

We owe these series of inspiring articles for Ethiopian Orthodox Church Sunday School in Trondheim, Norway.

## **I. New Birth**

When we were infants, our mothers carried us in joyful celebration and went with us to Church to be baptized.

The priest carries us as the child on his left arm and look to the west, which symbolizes the darkness of Satan, and to repeat the following words: " I renounce you Satan, and all your impure works, all your evil soldiers, all your evil devils, all your power, all your evil worship, all your evil misguiding and evil plans, all your army, all your authority, and all your hypocrisy. I renounce you, I renounce you, I renounce you."

This was a declaration made on our behalf that we reject Satan, his ways and methods.

Then the priest transfers the child onto his right arm and to face the east, the symbol of the sun of righteousness, and to repeat the words: "I confess You, Christ my God and all your faithful laws, all you loving ministry, and all your life-giving works.

I believe in one God, God the Father, who controls everything, and in His only Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, and in the life-giving Holy Spirit, in His glorious resurrection, and in the one and only Holy Evangelical and Apostolic Church. I believe, I believe, I believe."

This was a declaration of the acceptance of Christ as Savior and Redeemer! This took place when we were infants and the Church appointed for each of us a "godfather or godmother", that is a person who would bring us up in the faith, teaching us while we were children the bases of the Christian faith and of the life of the Holy Church.

What is required of us now that we have grown up and matured is that we repeat, with complete awareness and sincere faith, those very words many times. (I urge you to look at them again now in order to perceive the meanings inherent in them) and to ask yourself when you say:

I renounce Satan...

Is this truly my stand?

Is there a sin that is hidden in the depths of my heart?

Do I act in accordance with the thinking of Satan in different situations?

What is my attitude to life? Is it pleasing to God and does it build me up?

What are my relations with others like?

Are they truly loving?

Do I present a pleasing image of the children of Christ, or am I a stumbling block to others?

I Believe in Christ....

Has Christ begun to own my life?

Does Christ now occupy my heart and thoughts?

Have I entered into a real fellowship with Him night and day, and do I pray regularly?

Do I always read His personal message to me in the Bible?

Do I partake of His Holy Body and Blood so that I am united to Him and abide in Him?

Dear Reader, Baptism is a free gift; in it we die with Christ to rise with Him in a new life. It is a holy anointing that makes of us a new kind of human being, through the Spirit of God which lives within us.

We go into the baptismal font as children of Adam and we emerge as children of Christ by the renewing of the Holy Spirit. "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." (Rom. 6:4).

Baptism is a new birth that is renewed daily through the tears of repentance!

Would that you would sit quietly with the Lord and wash your sins away with your tears. Would that you would enter into a new and eternal covenant of love, into the side of Christ which was pierced for you.

"For what advantage is to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?" (Lk. 9: 25).

Will you start?

## The HOLY CHRYSM

When we were infants, after we emerged from the baptismal font, the priest anointed us with the "Holy Chrysm" (kidus meron) the second sacrament which is given to man immediately after baptism. It is a sacrament that is directly linked to baptism but independent of it. Both sacraments must be given together, first baptism and then the Chrysm. Why? Baptism is a "renewal" through the Holy Spirit whereas the Chrysm is an "establishing" in the Holy Spirit.

Baptism has made me a son of Christ and the Chrysm confirms me in that the Holy Spirit dwells. You surely know, dear reader, that the bishop "consecrates" a church after it is built with prayers and praise and anoints its walls, its altar, its vessels, and its icons with the holy Chrysm. It thus becomes a temple upon which the Spirit of God descends.

The same thing happens to you. You are "consecrated" by the Chrysm which makes you a temple for the Holy Spirit; 36 signs of the cross are made on you with the oil of the Chrysm.

Why 36 Signs of the Cross? Very simply, the Lord consecrates your whole being for Him. These signs are made as follows:

1. A sign of the cross on the head. Lord consecrate my thoughts"
2. Seven signs of the cross on the two nostrils, the mouth, the ears, and the eyes ... "Lord, consecrate my senses"
3. Two signs of the cross on the chest ... "Lord, consecrate my heart"
4. Two signs of the cross on the back and spine ... "Lord, consecrate my will"

5.Six signs of the cross on both arms (on all three joints) "Lord, consecrate my actions"

6.Six signs of the cross on both legs (on all three joints)... "Lord, consecrate my way"

Do you perceive, dear reader, that the Lord's aim is to consecrate your whole being so that you become a holy temple and a pure church?!

Do you perceive, dear reader, that the oil of the Chrism has made all your members belong to Christ?! So it has become painful for any of us to "take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot" (1 Cor. 6: 15)

The Effects of the Holy Chrism:

1.The holy Chrism enlightens our minds. "But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things" (I Jn. 2: 20)

2.It grants us a strong will for sanctity: "Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God." (1 Cor. 1: 21)

3. It puts on us the seal of the Holy Spirit: "who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a deposit." (1 Cor. 1: 22); the seal is the emblem of ownership and consecration.

Dear Reader, We have received all this in our infancy, and there is no doubt that all this works in our hearts through the Spirit of God which dwells within us and through the holy teachings which we listen to at home and in church.

Will you renew with me the covenant of the Chrism? Will you pray with me and say:

Lord, sanctify my thoughts! Lord, sanctify my senses!

Lord, sanctify my heart! Lord, sanctify my will!

Lord, sanctify my deeds! Lord, sanctify my way!

Repeat this prayer anew several times, meditating on the meaning of its words.

Then close your prayer thus: "O comforting, the Spirit of truth who is present everywhere and who fills everything, storehouse of all that is good, giver of

life, please come and fill us; purify us of all defilement, O Righteous One, and save our souls."

My Lord Jesus Christ, You have anointed me with Your Holy Spirit, this fiery Spirit that led the prophet Elijah...

This gentle spirit which lived within the Virgin...

The Spirit of holiness that sanctifies the being of man...

The Spirit of gifts who grants the ministers words and strength....

But, O Lord, forgive me I do not respect the Spirit within me for lack of faithfulness, for lack of the uprightness of my intentions, and for the weakness of my requests and prayers. For You give the Spirit to those who ask You.

O Holy Spirit of God, fill my whole being so that I may belong to God and to God only!

Do not pray this for yourself only, but for all your loved ones.

May the Lord be with you.

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#### **Holy Communion (UNION WITH GOD)**

"He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him." (Jn.6: 56)

Thus said our glorious Lord, but do you allow me, dear reader, to repeat this verse in the negative?

"He who does not eat My flesh and does not drink My blood, does not abide in Me and neither do I abide in him!!"

Do you not agree with me that this is an alarming version and its result a painful one?!

If you find that you are spiritually weak and not fixed in Christ and that Christ does not abide in you, you will know

that the reason is that you do not take Holy Communion regularly or with preparedness.

What is Holy Communion?

It is simply "union with Christ", for we eat and drink of the body and blood of Christ, so the Lord of glory enters into us and unites with us, and we are grafted into him like the branches are grafted in the vine.

The matter is most reasonable, for if the food that a child eats is transformed into blood and flesh and tissues, what is the problem with the same thing happening to the bread and wine which become the body and blood of the Lord? What is important is that:

### **1. Trust in the Accuracy of the Words of Christ:**

"I am the living bread which came down from heaven.

If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world ..... Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life..... for my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in me, and I in him." (Jn. 6: 47 - 58).

The Jews were astonished at those words and the disciples found them hard; who can understand it? (Jn. 6: 60).

The Lord, however, insisted on what He had said although some people went back. He declared the necessity of walking by faith, asserting the truth of the Holy body and blood.

### **2. Obedience to the Commandment of Christ:**

It is He who commanded insistently that we "break the bread" when He said "Do this in remembrance of Me" (Lk. 22: 20). This is a remembrance in kind, just like the remembrance of the manna from the measure of manna which symbolized the true manna, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord entrusted this same mystery to our teacher, St. Paul: "For I received from the

Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which he was betrayed took bread. and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.'" And the same thing happened with the cup.... "'This cup is the new covenant in My blood.'" (1 Cor. 11: 23 -25).

Therefore, it is a matter of the Lord entrusting this to the apostles and the apostles to us. So let us keep that with which we have been entrusted.

Not Deserving Someone might say: "I believe in all that, but I am undeserving. This is both light and fire and I cannot 'preserve the Holy Communion'! Did you not hear what the apostle Paul says:

'Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.' (1 Cor. 11: 27). Do you want me to become a criminal where the body and blood of the Lord are concerned?... God forbid!!"

But I say to you, dear reader: "Continue the verse" ..... "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup." (1 Cor. 11: 28). This means that you are to examine yourself and to confess any transgression that disturbs your conscience. Struggle against it and you will have victory over it in the strength of the Lord, and in the strength of the body and the blood you will win and be sanctified!

Is it conceivable that we let the disease ravage our body and reject the remedy?! The remedy is present on the altar every day ... "given for our salvation and the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life to all who partake of it."

Let go of sin.... and not of Communion!

Let go of dissension .... and not of Communion.

Christ is waiting for you on the altar to grant you forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life, so do not delay and may the Lord be with you.

Dear reader, I beg you to repeat with me the following: My Lord Jesus Christ, In the Eucharist, I see You, I touch

You, I talk to You, I unite with You! Your blood flows in my veins! Your flesh unites with my weak flesh! Lasting life and strength are poured into me and the strength that comes from abiding in Your person.

Lord, I neglect to partake of Holy Communion regularly, being prepared, in the fervour of love.

When do I start..... and continue?

When do I go to the depth of Your eternal gift of love that is present with us everyday on the altar?!