

ARE CHRISTIANS MEANT TO COMMUNE ONLY ON A SATURDAY AND NEVER ON A SUNDAY?

In the second paragraph of his first letter to Fr. Pedro, Bp. Kirykos writes: *“Also, all Christians, when they are going to commune, know that they must approach Holy Communion on Saturday (since it is preceded by the fast of Friday) and on Sunday only by economia, so that they are not compelled to break the fast of Saturday and violate the relevant Holy Canon [sic: here he accidentally speaks of breaking the fast of Saturday, but he most likely means observing a fast on Saturday, because that is what violates the canons].”*

The first striking remark is “All Christians.” Does Bp. Kirykos consider himself to be a Christian? If so, why does he commune every Sunday without exception, seeing as though “all Christians” are supposed to “know” that they are only allowed to commune on a Saturday, and never on Sunday, except by “economia.” Or perhaps Bp. Kirykos does not consider himself a Christian, and for this reason he is exempt of this rule for “all Christians.” It makes perfect sense that he excludes himself from those called Christians because his very ideas and practices are not Christian at all.

Is communion on Saturdays alone, and never on Sundays, really a Christian practice? Is this what Christians have always believed? Was Saturday the day that the early Christians “broke bread” (*i.e.*, communed)? Let us look at what the Holy Scriptures have to say.

St. Luke the Evangelist (+18 October, 86), in the Acts of the Holy Apostles, writes: *“And on **the first day of the week**, when we were assembled to break bread, Paul discoursed with them, being to depart on the morrow (Acts 20:7).”* Thus the Holy Apostle Paul would meet with the faithful on the first day of the week, to wit, Sunday, and on this day he would break bread, that is, he would serve Holy Communion.

St. Paul the Apostle (+29 June, 67) also advises in his first epistle to the Corinthians: *“On **the first day of the week**, let every one of you put apart with himself, laying up what it shall well please him: that when I come, the collections be not then to be made (1 Corinthians 16:2).”* Thus St. Paul indicates that the Christians would meet with one another on the first day of the week, that is, Sunday, not only for Liturgy, but also for collection of goods for the poor.

The reason why the Christians would meet for prayer and breaking of bread on Sunday is because our Lord Jesus Christ arose from the dead on *one day after the Sabbath, on the first day of the week*, that is, the *Lord’s Day* or *Sunday* (Matt. 28:1-7; Mark 16:2,9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1).

Another reason for the Christians meeting together on Sundays is because the Holy Spirit was delivered to the Apostles on the day of Pentecost, which was a Sunday, and this event signified the beginning of the Christian community. That Pentecost took place on a Sunday is clear from God's command in the Old Testament Scriptures: "*You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall present a new grain offering to the Lord (Leviticus 23:16).*" The reference to "*fifty days*" and "*seventh Sabbath*" refers to counting fifty days from the first Sabbath, or seven weeks plus one day; while "*the day after the seventh Sabbath*" clearly refers to a Sunday, since the day after the Sabbath day (Saturday) is always the Lord's Day (Sunday).

It was on the Sunday of Pentecost that the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles. Thus we read: "*When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance (Acts 2:1-4).*"

A final reason for Sunday being the day that the Christians met for prayer and breaking of bread was in order to remember the promised Second Coming or rather Second Appearance (Δευτέρα Παρουσία) of the Lord. The reference to Sunday is found in the Book of Revelation, in which Christ appeared and delivered the prophecy to St. John the Theologian on "Kyriake" (Κυριακή), which means "the main day," or "the first day," but more correctly means "the Lord's Day." (Revelation 1:10).

For the above three reasons (that Sunday is the day of the Resurrection, the Pentecost and the Second Appearance) the Apostles themselves, and the early Christians immediately made Sunday the new Sabbath, the new day of rest, and the new day for God's people to gather together for prayer (*i.e.*, Liturgy) and breaking of bread (*i.e.*, Holy Communion) Thus we read in the *Didache* of the Holy Apostles: "*On the Lord's Day (i.e., Kyriake) come together and break bread. And give thanks (i.e., offer the Eucharist), after confessing your sins that your sacrifice may be pure (Didache 14).*" Thus the Christians met together on the Lord's Day, that is, Sunday, for the breaking of bread and giving of thanks, to wit, the Divine Liturgy and Holy Eucharist.

St. Barnabas the Apostle (+11 June, 61), First Bishop of Salamis in Cyprus, in the Epistle of Barnabas, writes: "*Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead (Barnabas 15).*" The eighth day is a reference to Sunday, which is known as the first as well as the eighth day of the week. How more appropriate to keep the eighth day with joyfulness other than by communing of the joyous Gifts?

St. Ignatius the God-bearer (+20 December, 108), Bishop of Antioch, in his Epistle to the Magnesians, insists that the Jews who became Christian should be *“no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord’s Day, on which also our Life rose again* (Magnesians 9).” What could commemorate the Lord’s Day as the day Life rose again, other than by receiving Life incarnate, to wit, that precious Body and Blood of Christ? For he who partakes of it shall never die but live forever!

St. Clemes, also known as **St. Clement** (+24 November, 101), Bishop of Rome, in the Apostolic Constitutions, also declares that Divine Liturgy is especially for Sundays more than any other day. Thus we read: *“On the day of the resurrection of the Lord, that is, the Lord’s day, assemble yourselves together, without fail, giving thanks to God, and praising Him for those mercies God has bestowed upon you through Christ, and has delivered you from ignorance, error, and bondage, that your sacrifice may be unspotted, and acceptable to God, who has said concerning His universal Church: In every place shall incense and a pure sacrifice be offered unto me; for I am a great King, saith the Lord Almighty, and my name is wonderful among the nations* (Apostolic Constitutions, ch. 30).” The reference to *“pure sacrifice”* is the oblation of Christ’s Body and Blood; *“giving thanks to God”* is the celebration of the Eucharist (εὐχαριστία = giving thanks).

The Apostolic Constitutions also state clearly that Sunday is not only the most important day for Divine Liturgy, but that it is also the ideal day for receiving Holy Communion. It is written: *“And on the day of our Lord’s resurrection, which is the Lord’s day, meet more diligently, sending praise to God that made the universe by Jesus, and sent Him to us, and condescended to let Him suffer, and raised Him from the dead. Otherwise what apology will he make to God who does not assemble on that day to hear the saving word concerning the resurrection, on which we pray thrice standing in memory of Him who arose in three days, in which is performed the reading of the prophets, the preaching of the Gospel, the oblation of the sacrifice, the gift of the holy food?* (Apostolic Constitutions, ch. 59).” The *“gift of the holy food”* refers to Holy Communion.

The Holy Canons of the Orthodox Church also distinguish Sunday as the day of Divine Liturgy and Holy Communion. The 19th Canon of the Sixth Ecumenical Council mentions the importance of Sunday as a day for gathering and preaching the Gospel sermon: *“We declare that the deans of churches, on every day, but more especially on Sundays, must teach all the clergy and the laity words of truth out of the Holy Bible...”*

The 80th Canon of the Sixth Ecumenical Council states that all clergy and laity are forbidden to be absent from Divine Liturgy for three consecutive Sundays: *“In case any bishop or presbyter or deacon or anyone else on the list of the clergy, or any layman, without any grave necessity or any particular difficulty*

compelling him to absent himself from his own church for a very long time, fails to attend church on Sundays for three consecutive weeks, while living in the city, if he be a clergyman, let him be deposed from office; but if he be a layman, let him be removed from communion." Take note that if one attends Divine Liturgy for three consecutive Saturdays, but not on the Sundays, he still falls under the penalty of this canon because it does not reprimand someone who simply doesn't attend Divine Liturgy for three weeks, but rather one who *"fails to attend church on Sundays."* The reference to *"church"* must refer to a parish where Holy Communion is offered every Sunday, for an individual who does not attend for three consecutive Sundays cannot be punished by being *"removed from communion"* if this is not even offered to begin with. Also, the fact that this is the penalty must mean that the norm is for the faithful to commune every Sunday, or at least every third Sunday.

The 9th Canon of the Holy Apostles declares that: *"All those faithful who enter and listen to the Scriptures, but do not stay for prayer and Holy Communion must be excommunicated, on the ground that they are causing the Church a breach of order."* The 2nd Canon of the Council of Antioch states: *"As for all those persons who enter the church and listen to the sacred Scriptures, but who fail to commune in prayer together and at the same time with the laity, or who shun the participation of the Eucharist, in accordance with some irregularity, we decree that these persons be outcasts from the Church until, after going to confession and exhibiting fruits of repentance and begging forgiveness, they succeed in obtaining a pardon..."* Both of these canons prove quite clearly that all faithful who attend Divine Liturgy and are not under any kind of penance or excommunication, must partake of Holy Communion. Thus, if clergy and laity are equally expected to attend Divine Liturgy every Sunday, or at least every third Sunday, they are equally expected to Commune every Sunday, or at least every third Sunday. Should they fail, they are to be excommunicated.

St. Timothy of Alexandria (+20 July, 384), in his Questions and Answers, and specifically in the 3rd Canon, writes: *"Question: If anyone who is a believer is possessed of a demon, ought he to partake of the Holy Mysteries, or not? Answer: If he does not repudiate the Mystery, nor otherwise in any way blaspheme, let him have communion, not, however, every day in the week, for it is sufficient for him on the Lord's Day only."* So then, if even those who are possessed with demons are permitted to commune on every Sunday, how is it that Bp. Kirykos advises that all Christians are only permitted to commune on a Saturday, and never on a Sunday except by extreme economia? Are today's healthy, faithful and practicing Orthodox Christians, who do not have a canon of penance or any excommunication, and who desire communion every Sunday, forbidden this, despite the fact that of old even those possessed of demons were permitted it?

The above Holy Canons of the Orthodox Church are the Law of God that the Church abides to in order to prevent scandal or discord. Let us now compare this Law of God to the “traditions of men,” namely, the Sabbatian, Pharisaic statement found in Bp. Kirykos’s first letter to Fr. Pedro: “... *I request of you the avoidance of disorder and scandal regarding this issue, and to recommend to those who confess to you, that in order to approach Holy Communion, they must prepare by fasting, and to prefer approaching on Saturday and not Sunday.*” Clearly, Bp. Kirykos has turned the whole world upside down, and has made the Holy Canons and the Law of the Church of God as a matter of “discord and scandal,” and instead insists upon his own self-invented “tradition” which is nowhere to be found in the writings of the Holy Fathers, in the Holy Canons, or in the Holy Tradition of Orthodoxy.

The truth is that Bp. Kirykos himself is the one who introduced “disorder and scandal” when he trampled all over the Holy Canons and insisted that his priest, Fr. Pedro, and other laymen do likewise! The truth is that Fr. Pedro and the laymen supporting him are not at all causing “disorder and scandal” in the Church, but they are the ones preventing disorder and scandal by objecting to the unorthodox demands of Bp. Kirykos.

Throughout the history of the Orthodox Church, Sunday has always been the day of Divine Liturgy and Holy Communion. This was declared so by the Holy Apostles themselves, was also maintained in the post-apostolic era, and continues even until our day. Nowhere in the doctrines, practices or history of Orthodox Christianity is there ever a teaching that laymen are supposedly only to commune on a Saturday and never on a Sunday. The only day of the week throughout the year upon which Liturgy is guaranteed to be celebrated is on a Sunday. The Liturgy is only performed on a few Saturdays per year in most parishes, and mostly only during the Great Fast or on the Saturday of Souls. Liturgy is more seldom on weekdays as the Liturgies of Wednesday and Friday nights have been made Pre-sanctified and limited to only within the Great Fast. Liturgy is now only performed on weekdays if it is a feastday of a major saint. But Liturgy is always performed on a Sunday without fail, in every city, village and countryside, because it is the Lord’s Day. The purpose of Liturgy is to receive Holy Communion, and the reason for it being celebrated on the Lord’s Day without fail is because this is the day of salvation, and therefore the most important day of the week, especially for receiving Holy Communion. For, “*This is the day that the Lord hath made, let us rejoice and be glad in it* (Psalm 118:24).” What greater way to rejoice on the Lord’s Day than to commune of the very Lord Himself?

The theory of diminishing Sunday as the day of salvation and communion, and instead opting for Saturday, is actually a heresy known as

Sabbatianism. It has been condemned several times by the Orthodox Church. The originators of this heresy are the Jews themselves, who at times would convert to Orthodox Christianity but would maintain their Jewish customs such as the old Sabbath (Saturday) as a day of fasting and resting from all works, including the work of cooking and preparing meals.

The Pharisees often accused the Disciples of Christ of not observing the Sabbath (Saturday) the way they thought it ought to be observed. The Gospel of Mark gives the following account of an event in which Christ and his disciples ate wheat on the Sabbath day and were questioned by the Pharisees: *“And it came to pass, that he went through the wheat fields on the Sabbath day (Saturday); and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of wheat. And the Pharisees said unto him, Behold, why do they on the Sabbath day (Saturday) that which is not lawful? And he said unto them, Have ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungred, he, and they that were with him? How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shewbread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him? And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath (Mark 2:23-28).”*

To prevent this fall into Sabbatianism, the Holy Apostles ordered in their 64th Canon: *“If any clergyman be found fasting on Sunday, or on Saturday (except for one only), let him be deposed from office. If, however, he is a layman, let him be excommunicated.”* The term *“fasting”* refers to the strict form of fasting, not permitting oil or wine. The term *“except for one”* refers to Holy and Great Saturday, the only day of the year upon which fasting without oil and wine is expected. In their 69th Canon, the Holy Apostles determined which days of the week were indeed to be fasted: *“If any bishop, or presbyter, or deacon, or subdeacon, or anagnost, or psalt, fails to fast throughout the forty days of Holy Lent, or on Wednesday, or on Friday, let him be deposed from office. Unless he has been prevented from doing so by reason of bodily illness. If, on the other hand, a layman fail to do so, let him be excommunicated.”* Thus, whereas one is to be deposed or excommunicated if he fasts on Saturdays or Sundays, he is also to be deposed or excommunicated if he does not fast on Wednesdays or Fridays.

As can be observed from the above Holy Canons, in a normal week, Christians were to fast on Wednesday and Friday, not fast on Saturday, receive Holy Communion on Sunday, and spend Sunday, Monday and Tuesday without fasting. The only two fasting days were Wednesday and Friday. The fact they would not fast on Saturday did not prevent them from being able to receive Holy Communion on Sunday. For the fast was not related to Communion at all. Whether or not someone was planning to commune on Sunday, he still needed to fast on Wednesday and Friday

regardless. Fasting and Communion were not interrelated. They were both important but distinct practices within the Orthodox daily life, and failing to observe either of these correctly resulted in the same penalty: either deposition or excommunication.

But why was fasting on Saturday strictly forbidden under penalty of deposition or excommunication? The answer is simply to prevent Christians from falling into Pharisaic Sabbatianism. Christians were to shun the Jewish traditions as much as possible. People may think that Sabbatians were done away with during the first few centuries of Christianity. Unfortunately, this is not the case. They survived throughout the late Byzantine Period, the Ottoman Period, and even the Modern Period. They exist even today.

The Sabbatians were still around during the time of the Iconoclastic Period, for which reason the 8th Canon of the Seventh Ecumenical Council declares: *“Inasmuch as some persons who have been misled by their inferences from the religion of the Jews, have seen fit to sneer at Christ our God, while pretending to be Christians, but secretly and clandestinely keeping the Sabbath and doing other Jewish acts, we decree that these persons shall not be admitted to communion, nor to prayer, nor to church, but shall be Jews openly in accordance with their religion; and that neither shall their children be baptized, nor shall they buy or acquire a slave...”*

As late as the 18th century, a group of Sabbatians, particularly some shameful monks of Mt. Athos, attempted to turn the Orthodox teachings and practice upside down. One such Sabbatian was the monk Theodoret, who was fiercely and demonically opposed to St. Nicodemus of Mt. Athos and the Kollyvades Fathers. When St. Nicodemus compiled the Rudder and sent it to be approved for publishing, Theodoret had taken hold of the manuscript and added several footnotes that contained his Sabbatian delusion among other things. When St. Nicodemus read these interpolations, he wept bitterly and called Theodoret a “false brother.” But many (although unfortunately not all) of the errors contained in footnotes written by Theodoret were later removed from the Rudder and replaced with other footnotes. A short summary of this history can be found in the Rudder itself, in the introduction by **Ecumenical Patriarch Neophytus VII** (+17 June, 1801). The relevant text reads as follows:

“...Nevertheless, because of the fact that Theodoret, who superintended the typography, made additions to the Handbook, without the sanction of the translators and of the notable gentlemen who had revised the Handbook by ecclesiastical order, involving much that was very improper, these additions were omitted for the sake of rightness in order to avoid interlarding what is genuine with what is spurious, ravaging the noble character of the book, and causing harm of no ordinary kind to

readers, with respect to both body and soul. The reasons were because in the additions in question he said:

- 1) *that **our Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead on Saturday;***
- 2) *that genuflections are in order on Sunday, even on the principal day of Pentecost;*
- 3) ***that Saturday is entitled to the same preferment as Sunday,** because it too is a type of the Resurrection;*
- 4) *the fact that in a sophistical manner he stirred up anew the old scandals which had developed in the Holy Mountain concerning the question of requiems, which by the grace of Christ, had been and still are discontinued, at a time when the Holy Church of Christ, with provisory care for the common peace of the monks, in three synodical letters of hers with dire imprecations forbade anyone to agitate or to speak of or to write about them;*
- 5) *the fact that he taxed all the Rituals of the Holy Mountain with being discrepant and contradictory, which, however, are not contrary to the general Ritual (or catholicon Typicon), but are rather a clarification and expansion of the obscure and condensed passages in the general Ritual;*
- 6) *the fact that **he was simply adding things opposed to the Canons of the Ecumenical Councils and Regional Councils, and to the traditions of the Church of Christ;***
- 7) *and last, the reckless fellow dared to write into such a book where he was speaking of the antichrist, so fearful and audacious a statement that we shuddered, not only to commit it to quotation, but even to describe it at all, on account of its dangerous nature and because of its exceeding absurdity..."*

It was this very type of Pharisaic Sabbatianism that the Apostles and Holy Fathers tried to avoid, which is why they wrote against fasting from foods or work on a Saturday. Yet the Sabbatians turn the table upside down and use these very Canons as an excuse to turn Saturday into the day of Holy Communion, instead of Sunday! Thus the Sabbatians, through their Pharisaic hypocrisy have managed to subvert the laws of Christ, the Apostles, the Holy Fathers, the Ecumenical Councils, the Local Councils, and even the Rudder, in order to insist on their Sabbatianism, to make Saturday either a day of strict fasting, or to turn it into a type of the resurrection by making it the principal day of Holy Communion instead of Sunday, which is the Lord's Day.

So let us assess the ideology of Bp. Kirykos one more time in order to perceive whether his teachings belong to the Orthodox Church or rather to the Sabbatian heresy. In his letter to Fr. Pedro, Bp. Kirykos wrote: "*Also, **all Christians, when they are going to commune, know that they must approach Holy***

Communion on Saturday (since it is preceded by the fast of Friday) and on Sunday only by economy..."

Is the above statement Orthodox? Does it reflect the Truth of Christ, the Gospels, and the Holy Fathers? Certainly not! A more correct version of Bp. Kirykos' statement would be: "*Also, **all Sabbatian Judaizing Pharisaic hypocritical heretics**, when they are going to commune, know that they must approach Holy Communion on Saturday (since it is preceded by the fast of Friday) and on Sunday only by economy..."* Now that sounds much more appropriate!