

CAN FASTING MAKE ONE “WORTHY” TO COMMUNE?

In the first paragraph of his first letter to Fr. Pedro, Bp. Kirykos writes: “... according to the tradition of our Fathers (and that of Bishop Matthew of Bresthena), all Christians, who approach to receive Holy Communion, must be suitably prepared, in order to *worthily* receive the body and blood of the Lord. This preparation indispensably includes *fasting* according to one’s strength.” To further prove that he interprets this *worthiness* as being based on *fasting*, Metropolitan Kirykos continues further down in reference to his unhistorical understanding about the early Christians: “They *fasted* in the fine and broader sense, that is, they were *worthy* to commune.”

Here Bp. Kirykos tries to fool the reader by stating the absolutely false notion that the Holy Fathers (among them St. Matthew of Bresthena) supposedly agree with his unorthodox views. The truth is that not one single Holy Father of the Orthodox Church agrees with Bp. Kirykos's views, but in fact, many of them condemn these views as heretical. And as for referring to St. Matthew of Bresthena, this is extremely misleading, which is why Bp. Kirykos was unable to provide a quote. In reality, St. Matthew’s five-page-long treatise on Holy Communion, published in 1933, repeatedly stresses the importance of receiving Holy Communion frequently and does not mention any such pre-communion fast at all. He only mentions that one must go to confession, and that confession is like a second baptism which washes the soul and prepares it for communion. If St. Matthew really thought a standard week-long pre-communion fast for all laymen was paramount, he certainly would have mentioned it somewhere in his writings. But in the hundreds of pages of writings by St. Matthew that have been collected, no mention is made of such a fast. The reason for this is because St. Matthew was a Kollyvas Father just as was his mentor, St. Nectarius of Aegina. Also, the fact St. Matthew left Athos and preached throughout Greece and Asia Minor during his earlier life, is another example of his imitation of the Kollyvades Fathers.

As much as Bp. Kirykos would like us to think that the Holy Fathers preach that a Christian, simply by fasting, can somehow “worthily receive the body and blood of the Lord,” the Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church actually teach quite clearly that **NO ONE** is worthy of Holy Communion, except by the grace of God Himself. Whether someone eats oil on a Saturday or doesn't eat oil, cannot be the deciding point of a person’s supposed “worthiness.” In fact, even fasting, confession, prayer, and all other things don't come to their fulfillment in the human soul until one actually receives Holy Communion. All of these things such as fasting, prayers, prostrations, repentance, etc, do indeed help one quench his passions, but they by no means make him “worthy.” Yes, we confess our sins to the priest. But the sins

aren't loosened from our soul until the priest reads the prayer of pardon, and the sins are still not utterly crushed until He who conquered death enters inside the human soul through the Mystery of Holy Communion. That is why Christ said that His Body and Blood are shed "for the remission of sins." (Matthew 26:28).

Fasting is there to quench our passions and prevent us from sinning, confession is there so that we can recall our sins and repent of them, but it is the Mysteries of the Church that operate on the soul and grant to it the "worthiness" that the human soul can by no means attain by itself. Thus, the Mystery of Pardon loosens the sins, and the Mystery of Holy Communion remits the sins. For of the many Mysteries of the Church, the seven highest mysteries have this very purpose, namely, to remit the sins of mankind by the Divine Economy. Thus, Baptism washes away the sins from the soul, while Chrism heals anything ailing and fills all voids. Thus, Absolution washes away the sins, while Communion heals the soul and body and fills it with the grace of God. Thus, Unction cures the maladies of soul and body, causing the body and soul to no longer be divided but united towards a life in Christ; while Marriage (or Monasticism) confirms the plurality of persons or sense of community that God desired when he said of old "Be fruitful and multiply" (or in the case of Monasticism, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"). Finally, the Mystery of Priesthood is the authority given by Christ for all of these Mysteries to be administered. Certainly, it is an Apostolic Tradition for mankind to be prepared by fasting before receiving any of the above Mysteries, be it Baptism, Chrism, Absolution, Communion, Unction, Marriage or Priesthood. But this act of fasting itself does not make anyone "worthy!"

If someone thinks they are "worthy" before approaching Holy Communion, then the Holy Communion would be of no positive affect to them. In actuality, they will consume fire and punishment. For if anyone thinks that their own works make themselves "worthy" before the eyes of God, then surely Christ would have died in vain. Christ's suffering, passion, death and Resurrection would have been completely unnecessary. As Christ said, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick (Matthew 9:12)." If a person truly thinks that by not partaking of oil/wine on Saturday, in order to commune on Sunday, that this has made them "worthy," then by merely thinking such a thing they have already proved themselves unworthy of Holy Communion. In fact, they are deniers of Christ, deniers of the Cross of Christ, and deniers of their own salvation in Christ. They rather believe in themselves as their own saviors. They are thus no longer Christians but humanists.

But is humanism a modern notion, or has it existed before in the history of the Church? In reality, the devil has hurled so many heresies against the Church that he has run out of creativity. Thus, the traps and snares he sets are but fancy recreations of ancient heresies already condemned by the Church. The humanist notions entertained by Bp. Kirykos are actually an offshoot of an ancient heresy known as Pelagianism.