

NOTES ON THE PRAYER BEFORE COMMUNION “O LORD, I BELIEVE AND PROFESS”

- One of the most remarkable sets of prayers within the Byzantine Divine Liturgy is the Prayer of Preparation for Holy Communion.
- These are the prayers prayed aloud by both the clergy and the laity to prepare spiritually for the worthy reception of the Eucharistic of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.
- It is not uncommon for many first-time visitors to our Byzantine churches to comment on the beauty of this particular prayer, and its rich tapestry of biblical themes and explicit professions of faith in the sacredness of the Mysteries believed and about to be received.
- Over the weeks of the Great Fast, I would like to offer a few points of consideration regarding the meaning of this prayer to help us participate more consciously in it both in the Divine Liturgy and in the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts offered during this penitential season.
- The prayer begins: “O Lord, I believe and profess”
- “O Lord”
 - We note that the first words of the prayer are directed by us to the Lord.
 - The word “Kyrie” in the New Testament is complex. Although it can mean “sir”, it is the word used in the Septuagint for the one God.
 - The Jews then as now do not say the sacred name of God, and so they substituted Adonai (Master) in liturgy and Hashem (the Name) outside of Liturgy.
 - In the Greek translation, the word Kyrie (Lord) was used. In the New Testament it is clear from context that sometimes when Jesus is addressed as Kyrie, the Divine element is intended.

- This phrase also refers to Romans 10:9 “If you declare with your mouth “Jesus is Lord” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”
- The second part of this opening is “I believe and profess”
 - Like the Creed (or Symbol) of Nicea-Constantinople prayed before the beginning of the Eucharistic Anaphora in the Divine Liturgy, this prayer also begins with the phrase “I believe.”
 - The Creed, as we know, is the shared expression of the faith of our Baptism as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and members of His Body, the Church.
 - It is the proclamation of the apostles that indelibly marks every Christian mind and heart as we prepare to enter the salvific mystery of life in the Kingdom of God.
 - Like the Creed, this Prayer of Preparation for Communion is a profession of faith that, while said corporately – that is together as a whole church – is also an meant to be an expression of my own faith as a Christian.
 - The fact that, not just we, but I believe and profess means that as a Christian and a believer in Christ I am laying claim to the faith in Christ who has laid claim to me as a disciple and follower.
- There comes a time when we as Christians must make that commitment not to pray or profess our faith just merely by force of habit...”I say this prayer because I have always said it!”
- Rather, we are called as mature followers of Christ to internalize this prayer, this profession of faith, and make it our own...like the person who discovers a treasure in a field that they owned for many years. It was always there, but they only had to dig a bit to find it!

- A few years ago, a Pew Poll that came out that asked some questions of Catholics in the US about their faith in the Holy Eucharist.
 - One question was: What does the Catholic Church teach about the Eucharist?
 - Another question was: Do you believe it?
- And the results from these questions have created quite a stir – in the Catholic press, on social media and even among the Bishops.
- Here are the highlights.
 - 31% of professing Catholics believe that the Bread and the Wine become the actual Body and Blood of Christ in the liturgy.
 - 69% of professing Catholics believe that the Bread and Wine are ONLY symbols of the Body and Blood of Christ... that they do not undergo a miraculous and substantive change in the liturgy.
 - Most Catholics who believe the change to the Bread and Wine is only ritually symbolic DO NOT KNOW what the Church teaches about the Eucharistic Mystery.
 - Six-in-Ten (63%) of the most observant Catholics who attend liturgy at least once per week believe in what is often called “the Real Presence” of Christ in the Eucharist, whereas 37% do not believe.
 - That means approximately 7 out of 10 baptized Catholics generally (anyone who calls themselves a Catholic) AND 4 out of 10 observant Catholics who attend the liturgy once a week (presumably on a Sunday) cannot make a sufficient act of faith

- when it comes to receiving this Divine Mystery of the Holy Eucharist.
- This is quite staggering!
 - There has been, of course, all sorts of discussion regarding the CAUSE of this lack of faith in what the Church has affirmed for 2000 years regarding the Eucharistic Gifts.
 - Some say that the problem is a lack of catechesis – people are not taught what the Catholic and Orthodox Churches teach. (There is some reason to believe this with the high numbers who say that they DO NOT KNOW or that the Church teaches a symbolic view)
 - As Byzantine Catholics, I believe that the answer to what the Catholic Church teaches and what we believe about BOTH Jesus Christ and the Holy Eucharist is to be found in this profound Prayer of Preparation for Holy Communion.
 - So as we go through the weeks of the Great Fast together, let us strive to dig a little deeper to this great treasure, to internalize this great profession of faith contained in this prayer by praying it together with great reverence and understanding.
 - Glory to Jesus Christ!