

1) Letter to St Vladimir

“Then we went to Greece, and the Greeks led us to the edifices where they worship their God, and we knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth. For on earth there is no such splendor or such **beauty**, and we are at a loss how to describe it. We only know that **God dwells there among men**, and their service is fairer than the ceremonies of other nations. For we cannot forget that beauty. Every man, after **tasting something sweet**, is afterward unwilling to accept that which is bitter, and therefore we cannot remain apart from it.”

2) Homily by Elder Aimilianos

It means that when we enter the Church, to follow the Divine Liturgy, it is not just like any other practice, it is not something that doesn't really matter, (saying to ourselves) "I will also come tomorrow, and the day after!"

It is a unique event!

We go to Him Who we have loved! To Him Who gave His life for us! To Christ!

But where is Christ?

Christ is here! And here! But in fact, the Second Person of God, our Christ, is at the right hand of the Heavenly Father, inside the Holy of Holies.

Therefore, do not think, my beloveds, that when we enter the Church we are simply entering, and leaving, and again entering.

No! We go up and enter the Holy of Holies; up in Heaven!

As we remove the curtain and Christ comes out, inside the Holy Chalice, at the same time we are opening the gate of Heaven and we are entering inside; we the unworthy.

While we enter the Church, during the Divine Liturgy, we are going up to the Jerusalem that is on high.

Do you all understand how great a work this is?

This work which our souls are experiencing.

We too will reside at the right hand of the Father! And we will acquire honor from the honor of our Christ, and from the Honorable Body of our Lord and our God!

Therefore, when we enter the Church we are crossing over the distance between earth and Heaven, and we are passing by the stars!

We leave the angles behind us, and we climb up to the place where the Holy Trinity resides!

This is what mystery means!

We see the bread and the wine, but who among us does not believe it is Christ?

We see one thing, but we sense another.

This is the wine. This is the bread.

But, no! It is Christ!

The same mystery occurs right here! What do we see? That we are in front of the icons, down under the chandeliers; one next to another?

Wrong! It is a mystery! We are not here, we are there; up there!

And we are all there together! Together with the Saints! Together with the angelic ranks! Together with the Seraphim who have six wings, and who fly fast so that they may teach us to run to Christ, both day and night!

Together with the Cherubim who have many eyes, so that they can teach our eyes how to discover Christ!

This is what the mystery of our Church means!

3) Synaxarion for St. Erasmus

“Erasmus was a monk in the Monastery of the Caves in Kiev. HE inherited great wealth from his parents and spend all on adorning churches, especially on silver-plating and gilding icons. When he had become impoverished and remained without anything, he was despised by all. The devil whispered to him that he squandered his estate in vain; instead of distributing his wealth among the poor, he gave it for the adornment of churches. Erasmus succumbed to this temptation and believed it for which he despised himself and fell into a state of despair and began to live aimlessly and lawlessly. When the hour of his death approached the brethren assembled around him and discussed his sins which he himself was not conscious of. All at once, he straightened up in bed and said: “Fathers and brothers, it is as you say; I am sinful and unrepentant, but behold St Anthony and St Theodosius appeared to me and after that, the All-Holy Mother of God told me that the Lord gave me more time for repentance.” The Mother of God also spoke to these encouraging words to him: “The poor you have with you in every place and my churches you do not.” Erasmus lived for three more days, repented and fell asleep in the Lord. This teaches us that zeal for the Church and adornment of the churches is a task pleasing to God.”

4) St John of Damascus on matter and images

“I do not worship matter; I worship the Creator of matter who became a matter for my sake, who willed to take His abode in matter; who worked out my salvation through matter. Never will I cease honoring the matter which wrought my salvation! I honor it, but not as God... I salute all remaining matter with reverence, because God has filled it with His grace and power. Through it my salvation has come to me. Was not the thrice-happy and thrice-blessed wood of the cross

matter? Was not the holy and exalted mountain of Calvary matter? What of the life-bearing rock, the holy and life-giving tomb, the fountain of our resurrection, was it not matter? Is not the ink in the most holy Gospel-book matter? Is not the life-giving altar made of matter? From it we receive the bread of life! Are not gold and silver matter? From them we make crosses, patens, chalices! And over and above all these things, is not the Body and Blood of our Lord matter? Either do away with the honor and veneration these things deserve, or accept the tradition of the church and the veneration of images.

5) St. Athanasius on creation

“He provided the works of creation also as means by which the Maker might be known....”

6) St Maximus the Confessor on contemplation

“When the mind perceives and contemplates the principles of the things that are, **it will end in God himself**, as the cause and beginning and end of the creation and origin and as the everlasting foundation of the compass of the whole universe.”

7) Elder Aimilianos on prayer

“There are some things that go together – they cannot be separated – like ‘faith’ and ‘works,’ since one has no meaning apart from the other (James 2:14-16). The same is true of prayer, which is linked to something else, namely, liturgy and especially Holy Communion. If there is no worship and no Holy Communion, then there can be no prayer; and any prayer uttered apart from them is false. At the same time, if our worship is divorced from intense, inward personal prayer, which cries out to God from our depths, then you can be certain that our worship and our Holy Communion is in vain: it is an attempt to deceive God and ourselves by pretending we love him, when in fact we have no relationship with him whatsoever. One day he will say to us: *do not know you* (Mt 25:12).

I cannot say, “I go to church,” if I do not pray. It is pointless for me to receive Holy Communion if I am not constantly praying. And it is pointless for me to pray if I have no part in the Divine Liturgy and the worship of the Church. It should be clear that the spiritual life and the sacramental life go together, each presupposes the other, and to have one without the other is to have neither. But when prayer and liturgy are inseparably united, when they work together, God becomes present to me; and as I address myself to him, he rushes toward me, he stretches out toward me, and, through prayer, I stretch out toward him, until we are completely united.”

8) From the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom

“And as for us, partakers of the one bread and of the one cup, do thou unite all to one another unto the communion of the Holy Spirit...”