

August 10, 2020

Dear George,

I hope this letter finds you and your family well!

In your previous correspondence with me, you asked that I offer my opinion on the recent chaos that has broken out in Toronto regarding the use of the Eucharistic holy spoon. On such matters, there are no personal, academic opinions that one may offer. Rather, the only thing that I can do is present you with historical testimonies and the pronouncements of the Holy and God-bearing fathers. As you will see, the statements of the fathers are of critical importance for this topic as they – through the purifying and sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit – have made all things clear to us.

Let us begin with the Holy Gospels, the very basis of our faith. Each of the synoptic Gospels records the events of the Mystical Supper. The wording is critical for understanding what it is that rests in the very chalice that we commune from. The relevant passages read:

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”

(Matthew 26:26-28)

And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, “Take, eat: this is my body.” And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it. And he said unto them, “This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many.” (Mark 14:22-24)

And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, “This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.” Likewise, also the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.”

(Luke 22:19-20)

There is a clear, indisputable common denominator in all three synoptic retellings of the events of that night wherein our Lord gave Himself up for the salvation of humankind. The bread is indeed the Immaculate Body of our Lord and Savior, and the wine likewise is His Precious and All-Holy Blood. This comes to us directly from the mouth of our Savior and, thus, there is no room for any sorts of debate on the matter. Looking now towards the theological Gospel, that of the virgin and beloved disciple of our Lord, John, we are revealed another aspect of the mystery of those precious gifts. It reads:

Then Jesus said unto them, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which comes down from heaven, and gives life unto the world.” Then said they unto him, “Lord, evermore give us this bread.” And Jesus said unto

them, “I am the bread of life: he that comes to me shall never hunger; and he that believes in me shall never thirst.” (John 6:32-35)

“I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world”...Then Jesus said unto them, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, has eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, dwells in me, and I in him. As the living Father has sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eats me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eats of this bread shall live for ever.” (John 6:48-58)

The Institution of the Eucharist may be absent in St. John’s Gospel, but the theology of the Eucharist is as pronounced as can be. The Evangelist records our Lord’s own words concerning the power of consuming His Body and Blood. These holy elements are the very source of eternal life for us Orthodox Christians. The Lord is clear that those who partake of His Body and Blood dwell in Him and He in them. The end result? These persons will all be raised to eternal life in the last day. In other words, the Christian who participates in the Eucharist becomes *deified* by grace since they have become one with Christ’s Body (σύσσωμοι). The Body and Blood of our Lord transmits eternal life to its recipients. Since the Lord is life itself, then it goes without saying that diseases and death cannot under ANY circumstances be transmitted in the act of Holy Communion. It is, thus, obvious that where life is, there is death absent. Both cannot be present, no matter what theoretical framework one wishes to use, as death is nothing more than the absence of life.

While the Gospels make abundantly clear the reality of the situation, it is also necessary to look at how the early church received, maintained and imparted the tradition of the Holy Eucharist. Next to the Gospels, the earliest attestation we have concerning this mystery is again to be found in the writings of the New Testament. The Glorious Apostle of the Nations, Paul (whom unfortunately the Orthodox rarely study – much to our disgrace!), mentions the mystery on two occasions in his first epistle to the Corinthians. He writes:

The cup of blessing which we bless, *is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?* The bread which we break, *is it not the communion of the body of Christ?* For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.

(1 Cor 10:16-17)

For I have received from the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, *Take, eat: this is my body*, which is broken for

you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, ***this cup is the new testament in my blood***. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

(1 Cor 11:23-26)

St. Paul is clear that we Christians participate in something that is very real. The bread and the wine are the actual Body and Blood of our Lord. Furthermore, the Apostle says, “For I have received from the Lord that which also I delivered unto you.” Now, while St. Paul is saying this with reference to the practice of the Holy Eucharist, it is nevertheless the foundational stone on which rests the Orthodox understanding of how the church receives and passes on its traditions. Let us keep this in mind for a later point that I will make.

While the New Testament could not be any clearer concerning what the bread and wine truly are, the subsequent generation of church writers continued to deal with this matter. This makes sense given that the Holy Eucharist is the very heart and soul of the Christian’s existence. Therefore, we can now move on to the successors of the Holy Apostles themselves, the Apostolic fathers. There is one saint from this group whose writings are particularly relevant to the topic – St. Ignatius the Godbearer (of Antioch). St. Ignatius writes:

I take no pleasure in the food of corruption or in the pleasures of this life. ***I desire the Bread of God*** [cf. John 6:33], ***which is the flesh of Jesus Christ*** (who was of the seed of David) [cf. Rom. 1:3], ***and for drink I desire his blood***, which is imperishable love.

(Letter to the Romans 7:3)¹

Observe well those who hold heterodox views about the grace of Jesus Christ which came to us – how opposite they are to God’s purpose...***They abstain from Eucharist and prayer because they do not acknowledge that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ which suffered for our sins, which the Father raised up by his goodness*** [cf. John 6:51-58]. ***Those who deny God’s gift are dying in their squabbles***; it would be better for them to love so that they may rise [cf. 1 John 2:10, 11; 3:14]. It is fitting to keep away from such men and not to speak about them either privately or publicly, but to pay attention to the prophets and especially to the gospel, in which the passion has been explained to us and the resurrection has been accomplished.

(Letter to the Smyrnaeans 6:2-7:2)²

If Jesus Christ deems me worthy through your prayer, and if it is God’s will, in the second brochure [small letter] which I am going to write you I will give you the explanation of what I have begun – the divine plan in relation to the new man Jesus Christ, concerning his faith and his love, his passion and resurrection; especially if the Lord reveals to me that individually you are all joining, by grace from the Name, in one faith and in Jesus Christ, who was of the family of David after the flesh [cf.

¹ Jack N. Sparks, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers* (Minneapolis: Light and Life Publishing Company, 1978), 101.

² *Ibid.*, 112.

Rom. 1:3], son of man and Son of God, so that you may obey the bishop and the presbytery with undisturbed mind [cf. 1 Cor. 7:35], **breaking one loaf** [cf. 1 Cor. 10:16-17], **which is the medicine of immortality, the antidote which results not in dying but in living forever in Jesus Christ** [cf. John 6:51-58].

(Letter to the Ephesians 20:1-2)³

How marvellous are these words by a saint who, according to the tradition, was acquainted with St. John the Evangelist and who was furthermore ordained a bishop for Antioch by the Apostle Peter himself.⁴ It is especially the last statement in his *epistle to the Ephesians* where an exact theology is expounded on the salvific and medicinal – if you will – effects of consuming the holy elements. St. Ignatius claims that the loaf, the Holy Body of our Lord, which is broken, is the **medicine of immortality** (φάρμακον ἀθανασίας) and **the antidote which results not in dying** (ἀντίδοτος τοῦ μὴ ἀποθανεῖν). According to Lampe's *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, one of the main meanings of the word *antidote/ἀντίδοτος* in its adjectival form means something that is *remedial*, given to counteract a malady. In its substantive form, as found in this epistle, it literally means remedy or medicine.⁵ Thus, there is no question that for St. Ignatius, those very elements that we consume during the Eucharist, is *the* medicine for not dying. Since the body of our Lord is the medicine which heals the soul and links us to Christ Himself, who is the author of life itself, naturally it can only transmit grace and life to the communicant and in no way deliver death or any of its appendages – illnesses and the such!

Let us now proceed to the second generation of church fathers; that is, the successors to the successors of the Holy Apostles. St. Irenaeus of Lyons was a disciple of St. Polycarp of Smyrna who in turn had been instructed and ordained by St. John the Evangelist.⁶ Let us see what this

³ Sparks, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 83-84.

⁴ There are two traditions in the church about who ordained St. Ignatius. According to Theodoret of Cyrrhus, St. Ignatius received the grace of the High Priesthood directly from the hands of St. Peter. He writes, "You have no doubt heard of the illustrious Ignatius, who received episcopal grace by the hand of the great Peter" (*Eranistes: Dialogue 1-The Immutable*; *NPNF*² 2:175). The *Apostolic Constitutions*, however, claim that he was ordained by St. Paul. It reads, "Now concerning those bishops which have been ordained in our lifetime, we let you know that they are these...Of Antioch, Evodius, ordained by me Peter; and Ignatius by Paul" (VII:4; *ANF* 7:478). The confusion may perhaps stem from the fact that St. Ignatius was not the first bishop of Antioch, but rather the second as he succeeded Evodius (See Eusebius, *Chron. ann. Abr.* 2058; H. E. iii. 22). John Malalas, a Greek chronicler from Antioch who wrote in the early sixth-century AD records that St. Peter did in fact ordain both Evodius and Ignatius. On his way to Rome to contest with Simon Magus, St. Peter passed through Antioch and as it happened, St. Evodius had just passed away. St. Peter, thus, ordained St. Ignatius (X:246; X:252; Elizabeth Jeffreys, Michael Jeffreys and Roger Scott, trans., *The Chronicle of John Malalas* (vol. 4 of *Byzantina Australiensia*; eds. Ken Parry et al.; Leiden: Brill, 2017), 131, 133-134). In addition to these testimonies, the later fathers of the church also place the saint within the ranks of the Apostles as though inseparable from them. See Athanasius the Great (*de Synodis*, 1:47; *NPNF*² 475) and St. John Chrysostom (*Homilies on St. Ignatius and St. Babylas* 1-2; *NPNF*¹ 9:136-137). One thing is beyond certain through these ancient testimonies, St. Ignatius knew the Holy Apostles and was ordained by them.

⁵ PGL, s.v. "ἀντίδοτος."

⁶ The beauty of the degrees of this relationship between St. Ignatius and the Apostolic fathers is eloquently expressed in his own writings where he states, "But Polycarp also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna, whom I also saw in my early youth, for he tarried [on earth] a very long time, and, when a very old man, gloriously and most nobly suffering martyrdom, departed this life, having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true" (*Adversus Haereses*, Book III, 3:4; *ANF*

great father and martyr of the church, who only had two degrees of separation from our Lord Himself and one degree separation from the Holy Apostles, has to say concerning the mystery of the Eucharist. He writes:

But our opinion is in accordance with the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn establishes our opinion. For we offer to Him His own, announcing consistently the fellowship and union of the flesh and Spirit. ***For as the bread, which is produced from the earth, when it receives the invocation of God, is no longer common bread, but the Eucharist, consisting of two realities, earthly and heavenly; so also our bodies, when they receive the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of the resurrection to eternity.***⁷

When Christ visited us in His grace, He did not come to what did not belong to Him: also, by shedding His true blood for us, and exhibiting to us His true flesh in the Eucharist, He conferred upon our flesh the capacity of salvation... For blood can only come from veins and flesh, and whatsoever else makes up the substance of man, such as the Word of God was actually made. By His own blood he redeemed us, as also His apostle declares... He has acknowledged the cup (which is a part of the creation) as His own blood, from which He bedews our blood; and the bread (also a part of the creation) He has established as His own body, from which He gives increase to our bodies... ***When, therefore, the mingled cup and the manufactured bread receives the Word of God, and the Eucharist of the blood and the body of Christ is made, from which things the substance of our flesh is increased and supported,*** how can they affirm that the flesh is incapable of receiving the gift of God, which is life eternal, which [flesh] is nourished from the body and blood of the Lord, and is a member of Him?—even as the blessed Paul declares in his Epistle to the Ephesians, that “we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.” He does not speak these words of some spiritual and invisible man, for a spirit has not bones nor flesh; but [he refers to] that dispensation [by which the Lord became] an actual man, consisting of flesh, and nerves, and bones,—that [flesh] which is nourished by the cup which is His blood, and receives increase from the bread which is His body.⁸

St. Ignatius dealt with one of the earliest and most pernicious of heresies, *Gnosticism*. Given the context, it would appear as though he is attacking a branch of this heresy referred to as *Valentinianism*, which rejected all material matter including human nature. The saint combats this error by emphasizing how the true flesh and blood of the Savior provides life and increase to our own bodies. In his apology, St. Ignatius reiterates that which we have already seen in the writings of the Apostolic fathers and in the epistles of St. Paul. Mainly, that the bread and wine – after the

1:416). This shows the early church’s understanding of an unbroken transmission of teachings and traditions from (a) our Lord Himself to the Apostles, (b) the Apostles to their successors, the Apostolic Fathers, and (c) from the Apostolic Fathers to the later fathers. What was received was unadulteratedly passed on. This was the trend from day one. As much responsibility as there was for those transmitting the teachings, there was also to those receiving it so as to keep it uncontaminated and to transmit it to the next generation.

⁷ *Adversus Haereses*, Book IV, 18:5 (ANF 1:486).

⁸ *Ibid.*, Book V, 2:1-3 (ANF 1:527-528).

invocation – are indeed the very real Body and Blood of our Savior, and that the consumption of these holy elements nourishes our bodies and souls. St. Ignatius is clear that such is the nourishing power of the Holy Eucharist that it will cause the body to rise at the appointed time and will, furthermore, impart immortality and incorruption forevermore to that which is currently feeble and mortal. These statements of the saint are so powerful and clear that they should suffice for anyone inquiring as to what the holy elements that the Orthodox receive in the Divine Liturgy actually are. Nevertheless, to show that this truth was maintained by all subsequent generations of fathers of the church, I will present the writings of just three more fathers.

I will first present a few samples from the renowned, celebrated and ecumenical teacher of our church, the divine Chrysostom. He writes:

Let us then in everything believe God, and contradict Him in nothing, though what is said seem to be contrary to our thoughts and senses, but let His word be of higher authority than both reasonings and sight. Let us do likewise in the mysteries also, not looking at the things set before us, but keeping in mind His sayings. For His word cannot deceive, but our senses are easily beguiled. That [=His word] has never failed, but this [=our senses] in most things goes wrong. Since then the word says, “This is my body,” let us both be persuaded and believe, and look at it with the eyes of the mind. For Christ has not given us something tangible, but even in tangible things all is to be perceived by the mind. So also, in baptism, the gift is bestowed by a tangible thing, that is, by water; but that which is done is perceived by the mind, the birth, I mean, and the renewal. For if you had been incorporeal, He would have delivered to you the incorporeal gifts bare; but because the soul has been locked up in a body, He delivers to you the things that the mind perceives, in things tangible. How many now say, I would wish to see His form, the mark, His clothes, His shoes. ***Behold! You see Him, you touch Him, you eat Him.*** And indeed, you desire to see His clothes, but He gives Himself to you not only to see, but also to touch and eat and receive within you.⁹

“For we, who are many, are one bread, one body.” “For why speak I of communion?” says he, “we are that self-same body.” ***For what is the bread? The Body of Christ. And what do they who partake of it become? The Body of Christ:*** not many bodies, but one body. For as the bread consisting of many grains is made one, so that the grains appear nowhere; they exist indeed, but their difference is not seen by reason of their conjunction; so are we conjoined both with each other and with Christ: there not being one body for you and another for your neighbor to be nourished by, but the very same for all... and when you see It set before you, say to yourself, “***Because of this Body I am no longer earth and ashes, no longer a prisoner, but free:*** because of this I hope for heaven, and to receive the good things therein, immortal life, the portion of angels, converse with Christ; this Body, nailed and scourged, was more than death could stand against; this Body the very sun saw sacrificed and turned aside its beams; for this both the veil was rent in that moment,

⁹ *Homilies on Matthew*, 82:4 (NPNF¹ 10:495). [As the works of St. John Chrysostom in the Nicene-Post Nicene Series were translated into a more classical form of English, I have slightly emended the translations for the sake of clarity to the modern-day reader].

and rocks were burst asunder, and all the earth was shaken. ***This is even that Body, the blood-stained, the pierced, and that out of which gushed the saving fountains, the one of blood, the other of water, for all the world.***¹⁰

St. John Chrysostom's statements are in clear alignment with those of all previous fathers examined. The beautiful thing about St. John is that his homilies are self-explanatory and therefore do not require any additional statements from us. He is clear of what the bread and wine are and of what effects they have on the communicant.

The next author, St. Ambrose of Milan, speaks in many places concerning the Holy Eucharist. He writes:

“For My Flesh is food indeed, and My Blood is drink [indeed].” You hear Him speak of His Flesh and of His Blood, You perceive the sacred pledges, [conveying to us the merits and power] of the Lord's death, and you dishonour His Godhead? Hear His own words: “A spirit does not have flesh and bones.” ***Now we, as often as we receive the Sacramental Elements, which by the mysterious efficacy of holy prayer are transformed (transfigurantur) into the Flesh and the Blood,*** “we proclaim the Lord's death.”¹¹

Perhaps you will say, “I see something else, how is it that you assert that I receive the Body of Christ?” And this is the point which remains for us to prove. And what evidence shall we make use of? ***Let us prove that this is not what nature made, but what the blessing consecrated, and the power of blessing is greater than that of nature, because by blessing nature itself is changed...*** Why do you seek the order of nature in the Body of Christ, seeing that the Lord Jesus Himself was born of a Virgin, not according to nature? ***It is the true Flesh of Christ which [was] crucified and buried, this is then truly the Sacrament of His Body...*** In that sacrament is Christ, because it is the Body of Christ, it is therefore not bodily food but spiritual.¹²

St. Ambrose is also in strict alignment with all the other writings examined so far. He claims that through the power of the prayers offered, the bread and wine are mysteriously changed into the very Body and Blood of our Lord. The saint is clear that the bread which appears before the eyes of the people – what nature made (i.e. wheat, salt, water, leaven) – is actually not bread since the blessing of the officiant has changed it into *that* very Body of the Lord which was born of the Virgin Mary, which endured betrayal and sufferings, which was crucified, prepared and buried, which arose from the dead on the third day and which ascended into the heavens and now sits in the Glory of the Father. Finally, it would appear as though the saint was dealing with individuals who questioned the ability of the Eucharistic elements to change. The saint makes an interesting point to absolve these skeptics of any doubt by presenting the following argument. He writes:

¹⁰ *Homilies on First Corinthians*, 24:17-24 (NPNF¹ 12:140-142).

¹¹ *On the Faith* 4.10.125 (NPNF² 10:278).

¹² *On the Mysteries* 9.50-58 (NPNF² 10:324-5).

But if the word of Elijah had such power as to bring down fire from heaven, shall not the word of Christ have power to change the nature of the elements? You read concerning the making of the whole world: “He spoke and they were made, He commanded and they were created.” Shall not the word of Christ, which was able to make out of nothing that which was not, be able to change things which already are into what they were not? For it is not less to give a new nature to things than to change them.¹³

Let us reflect for a moment on these potent and authoritative words written by the saint. If the word of the prophet Elijah possessed such power that it was able to shut the heavens and cause a three-year drought, bring down a consuming fire upon the wet offerings on Mt. Carmel, bring down fire to destroy the soldiers of Ahaziah, make the flour and the oil in the widow’s house miraculously replenish daily for the duration of the great drought, raise the widow’s son, divide the Jordan river making a dry path for he and Elissaeus to pass through, and impart a double portion of his prophetic spirit to his disciple Elissaeus, what can one possibly say about the power of the words spoken by the very God of Eljah – our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? If our Lord was able to create the entire cosmos out of nothing, He can certainly change things that exist into what they are not! St. Ambrose is clear that the word of our Lord is true and binding. The bonds of nature are overcome in the Eucharistic service since that which is seen becomes, according to our Lord’s very own words and promise, that which is not seen by our earthly senses.

The final piece I will present in this portion of my letter is a piece by the luminary of Syria and the Harp of the Spirit – St. Ephrem. In my opinion, no other church father has written about the Eucharistic elements to the degree that this saint did. His poetry is replete with such references. I will present a segment from just one of his poems to display what this father believed the bread and wine to be. He writes:

In your bread is hidden the Spirit which cannot be eaten.

In your wine dwells the fire that cannot be drunk.

Spirit in your bread, fire in your wine:

It is a distinct wonder that our lips have received!

When the Lord came down to earth among mortals,

He made them a new creation, like the watchers,

Within which both fire and spirit mingle,

Since fire and spirit exist secretly.

The Seraph did not touch the coal with his fingers.

It touched only the mouth of Isaiah.

[The Seraph] did not hold it, and [Isaiah] did not eat it.

But to us our Lord has given both.

Abraham offered bodily food

To the spiritual watchers, and they ate. ***A new marvel***

Of our great Lord: for bodily ones

Fire and spirit to eat and drink!

Fire descended and consumed sinners in anger.

¹³ *On the Mysteries.*, 9.50.52 (NPNF² 10:324).

The fire of compassion has come down and dwelt within
the bread.

Instead of the fire which consumed humanity,
The fire inside the bread you have consumed and lived.
Fire came down and consumed the sacrifices of
Elijah.

The fire of mercy has become for us a living sacrifice.

Fire consumed the offering:

Your fire, O our Lord, we have eaten in your offering...

Fire and the Holy Spirit are in the bread and the cup.

***Your bread has slain the greedy one, who made
us his bread.***

Your cup destroys death, which, lo, had swallowed us up.

We have eaten you, my Lord, and we have drunk you,

Not to nullify you, but to receive life in you.¹⁴

In this highly theological poem, St. Ephrem makes clear that the bread and wine are more than they appear to the human eye as they have been infused with God's Spirit and with divine fire. In a manner typical of the Syriac fathers, he repeats this theme continuously so that it will set firmly in the minds of the congregants for whom he is writing. For the saint, the bread and wine are spiritual food which destroys death and gives us life. However, lest anyone question what exactly is the nature of this spiritual food which he continuously refers to, he states plainly at the end that it is indeed the Body and Blood of our Lord – "We have eaten you, my Lord, and we have drunk you."

I apologize for using so many references and such lengthy quotes but it was necessary for me to do so as I wanted to afford you the opportunity to see for yourself how from east to west, and from our Saviour Himself through to the later fathers, the exact same thing has been taught concerning the Eucharistic elements. I specifically chose the above patristic figures precisely because they are found in and writing for different communities across the then Christian-speaking world. Thus, there can be no disputes whatsoever about what the early church taught concerning the bread and wine in the Eucharist as from Nineveh to Antioch to Constantinople to Milan, the same thing was taught – it is the very Body and Blood of our Lord! Furthermore, the same thing holds temporally as what our Saviour Himself said at the Mystical Supper, the same was upheld and taught by the Holy Apostles, who passed it along to the Apostolic Fathers who in turn gave it to the subsequent generations of holy and God-bearing fathers. To summarize, the same thing has been taught in all places and at all times.

With regards the recent issue pertaining to Holy Communion, here is a synopsis.¹⁵ Certain churches here in Canada under the Ecumenical Patriarchate thought it appropriate to alter the

¹⁴ *Hymns on Faith* 10.8-18 (Jeffrey T. Wickes, trans., *St. Ephrem the Syrian: The Hymns on Faith* (vol. 130 of *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*; ed. David G. Hunter et al.; Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 122-124).

¹⁵ For more details on the matter, I refer you to an article put out by Dr. Irene Polidoulis, MD., a prominent member of the Greek church in Toronto and also a fierce defendant of the ancient practice of the single spoon. See "A Circus

method of giving Holy Communion. They stopped using the single, common spoon for the recipients and instead use separate, plastic spoons for each person who communes.¹⁶ Furthermore, they stopped wiping the lips of the faithful with the holy napkin and provide the people with disposable napkins which are afterwards burnt. If it were possible to add another layer of blasphemy, they successfully did so by having the administering priest wear a face shield and gloves! Now, in all fairness, nobody came out and said that the bread and wine are not the Body and Blood of Christ, but such a statement is completely unnecessary from them as actions speak far louder than words. The actions of these individuals beg the following questions. Do they know what the bread and wine truly are? Do they realize that during the Divine Liturgy we are found at that very same Mystical Supper wherein our Lord imparted this sacrament to us? Do they understand that the consecrating prayers change that which is seen to that which only our soul comprehends? Do they believe that Christ is the source of life and immortality? Do they trust the promise of our Lord that He would dwell in those receiving Him and grant them eternal life? Have they ever read the Holy Fathers? Have they even studied the basic text – the sacred Scriptures? I cannot presume to know what lies in the heart of any individual as only God is the *Knower-of-hearts* (καρδιογνώστης). However, given the actions of these clergymen, their answer to at least one of these questions (if not all!) would have to be no. If they truly believed that the bread and wine are the very Body and Blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, He who is perfect God and perfect man, the pre-eternal Logos made flesh, then such a change in the ancient practice of using the holy spoon would have never occurred because they would have known in their hearts that our Lord can only convey life and health and never death and illness. Did they need more proof than our Saviour's words? They could have looked at all of church history. Nobody at any point ever died from a disease that was transmitted from the Eucharistic cup, precisely because the Body of our Lord is life-giving! Do we need to mention how many Orthodox priests served in leper colonies in Greece up until the early 20th century? I have spoken with elderly clergymen in Greece (one of whom is our beloved Fr. Efstratios from Archangel Michael at Mandamades) who knew priests who had ministered in such colonies. They would commune all the sick and then consume the remaining holy contents. None of them ever contracted leprosy – a highly contagious disease! These priests did not wear gloves, nor masks, nor sterilize the holy spoon between communicants...why? Because they knew Who it was that rested in the holy chalice! They understood what His powers are and that He is life itself!

Unfortunately, the blasphemies do not finish there. The bishop of the Greek church here in Canada mentioned publicly how before he reached the decision to change the method of administering Holy Communion, he consulted with members of other faiths to get their input. He specifically referenced his Catholic, Coptic, and Armenian *brothers-in-Christ*. Does he realize that these people are outside the boundaries of the One True Church of Christ? Because he specifically referenced the Copts and Armenians, I will say just this – what spiritual advice can those who separated from the True Church in 451 C.E. and fall under the anathemas of the fathers of the Fourth Ecumenical Council have to offer the Orthodox? Is it possible for those who are deprived of the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit and, by extension, of the Holy Mysteries, to offer us anything of value? No! The Eucharist is what it is only because of the power of the Holy Spirit

of Spoons in Toronto," Orthodox Reflections: Looking at Life in the Orthodox Christian Faith, accessed August 10, 2020, <https://orthodoxreflections.com/a-circus-of-spoons-in-toronto/>.

¹⁶ It has not been established as to what they do with these spoons afterwards. Rumours range from disinfecting them with harsh chemicals for subsequent reuse to burning them.

which rests upon the bread and wine during the consecrating prayers. Such mysterious efficacy is altogether absent in the prayers of those who are separated from the One True Church. These other groups have no idea about what we Orthodox experience during our participation in the Eucharist since they have never experienced it. Our mystical experience during our reception of the Body and Blood of our Lord is beyond their comprehension in every way possible! If these other groups stopped communion, they were right to do so because grace is absent from them and their “communion” could very well become a source of transmitting illness. We, however, are inheritors of that faith once delivered to the saints, and know that this cannot happen with us! Why the bishop consulted with these aforementioned heretics so as to reach his verdict is beyond any of us! I wonder if he has ever read the epistles of St. Paul? It would perhaps be good for someone to remind him of the words of the Apostle in his second letter to the Corinthians which read:

Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness? What agreement does Christ have with Beliar? Or what does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore, come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; then I will welcome you, and I will be your father, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.”

(2 Cor 6:14-18)

We have now finally reached the issue of the currently-contested communion spoon. First, I should begin by applauding all the Greek people of Toronto for their resistance to the implementation of multiple spoons. Second, I lament the deplorable bishop who continuously mocks his flock saying that the people are uneducated and that they worship the holy spoon and not Christ. What he fails to see is that the people do not worship the holy spoon or treat it in any way as superior to the Body of Christ. Rather, they revere the traditions of the church and wish to uphold that which was delivered to them by their spiritual ancestors.

One of the accusations hurled against the communion spoon is that it was a later development and that historically, holy communion was delivered by a different means. Now, there is a truth to this but also a serious oversight. In the early church, the holy elements were given to the faithful in the same way that the clergy receive it in the sanctuary. The Body of our Lord was given into the hand of the recipient and afterwards they would be presented the holy chalice from where they would drink the Saviour’s Blood. St. Cyril of Jerusalem vividly describes the mode of receiving the holy elements in one of his catechetical homilies. He writes:

In approaching therefore, come *not with your wrists extended, or your fingers spread*; but make your left hand a throne for the right, as for that which is to receive a King. And having hollowed [=cupped] your palm, receive the Body of Christ, saying over it, Amen. So then after having carefully sanctified your eyes by the touch of the Holy Body, partake of it; *giving heed lest you lose any portion thereof; for whatever you lose, is evidently a loss to you as it were from one of your own members*. For tell me, if any one gave you grains of gold, would you not hold them

with all carefulness, being on your guard against losing any of them, and suffering loss? *Will you not then much more carefully keep watch, that not a crumb fall from you of what is more precious than gold and precious stones?*

Then after you have partaken of the Body of Christ, draw near also to the Cup of His Blood; *not stretching forth your hands*, but bending, and saying with an air of worship and reverence, Amen, sanctify yourself by partaking also of the Blood of Christ. And while the moisture is still upon your lips, touch it with your hands, and sanctify your eyes and brow and the other organs of sense. Then wait for the prayer, and give thanks unto God, who has accounted you worthy of so great mysteries.¹⁷

In addition to getting a glimpse into the early church's practice of administering Holy Communion, one comes to realize – through the saint's admonitions – that there were problems with this method of receiving. For the saint to give such injunctions allows for the conclusion that carelessness was in fact a real, consistent problem. One must realize that not everyone receiving communion in the early church was young and able-bodied. Very much like today, you had the elderly, those afflicted with various illnesses and disabilities, and young children all receiving the holy mysteries. Could you imagine how long, difficult and dangerous the process of administering Holy Communion must have been with such an array of persons all receiving during the liturgy? Dropping crumbs from the Body of our Lord (which would be dropping the Lord entirely given that He is fully present in each particle of the bread that has been consecrated!) must have been a more frequent phenomenon than we'd like to think of. The holy fathers, being vessels of the Holy Spirit, were guided to institute the use of the holy spoon to commune the lower clergy and the laity so as to avoid these serious problems. When was the practice instituted and by whom? These are certainly not easy questions to answer but we do have some historical evidence to help us get an idea. It has been suggested by some that this practice was first instituted in Constantinople by St. John Chrysostom after an episode occurred wherein a woman-follower of Macedonius conducted an impious act with the Body of the Lord.¹⁸ There are many individuals, mainly academics, who reject this position because there are no recorded testimonies from the late-fourth/early-fifth centuries that explicitly mention either the practice of intinction¹⁹ or the use of a spoon to administer the divine, *intincted* elements. However, one must consider the following. First, not everything that was done was recorded. Second, in antiquity, traditions spread slowly through the empire. While it may be difficult for anyone today, especially the younger generation, to envision an age wherein there were no iphones and tablets, no internet or any mode of instantaneous communication, the reality is that there was! If a practice – that was to gain popularity – was instituted by a holy father, it usually took decades for it to spread. Irrelevant of who first instituted this practice of administering with the holy spoon, the important thing is that by the eighth-century, it had received widespread acceptance in the entire eastern church. I will present you with just two texts to show you the antiquated nature of the practice.

¹⁷ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Homily* 23.21-22 (NPNF² 7:156).

¹⁸ J. Goar, *Ευχολόγιον Sive Rituale Graecorum Complectens Ritus et Ordines* (2nd ed.; Venice: Bartholomaei Javarina, 1730), note 179 (129-130); For a full account of what transpired in the event with the woman, see Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History* 8.5 (NPNF² 2:402-403).

¹⁹ The act of mingling together the consecrated bread and wine at the Eucharist so that the communicant receives both together.

In the *Narrationes* of the sixth-century St. Anastasius of Sinai, we have the earliest mention of the holy spoon to administer the sacrament of Holy Communion. In *Narrationes* 43 is related the following. A certain priest from Damascus, who had been accused of a serious carnal sin, went with a group to visit a stylite saint who lived outside of the city. At the pillar, the group celebrated the liturgy with the accused priest presiding. It reads the following:

...The reviled presbyter also went out to the righteous stylite, and, as a presbyter of the metropolis, for he was among first in rank, he offered up the holy oblation. And, as is the established rite, the deacon having invoked the communion hymn and saying, “Presbyters, approach,” the stylite lowered into the basket his holy chalice which he kept above [on his pillar], and they sent in it to him a holy portion [a particle of the Body] with the Precious Blood. Having brought up the Holy Communion (and) holding the holy chalice **and the spoon** [κογγλάριον], he [the stylite] hesitated to commune on account of the accusation he had heard against the celebrating presbyter.²⁰

There are three items of importance here. First, there is an explicit mention of the intinction of the holy elements since a particle of the Holy Body was placed into the chalice along with the Holy Blood. Second, there is a clear reference to the holy spoon which the stylite saint would have used to receive the holy elements that were mingled together in the chalice. While one may argue that the word used in the text, κογγλάριον, is not the traditional word used almost exclusively for the holy spoon throughout church history [λαβίς], they ought to remember that the item in question is being used to transfer the holy particle to the communicant and is therefore functionally tantamount to the holy spoon we use in church today, irrelevant of what it may be referred to in this text. The third and final point, while the saint does not give us a date for this event, we know that it must have occurred at some point up the time of his writing. The way he relates the story conveys the feeling that it happened prior to his time, but in the absence of any direct proof for this, we will maintain that it happened during his lifetime (better to err on the side of caution!). If this hypothesis is correct, then we know that at least in the second-half of the seventh-century, the practice of receiving the *intincted* holy elements via a spoon was well-established in Syria – the eastern frontier of the Byzantine Empire! Furthermore, given the distance between Constantinople and Syria and all the eparchies that exist in between, this narrative may be seen as implying that the use of the holy spoon to administer Holy Communion had widespread acceptance by this time, as the practice would have had to successfully travel eastward through the various jurisdictions before settling in the Syrian provinces.

The second source I will present here is not from an Orthodox work but rather from an unknown Miaphysite [=Monophysite/Anti-Chalcedonian] chronicle. In the late eighth-century historical work entitled, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius of Tell Mahre*,²¹ an interesting story is told of a dramatic episode between the Chalcedonian bishop of Amida, Abraham bar Kaili, and the Jacobite priest Cyrus. It reads:

²⁰ François Nau, ed. “Le texte grec des récits utiles à l’âme d’Anastase (le Sinaïte),” *Oriens Christianus* 3 (1903): 56-75, 78-79, esp. 62.

²¹ As this work was composed by an anonymous monk (known as *Pseudo-Dionysius*) who lived at the Zuqnīn monastery near Amida, it is also referred to as the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*.

One priest whose name was Cyrus, of the Ligin village, was arrested and compelled to receive the Eucharist. When he did not consent, they brought him into the city to the bishop. The latter shouted at him harshly and in indignation, saying: “Why do you not take the Eucharist?” He answered: “You are teaching me to suspect your Eucharist and not to take it, for the Eucharist given by such force is not the Eucharist!” Then the bishop swore: “You will not go far from here before you take the Eucharist!” But he swore: “I will absolutely not take from you the Eucharist of compulsion!” When the bishop gave orders and the Eucharist was brought, he commanded that they seize that priest and that *they fill a spoon and put it into his mouth*. Since the priest shut his mouth, *they were not able to put in the spoon*.²²

The chronicler dates this disturbing event to the year 525/6, when bishop Abraham bar Kaili was working hard, alongside Patriarch Ephrem of Antioch, to bring the opponents of the Fourth Ecumenical Council back into the church.²³ Despite the fact that the chronicler is promoting his own religiopolitical position through this story that he narrates, there are, nevertheless, two things that are of relevance for us. First, there was an event that occurred between the Jacobite priest Cyrus and the local Orthodox bishop in the year 525/6 that had clearly left a severely tainted impression in the heart of the Miaphysite community. Second, the recollection deals with the sufferings imposed on Cyrus by bishop Abraham. Specifically, there are multiple mentions of the *spoon* that bishop Abraham has his clergymen use to forcefully place the Eucharist into the mouth of Cyrus.²⁴ Given the number of times that the spoon is mentioned and its functional role is emphasized, one can conclude that at such an early date, the Orthodox in Syria had adopted the practice of using a spoon to impart the mysteries. Indeed, one can argue that the spoon may have been used in this case to forcefully place the holy elements into Cyrus’ mouth and does not, therefore, represent the liturgical practice of the day. If such an argument were true, why didn’t the Orthodox clergymen simply force the consecrated bread into his mouth with their hand and simply spill the Holy Blood into his mouth? It would have been more practical than, and just as successful as placing the Eucharistic elements into Cyrus’ mouth with a spoon. Furthermore, the chronicler could have simply stated that they forced the Eucharist into Cyrus but instead, he persistently repeats that a spoon was used to impart it. On account of all these points, it can be deduced that the practice of intinction was firmly rooted in Syria by the early sixth-century and a spoon was necessary to impart the Holy Mysteries to the people. The validity of the detail of the spoon in this narrative is made stronger if one considers that this is not some plain story or mundane historical episode but rather a cultural memory. As this story recounts the martyrdom of one of their own saints, an event that strengthened their own movement, the details would have been well-preserved both by the locals and the regional Miaphysite church. Aside the animosity which the author clearly had for the Orthodox, and of the questionable actions of the Orthodox, the author of this text reveals for us the antiquated practice of the communion spoon.

²² Amir Harrak, ed. & trans., *The Chronicle of Zuqnān Parts III and IV: A.D. 488-775* (vol. 36 of *Mediaeval Sources in Translation*; Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1999), 62.

²³ Unfortunately, while the intentions of the Orthodox may have been noble, history testifies to the less-than-ideal methods that were *sometimes* employed to coerce the Miaphysites in returning to the fold of the Church. The continuous tensions and wars between the Orthodox and the Miaphysites were ultimately responsible for the Copts and the Syrians turning their backs on the Byzantine forces and embracing their new, Arab overlords during the Arab conquest of the Middle East in the early seventh-century.


²⁴ The spoon for administering the Eucharist is mentioned continuously even in the subsequent section but I’ve omitted that portion due to the extreme violence that is portrayed.

I could present you with more ancient documents that contain similar testimonies but given that these two examples suffice to show the ancient practice and its widespread acceptance as early as the sixth-century, it would be superfluous to do so. Perhaps you may now ask what so many here in Toronto have been asking about from the onset of the controversy – is it not possible to alter the method of administering the Holy Sacraments since it underwent change once before? Before I give you the answer, we must all understand that the Spirit of God guides all things in the church! Our Saviour made this very promise to us when He told His disciples, “But the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things” (John 14:26). We saw that in the early church there was a concern about the method by which the Holy Eucharist was being administered on account of the natural dangers involved in such a delivery. St. John Chrysostom was inspired by that very Spirit of God which rested in him to implement the use of a spoon so as to avoid the common dangers of dropping or spilling any of the holy contents. Should this be considered some arbitrary move on the part of one of the greatest fathers of the church? A random act of a father in whose ear the Apostle Paul would speak daily to explain his epistles to? An incidental move of a father who is considered a universal teacher of the church? Absolutely not! As proof for this we have the very fact that at some point, the entire church of Christ on earth came to fully adopt this practice. Such a thing could not have occurred under any circumstances had the change not been inspired by the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, as nothing is coincidental in the church, it was in God’s divine plan for the holy spoon to be used in administering the spiritual coal – our Lord Himself – to us. This was foreshadowed in the Old Testament, in the vision of the Prophet Isaiah. It reads:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphim were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one cried to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.” The posts of the door shook at the voices of those who cried, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! I am undone, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar. And he laid it upon my mouth, and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips, and your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged.”

(Isaiah 6:1-7)

Keeping all these points in mind, we must ask ourselves, what warrants another change in the practice? Is it to somehow better safeguard the holy elements during their administration? This could not be the case since the grace of God inspired the fathers to rectify the situation in the most perfect of ways. That their choice was God-inspired is made especially evident when one considers that the method they chose was foretold of in the Old Testament and fulfills the vision of Isaiah. What then is it that would justify a change in the practice? Unfortunately, those in Toronto changed the method and use multiple spoons simply to appease the governmental authorities of this city! This is where things get a bit complicated. On the one hand, we are expected to model, law-abiding citizens and follow all precautionary measures implemented by the local authorities. On the other hand, we cannot alter the dogmas, traditions and practices of the church

to appease these authorities, as then we would be guilty of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. This is not an exaggeration by any means but rather the simple truth. The glorious martyrs of the church are our model for this balancing between worldly authority and the faith. St. George and St. Demetrius were both high-ranking officials in the Roman army and faithfully served their emperor and empire with honour and diligence. Yet, when they were forced into choosing between either the law of the land (which entailed denying Christ and worshipping the idols) and living, or preserving the faith and dying, they willfully and graciously chose suffering and death! The saints were obedient to their sentences and neither stirred the masses to revolt nor preached against the government in any way. Actually, St. Ignatius the Godbearer in his letter to the Romans exhorts the faithful of the capital to not interfere with his upcoming martyrdom in the least of ways. He says, "I am voluntarily dying for God if you do not hinder me. I exhort you not to be an inopportune favor to me. Let me be food for the wild beasts, through which I can attain to God."²⁵ He accepts the sentence and furthermore asks that all the faithful respect the lot fallen to him and allow him to freely die for Christ! What about the New Martyrs of the Turkish yoke? Did anyone ever speak out against the inhumane taxing or against the authorities in general? No. Rather, they fulfilled all their earthly obligations up until they were asked to choose between this life or the next. The City of Toronto did not go around searching who is giving Holy Communion and who is not. It was certain bishops that alone caused the commotion which in turn awoke a sleeping giant that now threatens the greatest mystery of our faith – communion with our Lord Himself through the reception of His Body and Blood! While the bylaws are not clear, let us say for the purposes of our discussion that they do in fact forbid the act of communion. There is a very simple solution...the churches can simply refrain from administering the Holy Sacrament until the restrictions are lifted! This way, the authorities are obeyed (even though this is a clear infringement of our religious rights!) and the holy traditions are upheld. 

The people of Toronto were right to cause an uproar because they saw the blasphemy in the action of using multiple spoons. In changing the method of administering the Holy Eucharist to appease the authorities, the Greek church in Canada basically told the entire world that Covid, or any virus for that matter, can be transmitted in the act of Holy Communion. This action of theirs allows for no other conclusion other than they do not believe the bread and wine in the cup as being the very Life-giving Body and Blood of our Lord and God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Irrelevant of the excuses they present, and they are quite weak, their actions render them guilty before Divine Justice at the Second Coming of our Lord! If they admit to having changed the practice for the sake of adhering to the law of the land, then they do not follow the royal path of the Apostles, Fathers and Martyrs! If they claim they changed the tradition for the sake of "protecting" the communicant, then they are guilty of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit since – in the fashion of the Protestants and the Evangelicals – they do not believe the bread and wine to be the very Body and Blood of our Lord. If they allege that the holy elements do not transmit disease but the spoon can as it is not part of the Body or Blood of Christ, then they have not understood that the One who rests in the holy chalice is the source of all life and sanctification, and makes holy not only His rational animals but also inanimate objects such as the Holy Table, the chalice and paten, the icons, water, oil, bread, etc., which in turn convey God's grace to us for our further sanctification!²⁶

²⁵ Sparks, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 99.

²⁶ It would also do them some good to read the Book of Daniel (Chapter 5) to see what happened to King Belshazzar and his kingdom when he brought out the gold and silver goblets from the treasury (that had been taken from the Jerusalem Temple), and had his harlots drink from them. If God destroyed an entire kingdom on account of the

If they say that it is in the power of the bishop to determine the method of giving out the Eucharist, then they do not listen to the Apostle Paul who commands:

Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which you have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle. (2 Thes. 2:15)

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother that walks disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received from us. (2 Thes. 3:6)

Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you. (1 Cor. 11:2)

Those things, which you have learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you. (Phil. 4:9)

As you could see, a novel and blasphemous heresy has entered the church which attacks not only dogma, but also the ancient practice of how we commune. St. Vincent of Lerins speaks clearly as to what we ought to do if a new teaching should appear in the church. He writes:

What, if some novel contagion seeks to infect not merely an insignificant portion of the Church, but the whole? Then it will be his care to cleave to antiquity, which at this day cannot possibly be seduced by any fraud of novelty. But what, if in antiquity itself there be found error on the part of two or three men, or at any rate of a city or even of a province? Then it will be his care by all means, to prefer the decrees, if such there be, of an ancient General Council to the rashness and ignorance of a few. But what, if some error should spring up on which no such decree is found to bear? Then he must collate and consult and interrogate the opinions of the ancients, of those, namely, who, though living in divers times and places, yet continuing in the communion and faith of the one Catholic Church, stand forth acknowledged and approved authorities: ***and whatsoever he shall ascertain to have been held, written, taught, not by one or two of these only, but by all, equally, with one consent, openly, frequently, persistently, that he must understand that he himself also is to believe without any doubt or hesitation.***²⁷

Do you see the system of checks-and-balances that the Church has in place to protect us? If decrees do not exist concerning a certain matter, then one must examine what the approved, ancient authorities [=the holy fathers] taught. The saint, furthermore, exhorts us to accept and uphold what was taught by all the holy fathers at all times. While the saint refers to dogmas and teachings, his statements can also be applied to the traditions and practices of our church for they are part of our living faith (since they are intertwined with the dogmas of the church). Thus, we can see St.

disrespect shown towards goblets that were used in the sacred services of the Temple during Old Testament times, wherein everything was but a shadow of the realities to come, what will the consequences be for those who desecrate the sacred vessels that house and administer the Body and Blood of Him who revealed all things to us and redeemed us from the curse of the Law?

²⁷ Vincent of Lerins, *The Commonitory* 3.7-8 (NPNF² 11:132-133).

Vincent exhorting us to uphold that which was *practiced* by all the holy fathers at all times. In the midst of the current chaos, all one has to do is look at church history and the answer rests there. After the use of the holy spoon became widespread in all the churches, all the holy fathers in every part of the world used it. There are no historical incidents that tell us of the tradition ever stopping in any place for any reason. Thus, it was practiced by all the fathers at all times! This passage of St. Vincent, furthermore, confirms for us what we previously examined with regards what the consecrated bread and wine truly are. All the fathers of the entire church at all times upheld that the holy elements are the very Body and Blood of our Lord!

Please forgive the verbosity of my letter, but this is not a small matter. Many Orthodox Christians today, myself, first and foremost, have become “couch” Christians. We get comfortable with ourselves and stop putting in any effort. We are lax in our fasting, too tired for our prayers, self-righteous in our confession and attitude, mentally-preoccupied with worldly matters when in church, too busy for church, would rather attend a sports event than a church service, etc. Yet, we have this expectation that God owes us everything! Well, I have news for us... We owe everything to our Lord! While He promises us eternal life if we adhere to His commandments, He owes us nothing! I could not bear to keep silent on the matter knowing that the Holy Eucharist, the very Lord Himself, the heart and soul of the Christian’s existence, is under attack. I feel as though if I had not written to you my thoughts, I would be a participant in the iniquities of those who dared to do such actions. As Metropolitan Paul of Nairobi told me after his ordination, “You gave me a wish to uphold that faith ‘once delivered to the saints’ and I thank you for this. But know that you are just as responsible as me or any other bishop in upholding the faith. Just because you are a layperson does not make your responsibility any less.” I have never forgotten these words which served as my inspiration for writing to you on this matter.

In closing, I will simply reiterate the need for us to uphold the faith and traditions which we have received from the church. It is a moral imperative! St. Vincent admonishes us to do so when he writes:

Moreover, in the Catholic Church itself, all possible care must be taken, that we hold that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all. For that is truly and in the strictest sense “Catholic,” which, as the name itself and the reason of the thing declare, comprehends all universally. This rule we shall observe if we follow *universality, antiquity, consent*. We shall follow *universality* if we confess that one faith to be true, which the whole Church throughout the world confesses; *antiquity*, if we in no wise depart from those interpretations which it is manifest were notoriously held by our holy ancestors and fathers; *consent*, in like manner, if in antiquity itself we adhere to the consentient definitions and determinations of all, or at the least of almost all priests and doctors.²⁸

Finally, as the issue at hand revolves around the Holy Eucharist, I think it fitting to end my letter with a passage from St. Cyril of Alexandria’s *Third Letter to Nestorius*.

Proclaiming the death according to the flesh of the only begotten Son of God, that is, of Jesus Christ, and confessing his Resurrection from the dead and his Ascension

²⁸ Vincent of Lerins, *The Commonitory* 2.6 (NPNF² 11:132).

into heaven, we celebrate the unbloody sacrifice in the churches, and we thus approach the spiritual blessings and are made holy, becoming partakers of the holy flesh and of the precious blood of Christ, the Savior of us all. And we do this, not as men receiving common flesh, far from it, nor truly the flesh of a man sanctified and conjoined to the Word according to a unity of dignity, or as one having had a divine indwelling, but as the truly life-giving and very own flesh of the Word himself. For, being life according to nature as God, when he was made one with his own flesh, He proclaimed it life-giving. Wherefore even if he may say to us, “Amen, I say to you: Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood,” we shall not conclude that his flesh is of some one as of a man who is one of us, (for how will the flesh of a man be life-giving according to its own nature?), but as being truly the very flesh of the Son who was both made man and named man for us... We have been taught to have these thoughts by the holy apostles and evangelists, and by all the divinely inspired Scripture, and by the true confession of the saintly Fathers. It is necessary that your reverence also consent to all these and agree to every one without deceit.²⁹

I think you'll agree with me that this is perhaps the most concise and powerful statement ever written on the Holy Eucharist. St. Cyril may have initially directed this injunction towards Nestorius, but it is also aimed towards us! The voice of the great pillar of faith passes through time and space and exhorts us, clergy and laity alike, to hold on to all which has been delivered to us by the Apostles, by Scripture, and by the Holy Fathers. Let us, therefore, preserve the precious pearl that was delivered to us by the Fathers, by the Apostles, and by our Lord Himself and always maintain in our hearts the Orthodox understanding of Who it is we receive in the Holy Eucharist. Only then will we be able to cry out with the children, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord” and triumphally chant in our hearts and souls, “One is Holy, One is Lord, Jesus Christ to the Glory of God the Father! Amen!”

Kindly convey my love to everyone there. We'll talk soon!

With love,

Your brother,

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²⁹ John I. McEnerney, trans. *St. Cyril of Alexandria: Letters 1-50* (vol. 76 of *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*; ed. Thomas P. Halton et al.; Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1987), 86-87, 90.