

ANCIENT AND CONTEMPORARY FATHERS REGARDING SO-CALLED “WORTHINESS” OF THE HOLY MYSTERIES

St. John Cassian (+29 February, 435) totally disagrees with the notion of Bp. Kirykos that the early Christians communed frequently supposedly because “*they fasted in the fine and broader sense, that is, they were worthy to commune.*” Blessed Cassian does not approve of Christians shunning communion because they think of themselves as unworthy, and supposedly different to the early Christians. Thus whichever side one takes in this supposed dispute of Semipelagianism, be it the side of Blessed Augustine or that of Blessed Cassian, the truth is that both of these Holy Fathers condemn the notions held by Bp. Kirykos.

Blessed Cassian writes: “*We must not avoid communion because we deem ourselves to be sinful. We must approach it more often for the healing of the soul and the purification of the spirit, but with such humility and faith that **considering ourselves unworthy**, we would desire even more the medicine for our wounds. Otherwise it is impossible to receive communion once a year, as certain people do, considering the sanctification of heavenly Mysteries as available only to saints. **It is better to think that by giving us grace, the sacrament makes us pure and holy.** Such people [who commune rarely] **manifest more pride than humility, for when they receive, they think of themselves as worthy.** It is much better if, in humility of heart, **knowing that we are never worthy of the Holy Mysteries** we would receive them every Sunday for the healing of our diseases, rather than, **blinded by pride, think that after one year we become worthy of receiving them.**” (John Cassian, Conference 23, Chapter 21)*

Now, as for those who may think the above notion is only applicable for the Christians living at the time of St. John Cassian (5th century), and that the people at that time were justified in confessing their sins frequently and also communing frequently, throughout the year, while that supposedly this does not apply to contemporary Orthodox Christians, such a notion does not hold any validity, because contemporary Holy Fathers, among them the Hesychastic Fathers and Kollyvades Fathers, have taught exactly the same thing as we have read above in the writings of Blessed Cassian. Thus St. Gregory Palamas, St. Symeon the New Theologian, St. Macarius Notaras of Corinth, St. Nicodemus of Athos, St. Arsenius of Paros, St. Pachomius of Chios, St. Nectarius of Aegina, St. Matthew of Bresthena, St. Moses of Athikia, and so many other contemporary Orthodox Saints agree with the positions of the Blessed Cassian. The various quotes from these Holy Fathers are to be provided in another study regarding the letter of Bp. Kirykos to Fr. Pedro. In any case, not only contemporary Greek Fathers, but even contemporary Syrian, Russian, Bulgarian, Serbian and Romanian Fathers concur.

St. Arsenius the Russian of Stavronikita (+24 March, 1846), for example, writes: *“One can sometimes hear people say that they avoid approaching the Holy Mysteries because they consider themselves unworthy. **But who is worthy of it? No one on earth is worthy of it, but whoever confesses his sins with heartfelt contrition and approaches the Chalice of Christ with consciousness of his unworthiness** the Lord will not reject, in accordance with His words, Him that cometh to Me I shall in no wise cast out (John 6:37).”* (Athonite Monastery of St. Panteleimon, *Athonite Leaflets*, No. 105, published in 1905)

St. John Chrysostom (+14 September, 407), Archbishop of the Imperial City of Constantinople New Rome, speaks very much against the idea of making fasting and communing a mere custom. He instead insists on making true repentance of tears and communion with God a daily ritual. For no one passes a single day without sinning at least in thought if not also in word and deed. Likewise, no one can live a true life in Christ without daily repentance and frequent Communion. But in fact, the greatest method to abstain from sins is by the fear of communing unworthily. Thus, through frequent Communion one is guided towards abstinence from sins. Of course, the grace of the Mysteries themselves are essential in this process of cleansing the brain, heart and bowels of the body, as well as cleansing the mind, spirit and words of the soul. But the fear of hellfire as experienced in the partaking of communion unworthily is most definitely a means of preventing sins.

But if one thinks that fasting for seven days without meat, five days without dairy, three days without oil, and one day without anything but xerophagy, is a means to make one “worthy” of Communion, whereas the communicant then returns to his life of sin until the next year when he decides to commune again, then not only was this one week of fasting worthless, not only would 40 days of lent be unprofitable, but even an entire lifetime of fasting will be useless. For such a person makes fasting and Communion a mere custom, rather than a way of Life in Christ.

Blessed Chrysostom writes: *“But since I have mentioned this sacrifice, I wish to say a little in reference to you who have been initiated; little in quantity, but possessing great force and profit, for it is not our own, but the words of Divine Spirit. What then is it? Many partake of this sacrifice once in the whole year; others twice; others many times. Our word then is to all; not to those only who are here, but to those also who are settled in the desert. For they partake once in the year, and often indeed at intervals of two years. What then? Which shall we approve? Those [who receive] once [in the year]? Those who [receive] many times? Those who [receive] few times? **Neither those [who receive] once, nor those [who receive] often, nor those [who receive] seldom, but those [who come] with a pure conscience, from a pure heart, with an irreproachable life. Let such draw near***

continually; but those who are not such, not even once. Why, you will ask? Because they receive to themselves judgment, yea and condemnation, and punishment, and vengeance. And do not wonder. For as food, nourishing by nature, if received by a person without appetite, ruins and corrupts all [the system], and becomes an occasion of disease, so surely is it also with respect to the awful mysteries. Do you feast at a spiritual table, a royal table, and again pollute your mouth with mire? Do you anoint yourself with sweet ointment, and again fill yourself with ill savors? Tell me, I beseech you, when after a year you partake of the Communion, do you think that the Forty Days are sufficient for you for the purifying of the sins of all that time? And again, when a week has passed, do you give yourself up to the former things? Tell me now, if when you have been well for forty days after a long illness, you should again give yourself up to the food which caused the sickness, have you not lost your former labor too? For if natural things are changed, much more those which depend on choice. As for instance, by nature we see, and naturally we have healthy eyes; but oftentimes from a bad habit [of body] our power of vision is injured. If then natural things are changed, much more those of choice. Thou assignest forty days for the health of the soul, or perhaps not even forty, and do you expect to propitiate God? Tell me, are you in sport? These things I say, not as forbidding you the one and annual coming, but as wishing you to draw near continually.” (John Chrysostom, Homily 17, on Hebrews 10:2-9)

The Holy Fathers also stress the importance of confession of sins as the ultimate prerequisite for Holy Communion, while remaining completely silent about any specific fast that is somehow generally applicable to all laymen equally. It is true that the spiritual father (who hears the confession of the penitent Orthodox Christian layman) does have the authority to require his spiritual son to fulfill a fast of repentance before communion. But the local bishop (who is not the layman’s spiritual father but only a distant observer) most certainly does not have the authority to demand the priests to enforce a single method of preparation common to all laymen without distinction, such as what Bp. Kirykos does in his letter to Fr. Pedro. For man cannot be made “worthy” due to such a pharisaic fast that is conducted for mere custom’s sake rather than serving as a true form of repentance. Indeed it is possible for mankind to become worthy of Holy Communion. But this worthiness is derived from the grace of God which directs the soul away from sins, and it is derived from the Mysteries themselves, particularly the Mystery of Repentance (also called Confession or Absolution) and the Mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ (also called the Eucharist or Holy Communion).

St. Nicholas Cabasilas (+20 June, 1391), Archbishop of Thessalonica, writes: *“The Bread which truly strengthens the heart of man will obtain this for us; it will enkindle in us ardor for contemplation, destroying the torpor that weighs down*

our soul; it is the Bread which has come down from heaven to bring Life; it is the Bread that we must seek in every way. We must be continually occupied with this Eucharistic banquet lest we suffer famine. We must guard against allowing our soul to grow anemic and sickly, keeping away from this food under the pretext of reverence for the sacrament. On the contrary, after telling our sins to the priest, we must drink of the expiating Blood.” (St. Nicholas Cabasilas, *The Life in Christ*).

St. Matthew Carpathaces (+14 May, 1950), Archbishop of Athens, while still an Archimandrite, published a book in 1933 in which he wrote five pages regarding the Mystery of Holy Communion. In these five pages he addresses the issue of Holy Communion, worthiness and preparation. Nowhere in it does he speak of any particular pre-communion fast. On the contrary, in the rest of the book he speaks only about the fasts of Wednesday and Friday throughout the year, and the four Lenten seasons of Nativity, Pascha, Apostles and Dormition. He also mentions that married couples should avoid marital relations on Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. Aside from these fasts and abstaining, he mentions no such thing about a pre-communion fast anywhere in the book, and the book is over 300 pages long.

In the section where he speaks specifically regarding Holy Communion, Blessed Matthew speaks only of confession of sins as a prerequisite to Holy Communion, and he mentions the importance of abstaining from sins. Nowhere does he suggest that partaking of foods on the days the Orthodox Church permits is supposedly a sin. For to claim such a thing is a product of Manicheanism and is anathematized by several councils. But Blessed Matthew of Bresthena was no Manichean, he was a Genuine Orthodox Christian, a preserver of Orthodoxy in its fullness. The fact he had 600 nuns and 200 monks flock around him during his episcopate in Greece is proof of his spiritual heights and that he was an Orthodox Christian not only in thought and word, but also in deed. Yet Bp. Kirykos, who in his thirty years as a pastor has not managed to produce a single spiritual offspring, dares to claim that Blessed Matthew of Bresthena is the source of his corrupt and heretical views. But nothing could be further from the truth.

In Blessed Matthew's written works, which are manifold and well-preserved, nowhere does he suggest that clergy can simply follow the common fasting rules of the Orthodox Church and commune several times per week, while if laymen follow the same Orthodox rules of fasting just as do the priests, they are supposedly not free to commune but must undergo some kind of extra fast. Nowhere does he demand this fast that is not as a punishment for laymen's sins, but is implemented merely because they are laymen, since this fast is being demanded irrespective of the outcome of their

confession to the priest. Yet despite all of this, Bp. Kirykos arbitrarily uses the name of Bishop Matthew as supposedly agreeing with his positions. The following quote from the works of Blessed Matthew will shatter Kirykos's notion that "*fasting in the finer and broader sense*" can make a Christian "*worthy to commune,*" without mentioning the Holy Mysteries of Confession and Communion themselves as the source of that worthiness.

The following quote will shatter Bp. Kirykos' attempt to misrepresent the positions of Blessed Matthew, which is something that Bp. Kirykos is guilty of doing for the past 30 years, tarnishing the name of Blessed Matthew, and causing division and self-destruction within the Genuine Orthodox Church of Greece, while at the same time boasting of somehow being Bishop Matthew's only real follower. It is time for Bp. Kirykos' three-decades-long façade to be shattered. This shattering shall not only apply to the façade regarding the pharisaic-style fast, but even the façade regarding the post-1976 ecclesiology held by Bp. Kirykos and his associate, Mr. Gkoutzidis—an ecclesiology which is found nowhere in the encyclicals of the Genuine Orthodox Church from 1935 until the 1970s. That was the time that Mr. Gkoutzidis and the then layman Mr. Kontogiannis (now Bp. Kirykos) began controlling the Matthewite Synod. On the contrary, many historic encyclicals of the Genuine Orthodox Church contradict this post-1976 Gkoutzidian-Kontogiannian ecclesiology, for which reason the duo has kept these documents hidden in the Synodal archives for three decades. But let us begin the shattering of the façade with the position of Blessed Matthew regarding frequent Communion. For God has willed that this be the first article by Bishop Matthew to be translated into English that is not of an ecclesiological nature, but a work in regards to *Orthopraxia*, something rarely spoken and seldom found in the endlessly repetitive periodicals of the Kirykite faction.