

THE TEACHING OF BLESSED MATTHEW OF BRESTHENA REGARDING FREQUENT RECEPTION OF COMMUNION

Written in 1933 by Archimandrite Matthew [Carpathaces] of Great Laura, the future Bishop of Bresthena (1937-1949), and Metropolitan of Athens (1949-1950), of the Genuine Orthodox Church of Greece (+14 May, 1950).

Is it possible, you ask me, to receive Communion? Why, don't we have to become saints in order to be worthy, as Blessed Chrysostom calls out in his liturgy, *"The Holies for the holy?"* And who can become a saint? You're not able? Then, are the Holy Scriptures false? *"And ye shall be holy men unto me (Exodus 22:31);" "I said ye are gods (Psalms 81:6)."* This is what God says about us. So, who is able? As many as desire this, cleanse yourselves from every bodily and spiritual sin, and you will immediately become saints. I do not tell you this myself, God says it through the Apostle. *"So clean yourselves, brethren, from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Corinthians 7:1)."* But is it difficult? I do not deny it. But it is probably not as difficult as you think. Consider this...

An infant or even a very sinful old man, upon leaving the baptismal font, is he not worthy to commune of the Holy Mysteries? Yes, and who can doubt this? Baptism is a divine bath, it is a purification of sins, it is a spiritual rebirth. In the baptismal font we bury the old person of sin, and we put on the new man, Jesus Christ. *"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Galatians 3:27),"* says he who ascended to the third heaven. So, what if it was possible to multiply the Mystery of Holy Baptism? What I am trying to say is, if it was possible for us to be baptized every time we wished, then you would no longer have any doubt that we worthily commune of the Mystery of the Frightful Eucharist. So if I prove to you that every time you wish, it is possible to enter the baptismal font and to get baptized, then you would no longer be able to leave [*i.e.*, shun the Mystery of Holy Communion]. You must conclude then, that it is possible to become worthy of the Mystery of Holy Communion.

And is not Repentance, my brethren, a second baptismal font, into which it is possible to enter every time we wish and as many times as we wish, and nobody can prevent us? Is not Repentance a font equivalent to the font of Holy Baptism? *"Tears dropped are equivalent to the font."* Yes, the tear, whenever it drops from our eyes for our sins, has the power of Holy Baptism. *"And toilsome lamentation brings back the grace which departed for some time."* A lamentation from the heart ascends to heaven, and brings down that grace, which we have lost because of the multitude of our sins. It is not my opinion, but that of Gregory of Nyssa and the moral teachers of the Church. See now,

upon what that which seemed impossible and most difficult to you depends? Upon one tear, one lamentation! *"Tears dropped are equivalent to the font, and toilsome lamentation brings back the grace which departed for some time."* (Gregory of Nyssa, Words Concerning Repentance).

What is this? I knew it! In the midst you bring to me the canons of St. Basil, the revealer of heavenly things, to St. Amphilochius, in order to oppose me. And you tell me, "Does not St. Basil, the revealer of heavenly things, define in his canons that for those who steal to not receive Communion for two years; for those who murder, twenty; for those who commit adultery, fifteen years; and so forth? For nearly all sins he appoints many years for us to abstain from Communion."

And what is concluded from this? Is it concluded that it is not possible for us to become worthy to receive Communion? Or rather that Repentance does not have the same power that Baptism has? Both conclusions are erroneous. They are erroneous because from these same canons of St. Basil, it is concluded that it is possible for us to become worthy to receive Communion, since he himself appoints that after so many years, depending upon the sin, we may receive Communion. So the revealer of heavenly things himself says that it is possible for us to become worthy.

Basil also believed that Repentance is equivalent to Baptism and that there is no other difference between Baptism and Repentance, except that Repentance only blots out the voluntary sins, while Baptism also blots out the ancestral sin. But because he was most exact and perfect in everything, he desired a sure and true Repentance. And because he knew how easy it is for man to fall into evil, especially after he has fallen once, for this reason he appointed the years so that everybody be informed, and for us ourselves to be informed, that our Repentance is sure and true.

So whenever Repentance is perfect and true, what then remains? Then everything remains to the judgment of the corrector of our souls and spiritual father, as St. Basil himself, the revealer of heavenly things, clearly appoints in his second canon, and informs us, how he agrees with all the other fathers: *"To also define the therapy of Repentance not based on time but on manner."* And behold how Repentance is equivalent to Baptism even according to St. Basil, if you interpret his opinion correctly. And behold how you no longer have any reply to a truth so evident.

Tell me, my Christians, after Pascha, which will be in a few days, what will you do? Do you celebrate Pascha? What a ridiculous question! Yet, this is what I ask you. Do you celebrate Pascha as all Christians have the obligation

to do? Do we celebrate Pascha? Indeed, all of us with such eagerness await Pascha. The Lord grant! [*i.e.*, God willing!] But I am afraid that few of us celebrate Pascha. Pascha, O Christians, is not that which is commonly called pascha, to wit, the partaking of meat and the rest of the foods. That is called eating; that is called nourishment. Pascha, however, is the Communion of the Mysteries! This is Pascha, as God told Moses, "*and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the Lord's Pascha* (Exodus 12:11)." Know therefore, all of you who do not wish to commune of this mystical Pascha, that you will not have any reply; you will not be able to find any excuse when you appear before the judgment of the fearful God.

—"And why did you not condescend," the God-man will tell you then, "when I was crying out to you to come eat my bread, and drink my wine, which I have treated to you? Why such contempt for me, when I have showed you so much love? You see this Cross? You see these wounds? Out of love for you I endured them."

—"Lord we were not worthy." Is this what you have to respond to Him?

—"And you do not know how to cleanse yourselves with Repentance, to wash yourselves with tears, to bathe yourselves with Confession?"

—"But it was difficult for us to stop sinning."

—"So you preferred your passions and your sins above me? Therefore, since you desired to be separated from me while you were living on earth, separated from my word you must also be in heaven. Is this really so, O wretched and unfortunate ones, as many of you as are wounded by your passions, and full of your uncleanness and sins?"

O my Lord, I am the first [among sinners], and what will become of me then during so many frightful censures? And what will become of all of you who are similar to me? It would have been better if we were never born.

—"Such contempt for my blood? Such contempt for my body?" the Judge will cry, "Are your hands filthy and have you sacrificed me and cut me to pieces, and touched me, as did the Jews? Are your lips foul and have you kissed me, as did Judas? Is your heart dirty and have you partaken of me? Is your soul sinful, and have you been insolent?"

And what will I say, what will I reply, when, after the censures, Hades immediately swallows me up?

My Christian brethren, please listen to me carefully. We cannot remain without Holy Communion: "*If we do not eat of the body of the Son of Man and*

drink His blood, we have no life in us." And we cannot receive Communion unworthily: *"For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself."* If we do not receive Communion: despair. If we receive Communion unworthily: hell. Therefore, we must receive Communion worthily (which, as I have shown you, is possible) in order to inherit eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be glory and power unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Thus in the above homily by Blessed Matthew Carpathaces, we see that the worthiness of a communicant is obtained by the Mystery of Repentance, which is equal to Baptism, and is sealed by receiving Holy Communion itself.