



Diocese of South-West America
Sunday School

6th Grade

Give Me Life, Lord



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Midterm Exam (December/January): Lessons 1-8

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LESSON 1 - THE SYMBOL OF OUR FAITH

OBJECTIVE: Understand the Purpose of the Nicene Creed

We recite the Nicene Creed often - when we participate in Morning and Evening prayers, during the Holy Qurbana, and at every Holy Qurbana of the Holy Sacraments. The Creed expresses our belief in one God, the Holy Trinity, in the Church and in the new life in the Kingdom of God.

What is a creed? A creed is a statement of faith.

The Nicene Creed, also referred to as the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, developed in response to various heresies or wrong teachings about Jesus. These false teachings began to mislead members of the Church which resulted in misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the true faith. Remember at that time, there was no Internet or even postal mail, and not many people were able to read and write. Therefore the oral teachings of the leaders of the Church were the primary source of learning for the faithful, and the growing Church needed to start making the Statement of Faith official. In order to be clear on the teachings of Christ, the Church Fathers approved the Creed to state how the Orthodox ('true' or 'correct') faith would be known to all.



The Creed we recite was first approved at the Council of Nicea in 325 A. D. in response largely to the false teachings of Arius, who incorrectly claimed that Jesus was not equal to God the Father. The Creed was further expanded at the Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D to clarify the Holy Spirit's position in the Holy Trinity.

This Creed is not merely a statement of faith. The confession of the Creed is an act of praise and thanksgiving. We praise and thank God who is the Creator, the Savior and the Giver of new life in His Kingdom.

The Creed is the wisdom of God. The Holy Spirit guided the Fathers to distinguish the right faith from the false teachings and to put together the faith in words. Do you remember where in Holy Qurbana we hear these words, “Wisdom of God! Let us attend”?



The Creed is our symbol of faith.

The Church expresses its unity of faith through this Creed. The Creed shares the journey the Church has traveled in order to avoid heretical teachings put forward by false teachers. The Creed binds Christians together in one faith.

The Creed is confessed when preparing to receive the Holy Qurbana. When we recite the Creed, the deacon comes to the midst of the people censing them. The censing signifies an important act of worship by the Church because it signals prayers, praises and thanksgiving

made by the whole Church before God.

What does the Creed address?

The Creed affirms the faith of the Church in:

- 1) One True Trinitarian God - The Holy Trinity i.e. The Father Almighty, The Lord Jesus Christ, and The Holy Spirit
- 2) The One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church
- 3) The Hope of the New Life in the Kingdom of God.

We Believe in One God

We believe in one God. In the Old Testament times, the people of Israel sometimes strayed from their faith in one God and prayed to pagan gods. However, like many prophets in the Old Testament, Moses affirms faith in one God saying:

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might".Deut. 6:4-5

But do we believe in One God? Don't we pray to three different beings?

It can seem confusing to believe in one God and then say that we believe in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These three holy beings are part of the **Holy Trinity**. The Holy Trinity is what we confess to be God. Holy Trinity means that there are three persons in the Godhead; **God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit** and yet there are not three gods, but one God.

Our Fathers tried to explain this mystery of the Holy Trinity by using the sun as an example. We experience the sun through its rays, light and heat. The three together make the sun. In the same way the Father, the Son and The Holy Spirit are God. It is important to note that no example can fully explain the mystery of the Holy Trinity. The New Testament in several passages tells us that The Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God while it strongly holds that there is only one God.

Mark 12:29-30 - "Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment."

Our Lord Jesus says that there is only one God whom we should love with our whole being.

John 1:1 - "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

The Son, Lord Jesus Christ is Himself God.

John 15:26 - "But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me."

Holy Spirit who comes from God is Himself God.

Thus when we affirm our faith in One God, we confess God as the Holy Trinity. We enjoy the love of the Father, the grace of the Son and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit as the experience of One God (**2 Cor. 13:14**).

Hence we confess in our Creed: "We believe in One True God." Our belief in one God makes us grow in an experience of oneness in the Church. This is emphasized by St. Paul when he says: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:4-6). We are united into one body in our confession of One God through the Creed. The Creed is a summation of our faith and every time we recite it, we once again reaffirm ourselves as members of the One, Holy, Catholic Church ; the Malankara Orthodox Church.

LESSON 2 - THE HOLY TRINITY

OBJECTIVE: Understand our beliefs in the Holy Trinity through the lens of the Nicene Creed



Who Do We Believe In?

Christianity is known as a monotheistic religion, with a belief in ONE God. The Nicene Creed proclaims this. However, as mentioned in the previous lesson, it can seem as though we have three gods. But these three beings are one in the Holy Trinity, the Trinitarian God. In this lesson, we will understand how the *Nicene Creed* defines the Holy Trinity and each person of the Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

God the Father

"We believe in one true God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible."

1. God is our Father:

Jesus Christ taught us to address Him as "Our Father" in the Lord's Prayer (**Mt 6: 9-13**).

God is our Father in Heaven and He loves, cares and shows compassion for each and every one of us, fulfilling our earthly needs:

"Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'[...] For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all" (**Mt 6: 25-34**)

This loving Father not only cares for our earthly life, but also for our heavenly life. When man sinned and removed himself away from God, He sent His own Son, Jesus Christ that we may become His children again.

St. John says: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God" (**1 Jn. 3:1**). Think back to how you described a father. Ponder how much more comfort there is in knowing that we are children of the Creator.

2. God is Almighty:

In **Genesis 17:1** God states to Abraham that, "I *am* Almighty God." Later to Moses, He reveals "I AM WHO I AM" (**Exodus 3:14**). When God said, "Let there be light," there was light and in Revelations, He states, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." (**Revelations 1:8**).

St. John the Apostle further refers to this almighty power of God in Revelations when he sees elders praising, "You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created." (**Revelations 4:11**). The 'almightiness' of God was manifested through His creation of the world. By His will it was done, no questions asked.

His almightiness is not limited to His creation but is constantly observed throughout His saving acts for the people of Israel; from their redemption from Egypt's bondage, providing for their survival in their 40 year walk and on through protecting and bringing them back from Babylon's exiles.

Even after Jesus's resurrection, we are reminded of His almighty power from the apostles ability to do mighty works in His name to the works of the saints throughout the centuries to the present. In these, God is not only creator of physical things, but also of our capacities as humans and this does not include all the things that we do not understand or have not seen.

This Almighty God is our Father and our ruler. We approach Him as children would approach a loving father and as the subjects approach a righteous ruler. We should offer our praises and thanksgiving to Him with love and respect.

God the Son

"And in the One Lord, Jesus Christ ..."

A large portion of the Nicene Creed and its development through the Councils was to address various heresies that arose about the Lord, Jesus Christ.

The two major heresies that brought forth the meeting of the Nicea and Constantinople councils were the Arian Heresy and Apollinarian Heresy.

Arianism was the belief that asserts that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who was created by God the Father at a point in time, is distinct from the Father and is therefore subordinate to the Father. Arian teachings were first attributed to Arius (c. AD 250–336), a Christian presbyter in Alexandria, Egypt. were two major heresies.

Apollinarism or Apollinarianism was a view proposed by Apollinaris of Laodicea (died 390) that Jesus could not have had a human mind; rather, Jesus had a human body and lower soul (the seat of the emotions) but a divine mind.

Both Arius and Apollinarius were deemed heretics and cast out from the church.

The Creed also teaches that the Son of God came down from Heaven and became man. The term “became man” clearly points to the complete manhood of the incarnate God (Son) and the terms 'suffered', 'died', and was 'buried', emphasize His perfect humanity.

In the Creed we confess the death, the resurrection, the ascension and the second coming of Jesus Christ. The belief in the resurrection is very important to the Church, because it represents victory over death. Even after His first ascension, He would come in all His glory to judge both the living and the dead. Then the glory of His Kingdom will manifest itself and His Kingdom shall have no end.

God the Holy Spirit

“And in the one Living Holy Spirit, the life-giving Lord of all, Who proceeds from the Father and Who together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified Who spoke through the prophets and the apostles.”

Many people have questions about the Holy Spirit, and are in disagreement with who or what the Spirit really is ... is it a force, or a feeling? Is the Holy Spirit really God?

The earliest of Christians had no doubt on Who is the Holy Spirit, and therefore became an important part of the Creed. For the first Christians and for us today, the Holy Spirit is without doubt God. The Holy Spirit bears the title of ‘Lord’ with God the Father and Christ the Son.

He is eternal, uncreated, and divine; always existing with the Father and the Son; perpetually worshipped and glorified with them in the oneness of the Holy Trinity. Just

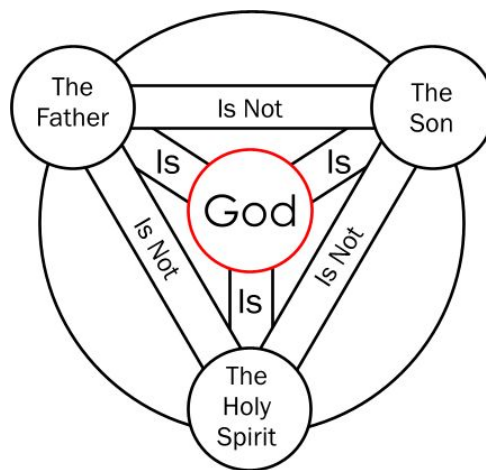
like the Son, there was no time when there was no Holy Spirit. The Spirit is before creation. He comes forth from God, as does the Son, in a timeless, eternal procession. “He proceeds from the Father,” in eternity in a divinely instantaneous and perpetual movement (Jn 15.26).

At this point it is necessary to note that the Roman and Protestant churches differ in their understanding about God by adding that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father “and the Son” (filioque)—a doctrinal addition unacceptable to Orthodoxy since it is both unscriptural and inconsistent with the original teaching of God as given to the Apostles by Jesus Christ Himself.

Summary

The Holy Trinity although three persons is one in essence. In the opening hymn (Manitho of Mor Severus) of our Holy Qurbana, we reaffirm this teaching by singing that Jesus is, “Who is one person of the Holy Trinity And is worshipped equally With His Father and Spirit.”

We can see all three persons present at Jesus’s baptism. Jesus, the son, being baptized; the voice, the Father, speaking from heaven and a dove, the Holy Spirit, being present and descending from heaven.



LESSON 3 - THEOSIS

OBJECTIVE: Understand how our choices leads to our new life in the heavenly kingdom

“And we confess one baptism for the remission of sins and we look for the resurrection of the dead and the new life in the world to come. Amin.”

We are baptized only once, and we believe this is our rebirth into a new life in the Church. When we listen to the hymns and prayers of the Liturgy of Holy Baptism, it is clear to those who understand the meaning that we have died and are risen in Christ to begin our new life in the Kingdom of God.

From this starting point, we begin growth in the Kingdom of God. At the time of our Baptism, we also receive the Sacrament of Chrismation, where we are sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit, and taste the real Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ through the Sacrament of the Holy Qurbana.

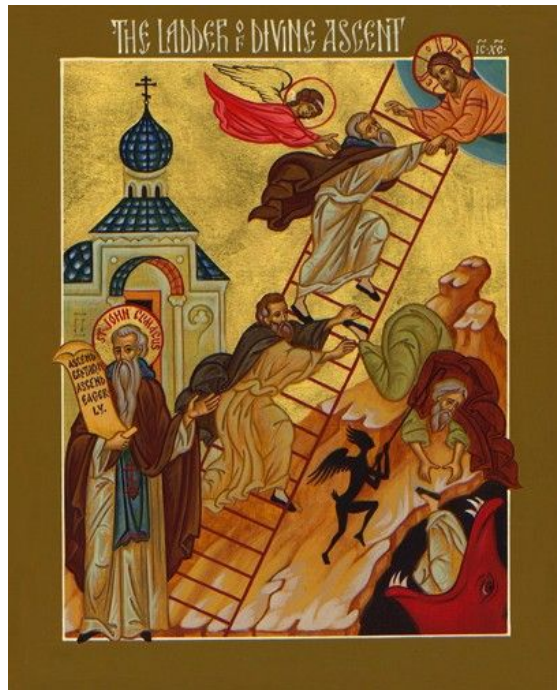
Unlike some Protestant denominations, we do not hold to the notion that we are “once saved, already saved.” For Orthodox Christians, salvation is a process and not a once-and-done event. The Greek word for this process is *theosis*, or deification.

Theosis: The understanding that human beings can have real union with God, and so become like God to such a degree that we participate in His divine nature. Also referred to as deification, divinization, or illumination, it is a teaching found in the Holy Bible (**2 Peter 1:3–4, Philippians 2:12–13, John 10:34–36, Ephesians 4:15, Romans 5, Psalm 82:6**) regarding the goal of our relationship with the Trinitarian God.

The Church rejects that a person needs to be Baptized again when we are adults, as the process of growing and understanding Christ begins with the Mystery of Baptism - some are baptized young, some are baptized when they are older. It marks the start of our new life in the Church. Many other Christian denominations view Baptism as the precise moment when they are saved e.g., some Protestants look at Baptism as the moment when an individual receives Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior, and Roman Catholics look at it as the moment Original Sin is washed away. The early Church teaches that Holy Baptism is the new life as Christians in the fellowship and

communion of the One Holy Church, with the understanding that we are “being saved,” not “already saved.”

Holy Baptism is commanded by Christ and essential for our salvation. It is not an end in itself, nor is it the “goal” of Christian life; rather, just as one is physically born from his or her mother’s womb, so too one is “born again” of water and the Spirit in the Sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation. These sacraments mark the beginning of one’s spiritual life, one’s life as a Christian, just as physical birth marks the beginning of our physical life and growth and development.



Salvation includes a process of growth of the whole person whereby the sinner is transformed into the image and likeness of God. One is saved by faith through grace, although saving faith involves more than belief. Faith must be active and living, manifested by works of righteousness, whereby we cooperate with God to do His will. Hence, if one is “being saved,” one is on the way to one’s ultimate goal: eternal union with God and participation in the divine nature.

The Holy Spirit guides us to live the new life by dwelling within us providing an internal light. Through the Sacrament of Confession, we renew ourselves again and again. We cleanse ourselves

from our worldly sins and grow towards being pure. In the Sacrament of the Holy Qurbana, we participate in the eternal food of the Kingdom of God. The Anointing of the Sick brings us back to Christ in our time of greatest physical need so that we can continue to seek purification and oneness with God. A Christian family is a miniature Kingdom and by the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony, man and woman are united to form this new little Kingdom, where the will of God is accomplished. The sacrament of Holy Priesthood is for the specially called ones. They are given the special grace by the Holy Spirit to be the representatives of Christ. They lead the people before God in prayers and Holy Qurbana and stand amidst them as the good shepherd. Thus all the sacraments of the Church help us participate in the new life of the Kingdom of God.

The most important characteristic of our new life is love. We are bound together in fellowship of God’s selfless love. Jesus Christ speaks of this in **Acts 2: 46-47**,

“So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”

St. Paul announces its importance, "So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (**1 Cor. 13:13**). St. John further speaks of it's importance in **1 John 3:14**, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love *his* brother abides in death." As people with new life, we have already experienced death and continuously seek life. In order to attain this life, we must love, or we die again. Thus through our devotion, goodness and virtues, we show the quality of our new life in the Kingdom of God.

But this newness of life that we experience now is not the full new life in the Heavenly Kingdom - it is just the start. We hope for this life in the world to come. Our life in this world is only momentary, but our life in the world to come is everlasting. There will come a time when Jesus Christ will come again. At that time, the departed ones will be raised from the tombs. St. Paul foresees the coming of that day and says:

"Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality (**I Cor. 15:51-53**).

Death marks the beginning of a new life in the Kingdom in its fullness. The resurrection of Jesus Christ shows that everyone will be raised from death to a new life. Jesus Christ conquered death and thus we have this possibility. Christians live a life of hope. Though they have trials and tribulations, they are not disappointed; instead, their steadfastness becomes deepened.

They have their faith in Jesus Christ who gained victory over death. They look for the final resurrection of the departed ones and for the blessed new life in the world to come.

Lesson 4 - Holy Baptism & Holy Chrismation

OBJECTIVE: Understand and define the importance of and reasoning for Holy Baptism and Holy Chrismation

Birth is an annually celebrated event by most people in North America. It commemorates our entry to the world we live in. Holy Baptism is an even larger deal- it is the entry of our life in the New Kingdom of God. It comes from the old testament and pagan practices of renewing oneself - but in our case, it's renewing ourselves from the death of the world in life through Christ.

Jesus Christ lays down the importance of Baptism when He says: "Truly, truly I say to you unless one is born anew, he cannot see the Kingdom of God" (**John 3:5**).

Who gets baptized?

Catechumens who are preparing to receive Baptism. 'Catechumen' means 'one who hears' or, 'the learner'.

In the Early Church, the adults were taught by the bishop or by a teacher appointed by the bishop. Also, they were allowed to attend the first part of the Divine Holy Qurbana in the Church. They listened to the lessons read from the Old Testament, the Epistles and the Gospels and they heard the Word of God preached in the Church. After this they left the Church. Only the baptized were allowed to participate in the Holy Qurbana.

Today, most of the newly baptized are children born to the believers. They are taught as they grow in the life of the Church by their Godparent and family. The Godparent has the special role of sponsoring the child and speaking for them during Baptism. They have the responsibility to bring the child up in the faith.

The Service of Baptism and Chrismation:

1.Preparation

a.Renouncing Satan

In order to accept Christ, we must first reject Satan. If we are filled with darkness, then there is no space for light. There are many instances recorded in the Gospels where we find Jesus Christ driving out evil spirits from people in order to cleanse and heal them.

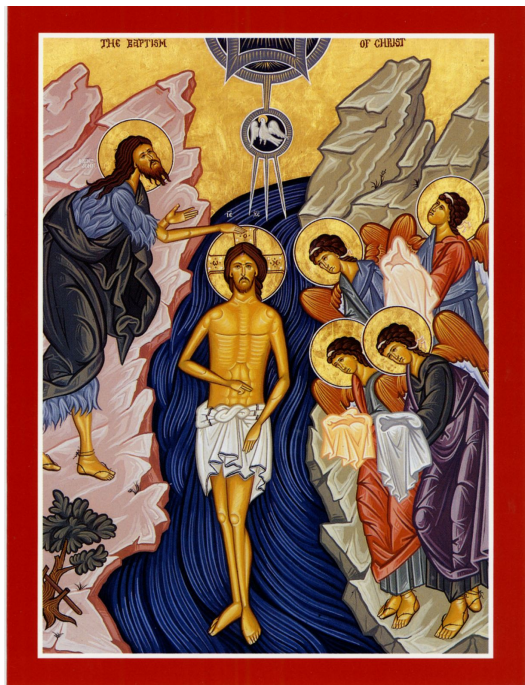
In the first prayer of exorcism, the priest prays to God to expel all evil spirits from the person. Then he makes the sign of the Cross over the individual nine times calling on God to free him from deceitful spirits. He rebukes the demons and commands them to leave the person because s/he is “not the dwelling place of demons but is the temple of God.” (1 Corinthians 3:16)

The person then turns to the west and rejects Satan and all his forces. S/he utters the following words of denouncement three times: "I (name) renounce you, Satan and all your deeds, your services, your worship, your vain pomp, your worldly deceitfulness, your followers and adherents."

Though we officially reject Satan, it does not mean that Satan will no longer tempt us. Rather, now as a member of God's kingdom, Satan tries to tempt us even more in order to bring us back to him. These temptations can either sever our relation with God if we succumb to them, or they can empower and strengthen our relationship if we overcome them.

b. Accepting Jesus Christ

After rejecting Satan, we accept Christ as our Lord and Savior. We pledge: "I, _____, who receive Baptism, believe in Thee, Lord Christ, and the whole teaching divinely handed over by Thee through the holy Prophets, Apostles and Fathers." After this pledge of loyalty to Christ, we recite the Creed as a proclamation of faith in God.



Every time we recite the Creed, we renew our faith and loyalty to God.

2. Baptism

a. Anointment

The actual service of Baptism begins with the anointment of the catechumen with the Oil of Gladness. It is called the Oil of Gladness because the oil is the symbol of joy, peace and happiness (Psalm 45:7). It is used for healing and as a source of light. The Oil of Gladness is the sign of Christ's coming in joy, peace and happiness to the life of the person leading him or her from darkness to light and healing him of all sins.

b.Immersion

Immersion is the central act of Baptism. Immersion signifies our death and resurrection in Jesus Christ. After the catechumen is anointed with the Oil of Gladness, the priest brings him or her to the baptismal font. Then, he begins special prayers for the blessing of the water of Baptism. Pouring cold and hot water simultaneously to the font, the priest prays to God to make the water a spiritual garment of immortality and liberation from the bonds of sin. We die in the immersion of water, but by being raised from the water we are raised with Him. We are cleansed of all our sins and are adorned with a new garment of immortality and incorruptibility.

The Holy Spirit descends into the water of Baptism as the Holy Oil of Chrism (like the dove descended upon Jesus in **Matthew 3:16**) is poured. The priest prays the prayer of the Invocation of the Holy Spirit, while blessing the water. He prays to God to send the Holy Spirit and change these waters of immersion into waters of purification and absolution, signifying the death of the sinful nature and resurrection of the new man allowing us to have sonship in the kingdom of God.

In the Sacrament of Baptism we are born of water and the Spirit. St. Paul tells the Romans,

“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be united *in the likeness of His resurrection*,” (**Romans 6: 3-5**).

3. Chrismation

Chrismation is receiving the Seal of the Holy Spirit. The priest gives the baptized the Seal of the Holy Spirit by anointing him or her with the Holy Chrism. The priest anoints every part of the body of the baptized. The body is thus made holy and dedicated to the service of God with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Holy Chrism is also called the Holy Mooron. The term 'Mooron' came from the name of a perfumed-oil used in the ancient Orient.

Baptism has its perfection in Chrismation. After Jesus Christ's baptism, He is full of the Holy Spirit. He quotes prophet Isaiah, saying, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor" (**Lk. 4:18**).

Chrismation is our participation in the anointing of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. In the Sacrament of Chrismation, the Holy Spirit descends and anoints the baptized. Just as the Church was endowed with this great gift on the day of Pentecost, so are we at Holy Chrismation.

Jesus told His disciples before His ascension to heaven that they would receive the Holy Spirit. He asked them to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the 'promise of the Father'. We read about the coming of the Holy Spirit in the book of the Acts of the Apostles (**Acts 2:1-4**).

Being anointed by the Holy Spirit reminds us of how the priests, prophets and kings were chosen and anointed for a special work to be done for God in the world in the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit endows us with the grace to fulfill our task. In Chrismation, we are made the 'priests of the whole creation'. Read the words of St. Peter in **1 Pet. 2:5**.

With this anointment, we are made, "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (**1 Peter 2:9**). Holy Chrismation is the ordination of the baptized to be a 'Christian'. And our bodies become the temple of the Holy Spirit, housing God in each of us (**1 Corinthians 6: 19-20**). The Holy Spirit abides in us as strength of God to fight temptation and live a life worth of the Eternal kingdom. The indwelling Spirit works within us as our inner principle and teacher. St. John makes this clear in **1 John. 2:27**.

If we would lend our ears to the voice of the Holy Spirit and obey His guidance, we would grow in the grace of God. If we neglect His guidance, that would grieve the Holy Spirit. If we turn to the pages of the history of the Church, we see that the saints of the Church grew in the grace of God by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They were full of the Spirit and of wisdom and used it, "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints" (**Ephesians 6:17-18**)

Through the sacrament of baptism, we are called to be part of the priesthood and given entry into God's kingdom and through Chrismation, we are granted the Holy Spirit to comfort and guide our daily lives. Though they are two Sacraments, we cannot separate the one from the other because life in the Church means life in the Holy Spirit. Through these sacraments, we become a part of the church which is the body of Christ.

Lesson 5- Holy Qurbana

Objective: Identify and begin to understand the reasoning for the different parts of the Holy Qurbana

The most important act of the Church is worship. Holy Qurbana is the center of our worship. We worship God to express our gratitude to Him.

The Holy Qurbana is the highest expression of our thankfulness to God. That is why the



Holy Qurbana is called the 'Mystery of Thanksgiving'. The Greek word 'Qurbana' means "offering or sacrifice." God sent His only 'Begotten' Son to save us from the evil and to give us a new life. He has made us His own children. The first part of the liturgy of the Holy Qurbana is praise and thanksgiving.

When we celebrate Holy Qurbana, we thank God for all His blessings, especially for sending His Son Jesus Christ and saving us by His crucifixion and resurrection. The priest thanks God, "O Lord, Thy weak and sinful servants, receiving Thy Grace give thanks unto Thee and praise Thee for all things and by reason of all things." Then the faithful join the priest in thanking and praising God saying "Lord God we glorify Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee and we beseech Thee for mercy. Have mercy upon us." Thus we find that a considerable part of the Holy Qurbana is devoted for offering praises and thanks to God.

In the Holy Qurbana, we also express our thankfulness by offering our gifts. We offer to God, bread and wine as the expression of our thanksgiving. They are the fruits of our labor and they represent our own lives. Thus, we offer ourselves to God. Our Lord receives our humble offerings and gives Himself in return. In every Holy Qurbana we

participate in the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, and we live and grow in communion with the Divine Life. The Holy Qurbana gathers us together and makes us meet God to hear His words, to thank Him and to commune with Him.

Preparation during Service:

We need a great deal of preparation as we come to participate in this great Mystery of Thanksgiving. There are special prayers of preparation in the Holy Qurbana. One of the prayers is the prayer for pardon and grace. The priest, on behalf of the faithful asks God for forgiveness of sins and for the grace to offer praises and thanks in all purity and holiness.

"The Kiss of Peace" at the beginning of the Holy Qurbana has much relevance and signifies reconciliation. We should reconcile with our brethren, in order to fully commune with God as one Church. Having reconciled with God and our fellowmen and having a clear conscience, we approach the throne of God to offer our praises, and gifts as the expression of our thankfulness to God.

Liturgy of the Word:

The Holy Bible is the Word of God. We hear the Word from the Prophets, Kings, Evangelists and Apostles. Although from different contexts, it still remains relevant to us today. The Word gives us life and hope. St. Paul in his Epistle to Timothy emphasizes the importance of the Scriptures. **(2 Tim. 3:16)**

During the Holy Qurbana, in the Liturgy of the Word, there are three types of readings; the Old Testament reading, the Epistle reading and the Gospel reading. Passages are selected from different books of the Bible according to the theme and message of the day.

The Old Testament reading foreshadows the lesson to be read from the Epistles and the Gospels and the theme of the day. It tells us the story of God's works for the people of Israel.

The Epistle reading comprises of readings from the Acts of the Apostles and letters of the apostles. The Acts of the Apostles is the history of the Church in its early years. This book tells us how the early Church grew under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The letters of the apostles were written to different Churches to correct and confirm the Church in the right faith. Two lessons are read from this section. The first lesson is taken from the Acts of the Apostles or from a

non-Pauline apostolic letter. The second lesson is taken from the letters of St. Paul denoting that the Gospel was preached later to the gentiles.

The Gospel is prefaced with the priest praying to receive and pronounce a true understanding of His Holy knowledge, Thy divine gifts, and the grace of Thy Holy Spirit. After the priest processes to the congregation, the deacon receives the incense from the priest and proclaims to the people to prepare to hear the Word. Then the celebrant of the Holy Qurbana reads the Gospel.

The Gospel is called the “good news” because Jesus Christ comes to us with a good message that in Him and through Him the Father has pleased to save the world. Jesus Christ is the Word of God (**John 1:1**). He reveals the grace and truth of God. The Word is the expression or manifestation of the glory of the Father. The Gospel is placed on a special table called the ‘table of the Holy Gospel’ in the sanctuary. We venerate and Kiss the Gospel because Gospel is the presence of Jesus Christ. We carry the Holy Gospel in processions in the Church as the sign of Jesus Christ coming into our midst.

The Sermon is the last part of the liturgy of the Word. After the Gospel is read, the priest, bishop, or a layperson with permission, gives a short sermon. The preacher explains to us how to apply the scripture in our daily lives.

The liturgy of the Word of God is concluded as the priest thanks God for His life-giving words. He prays: "Praise and thanksgiving and exaltation to our Lord Jesus Christ for all His life-giving Words to us, and to His Father who sent Him for our salvation, and to His living and Holy Spirit who gives us life, now and forever, Amen."

Liturgy of the Eucharist

The root meaning of the word ‘Qurbana’ is ‘offering’. The Holy Qurbana is an offering in two ways.

1. Offering made by the faithful to God
2. Offering made by Jesus Christ of Himself to us

An Offering by the Faithful

The faithful brings their offerings before God when they gather for the Holy Qurbana. It is an expression of their love, thankfulness and adoration to God. We know that God loves us, keeps us, guides us and saves us from all evil. In Him alone we live.

What can we offer to God as an expression of our love, adoration, and thankfulness? The best gift that we can offer is ourselves and our love. We can offer Him the best of all our thoughts, actions, and our whole life. Read what St Paul reminded the Romans in **Romans 12:1**.

An Offering by Jesus Christ

Our Lord Jesus Christ offered Himself on the cross for our redemption. In the preparation, we refer to Christ as *"O God, Thou art the sacrificial offering and to Thee this sacrifice is offered"*

Jesus Christ instituted the Holy Qurbana taking the bread and wine as the elements for the Sacrament. They are the common food of man. In a prayer in the preparation of the Holy Qurbana, the priest says: *"O, pure and spotless Lamb, who offered Himself to the Father as acceptable offering for the atonement and redemption of the whole world, make us worthy that we may offer ourselves to Thee, a living sacrifice well-pleasing unto Thee, after the manner of Thy sacrifice for us."*

In the early Church it was the practice that the faithful brought bread and wine from their homes when they came for the Holy Qurbana. This signifies that what the faithful brought as their offering was that which sustained their life. The offering of those simple items of daily food meant the offering of their own lives to God. When we bring our offerings to God, we must pray God to make us worthy to offer our gifts. We ask God to make our souls free from sins, so that our offering of ourselves be complete and acceptable before God.

God receives our simple offerings of bread and wine and changes them to the precious Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. As we participate in these heavenly gifts, God comes and dwells in us, giving us remission of our sins and eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

What Participation in The Holy Qurbana Means

We receive God in the Holy Communion. At the last supper Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave to the disciples saying, "This is my body, which is given for you". Likewise, He took the cup after supper, gave thanks and gave it to them

saying, "This cup, which is poured out for you, is the new covenant in my blood."
(Matthew 26: 17-30, Luke 22: 7-38, Mark 14: 12-26)

Jesus Christ offered Himself on the cross as a sacrifice for the atonement of the sins of the whole world, and rose from the dead giving a new hope to the humanity. Jesus Christ started the Holy Qurbana so that we may participate in His atoning sacrifice and His life-giving resurrection. He told the disciples: "Do this in remembrance of me."
(Luke 22: 19).

We celebrate the Holy Qurbana in remembrance of His death and resurrection. In the Holy Communion Jesus Christ comes to us and gives Himself to us granting atonement for our sins and a new life in the Kingdom of God. It is our own offerings that God changes into the heavenly gifts. His Holy Spirit changes our simple offerings, the bread and wine into the precious Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

As we draw near to receive these precious gifts, we pray that God may make us worthy to receive Him in holiness and purity. In the Holy Communion, God, our Lord Jesus Christ comes and dwells in us. He becomes part of us. "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him", says Jesus Christ **(John 6:56)**. This is not momentary. It impacts our day-to-day life. Our participation in the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ enables us to live and grow in the grace of God. It gives us strength to overcome the evil and pursue the good in our practical life. Others should be able to see, from our lives, what it means to live a new life in Jesus Christ.

After participating in the Holy Communion, we praise God for the ineffable grace given to us through the Holy Mysteries. We pray that God may keep us in that same grace in our daily life in the world.

Jesus as the Word of God

God created man in his own image from the dust of the earth. We read in Genesis, "And God said. Let there be... and there it was..." God's Word signifies His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. It was Jesus Christ who revealed and expressed God to the whole creation.

But why do we say that Jesus was the Word of God? Lord Jesus Christ revealed God through His teachings and life. Thus actually Jesus was the 'Word' who spoke to the world about the way to the Eternal Kingdom and everlasting life. His title in the Bible is 'The Logos' which means the Word of God. We participate in the life that Jesus the Word gives through the Gospel and the Holy Qurbana.

Lesson 6 - Healing

OBJECTIVE: Recognize the relationship of Jesus' healing ministry with the life of the Church through the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick



All of us have undergone some kind of spiritual, physical or mental illness or disease. This makes us question how God, as all-powerful and loving, could let this happen. But God does not intend us to suffer. Our suffering comes as consequence of living in a fallen world. We suffer at the cost of the original sin, though we are not guilty of this sin.

God does not turn a blind eye to our suffering. He loves us and wishes to heal us of our illness. In His loving mercy, Jesus Christ came to heal our infirmities. When Jesus saw sick people and heard their cry for cure,

He showed compassion and healed them.

For example, during the feast of the Jews, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. There was in Jerusalem a pool called Bethesda. It was believed that whenever its water bubbled, the first person who steps down in it, if he is sick, would be healed. So there were many physically disabled individuals on the sides of this pool. Among them was a man who had been ill for thirty-eight years. Jesus went there and saw him and knew that he had been lying there a long time. Jesus said to him, "Do you want to be healed?" The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is troubled, and while I am going another steps down before me." Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your pallet, and walk." And at once the man was healed, and he took up his pallet and walked (John 5:7-9).

This is one of the many healing miracles performed by Jesus. You might have noticed the question that Jesus asked the sick man. Jesus asked if the sick man wanted to be healed. It was upon the sick man's response that Jesus healed with just His words.

This has 2 important points -

1. In order to be healed, we must seek healing. It does not come automatically. It comes with our want to be healed. We must knock on the door and communicate with God (**Matthew 7: 7**).
2. Jesus' words were powerful enough to raise the dead, to calm the storm and to heal the invalids. By raising the dead, He showed His power to restore life. By calming the storm, He showed His power to direct the nature and save life. By healing, He showed the invalids His power to strengthen life.

These examples show that Jesus was concerned not only for spiritual life but also for the physical well-being. He found life as a 'whole' including both body and soul. That is why he said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (**John 10:10**).

Jesus commissioned the disciples, to attend to individuals' physical needs as they were sent out to preach the coming of the Kingdom of God: "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying, give without pay" (**Matthew 10:8**). Jesus Christ entrusted His disciples with the ministry of healing the sick. He gave them the power of healing. This ministry of healing has continued in the Church since the very beginning of its history. We find His disciples healing the sick by anointing them with oil. We hear the report from St Mark: "...and they anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them" (**Mk. 6:13**). What does St. James tell the early Christians in **James 5:14-15**.

Healing the sick by anointing with oil is a part of the ministry of the Church. It gives the members of the Church an opportunity to gather together and pray for their fellow man. They pray to God to help heal the individual from his or her illness. The priest, on behalf of the Church anoints the sick person with the Oil of Healing.

Oil is used because of its significance in history. Oil was used for healing wounds in ancient days. In the story of the Good Samaritan, we read that he applied oil at the wounds of the man injured by the robbers.

In the Sacrament of 'Anointing the Sick,' the blessed oil is a sign of the healing power of Jesus Christ. He comes into the life of the sick, healing the individuals of all his or her

illnesses. This sacrament is not focused solely on the physical ailment of the individual. It is also a time for the sick person to repent his or her sins. Repentance purifies the soul and heals us of spiritual sins. In purifying our souls, we overcome separation from God and work towards curing our souls. This is essential in helping a person with a physical illness because it provides them the knowledge that they are supported and loved by God. Thus this sacrament has a double purpose: physical healing and forgiveness of sins. In all prayers in the liturgy of this sacrament, this double purpose can be heard.

Even as lay people, we are called to be part of this ministry. We should visit the sick, pray for them, console them and support their medical care. God works through medical treatment, not everything is solely done through prayer. It is the combination of God's power through our intellect (medicine) and God's grace through our prayers (spiritual) that an individual is healed.

Lesson 7 - Confession and Forgiveness

OBJECTIVE: Realize the importance of the repenting sinner in the Christian life and how we can be forgiven through life in the Church

In the sacrament of Baptism we are given a new life in the Kingdom of God. We become God's children. In the sacrament of Chrismation, the gift of the Holy Spirit is given to us as our comfort and counsel. But we know that this does not keep us perfect. Every day after our Baptism and Chrismation, we are tempted by Satan to return to the will of the world. We sin and separate ourselves from God. We disregard the Holy Spirit's guidance and pursue our own wishes. So long as we are in sin, we cannot have communion with God; sin separates us from God's love, His communion, His childship and His blessings.

But God wants us to turn again to Him. He waits for our return just as the father of the prodigal son was eagerly waiting for his son's return. God does not want the sinner to die in his sins. He wants the sinner to repent and return to the life in the Kingdom. The Holy Spirit helps us return through repentance and God receives us with open arms.

This is illustrated with several parables like:



The Parable of the Lost Sheep:

When the good shepherd finds the lost sheep, he says: "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost." Then Jesus adds "Just so, I tell you there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:6-7).

The Parable of the Lost Coin: Illustrates the same idea

The Parable of the Prodigal Son: The father makes a feast to

rejoice at the return of his repenting son. In the same way, God the Father and the angels in heaven rejoice when a sinner repents and comes back to the life of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Repentance

As we prepare ourselves for Confession, we must have a true repentance of our sins. This repentance begins with the realization that we have isolated ourselves from God's love. We must have a deep and genuine sense of sorrow and humility when we come before God to confess our sins. King David exemplifies this in **Psalm 51 (Psalm 50 OSB)** when he cries before God.

Some people are in such a disposition of their souls that they do not realize their sins. Their hearts are hardened constantly rejecting the counsel of the Holy Spirit who dwells in them.

Importance of Humility

When the Holy Spirit makes us aware of our sins, we should repent and confess, and renew our life in the Kingdom of God. We can have a true repentance only when we humble our hearts. The proud can never repent genuinely. Pride obstructs the clarity of our vision and we are not able to see our sins as they are - like the Pharisee in the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (**Luke 18: 9-14**). Jesus ends saying, "for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted" (**Lk. 18:14**).

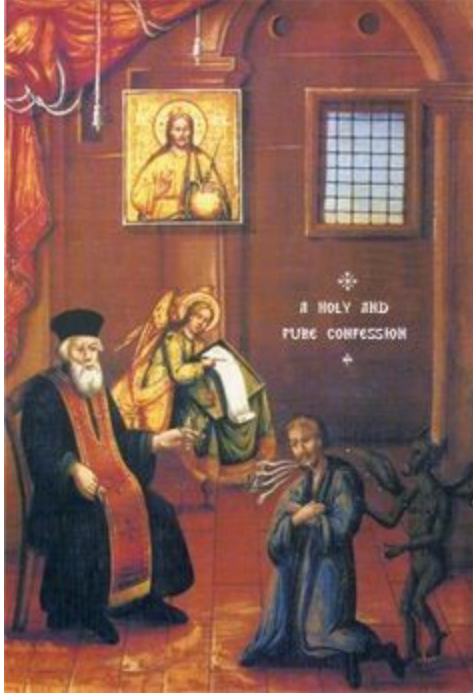
We should sit quiet in the presence of God and try to find out where we are, and how far we have gone away from the love of God. Then the Holy Spirit would help us to see our sins. The humility to examine ourselves in the presence of God is essential for true repentance and confession. We should pray as in **Psalm 139: 23-24 (Psalm 138 : 23-24)**.

Holy Confession

After humbly realizing our sins, we come before God to confess our sins and receive forgiveness in order to be received as His children in the Eternal Kingdom. Just as the Prodigal Son confessed his sins before his father, we confess our sins before the heavenly Father, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son" (**Luke 15:18-19**). When we confess our sins before God, He is happy to receive us. Like the Prodigal Son's father, God the Father receives a sinner who repents and confesses with affection and love. He receives us in unreserved love and joy. As we confess our sins, He forgives us and robes us in holiness and purity.

We were dead in our sins; and now we are given a new life. We were lost to the flock of Christ, but now we are found. This reminds us of our experience in Holy Baptism. In

Baptism we were given a new garment of holiness and rose again to the new life in the Kingdom of God. In confession, we renew and reestablish the experience of Holy Baptism. Hence confession is called ‘Second Baptism.’



When we come to the church for confession, we may spend a few minutes in prayer to prepare ourselves. We may read and meditate some of the penitential Psalms such as **Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 139 and 142**. They powerfully express the depth and genuineness of real repentance.

It is also helpful to say some of the penitential prayers from the prayer book. A few lines from one of the prayers is as follows: *"O God, who willest not the death of the sinner, but rather that he repent and live, I confess before Thee that I have sinned before heaven and in Your sight, while enjoying Thy great goodness... Make*

me, O Father, as one of Thy hired servants. Blot out my transgressions in Thy mercy. Cleanse me from my sin. Receive Thou my confession and help me in Thy mercy and grace to live a life that brings Thee glory and praise. Amen."

When the preparation is over, we go to the priest and confess. We begin the confession with a short prayer. In the prayer we acknowledge that we confess our sins before the Holy Trinity, all the Saints of the Church and the priest who is given the authority to forgive and retain the sins. We ask the priest to give us forgiveness of sins and be our mediator before God. The priest hears our confession.

Why do we confess to a priest? Why can't we just say it in our heads?

He stands before God and can pray for our forgiveness. In addition to this, he gives us necessary guidance in conquering the evil in our lives. The priest helps us see how we can avoid sins. As a shepherd, he guides us to the new life in Jesus Christ. We may seek his help not only at the time of confession, but at any time, we can approach him and seek his directions.

Forgiving One Another

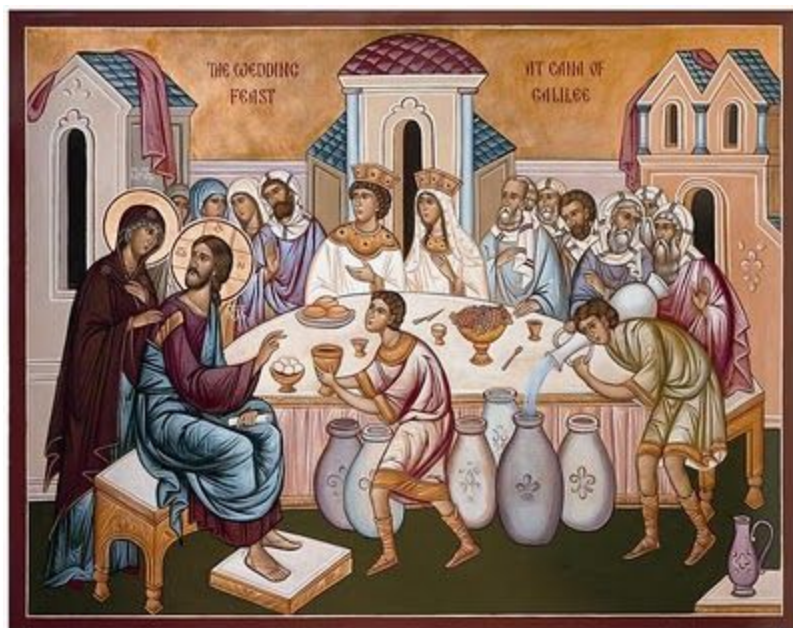
God forgives our sins when we confess before Him. But our confession becomes perfect when we reconcile with those we have sinned against. If we do not forgive our offenders, we are not eligible for the forgiveness from God. Jesus Christ tells us: "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (**Matt. 6:14-15**).

During the Holy Qurbana, we have the "Kiss of Peace." It is the occasion when we reconcile with each other. We forgive and forget any offenses by our brethren. Having our sins forgiven by God and having reconciled with our fellow men, we continue to walk in the newness of life.

Confession is a necessary part of life. With baptism we are granted entry into the Kingdom and confession helps us renew the vows taken at our baptism renouncing Satan and accepting Christ. By forgiving others the sins they have done to us, God will also forgive us our sins.

Lesson 8 - Marriage

OBJECTIVE: Understand the basic background for the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony



We read in the book of Genesis the story of the first family. God created man. Seeing him lonely, God wanted to give him a companion. God put man into sleep and made from him a woman and brought her to the man. When the man saw the woman, for the first time, he said: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." (**Genesis 2:23**) Then the author of the

Book of Genesis adds: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh." (**Genesis 2:24**) The bond of affection and love between the husband and wife is well depicted in the above passages. God created Adam out of love. Eve was created in order so that Adam may also love. Love is fundamental to God, and having been created in His image, love is fundamental to us as well.

St. Paul compares the love between the husband and wife to the love between Christ and the Church. Christ is the bridegroom and Church the bride. Just as Jesus Christ gave Himself for the Church, so also, the husband offers himself in love to the wife. St.

Paul exhorts the couples by saying "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her,... and let the wife see that she respects her husband." (Ephesians 5:25-33).

The couple confess their faith and dedication to God, vow that they will work towards the Eternal Kingdom as a family unit and receive blessings and prayers through the adornment of rings and crowns. There are two parts to the service.

The Blessing of the Ring

The ring is the sign of the betrothal of man and woman to unite them and live together as husband and wife. The priest puts rings on each of them and prays to God to accept their decision and bless them. The priest placing the ring on the finger signifies that the wedding is not just between the couple but God is also an active part.

The Blessing of the Crowns

Although chains with crosses are now used, the second part of the service is called the blessing of the crowns. The couple are given the “crowns” as they are now kings and queens of their own kingdoms on Earth. The priest crowns the couples and wishes, *“May the Lord adorn you the crown of justice and adorn you ornaments of incorruption.”* Afterwards, the couple receives the Holy Communion. Through the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony, human love becomes blessed and holy through the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Thali and Manthrakodi

This is followed by the tying of the "Thali" (Minnu) an Indian custom incorporated in the churches of South India. The Minnu is a small gold pendant stylized as a heart with a cross on it. This is placed on a silk thread made by interweaving seven threads taken out of the "Manthrakodi", the bridal sari given by the groom's family. The silk thread with the minnu on it is tied around the bride's neck by the groom. This is a symbolic act, accepting her as his own, signifying the life-long inseparable bond established in marriage.

The placing of Manthrakodi upon the bride's head by the priest symbolizes Rebecca who took a veil and covered herself when she first saw Isaac. An act of humility, chastity and devotion to her life-long partner united in marriage by God (**Genesis 24:65**). The groom henceforth accepts the responsibility to care for and cherish his bride. The service ends with an exhortation and the priest joins the right hands of the bride and the groom together, declaring them husband and wife entrusting them to each other in the name of the Lord. The priest stands as the mediator between God and the couple while the congregation stands as witnesses.

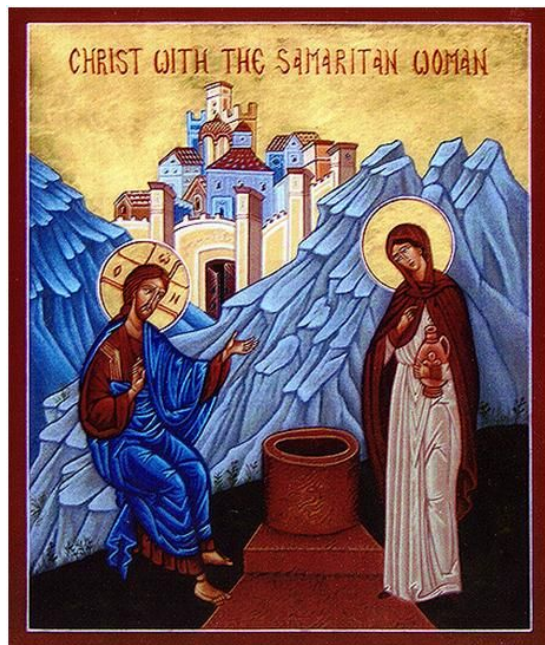
The family is a miniature Church. The husband and wife are the king and the queen in that little Kingdom of God. They are given all grace and blessings to be the rulers of the family. They lead and guide the family to the life in the Kingdom of God. They raise their children as the children of the Kingdom. A family shows what love and life together in Jesus Christ really means.

LESSON 9 - BORN AGAIN THROUGH WATER AND SPIRIT

OBJECTIVE: Understand Jesus as the Living Water and its relation to being Holy Baptism

Water is an essential element of life. It quenches our thirst and allows our bodies to function. When we read the Gospel according to St. John we come across a reference to the 'living water.' Jesus Christ says that He gives living water to those who believe in Him. When He says 'living water,' He means life, joy and gladness that exist for all times.

Jesus Christ was traveling through Samaria on His way back to Galilee from Judea. Shechem is a town in Samaria and Sychara village near Shechem, about a mile north of



Jacob's well. Jesus came to the well and sat there tired. It was about noon. His disciples had gone to the town to buy some food. A Samaritan woman came there to draw water. Jesus asked her to give him some water. She was very much surprised at this. There were no social contacts between the Jews and the Samaritans. Seeing her reluctance Jesus told her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink', you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water. **(John 4:10)**. The woman found Jesus' claim as impossible because Jesus did not have anything to draw water with. She misunderstood Jesus and thought He referred to the water running from the spring. Jesus corrected her: "but whoever drinks of the water

that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life," **(John 4:14)**.

God continually watches over our physical needs. In the Old Testament, God gave water for the people of Israel in the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land. At Marah, God gave them sweet water out of bitter water. Again as they reached Rephidim, they had no water to drink. As God commanded, Moses went up to Horeb, he struck the rock

with his stick and water came out of it. It satisfied their physical thirst and sustained their physical life.

But, through Jesus Christ, God has fulfilled our spiritual needs. Jesus Christ is the living water. He is the source of life. In Him, we have life. He who believes in Him shall be given the living water. Ordinary water quenches our thirst; it gives us momentary satisfaction and gladness. But the life, the joy, the gladness that the living water provides is everlasting. The living water refers both to the water of Baptism and to the Holy Qurbana. We are born again to a new life of the Kingdom of God by baptism. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a teacher and a ruler of Jews. He wished to see Jesus and to talk to Him. But since Nicodemus held a high position in the Jewish society, he did not dare to see Jesus openly. So he paid a visit to Jesus in secret by night. He came and told Jesus: "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him" (**John 3:2**). Nicodemus recognized Jesus as a teacher from God and admitted that God was with Him. This alone would not help him to enter into the Kingdom of God.

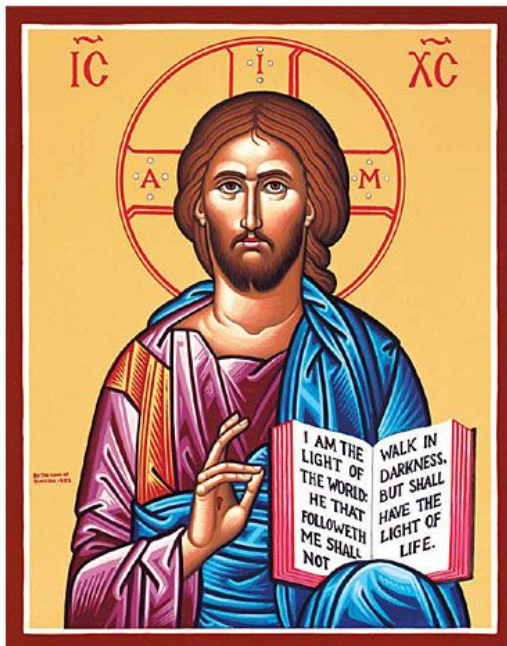
If anyone wishes to be admitted into the Kingdom of God, he should be born anew. He should be born of water and the spirit. Jesus Christ tells Nicodemus in an emphatic tone that "You must be born anew" (**John 3:7**). Jesus Christ here refers to a second birth. First we were born into our families physically. We must be born for a second time into the family of God and enter into the Kingdom of God. This new birth takes place in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism.

Baptism is our new birth in water and in Spirit. In Baptism, we are cleansed from all of our sins. With baptism we begin a new life in Jesus Christ. St. John the Baptist announced to the world about the coming of Jesus Christ. He said that Jesus would give a new birth that they might enter into the Kingdom of God. He would baptize people in water and in Spirit. Those who desire life in the Kingdom should turn to Jesus Christ. We enter into the Kingdom of God only when we confess our faith and allegiance to Jesus Christ who is capable of giving us life and salvation through His death and resurrection. In baptism, we turn to Jesus Christ and confess our faith in Him; and Jesus Christ gives the new life in the Kingdom through a rebirth in water and the Spirit. So, we are born again Christians!

Lesson 10 - The Light of the World

OBJECTIVE: Identify and recognize Jesus' title as Light of the World and what it means for our life

With physical sight we are able to witness the beauty of nature and the variety of God's creation. But think about a blind man, he experiences only darkness. In the Bible we see that Jesus Christ gives sight to several blind men.



In St. John Chapter 9, we read the story of a young blind man who receives sight from Jesus Christ. As Jesus was passing by, he saw a young man who was blind from his birth. Jesus Christ felt compassion and gives the man physical sight. The healing of the blind man had been portrayed as the symbol of Baptism in the early Christian Church.

As He heals the blind man, Jesus says, "I am the light of the world" (**Jn. 9:5**). The healing of the blind man reveals the work of Jesus Christ as the Creator. Jesus Christ has the power to give sight to the physical and spiritual eyes of humans. Many of us are spiritually blind even though we have physical sight. Jesus Christ says on another

occasion, "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (**Jn. 8:12**).

Spiritual sight refers to the capacity of the mind to see the right and the wrong. A person who has lost their spiritual sight cannot judge good from evil, life from death, righteousness from sin. This lost sight comes from clouding the internal light - the flame of the Holy Spirit. Without this light, our soul becomes sick and our life difficult. Jesus Christ heals the blindness of the soul. He is the light of life and thus He renews our flame by removing the sins that cloud it.

In the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, there are special prayers of illumination. Illumination means, "to give light." Illumination is the service through which catechumens are brought to the light. The priest prays to God to illumine the minds and

hearts of the catechumen, so that they may understand the commandments of God and distinguish the good and evil in their life. We can pursue good only when we have light within us. We can see God only when the cover of darkness is removed from our minds and hearts. Jesus Christ heals the blindness of our souls and illumines our hearts so that we may attain the vision of God.

In baptism the person is brought from darkness to light, from the power of the evil to the faith in Jesus Christ. In a prayer we sing thus:

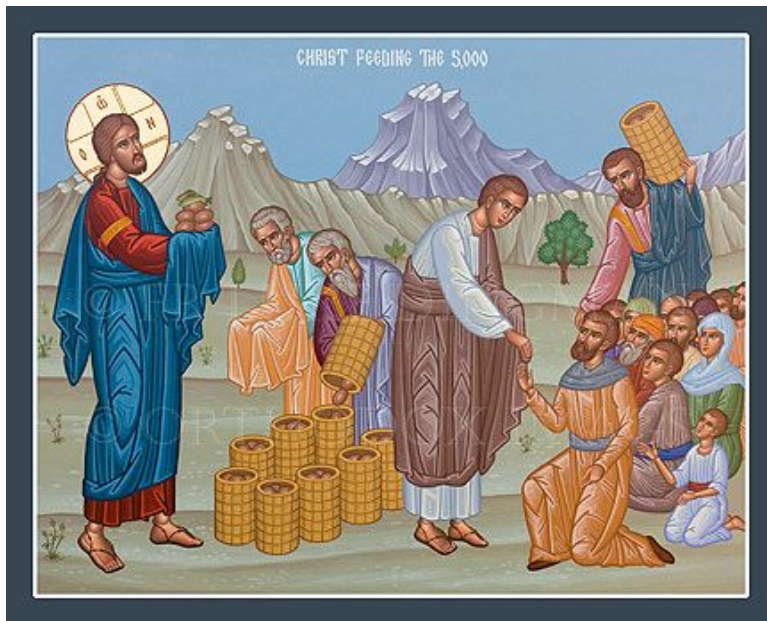
*"O Light, in Thy light shall we see light,
O Jesus, full of light; Thou art the true light
Thou enlighten the whole creation;
Enlighten us with your joyous light;
Splendor of the Father in Heaven."*

Lesson 11 - The Bread of Life

OBJECTIVE: Identify and recognize Jesus' title as the Bread of Life and what it means for us

The one miracle of Jesus Christ that all the four evangelists record is the feeding of the five thousand (**Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-15**).

One day Jesus was preaching in the hills near the sea of Tiberias. A large crowd gathered



around Him to see the signs done by Him and to hear His words. They were so attracted towards Jesus that they spent many days with Him. They did not take enough food with them. As days passed, they became tired. Jesus knew this. He asked His disciples to give them food. They wondered, how to bring food for such a large crowd in the wilderness. Our Lord asked them to bring before Him whatever they had with them. A boy in the crowd had five loaves of bread

and two small fish with him. Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it and asked them to serve it to the multitude. All ate, were satisfied and took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces of bread left over. All were astonished at this work done by Jesus Christ. Jesus and His disciples withdrew from the crowd and went to the hills. The next day they went to Capernaum. The multitude went to Capernaum seeking Jesus.

Our Lord understood their motive behind this search for him. He told them that they sought Him because they ate bread, and not due to His signs. He added, "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you. (**John 6:27**).

Jesus Christ gives food for the hungry. He caters to our physical needs. Man needs food for the growth and sustenance of his body in this impermanent life. But, we also need sustenance for the Eternal Kingdom. We can only fully grow when we establish

communion with God. Jesus Christ provides us with this communion since He is the Bread of life. Jesus Christ says to the crowd, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst." (**Jn. 6:35**)

The Bread of Life is the Flesh of the Son of God. Those who go to Him and put their faith in Him shall not hunger nor thirst. All who participate in this food shall have eternal life. He says again that the bread, which he refers to, is His own flesh. He says, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh" (**Jn. 6:51**). The Bread that Jesus Christ gives is His own body.

How do we participate in the body of Jesus Christ?

In the Holy Qurbana we have communion in the life-giving body of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ established the Holy Qurbana at His last supper. As they were eating Jesus took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave to the disciples saying, "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise He took the cup, blessed it and gave it to them saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (**Luke 22:19-20**).

Remember that Jesus Christ established the Holy Qurbana in anticipation of His death on the Cross on which He offered Himself as a sacrifice, and His resurrection by which He gave a new life to the humanity. In the Holy Qurbana too, Jesus Christ offers Himself for us and gives us a new life through His body and blood. Jesus Christ gives us a new life in His Kingdom by making us participate in His body and blood. He says, "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him" (**John 6:56**). Jesus Christ gives Himself to us. We receive Him by having communion of His body and blood.

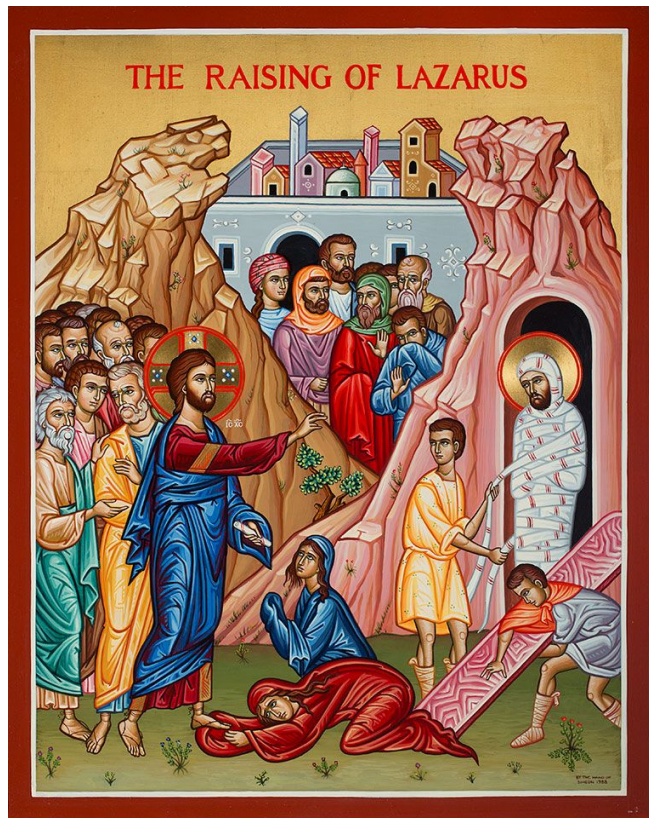
Christ died for us so that we may live. We must participate in the Holy Qurbana in purity and faith. Having the bread of life within us is a great privilege. Having participated in the bread of life, we must not consume or join in any activities that cause death or condemnation of our bodies; "for do you not know that your bodies are the temple of God" **1 Corinthians 6:19-20**. When it comes to physical food, we also have the same responsibility as Christ; to feed the hungry. We should not waste food and water as there are millions of people around the world suffering without these basic needs.

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Lesson 12 - Lazarus Saturday

OBJECTIVE: Understand the relevance of the Lazarus' resurrection to our everyday life

Across all Orthodox churches, Lazarus Saturday is celebrated the Saturday right before Palm Sunday. It refers to following event:



In the village called Bethany, there was a small family of three members, Lazarus and his two sisters, Martha and Mary. Our Lord Jesus was the intimate friend of this family. He used to visit them frequently with his disciples. One day Lazarus fell ill. Jesus was away from that village. His sisters sent messengers to Jesus. But our Lord did not go up there. He deliberately delayed His trip because He knew that this was the occasion when the glory of the Son of God might be revealed. Lazarus died and was buried. His sisters wept. They were sure that if Jesus had been there, Lazarus would not have died. At last, on the fourth day of the death of Lazarus, Jesus came to Bethany. Martha and Mary were deeply moved to see Jesus. He consoled them and asked them to believe in Him. Our Lord went up to the

tomb of Lazarus and wept. He prayed to His Father in heaven. Then He cried out with a loud voice: "Lazarus, come out". The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with bandages, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus asked the people around, "unbind him and let him go." **John 11:1-46**

The story of Lazarus is pertinent in many ways. Such as the following:

1. Its significance in the death and resurrection of Christ
2. Its importance for us as believers.

As mentioned at the beginning, Lazarus Saturday is the day before Holy Week begins. Holy Week is the commemoration of Christ's entry into Jerusalem through His resurrection. The story of Lazarus shows the plan and purpose for Jesus's death and resurrection. In the same way, Jesus comes to the house in Bethany with a purpose to console the Mary and Martha, so too did Jesus enter Jerusalem and was well received.

Throughout the week, many would doubt Jesus just as Jesus was ridiculed when He was caught. But more importantly, Jesus wept upon seeing His dead, dear friend Lazarus. God has cried and continues to cry when He loses one of us, His children, to sin. However, just as Christ went to Lazarus's tomb to pray and bring him back to life, He did the same for us with God's love. Jesus's death and resurrection was a petition to God to clean us of our sins so that we may live again with Him.

Furthermore, Jesus had risen two others after their death, the daughter of Jairus (**Mark 5:22-43**) and widow's son at Nain (**Luke 7:11-17**). But the raising of Lazarus is more remarkable than any of these. The two children were raised to life before they were buried. But Lazarus was a full-grown man who had been in the grave for four days and in the process of decay. For Jesus Christ, to give back life to a man in this stage, shows that Jesus is the Giver of Life. Jesus waited until the death of Lazarus to make the people believe in Him as the Giver of life, and thus, glorify the name of His Father.

All of us know that this miracle is quite possible for our Lord, because we know and believe that Jesus is the true Son of God, who has given life to all the living things in the creation. He is the Creator and Sustainer of all things in this universe, the Redeemer and Savior of humanity. He gives us not only this physical life, but also the eternal life. He says: "I am resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he dies, yet shall he live" (**John 11:25**). Therefore, we shall rejoice that we have a Savior who is the true Giver of life. We need not fear even death.

Death is only a slumber for Christians. After death, each of us enters into another form of life where we are free from all the physical ties and bondages. If we believe in Jesus, we shall live forever. The resurrection of Lazarus is a sign of the resurrection of all of us. Therefore, let us work for this everlasting life. We need not be afraid of the dangers of this physical life. Let us be prepared to welcome death by which we begin to live the real life with our Lord.

Lesson 13 - Holy Week

OBJECTIVE: Become familiar with the structure and importance of the events during Holy Week

The ministry of Jesus Christ comes to its climax during Holy Week. He sees clearly what is going to happen in the near future. He is ready to offer Himself on the Cross as a sacrifice for the salvation of man. "The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (**John 12:23-24**). As He prepares Himself for the Cross we hear Jesus repeating the words: "The hour has come."

The Raising of Lazarus

The raising of Lazarus in Bethany increased the fame of Jesus Christ. A huge crowd believed in Jesus and followed Him. When the chief priests and Pharisees found out that a large number of people disowned the Jewish authorities and followed Jesus, they planned to put Jesus and Lazarus to death (because Lazarus's resurrection led to Jews believing in Christ).

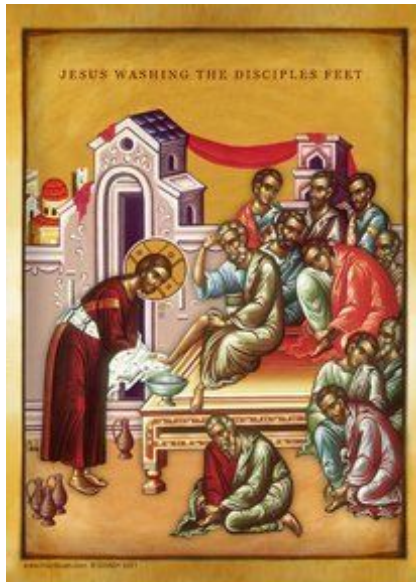
Six days before Passover, Lazarus and his sisters arranged a supper for Him. As they sat at the table, Mary took a pound of costly ointment of pure nard and anointed His feet. Judas Iscariot criticized this, saying that it should have been sold and the amount given to the poor. Then Jesus said, "Let her keep it for the day of my burial. The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me" (**John 12:7-8**). Jesus knew that the hour of His death had come. So He reveals the hidden significance of Mary's great act of devotion saying that she has poured it over Him in anticipation of His burial.



Triumphal Entry to Jerusalem

The following day, Jesus and His disciples set out for Jerusalem. A great multitude followed Him. They had seen His miracles and believed that He was the Messiah prophesied about. So they wanted to make Him their king. They gave Him a royal reception to the city; they cried out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, the King of Israel!" (**John 12:13**).

'Hosanna' is a term shouted at the time of great rejoicing. It can be translated as 'save now.' The people thought that Jesus would establish His Kingdom in Jerusalem soon. But for Jesus, this royal procession was a Eucharistic procession. He was not going to assume earthly power in Jerusalem. He was going to offer Himself as a sacrifice for the redemption of mankind. He chose the colt of a donkey to ride in order to express the humility and simplicity (not militarily) by which He would establish His Kingdom.



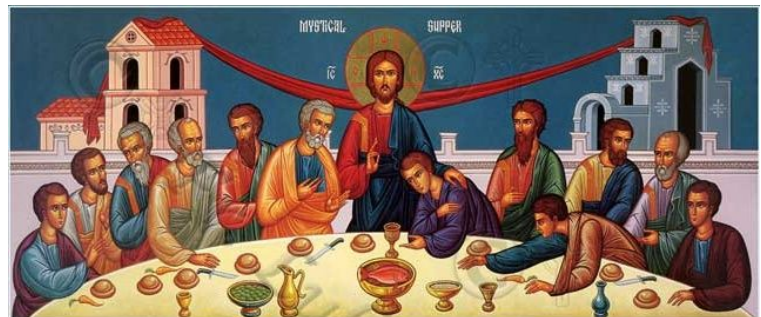
Last Supper and Washing of Disciples' Feet

As they were at the table, Jesus rose from supper, laid aside His garments and wore a towel around Himself. He washed the disciples' feet as a servant. Jesus showed His disciples that the Son of Man has come not to be served but to serve. "You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I, then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (**John 13:13-14**). Humility and service to others are real signs of greatness and leadership.

After this, as they were eating, our Lord took bread, blessed and broke it and gave to the disciples, saying: "Take, eat; this is my body." Likewise he took the cup, gave thanks and gave them saying: "Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (**Matthew 26:26-28**). These words of institution of the Holy Qurbana should be understood in light of His death on the Cross. He poured out His blood on the Cross for the sins of the world.

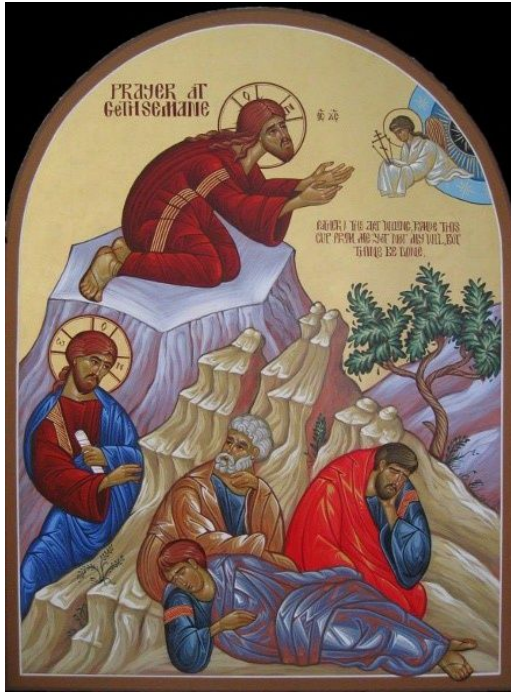
Cross and the Hour of Glory

Jesus Christ anticipated His death on the Cross and referred to the passion as His hour of glory. After the last meal, when He had gone to the garden of Gethsemane before He would be handed over to the chief priests



and Pharisees to be put to death, He said, "Now is the Son of man glorified, and in Him God is glorified; if God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him at once" (**John 13:31-32**). Jesus saw His death on the Cross as an occasion

when He is glorified and in Him God also is glorified. The Father is glorified because the will of the Father was accomplished on the Cross. It was the will of the Father that the Son should die for saving humanity.



Jesus' humility to subject Himself, even to death on the Cross reveals His glory. He was glorified on the Cross, because He conquered the temptation to identify Himself with the evil. Jesus Christ showed the world that we attain glory when we accomplish the will of God in our lives. When we disregard the will of God, we submit ourselves to the evil and thereby put ourselves to disgrace. Jesus Christ accepted the Cross and considered the passion on the Cross as the hour of His glory because the death on the Cross and His resurrection three days later was the sign of victory over the evil and the manifestation of the will of God.

Lesson 14 - The Good Shepherd

OBJECTIVE: Understand how Jesus is the Good Shepherd and who are the shepherds of His flock in our life



The Parable of the Lost Sheep

A shepherd had a hundred sheep and he loved each one of them. He knew every sheep and called each one by name. When they heard his voice they recognized the voice and gathered around him. He led them to green pastures. He walked before them and they followed him. He protected them from fierce animals, which came to snatch them away and kill them. He guarded them at the risk of his own life. In the evening he led them into the fields and kept watching over them throughout the night. Unfortunately, one day the shepherd found that one sheep was lost. He felt very sad. He decided to bring it back to the flock. He left the ninety-nine sheep in the pasture and went in search of the lost sheep. At last, after a long and tiresome search he found it. It was about to die in

the wilderness. He carried it back to the flock on his shoulders. He was very happy and he shared his happiness with his friends. He was the good shepherd who set in search of the lost sheep. He gave the sheep another chance at life.

Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd

Through this parable, Jesus Christ describes Himself as the good shepherd. He came to save us, the lost sheep. He sacrificed his life for us so that we may have life. We were dead in sin. He gave us a new life in the Kingdom of God. Jesus Christ says: "... I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (**John 10:10-11**).

Our relationship with Jesus Christ is intimate. Jesus Christ loves us and guards us from dangers. He protects us from the attack of the devil. Jesus Christ warns us against thieves and false shepherds, but still gives us free will to decide. We should be careful. Evil may attract us to leave the flock and safety of Jesus Christ. We should not be deceived by the evil. Sometimes we may disregard the words of the shepherd and go

astray. But our Lord comes to us and calls us back to His flock through repentance and renewed life of confession. Jesus Christ explains how God receives back a repenting sinner, "Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance " (**Luke 15:7**). Jesus Christ is sure that we would hear His voice and follow Him. He says "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand." (**John 10:27-28**). We should listen to the voice of our Lord and follow Him in every step of our life. If we obey Jesus Christ and follow Him, He will give us eternal life in his Kingdom.

Serving God

God has called each of us to serve Him in some way. Some do it through our work, some through our families and others through dedication to the Church. All of these roles are to help the Church grow and to help each of us strengthen our life in Christ.

St. Paul makes this clear in the following lines: "And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (**Eph. 4:11-13**). Just as every limb of our body has a special function of its own, every one of us has a special role in the Church as the members of the body of Christ. It may be as a bishop, priest or deacon, a teacher, a monk or nun or as a good Christian mother or father. God will aid us in choosing our vocation if we submit to him.

The Sacrament of Priesthood

Priesthood is a special vocation in the Church by which we are called to dedicate our entire life to the service of God. Our Lord sent the apostles to different parts of the world to preach the gospel and bring people to Christ. They were given all spiritual powers to feed and lead the flock of Christ.

The Clergy

Bishop

Our Lord appointed the apostles as the shepherds who would watch over his flock, the Church. When he appointed St. Peter as the shepherd, He said: 'Feed my sheep,' meaning in both spiritual and physical ways. The apostles then appointed bishops in different Churches as the shepherds of the flock of Christ. They represent Christ, the Good Shepherd and are referred to as "His Grace" or "His Holiness" to reflect that. St. Peter exhorts the bishops and priests saying, "Tend the flock of God that is your charge... being examples to the flock" (**1 Pet. 5:2-3**). A bishop is often seen with a shepherd's

staff in his hand. The word bishop comes from the Greek word, 'episcopos' which means 'one who watches over.'

The bishop stands before God on behalf of the faithful. He offers sacrifices, intercessions, thanks and praises to God on behalf of the faithful. He is the visible representative of God in the midst of them. Just as Jesus Christ sacrificed Himself for the Church, the bishop offers himself to the service of the Church.

Priest

The priest has the same duties as a bishop. The word priest comes from the Greek 'presbyteros' meaning 'elder'. The difference is that the priest concentrates his work in a parish, whereas the bishop watches over a region consisting of many parishes. The priest serves the faithful as a teacher and shepherd. He is the representative of his bishop, and of Jesus Christ in the Church. He also represents the faithful to God, in offering gifts, in praying, praising, and thanking God.

Deacon

The word deacon means 'servant'. He is the real servant of the Church. In the book of the 'Acts of the Apostles' we find that the Church, for the first time ordained seven deacons (**Acts 6:1 -6**). One among them was St. Stephen, the first martyr of the Church. The main function of the deacons is to assist the bishops and priests at the altar and to take the responsibility of the various social services of the Church. Just as Jesus Christ gave Himself for the service of man, the deacons give themselves for service by caring for the sick, the aged and the poor. The deacons help the bishops and priests in all areas of parish work.

As Christ is the Good shepherd guiding his flock, we are also called to help and guide others. Being young, you may wonder how to guide or help others. This is in the way you act and behave. Younger kids may look up to you to stand in church prayerfully or the respectful way you talk to teachers and parents, and the way you support your friends with a kind word. You can always be a good shepherd and role model in your actions.

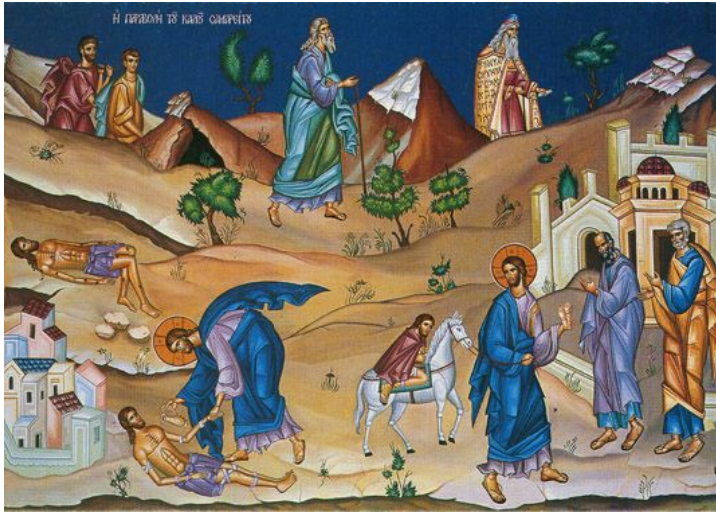
Lesson 15 - The New Commandment

OBJECTIVE: Understand Jesus' new commandment of love and apply in our own lives

We have been studying the various aspects of Christ's work on earth. The underlying meaning of His mission can be understood by a single word, 'love.'

Love was His new commandment to the world. The Gospel that Christ preached and lived out had two dimensions,

1. Love towards God the Father
2. Love towards one another



St. John Chapters 13 to 17 show how intimate Jesus Christ was and is in His love towards the Father and towards us. Jesus knew that it was time for His departure from the world. So He wished to have His last Passover meal with His disciples. When the disciples knew that their master in whom they put their entire trust was leaving them, they were troubled. After the supper, Jesus comforted them explaining the need and the

purpose of His departure and what all things He would do for them. Then He interceded before His Father for His disciples and for the world. We can sum up the main aspects in the following points:

1. "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love." (**John 15:10**)
 - a. Jesus obeys, adores and loves the Father. He knows that God the Father can do all for His disciples and followers. He intercedes: "Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, which Thou hast given me that they may be one, even as we are one."
2. "I go to prepare a place for you." (**John 14:2**)
 - a. Jesus comforted the disciples saying that His departure from the world was for the better. He was going to prepare a place for them in His Father's house. Their life in the world was temporary. They

were to be granted eternal life in His Kingdom. The life in the Kingdom would start here itself through the Church. The Church would help them to grow in the Kingdom of God. But the Church could only be established by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and by the descent of the Holy Spirit. It was due to His love for His disciples and the world that Christ accepted death.

3. "I will not leave you desolate" (**John 14:18**)
 - a. It was necessary that Jesus Christ should depart. But He promised them that He would not leave them alone. Though He was to go, He would be a living presence with them. Moreover, He would send the Holy Spirit to be with them forever.
4. "I am praying for those whom thou hast given me" (**John 17:9**).
 - a. The great intercession of Jesus Christ is contained in chapter 17 of St. John's Gospel. It is called the High Priestly prayer of Jesus Christ. He intercedes before the Father for those whom the Father had given Him, the disciples and all those who believed in Him. Jesus prayed to the Father to keep them from the evil one, to sanctify them in truth, and to keep them in unity.
5. "They may be with me where I am" (**John 17:24**)
 - a. Jesus' love for His disciples and all those who believed in Him was so deep that He wished they might be with Him always. So, that they might behold His glory, which the Father had given Him in love before the foundation of the world.
6. "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another" (**John 13:34**)
 - a. Jesus Christ gave the commandment to love one another. Jesus Christ showed the character of this love in His own life. His love went to that extent of laying down His life for others. He says, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." (**John 15:13**).

The two dimensions of the greatest commandment are equally important; love God first and love your neighbor. "We cannot see God. So how can we love God, if we don't love the people we can see?" **1 John 4:20** The cross bridges our barrier between us and God as well as us and fellow men. It is a bridge that closes the gap. We can always look at the cross to see the depth of God's love for us. Love others not just in words but also in deed.

Lesson 16 - Jesus The King

OBJECTIVE: Explain how Jesus is the King

“And we look for the resurrection of the dead and the new life in the world to come”

When Jesus stood before Pilate, he accused of Him claiming to be the king. Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of Jews?" (**John 18:33**). Jesus did not deny his claim to be the king, but went on saying "My Kingdom is not of this world" (**John 18:36**). To Jesus, the Kingdom was not something of power and force, armies and battles, or palaces and riches.



His idea of the Kingdom was quite different from that of the world. Our Lord taught us to pray, "Thy Kingdom come, and Thy will be done on earth as is in Heaven." Here, we get a perfect definition of the Kingdom of God - a society and state of things when God's will is as perfectly done on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus' Kingdom is invisible, spiritual and God-centered. For Jesus, to be the member of the Kingdom is not to be the master of man, but to be a perfect servant of God. A humble spirit and a serving heart are necessary for this Kingdom. The Kingdom is of past, present, and future, since all people doing the will of God in all times are included in it.

When we read **John 4:34; 5:30; 5:38** and **Matthew 26:42**, we find that Jesus again and again speaks of His own deliberate and

complete obedience to the will of God. He came to show what the Kingdom is by perfectly carrying out the will of God. For a child, the Kingdom means obedience, and constant growth in knowledge and goodness. For a worker, the Kingdom means putting his or her best into every task. To Jesus, the Kingdom means serving men and obeying God all the days of one's life.

When we look into the death of Jesus on the Cross, we find His greatness as the King, His death on the Cross was the victory over Satan, prince of the world. Jesus conquered the evil by submitting Himself to the will of the Father. This perfect obedience was not easy. He accomplished God's will in flesh and blood with pain and conflict. But He conquered every temptation and says, "Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself (**John 12:31-32**). He dethroned the evil by His obedience to the Father and gathered all people to His Kingdom where the will of God is accomplished. Thus the Cross reveals the glory of Jesus the King.

The resurrection of Jesus is the most important fact of the Christian religion. If Christ has not been raised, there would have been no Christian faith (**1 Corinthians 15:14**). By the resurrection it is proved that goodness is stronger than evil, life is stronger than death and love is stronger than hatred. Jesus' life, death and resurrection clearly proved that He is the King. Jesus reigns in the hearts of men. He is always with us. We need not be disappointed by the trials that we have to face the corruption of the world. Jesus Christ comforts His disciples: "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. (**John 16:33**).

We need not fear death, because our Lord has proved victorious over death. All of us are awaiting the second coming of our Lord, when Christ will appear as the glorified King and take us to heaven (**1 Thessalonians 4:16**).