

The Sacraments of the Orthodox Church

“Mystery” (μυστήριον) is the proper term in the Orthodox Church. “Sacrament” is Western terminology, but has become widespread among Orthodox in the West. We will use the term sacrament in our discussion.

Conventional number: Seven — though this is not written in stone anywhere!

All sacraments take their origin and meaning from the doctrines of salvation and deification that we have studied. But the sacraments also remind us of the sanctifying grace of God upon all creation. Thus, material substances like oil, water, bread and wine are sanctified and consecrated to restore the unity that God originally intended for all his creation, including the human. This is what a mystery/sacrament does, it communicates God’s sanctifying and saving grace. A sacrament restores us to God’s original purposes and elevates us further to the purposes of the new covenant in Christ.

Romans 5:10 εἰ γὰρ ἐχθροὶ ὄντες κατηλλάγημεν τῷ θεῷ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ πολλῶ μᾶλλον καταλλαγέμεθα ἐν τῇ ζωῇ αὐτοῦ

For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. (*KJV*)

for if, being enemies, we have been reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, **we shall be saved in his life.** (*Young’s Literal Translation, 1862*)

Baptism & Chrismation

Entrance into the Church and the Communion of Saints

The Orthodox baptism service, even in case of infant baptism, maintains its origins as an adult baptism. So there are prayers for the forgiveness of sins in the plural (but not a single reference to original sin — only to the old nature). The three “exorcisms” at the beginning are often deleted in infant baptisms. The blessing of baptismal waters connects baptism to the creation of visible and invisible natures.



Images of salvation/redemption in the baptism service:

In the very first prayer: “Remove far from him/her that ancient error (την παλαιάν εκείνην πλάνην), and fill him/her with faith and hope and love that is in you...”

“Redeem this your creature from the yoke of the enemy and receive him/her into your heavenly kingdom. Open the eyes of his/her understanding, so that the illumination of your Gospel may dawn upon him/her.”

Questioning of the candidate: “Do you renounce Satan, and all his works, and all his worship, and all his angels, and all his pomp?....”

“Do you unite yourself to Christ?...”



“Put off from him/her the old nature (παλαιότητα, παλαιόν άνθρωπον in another prayer), and renew him/her unto everlasting life. Fill him/her with the power of your Holy Spirit unto union with your Christ...”

“That he/she be σύμφυτον (born with/congenital/like by nature/grow together with) and κοινωνόν (communicant/partaker of) the death and resurrection of Christ our God...”

“That he/she may preserve the garment of baptism and the ἀρραβώνα (pledge, earnest money deposited by the purchaser and forfeited if the purchase is not completed = down payment?) of the Spirit undefiled and blameless in the awesome day of Christ...”

“Blessed is God who enlightens and sanctifies every human being that comes into the world....”

“The servant of God _____ is baptized in the name of the Father, Amen. And of the Son, Amen. And of the Holy Spirit, Amen.”

Prayer of Confirmation (Holy Chrism):

“... You who have granted regeneration to your servant newly illuminated through water and the Spirit and given him forgiveness of his/her sins, both voluntary and involuntary, now bestow upon him/her also the seal of your omnipotent and adorable Holy Spirit and the communion of the holy body and precious blood of your Christ. Keep him/her in your sanctification; confirm him/her in the Orthodox faith”

“THE SEAL OF THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AMEN.” (*Personal Pentecost*)

“The servant of God is clothed with the garment of righteousness...”

Walk around the baptismal font: “As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Alleluia.”



Holy Communion — The Eucharist

The Orthodox Church never developed a dogmatic statement similar to the Catholic belief in transubstantiation. But we do believe that the Bread and Wine we receive is truly the Body and Blood of Christ.



The preparation of the bread and wine takes place before Liturgy begins.



The Liturgy as a whole relives the incarnation and culminates in the Kingdom of God. The opening doxology, “Blessed is the kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages, Amen” proclaims the goal of our gathering, to partake of the feast in the kingdom. The Eucharist is not a re-enactment of the Last Supper, but the fulfillment of the promised heavenly feast.

This is what is often called “fulfilled eschatology”!

“Blessed is the entrance of your saints...”

“... You did not cease doing everything until you led us to heaven and granted us your kingdom to come... We also thank you for this liturgy which you are pleased to accept from our hands, even though you are surrounded by thousands of Archangels... Together with these blessed powers... He came and fulfilled the divine plan for us. On the night when he was delivered up, or rather when he gave himself up for the life of the world, he took bread ... gave thanks, blessed, sanctified, broke, and gave it ... saying:

Take eat, this is my body which is broken for you, for the forgiveness of sins.

Likewise, after supper, he took the cup....

Remembering, therefore, this command of the Savior, and all that came to pass for our sake, the cross, the tomb, the resurrection on the third day, the ascension into heaven, the enthronement at the right hand [of the Father], and the second and glorious coming

We offer to you these gifts from your own gifts in all and for all.

Once again we offer ... send down your Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts here presented...

So that they may be to those who partake of them for vigilance of soul, forgiveness of sins, communion of your Holy Spirit, fulfillment of the kingdom of the heavens, confidence before you, and not in judgment or condemnation..."

"For the precious gifts offered and consecrated ... that our loving God who has received them at his holy, heavenly and spiritual altar as an offering of spiritual fragrance, may in return send upon divine grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit, let us pray..."

Private prayers of preparation for communion emphasize our unworthiness to receive the heavenly gifts, but we ask God to make us worthy! Rules about fasting before communion really have nothing to do with how worthy we are!

Communion with a spoon began in 9th century, for practical reasons; but also due to growing clericalism.



Confession and Holy Unction

The two healing sacraments

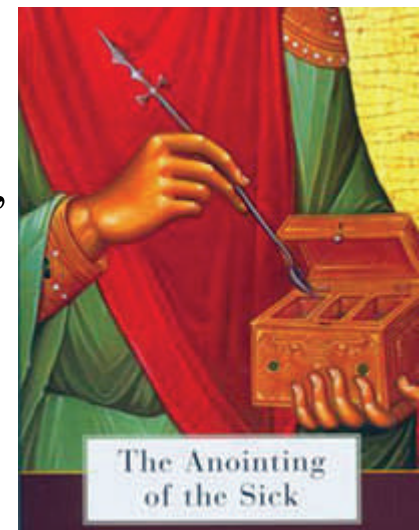
There are no confessionals in Orthodox practice. Priest and penitent stand before an icon or sit down in a pew.



No strict chronology of repentance. Does it come before a person comes to confession, after, or both before and after? Consider beginning of the service: “For the remission of sins of the servant of God ___ and the forgiveness of all his/her voluntary and involuntary transgressions... That the Lord may grant him/her remission of sins and time of repentance, let us pray to the Lord.” Repentance is more

than feeling sorry for one’s sins. Repentance implies a new orientation in life, and it comes from the healing that God grants with forgiveness of sins.

Holy Unction is the anointing of the sick with oil. It is meant to be done by 7 priests! The elaborate setup includes a bowl of wheat with 7 candles, 7 anointing brushes and an oil lamp. The oil is sanctified by the “Prayer of the Oil” - but before people are anointed with it comes a series of 7 pairs of Epistle and Gospel readings, each pair accompanied with a long prayer, each said by one of the 7 priests. People are anointed on the face and hands.



The Anointing of the Sick

Holy Matrimony and Ordination

Two sacraments of Calling/Vocation

Although very different, these two sacraments are related in the sense that they are not for all Orthodox Christians: Not everyone gets married, and only a few men are ordained. Both marriage and ordination to holy orders are considered as vocations, states in life to which one is called. Other callings include the monastic life and the various ways that a person can accept leadership roles in the church. But only marriage and ordination are treated as sacraments.

The Marriage service consists of two parts: The *Betrothal*, during which rings are placed on the bride and groom as a sign of the pledge they have made to each other.

The *Crowning* is the main celebration of marriage. Crowns are placed on the heads of the bride and groom, they drink from a common cup of wine, and they walk around the table. The prayers make heavy use of creation language and Old Testament figures.

When the crowns are removed at end of the service, the priest prays: “Accept their crowns in your kingdom unsoiled and undefiled, and preserve them without offense to the ages of ages. Amen.”



Ordination is the means by which the church maintains its “apostolic succession” and the transmission of all its ordinances. The most important ranks of clergy are: Deacon, Priest and Bishop. The rites of ordination are very convoluted. Only a bishop can ordain deacons and priests, and several bishops have to be present for the elevation of a priest to bishop. At the ordination, vestments appropriate to his rank are put on the newly-ordained, who is then presented to the congregation with the words, “Axios, Axios, Axios.” Bishops are required to be celibate (or widowers). Priests and deacons can be married, but must marry before ordination.



An Episcopal consecration in Russia
Patriarch Alexei II of Moscow and all Russia
is the chief celebrant.

A newly-ordained priest is presented to the local community at St. Andrew Church in Chicago for their acceptance.

