish meal, but a separate dinner.

VI. Conclusions

Orthodox Theology sees the Holy Eucharist as a sacrifice and this is affirmed in the words of the Priest, when he says, during the Eucharistic Canon, "Thine own of Thine own we offer unto Thee on behalf of all and for all". The sacrifice offered at the Eucharist is Christ Himself, but He Who brings the sacrifice is also Christ. Christ is, at one and the same time, High Priest and Sacrifice. In the prayer before the Great Entrance, the Priest prays: "For Thou art the Offerer and the Offered, the Receiver and the Received, O Christ our God..." This Eucharist is offered to God – the Holy Trinity, and so if we ask the threefold question, What is offered? By Whom is it offered? To Whom is it offered? we say in answer, Christ. In addition, the sacrifice is offered "on behalf of all and for all," for it is a sacrifice of redemption which is brought for the living and the dead.

According to the Orthodox Church, then, the Eucharist is not just a reminder of Christ's sacrifice or of its enactment, but it is a real sacrifice. On the other hand, however, it is not a new sacrifice, nor a repetition of the Sacrifice of the Cross upon Golgotha. The events of Christ's Sacrifice – the Incarnation, the Institution of the Eucharist, the Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension into Heaven, are not repeated during the Eucharist, yet they become a present reality.

Concerning the Communion itself, in the Orthodox Church both laity and clergy always receive Communion of both the Body and Blood of Christ. The Communion is given to the laity in a spoon containing a small piece of the Holy Bread together with a portion of the wine, and it is received standing. A strict fast is observed, usually from the night before, and nothing can be eaten or drunk after waking in the morning before Communion.

After the final blessing of the Liturgy, the faithful come up to kiss the Hand Cross held by the Priest and those who have not communed receive a small piece of bread, called the Antidoron, which, although blessed, was not consecrated, having been taken from the same bread(s) from which the Lamb was taken in the Proskomedia. This bread is given out as an expression of Christian fellowship and love (agape).

People of whatever convictions -- theistic or atheistic, Christian or non-Christian -- who behave in an orderly and respectful manner may attend liturgical services in an Orthodox church, and participate, as possible, in the prayers and rituals (such as singing psalms and hymns, and venerating icons and relics). But only members of the Orthodox Church who practice a specific spiritual discipline may participate in the Church's sacraments and receive holy communion at the Orthodox divine liturgy. The essential elements of eucharistic discipline in the Orthodox Church may be simply stated in five points.

- Participation in Holy Communion in the Orthodox Church requires first of all that a person be a baptized, chrismated member of the Orthodox Church who fully accepts the conditions and demands of his or her baptism and chrismation. Eucharistic discipline in the Orthodox Church demands that communicants in the eucharistic sacrifice understand themselves at all times and in all circumstances as having died and risen with Christ, as sealed by the Holy Spirit, and as belonging to God as His bonded-servants and free-born sons in Jesus.
- Baptism and chrismation, and so, participation in holy communion, require a person to believe in the Word of God, the Gospel of Christ, and the Christian Faith summarized in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed, as these are proclaimed and interpreted in the Orthodox Church. Members of the Orthodox Church who question biblical or churchly doctrines may participate in holy communion if they are praying and working to come to an enlightened understanding of the Faith under

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the guidance of their pastors and teachers. But those who have been baptized and chrismated in the Orthodox Church who publicly express doubt and disbelief about the faith as confessed and lived in the Orthodox Church, or secretly harbor such doubt and disbelief, may not partake of holy communion at an Orthodox divine liturgy.

- Confessing the Christian faith as understood and practiced in the Orthodox Church is to identify fully with Orthodox Church history and tradition, and to take full responsibility for it. It is to accept and defend the dogmas and canons of the councils accepted by the Orthodox Churches, to worship according to Orthodox liturgical rites, to venerate those who are glorified as Orthodox saints, and to struggle to practice the ethical and moral teachings of Christ and his apostles as recorded in the holy scriptures and elaborated in Orthodox Church tradition. Because participation in the holy Eucharist is not only a sacred communion with God through Christ and the Holy Spirit, but also a holy communion with Orthodox believers of all times and places, responsibility for the whole of Orthodox Church history and tradition is an absolute condition for partaking in the holy communion of Christ's body and blood at the Church's divine liturgy.
- Identifying fully with Orthodox Christian teaching and practice requires a communicant in the Orthodox Church to strive to put the Church's biblical, evangelical and apostolic teachings into practice in their everyday lives. No one can believe and do everything perfectly. Eucharistic discipline, however, demands that a communicant struggles to do so, admitting when he or she fails, and repenting without self-justification over one's failures and sins. This means, concretely, that eucharistic discipline requires a communicant to study God's Word in scripture, to pray and fast and give alms as one can, to attend church services as regularly as possible, and to live according to God's commandments in all aspects of one's life and work, regularly giving an account of one's behavior to one's pastor and spiritual guide, repenting of one's sins, and struggling by God's grace to change and improve. Persons rejecting such a disciplined life may not partake of Holy Communion in the Orthodox Church.
- Eucharistic discipline in the Orthodox Church finally requires that a communicant be in constant repentance, realizing that he or she is never worthy of receiving holy communion, and knowing that the

heartfelt confession of one's unworthiness is an absolute condition for partaking in a worthy manner. The essential expression of one's unworthiness to receive Christ's body and blood in Holy Communion, with the admission of one's sins, is the forgiveness of others. Eucharistic discipline demands that communicants of Christ's body and blood be at peace with everyone as far as they can be, even when others are unwilling to forgive and be reconciled. At least within themselves, partakers of Holy Communion at an Orthodox Divine Liturgy must be in a union of love with all people, including their worst enemies.

Acceptance of one's baptism and chrismation in the Church, responsibility for the Church's faith and life, the struggle to put the faith fully into practice, accountability for one's personal belief and behavior, constant and continual repentance, and peace with all people in the union of love commanded and given by God in Christ and the Holy Spirit - these are the requirements for participation in holy communion in the Orthodox Church. They are, ultimately and essentially, what Holy Communion itself is all about.

The knowledge and observance of the canonical ordinances and norms of the Orthodox Church, as well as the canonical-liturgical guidance and teachings of the brilliant bishops of the Romanian people, regarding the administration of the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist, is a canonical obligation of every priest of our Church.