

GREAT LENT

JOURNEY TO PASCHA



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Chapter Three

THE LITURGY OF THE PRESANCTIFIED GIFTS⁸

1. THE TWO MEANINGS OF COMMUNION

Of all liturgical rules pertaining to Lent, one is of crucial importance for its understanding, and being peculiar to Orthodoxy, is in many ways a key to its liturgical tradition. It is the rule which forbids the celebration of the Divine Liturgy on weekdays of Lent. The rubrics are clear: under no circumstances can the Divine Liturgy be celebrated in Lent Monday through Friday, with one exception—the Feast of the Annunciation, if it falls on one of these days. On Wednesdays and Fridays, however, a special evening service of Communion is prescribed; it is called the *Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts*.⁹

So radically has the meaning of this rule been forgotten that in many parishes, especially those which for a long time were exposed to Western and Latin influences, it is simply not obeyed and the purely Latin practice of the daily—"private" or "memorial"—liturgies is continued throughout the whole Lent. But even where it is obeyed, no effort is made to go beyond a formal compliance with "rubrics" and to understand their spiritual significance, the deep "logic" of Lent. It is important, therefore, that we explain in a more detailed way the meaning of this rule

which transcends the framework of Lent and enlightens the entire liturgical tradition of Orthodoxy.

In very general terms, we have here the expression and the application of one fundamental liturgical principle: the incompatibility of the Eucharist with fasting. To understand, however, the meaning of that principle, one must begin not with fasting but with the Eucharist. In the Orthodox tradition, deeply different in this from the eucharistic theology and practice of Western Catholicism, the Eucharist has always preserved its festal and joyful character. It is first of all the sacrament of Christ's coming and presence among His disciples, and therefore the celebration—in a very real sense—of His Resurrection. Indeed it is the coming and presence of Christ at the Eucharist that is for the Church the "proof" of His Resurrection. It is the joy and the burning of hearts experienced by the disciples when on the way to Emmaus Christ revealed Himself to them "in the breaking of bread" (Lk. 24:13-35) that is the eternal source of the Church's "experiential" and "existential" knowledge of the Resurrection. No one saw the actual Resurrection and yet the disciples believed in it, not because someone taught them so, but because they saw the Risen Lord when "the doors being shut" He appeared among them and partook of their meal.

The Eucharist is still the same coming and presence, the same joy and "burning of heart," the same transrational yet absolute knowledge that the Risen Lord makes Himself known "in the breaking of bread." And so great is this joy that for the early Church the Day of the Eucharist was not *one* of the days but the *Lord's Day*—a day already beyond time, for in the Eucharist the Kingdom of God was already "breaking through." At the Last Supper, Christ Himself told His disciples that He bestowed upon them the Kingdom so that they might "eat and drink at His table in His Kingdom." Being the presence of the Risen Lord who ascended into heaven and sits on the right hand of the Father, the Eucharist is, therefore, the partaking of the Kingdom which is "joy and peace in the Holy Spirit." Communion is the "food of immortality," the "heavenly

bread," and approaching the Holy Table is truly ascending to heaven. Eucharist is thus *the* feast of the Church or, better still, the Church as the feast, as rejoicing in Christ's presence, as anticipating the eternal joy of the Kingdom of God. Every time the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she is "at home"—in heaven; she is ascending where Christ has ascended in order to make us "eat and drink at His table in His Kingdom. . . ." One understands then why the Eucharist is incompatible with fasting, for fasting (we shall see below) is the main expression of the Church as still in a state of pilgrimage, as being only on her way to the heavenly Kingdom. And "the sons of the Kingdom," Christ said, "cannot fast while the Bridegroom is with them" (Matt. 9:15).

But why then, one may ask, is Communion still distributed during fasting days at the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts? Does it not contradict the principle enunciated above? To answer this question, we must now consider the second aspect of the Orthodox understanding of Communion, its meaning as the source and the sustaining power of our spiritual effort. If, as we have just seen, Holy Communion is the fulfillment of all our efforts, the goal toward which we strive, the ultimate joy of our Christian life, it is *also* and of necessity the source and *beginning* of our spiritual effort itself, the divine gift which makes it possible for us to know, to desire, and to strive for a "more perfect communion in the day without evening" of God's Kingdom. For the Kingdom, although it has come, although it comes in the Church, is yet to be fulfilled and consummated at the end of time when God will fill all things with Himself. We know it, and we partake of it in anticipation; we partake *now* of the Kingdom which is still *to come*. We foresee and foretaste its glory and blessedness but we are still on earth, and our entire earthly existence is thus a long and often painful journey toward the ultimate Lord's Day. On this journey we need help and support, strength and comfort, for the "Prince of this world" has not yet surrendered; on the contrary, knowing his defeat by Christ, he stages a last and violent

battle against God to tear away from Him as many as possible. So difficult is this fight, so powerful the "gates of Hades," that Christ Himself tells us about the "narrow way" and the few that are capable of following it. And in this fight, our main help is precisely the Body and Blood of Christ, that "essential food" which keeps us spiritually alive and, in spite of all temptations and dangers, makes us Christ's followers. Thus, having partaken of Holy Communion, we pray:

...let these gifts be for me the healing of soul and body, the repelling of every adversary, the illumining of the eyes of my heart, the peace of my spiritual powers, a faith unashamed, a love unfeigned, the fulfilling of wisdom, the observing of Thy commandments, the receiving of Thy divine grace, and the attaining of Thy Kingdom . . .

...consume me not, O my Creator, but instead enter into my members, my veins, my heart . . . may every evil thing, every carnal passion flee from me as from a fire as I become Thy tabernacle through communion. . . .

And if Lent and fasting mean the intensification of that fight, it is because—according to the Gospel—we then are face to face with evil and all its power. It is then, therefore, that we especially need the help and the power of that Divine Fire; hence, the special lenten Communion with the Presanctified Gifts, i.e., the Gifts consecrated at the Eucharist on the preceding Sunday and kept on the altar for distribution on Wednesday and Friday evenings.

There is no celebration of the Eucharist on fasting days because the celebration is one continuous movement of joy; but there is the continuous presence of the fruits of the Eucharist in the Church. Just as the "visible" Christ has ascended into heaven yet is invisibly present in the world, just as the Pascha is celebrated once a year yet its rays illumine the whole life of the Church, just as the Kingdom of God is yet to come but is already in the midst of us, so too with the Eucharist. As the sacrament and the celebration of the Kingdom, as the feast of the Church, it is incompatible with fast and is not celebrated during Lent; as the grace and the power of the Kingdom

which are at work in the world, as our supplier of the "essential food" and the weapon of our spiritual fight, it is at the very center of the fast, it is indeed the heavenly manna that keeps us alive in our journey through the desert of Lent.

2. THE TWO MEANINGS OF FASTING

At this point, the next question arises: if Eucharist is incompatible with fasting, why then is its celebration still prescribed on Saturdays and Sundays of Lent, and this without "breaking" the fast? The canons of the Church seem here to contradict one another.¹⁰ While some of them forbid fasting on Sundays, some others forbid the breaking of the fast on any of the forty days. This contradiction, however, is only apparent, because the two rules which seem to be mutually exclusive refer in fact to two different meanings of the term fasting. To understand this is important because we discover here the Orthodox "philosophy of fasting" essential for our whole spiritual effort.

There are indeed two ways or modes of fasting rooted both in Scripture and Tradition, and which correspond to two distinct needs or states of man. The first one can be termed *total* fast for it consists of total abstinence from food and drink. One can define the second one as *ascetical* fast for it consists mainly in abstinence from certain foods and in substantial reduction of the dietary regimen. The *total* fast, by its very nature, is of short duration and is usually limited to one day or even a part of one day. From the very beginning of Christianity, it has been understood as a state of *preparation* and expectation—the state of spiritual concentration on that which is about to come. Physical hunger corresponds here to the spiritual expectation of fulfillment, the "opening up" of the entire human being to the approaching joy. Therefore, in the liturgical tradition of the Church, we find this total fast as the last and ultimate preparation for a great feast, for a decisive spiritual event. We find it, for example, on the eves of Christmas and

Epiphany, and above everything else it is the Eucharistic Fast, the essential mode of our preparation for the messianic banquet at Christ's table in His Kingdom. Eucharist is always preceded by this total fast which may vary in its duration but which for the Church constitutes a necessary condition for Holy Communion. Many people misunderstand this rule, seeing here nothing but an archaic prescription and wondering why an empty stomach should serve as a prerequisite for receiving the Sacrament. Reduced to such a physical and grossly "physiological" understanding, viewed as mere discipline, this rule, of course, loses its meaning. Thus it is no wonder that Roman Catholicism which long ago replaced the spiritual understanding of fasting with a juridical and disciplinary one (cf. for example, the power to "dispense" from fasting as if it is God and not man who needed fasting!) has nowadays virtually abolished the "Eucharistic" fast. In its true meaning, however, the total fast is the main expression of that rhythm of preparation and fulfillment by which the Church lives, for she is both the expectation of Christ in "this world," and the coming of this world into the "world to come." We may add here that in the early Church this total fast had a name taken from the military vocabulary; it was called *statio*, which meant a garrison in the state of alarm and mobilization. The Church keeps a "watch"—she expects the Bridegroom and waits for Him in readiness and joy. Thus, the total fast is not only a fast of the members of the Church; it is the Church herself as fast, as expectation of Christ who comes to her in the Eucharist, who shall come in glory at the consummation of all time.

Quite different are the spiritual connotations of the second type of fasting which we defined as *ascetical*. Here the purpose for fasting is to liberate man from the unlawful tyranny of the flesh, of that surrender of the spirit to the body and its appetites which is the tragic result of sin and the original fall of man. It is only by a slow and patient effort that man discovers that he "does not live by bread alone"—that he restores in himself the primacy of the spirit. It is of necessity and by its very nature a

long and sustained effort. The *time* factor is essential for it takes time to uproot and to heal the common and universal disease which men have come to consider as their "normal" state. The art of ascetical fasting had been refined and perfected within the monastic tradition and then was accepted by the entire Church. It is the application to man of Christ's words that the demonic powers which enslave man cannot be overcome but by "prayer and fasting." It is rooted in the example of Christ Himself who fasted forty days and then met Satan face to face and in this encounter reversed the surrender of man to "bread alone," thus inaugurating man's liberation. The Church has set apart four periods for this ascetical fast: the seasons before Easter, Christmas, the Feast of SS. Peter and Paul, and the Dormition of the Mother of God. Four times a year she invites us to purify and liberate ourselves from the dominion of the flesh by the holy therapy of fasting, and each time the success of the therapy depends precisely on the application of certain basic rules among which the "unbrokenness" of fasting, its continuity in time, is the major one.

It is this distinction between the two modes of fasting that helps us to understand the apparent contradiction between the canons regulating the fast. The canon forbidding fasting on Sundays means literally that on that day fasting is "broken" first of all by the Eucharist itself, which fulfills the expectation, and being the goal of all fasting, is also its end. It means that Sunday, the Lord's Day, transcends Lent as it transcends time. It means in other terms that Sunday, the Day of the Kingdom, does not belong to that time whose meaning as pilgrimage or journey is expressed precisely in Lent; Sunday thus remains the day not of fasting but of spiritual joy.

But while breaking the *total* fast, the Eucharist does *not* break the "ascetical" fast which, as we have explained, requires by its very nature the *continuity* of effort. This means that the dietary regulations which govern the ascetical fasting remain in force on lenten Sundays. To put it in concrete terms, meats and fats are forbidden, but only because of the "psycho-somatic" character of ascetical

fasting, because the Church knows that the body, if it is to be "subdued," must undergo a lengthy and patient discipline of abstinence. In Russia, for example, monks never ate meat; but this did not mean that they fasted on Easter or any other great feast. One can say that a certain degree of ascetical fasting belongs to Christian life as such and should be kept by Christians. But the understanding of Easter, alas so common, as almost an obligation to overeat and overdrink is a sad and ugly caricature of the true spirit of Pascha! It is tragic indeed that in some churches people are discouraged from partaking of Holy Communion at Easter and the beautiful words of St. John Chrysostom's Paschal Sermon—"the table is full-laden, feast ye all sumptuously! The calf is fatted; let no one go hungry away"—are probably understood as referring *exclusively* to the rich contents of Easter baskets. The Feast is a spiritual reality and to be properly kept it requires as much sobriety and spiritual concentration as the fast.

It must be clearly understood, therefore, that there is no contradiction between the Church's insistence that we maintain abstinence from certain foods on lenten Sundays and the condemnation by her of fasting on the day of the Eucharist. It is also clear that only by following both rules, by keeping simultaneously the Eucharistic rhythm of preparation and fulfillment and the sustained effort of the "soul-saving forty days" can we truly achieve the spiritual goals of Lent. All this leads us now to the special place in lenten worship of the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts.

3. THE EVENING COMMUNION

The first and essential characteristic of the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is that it is an *evening service*.¹¹ From the formal point of view, it is a service of Communion following Vespers. At the early stages of its development it was deprived of the solemnity it has today so that its connection with the daily evening service was even more obvious. The first question, therefore, concerns the Vespers

character of the Liturgy. We know already that the Eucharist in the Orthodox tradition is always preceded by a period of total fasting. This general principle explains the fact that the Eucharist, different in this from all other services, has no *fixed hour* of its own, for the time of its celebration depends primarily on the nature of the day on which it is to be celebrated. Thus, on a great feast the *Typikon* prescribes a very early Eucharist because the Vigil fulfills the function of fasting or preparation. On a smaller feast with no Vigil, the Eucharist is moved to a later hour so that—theoretically, at least—on a weekday it ought to take place at Noon. Finally, on the days when a strict or total fasting is prescribed for the duration of the day, Holy Communion—the “breaking” of the fast—is received in the evening. The meaning of all these rubrics, which unfortunately are completely forgotten and neglected today, is very simple: the Eucharist, being always the end of preparation, the fulfillment of expectation, has the time of its celebration, or *kairos*, correlated to the length of the total fast. The latter either takes the form of an All-Night Vigil Service, or is to be kept individually. And, since during Lent Wednesdays and Fridays are days of total abstinence, the Communion Service, which is the fulfillment of that fast, becomes an evening celebration. The same logic applies to the *eves* of Christmas and Epiphany, also days of total fasting, and on which therefore the Eucharist is celebrated after Vespers. If, however, the eve of these feasts falls on Saturday or Sunday, which in the Orthodox tradition are Eucharistic days, the “total” abstinence is advanced to Friday. Another example: if Annunciation falls on a weekday of Lent, the celebration of the Eucharist is prescribed for after Vespers. These rules which to many seem archaic and irrelevant today, reveal in fact the fundamental principle of Orthodox liturgical spirituality: the Eucharist as always the end of preparation and fulfillment of expectation; and the days of total abstinence and fast being the most intense expressions of the Church as preparation, they are “crowned” with the evening Communion.

On Wednesdays and Fridays of Lent the Church prescribes complete abstinence from food until sunset. These

days, therefore, are selected as appropriate for lenten Communion which, as we said above, is one of the essential means or "weapons" for the lenten spiritual fight. Days of intensified spiritual and physical effort, they are illumined by the expectation of the forthcoming Communion with the Body and Blood of Christ, and this expectation sustains us in our effort, spiritual as well as physical; it makes it an effort aimed at the joy of the evening Communion. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence comes my help!"

And then, in the light of the approaching encounter with Christ, how serious and how grave becomes the day I have to spend in the usual occupations; how the most trivial and insignificant things, which fill my daily existence and to which I am so accustomed that I pay no attention to them, acquire a new significance. Every word I say, every act I perform, every thought passing through my mind becomes important, unique, irreversible, and either each is "in line" with my expectation of Christ or in opposition to it. Time itself, which we usually "waste" so easily, is revealed in its true meaning as the time of either salvation or damnation. Our whole life becomes that which it was made by Christ's coming into this world—ascension to Him, or running away from Him into darkness and destruction.

Nowhere indeed is the true meaning of fasting and Lent revealed better or fuller than on the days of the evening Communion—the meaning not only of Lent but of the Church and of Christian life in their totality. In Christ, all of life, all of time, history, the cosmos itself have become expectation, preparation, hope, ascension. Christ has come; the Kingdom is yet to come! In "this world" we can only anticipate the glory and joy of the Kingdom, yet as Church we leave this world in spirit and meet at the Lord's table where in the secret of our heart we contemplate His uncreated light and splendor. This anticipation is given to us, however, that we might desire and love the Kingdom and long for a more perfect communion with God in the forthcoming "day without evening." And each time, in anticipation, having

tasted of the "peace and joy of the Kingdom," we return into this world and find ourselves again on the long, narrow, and difficult road. From the feast we return to the life of fast—to preparation and waiting. We wait for the evening of this world which will make us partakers of the "gladsome radiance of God's holy glory," of the *beginning* that will have no end.

4. THE ORDER OF SERVICE

In the early Church, when Christians were very few and well "tested," there existed the practice of distributing the consecrated Gifts to the faithful at the end of the Sunday Eucharist for their daily individual Communion at home; the corporate and joyful Eucharist of the Lord's Day was thus "extended" to the totality of time and life. This practice, however, was discontinued when the growth in Church membership, the transformation of Christianity into a mass religion, inevitably lowered the spiritual intensity characteristic of the first Christian generations and forced the Church authorities to take measures against a possible misuse of the Holy Gifts. In the West, this led to the appearance of the daily Eucharist—one of the characteristic features of the Western liturgical tradition and piety but also the source of a significant change in the very understanding of the Eucharist. Once the Eucharist was deprived of its "festal" character and ceased to be the feast of the Church, becoming an integral part of the daily cycle, the door was opened for the so-called "private" masses which in turn altered more and more all other elements of worship. In the East, however, the initial eschatological, Kingdom-centered, joyful understanding of the Eucharist was never given up and, in theory at least, the Divine Liturgy even today is not a mere part of the daily cycle. Its celebration is always a feast, and the day of its celebration always acquires a spiritual connotation of the Lord's Day. As we have stressed time and again, it is incompatible with fast and is not served on weekdays of Lent. Thus, once the daily Communion at

home was discontinued, it was not replaced in the East with the daily celebration of the Eucharist, but gave birth to a new form of Communion with the Gifts reserved from the Sunday or "festal" celebration. It is very likely that at first this "Presanctified" service was not limited to Great Lent but was common to all fasting seasons of the Church. But then, as the number of feasts—major and minor—increased and made the celebration of the Eucharist much more frequent, the Presanctified Liturgy became a characteristic liturgical feature of Great Lent, and little by little under the influence of the lenten liturgical spirit, of that "bright sadness" of which we spoke, it acquired that unique beauty and solemnity which make it the spiritual climax of lenten worship.

The service begins with Great Vespers, although the opening doxology is "eucharistic"—"Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..."—and puts the entire celebration in the perspective of the Kingdom which is the spiritual perspective of Lent and fasting. The Evening Psalm (Ps. 104)—"Bless the Lord O my soul..."—is chanted as usual, followed by the Great Litany and the 18th portion or *kathisma* of the *Psalter*. This *kathisma* is prescribed for every weekday of Lent. It consists of Psalms 120-134, called "Songs of Degrees." They were sung on the steps of the Temple of Jerusalem as a processional—as the song of the people assembling for worship, preparing themselves to meet their God: "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord..." (Ps. 122:1). "Behold, bless ye the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord, which by night stand in the house of the Lord. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the Lord. The Lord that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion" (Ps. 134).

While these Psalms are chanted, the celebrant takes the consecrated Bread preserved from the previous Sunday and places it on the paten. Then, having transferred the paten from the altar to the Table of Oblation, he pours wine into the chalice and covers the Gifts as is usually done before the Liturgy. It is noteworthy that all this is performed with

the priest "saying nothing." This rubric stresses the pragmatic character of these actions, for all Eucharistic prayers have been said at the Sunday Eucharist.

After the Entrance and the evening hymn "O gladsome radiance . . .," the two appointed Old Testament lessons from the Books of *Genesis* and *Proverbs* are read. A particular rite accompanies the reading, taking us back to the time when Lent was still centered on the preparation of the catechumen for Baptism. While the lesson from *Genesis* is read, a burning candle is placed on the Book of the Gospel on the altar, and after the lesson the priest takes the candle and the censer and with them blesses the congregation, proclaiming: "The light of Christ illumines all men." The candle is the liturgical symbol of Christ—the Light of the World. Its being placed on the Gospel during the reading of the Old Testament signifies that all prophecies are fulfilled in Christ who opened His disciples' minds "that they might understand the scriptures." The Old Testament leads to Christ just as Lent leads to the baptismal illumination. The light of Baptism integrating the catechumens with Christ will open their minds for the understanding of Christ's teaching.

After the second Old Testament reading, the rubrics prescribe the singing of five verses from the Evening Psalm (Ps. 141)—beginning with verse 2: "Let my prayer be set before Thee as incense . . ." Since Psalm 141 was already sung at its usual place—before the Entrance—one may inquire about the meaning of this second singing of the same verses. One may presume on the basis of certain indications that this practice goes back to the earliest stages in the development of the Presanctified Liturgy. It is probable that at the time when this Liturgy had not yet acquired its present solemnity and complexity but consisted simply in the distribution of Communion at Vespers, these verses were sung as the Communion hymn. Today, however, they form a beautiful penitential introduction to the second part of the service—the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts proper.

This second part begins with the Liturgy of the Catechumens—i.e., a set of special prayers and petitions

for those who are preparing themselves for Baptism. At "mid-Lent"—on Wednesday of the Fourth Week—special prayers and petitions are added for the *photizomenoi*—"those ready for illumination." Once more the origin and the initial character of Lent as preparation for Baptism and Easter are stressed.

The catechumens having been dismissed, two prayers introduce the "Liturgy of the Faithful." In the first, we ask for the purification of our soul, body, and senses:

Let our eyes have no part in any evil sight;
 Let our hearing be inaccessible to all idle words;
 Let our tongues be purged from unseemly speech;
 Purify our lips which praise Thee, O Lord;
 Make our hands to abstain from evil deeds
 And to work only such things as are acceptable unto Thee,
 Strengthening all our members and our minds by Thy grace

The second prayer prepares us for the Entrance of the consecrated Gifts:

For behold, His most pure Body and His life-giving Blood,
 Entering at this present hour,
 Are about to be spread forth upon this mystical altar,
 Invisibly escorted by a great multitude of the heavenly host.
 Enable us to partake of them in blamelessness,
 That the eyes of our understanding being enlightened thereby,
 We may become children of the light and of the day
 Through the gift of Thy Christ

Then comes the most solemn moment of the whole service: the transfer of the Holy Gifts to the altar. Externally this entrance is similar to the Great Entrance of the Eucharist but its liturgical and spiritual meaning is of course totally different. In the full Eucharistic service, we have here the Offertory procession: the Church brings herself, her life, the life of her members, and indeed that of the entire creation as sacrifice to God, as re-enactment of the one full and perfect sacrifice of Christ. Remembering Christ, she remembers all those whose life He assumed for their redemption and salvation. At the Presanctified Liturgy, there is no offering, no sacrifice, no Eucharist, no Consecration, but the mystery of Christ's presence in the Church is being revealed and manifested!

It is useful to note here that the Orthodox liturgical tradition, different in this from the Latin practice, has no adoration of the Eucharistic Gifts outside Communion. But the preservation of Gifts as *reserved sacrament*, used for Communion for the sick and other emergency situations, is a self-evident tradition which has never been questioned in the Orthodox Church. We mentioned already that in the early Church there even existed a practice of private "self-communion" at home. We have thus the permanent *presence* of the Gifts and the *absence* of their adoration. By maintaining simultaneously these two attitudes, the Orthodox Church has avoided the dangerous sacramental rationalism of the West. Moved by the desire to affirm—against the Protestants—the objectivity of Christ's "real presence" in the Eucharistic Gifts, the Latins have, in fact, separated adoration from Communion. By doing this, they have opened the door to a dangerous spiritual deviation from the real purpose of the Eucharist and indeed of the Church herself. For the purpose of the Church and of her sacraments is not to "sacralize" portions and elements of matter and by making them sacred or holy to oppose them to the profane ones. Instead her purpose is to make man's life communion with God, knowledge of God, ascension toward God's Kingdom; the Eucharistic Gifts are the *means* of that communion, the food of that new life, but they are not an end in themselves. For the Kingdom of God is "not food and drink but joy and peace in the Holy Spirit." Just as in this world food fulfills its function only when it is consumed and thus transformed into life, the new life of the world to come is given to us through the partaking of the "food of immortality." The Orthodox Church consistently avoids all adoration of the sacrament outside Communion because the only true adoration is that having partaken of Christ's Body and Blood, we "act in this world as He did." As to the Protestants, in their fear of any "magical" connotation, they tend to "spiritualize" the sacrament to such an extent that they deny the presence of the Body and Blood of Christ outside the act of Communion. Here again the Orthodox Church, by the practice of reserving the Holy Gifts, restores

the true balance. The gifts are given *for* Communion but the reality of Communion depends on the reality of the Gifts. The Church does not speculate on the mode of Christ's presence in the Gifts. She forbids the use of them for any act other than Communion. She does not reveal, so to speak, their presence outside Communion, but she firmly believes that just as the Kingdom which is yet to come is "already in the midst of us," just as Christ ascended into heaven and sits on the right hand of the Father yet is also with us until the end of the world, the means of Communion with Christ and with His Kingdom, the food of immortality, is always present in the Church.

This theological footnote brings us back to the Pre-sanctified Liturgy and the "epiphany" of the consecrated Gifts which constitutes its solemn climax. This "great entrance" developed from the necessity to bring forth the consecrated Gifts which at first were kept not on the altar but in a special place, sometimes even outside the Temple. This transfer would naturally acquire a great solemnity for it expresses liturgically the coming of Christ and the end of a long day of fasting, prayer, and expectation, the coming of that help, comfort and joy for which we have been waiting.

Now the powers of heaven with us invisibly do minister,
 For lo! the King of Glory enters now.
 Behold the Mystical Sacrifice, all accomplished, is ushered in.
 Let us with faith and love draw near,
 That we may become partakers of life everlasting.
 Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

The Holy Gifts are placed on the altar and then, preparing ourselves for Communion, we ask that

all our souls and bodies be hallowed with the sanctification which cannot be taken away; that partaking with a pure conscience, with faces unashamed, with hearts illumined, of these Divine consecrated Gifts, and being quickened through them, we may be united unto Christ Himself... who has said: 'whoso eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him'... that we may become the temple of the Holy and adorable Spirit, redeemed from every wile of the Devil... and may obtain the good things promised unto us, with all the Saints....

Following this is the Lord's Prayer which is always our ultimate act of preparation for Communion, for being Christ's own prayer, it means that we accept Christ's mind as our mind, His prayer to His Father as our prayer, His will, His desire, His life—as ours. And then Communion begins while the congregation sings the Communion hymn: "O taste and see how good the Lord is!"

Finally, having completed the service, we are invited to "depart in peace." The last prayer summarizes the meaning of this service, of this evening Communion, of its relation to our lenten effort:

O Almighty Lord, who has made all created things in Wisdom, and by Thine inexpressible Providence and great goodness has brought us to these all-holy days for the purification of body and soul, for the controlling of carnal passions, and for the hope of the Resurrection; who during the forty days didst give into the hand of Thy servant Moses the Tables of the Law . . . enable us also, O Good One, to fight the good fight, to accomplish the course of the Fast, to preserve inviolate the faith, to crush under foot the heads of invisible serpents, to be accounted victors over sin, and to attain uncondemned and adore the Holy Resurrection . . .

By then it may be dark outside, and the night into which we must go and in which we have to live, to fight, and to endure, may still be long. But the light which we have seen now illumines it. The Kingdom, whose presence nothing seems to reveal in this world, has been given to us "in secret"; its joy and peace accompany us as we get ready to continue the "course of the Fast."