

**UNITY OF THE CHURCH
AND THE
CHURCH SACRAMENTS**

1999

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BITTER CRIES OF THE HEART!

Yesterday (27th of August) while I was in Mississauga, Canada, Fr. Angelos Saad told me about the terrible accident concerning a little lady who was shot by an unknown guy. Immediately she was killed without any cause, and the murderer does not know her.

I remembered the words of St. John Chrysostom who used to repeat them, expressing the bitter cries of his heart. He states that we do not hear about wild animals of the same family eat each other, for by their natural impulses they live together in peace cooperating with each other. While when a man meets his brother, envy arises within him quickly, and sometimes bitter hatred, and even the desire of killing him without any real cause.

The wild beasts by nature know the natural unity, while the rational man does not know the true unity that issues from the heart. Why? And what is the solution?

We attribute ignorance to the primitive tribes, as the cause of attacking each other without any cause, or through creating any trifle cause. In these tribes, man did not respect his brother, cooperate or unite with him. Now the twenty-one century is at hand, and the whole nations of the world, even the well-developed countries, like USA and Canada, are suffering of the increasing of the ratio of crimes. Now the ratio of crime is not calculated by a day, an hour or a minute, but by a second. Many crimes are committed for no reason, except that man's eager to practice violence against others. This means that attaining unity does not need the change of outer circumstances, but the renewal of the inner nature.

The Word of God descended to our world and was incarnated, He who is one with His Father and the Holy Spirit in a unique supernatural and divine unity as they have one essence (*ousia*) and one divine nature (*phusis*). He came to

bestow upon us His grace, that we may have the experience of the inner unity between our inner man and Christ Himself. Through this unity we attain the following:

- ❖ Our unity with the Father as His own children, and with the Only-Begotten Son as His heavenly bride, and with His Holy Spirit as His dwelling place.
- ❖ Unity between soul, spirit and body with all energies, as the whole man is sanctified and guided by the Holy Spirit.
- ❖ Our unity with our brethren, as many members of the one body.
- ❖ Our unity with the heavenly hosts as the rational creatures who participate together in giving hymns, as a heavenly chorus that play a symphony of love in harmony.

This divine work transmigrates powerfully in the Church sacraments, being an experience of continuous redeeming works of God.

UNITY OF THE CHURCH AND THE CHURCH SACRAMENTS

THE CONCEPT OF UNITY AND THE WORK OF THE HOLY TRINITY

To understand unity we have to know how schism found its way into the human race. When man gave his back to God, he separated himself from the Source of life and unity; he lost his peace and entered into an inner battle. His body desired against the desires of the spirit, and the spirit against the desires of the body. **Unity in fact is the return of man to his original nature.** It was impossible to realize that by him self. He was in need of the Creator Himself to renew his nature and to make an inner reconciliation between the body and the spirit by the reconciliation with the Creator of the body and the spirit.

The Church in fact, as St. John Chrysostom says, is the life in Jesus Christ. It is not a social institution that realizes unity by gathering men together. It is the new and risen life, through which the believer discovers the divine love, and receives the work of the Holy Trinity in his daily life.

He discovers **the fatherhood of God**, and finds a special place in His bosom. God is interested in him as a special child. He enjoys the divine bosom, hoping, praying and working very hard to attract every person to participate with him in this new position. As he is special in the eyes of God, everyone is special in his eyes. He is in the likeness of God, has a wide heart, open to every person in Jesus Christ.

He also accepts **the redeeming work of the incarnate Son of God**, through which he is united with Him as a member of His own body, i.e., His Church. He enjoys a unique friendship with Christ, through whom he becomes a unique friend to every man, as much as possible. In Jesus Christ, the

most Perfect One, there is no struggling between His body and His spirit, and in Him we attain perfection and do not suffer of inner schism between our bodies and our spirits.

Through the redeeming work of Christ **we receive the Holy Spirit**, the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, and we have the right to be the constant dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. He forms us as an icon of Christ, our Head, the Head of the Church. He guides us in the royal way without inclination toward the right or the left, the way of the true love towards our God, our brothers and ourselves.

As the Church is the new and risen life, that is the unity with the Father in the Son by the work of the Holy Spirit, it does not mean anything except inner unity, and unity with our brothers, through our unity with God Himself, the Holy Trinity. **Now how do the church sacraments realize this unity and develop it?**

CONCEPT OF CHURCH SACRAMENTS

Sacraments are outward and visible signs of inward, spiritual and divine grace, instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ. Sacraments are not just some rituals or duties we have to perform. Rather in total they represent the acceptance of the divine grace through which the Holy Spirit forms us gradually that we may become in the likeness and image of Christ. Church sacraments in their essences are an experience of the work of the Holy Trinity in our daily life

Members of the family of God

The Church as a mother to every believer offers the sacraments to her children as an aid throughout their life; in fact these sacraments represent life itself. The Holy Spirit through our spiritual mother grants us the following spiritual blessings in the seven Sacraments:

1- Through **Baptism**, we receive the gift of the new birth as children of God. The believer is newly born from God

the Father and from the baptismal font as the womb of the Mother Church. The newly baptized becomes a member of the Family of God.

2- This renewed body needs to be consecrated and belong to the new family of God. It receives the Holy Spirit and all its members are consecrated through the **sacrament of Chrismation** (Myron). The Holy Spirit dwelling within us guides us and forms us as an icon of Christ, the Holy One

3- The renewed believer needs food and drink. All the members of the family, who are nourished with the honored body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, share this food. Through **Eucharist**, we are united with the Lord's Body and Blood.

4- As in any family we as humans make mistakes. Although the children may commit mistakes toward each other, it hurts the hearts of the father and mother. Therefore, repentance and confession are the reconciliation with the Father and with the mother, as well as with one another. Since sin is a separation from God, i.e. a schism repentance and confession represent a return to God and unity with one another. Through **Repentance and Confession**, we return to God our Father and to the Church our mother to attain forgiveness of sins, and find a special place in their bosoms.

5- This newly admitted believer to the family of God, although possessing the Holy Spirit is still under the weakness of the flesh. It suffers pain and sickness and therefore needs spiritual and physical care. The Church therefore offers the **sacrament of the unction of the sick** offering the gifts of the true Healer to all. Also, every member shares the pain of other members of the one family. Through **Unction of the sick**, God, as our Physician grants the cure of our bodies and souls

6- The family also takes care that it continues forever as the family of God. It offers the **sacrament of matrimony** as a continuation for her existence in the new generation. In this

sacrament, true unity is achieved not only on the spiritual level but also on all the levels, unity of spirit, thought, emotion and body. It is a symbol of the true unity of the soul with her bridegroom in heaven. Through **Matrimony**, the groom and the bride become one, attaining a church family, as a shadow of the divine Family, and unity is realized even among the succeeding generations.

7- Finally through the **sacrament of priesthood** the church offers all of the above sacraments to her children. The priest is the father who dedicates his life to keep the family together. He is the presbyter, the intercessor who brings the requests of the children to their Father. He stands in front of God and says, here I am Lord and the children whom thou has given me. Through **Priesthood**, we are given the gift of sharing the work of Christ Himself in taking care of the salvation of our brothers.

1. CHURCH UNITY AND BAPTISM

Baptism is a ceremonial rite instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and regeneration by water and the Holy Spirit. In baptism one is **admitted into the fellowship of the One Church**, becomes the believer of her well-known members, and becomes a child to God.

Baptism is regarded as the first and principal sacrament, without which none of the other sacraments can be administered. Its primary importance is manifested in the words of Jesus Christ: "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

St. John Chrysostom in his sermons to the catechumens says that they are entering the new Paradise, where there is no ancient serpent, but Satan and all his angels are trodden under the feet of Christ and the newly baptized believers'. **Thus, we have the right to return to the Paradise, where there is no schism**, and practice true unity through the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

According to **St. John Chrysostom** Baptism is the beginning of the way and not its end. In other words, baptism must not depart from our inner eyes until our last breath. Through its work we grow in our spiritual life as children of God, **who want to become icons of Christ, in whom unity is realized**. Thus, we enjoy the unity of the Church as a daily experience, not just by attaining baptism from the One Church, but also by having the life of the One Church, and by becoming true and active members of the same body of Christ.

Through baptism we are attributed to one heavenly Father. St. Paul says, "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, **one baptism, one God and Father of all**, who is above all" (Eph. 4:4-6).

2. CHURCH UNITY AND CHRISM (MYRON)

Myron is consecrated oil used in the sacrament of Chrism, as well as at the consecration of the Church and of the sacred vessels etc. The priest anoints the newly baptized with the Chrism.

The tradition of using this sacred oil goes back to the Old Testament (Exod. 30) where God ordered Moses to prepare a compound anointing oil of myrrh, cinnamon, cassia, and sweet calamus mixed with pure olive oil. It was used in anointing kings, priests, the tent of the tabernacle, and its furniture.

It's made out of specific oils mixed with spices that were prepared when the Lord was shrouded.

Chrism is administered immediately after baptism. The newly baptized joins the Church and becomes one of its members through baptism, and is strengthened by the Holy Spirit through Chrism, thus he has now the right to partake of the Holy Communion.

St. Augustine says **the Holy Spirit is the spirit of unity and not of schism**. He unites us not only with Christ but also with each other. He alone penetrates within us and has the power to **renew our nature that adopts the true and eternal unity**. We cannot make a comparison between unity through the work of the Holy Spirit and that through social activities.

3. CHURCH UNITY AND THE EUCHARIST

Celebration of the Eucharist is an evangelic and ecclesiastic journey of the whole Church to heaven. It is a meeting of the entire Church around the one altar and one Sacrifice. The apostle St. Paul said, "For we, being many, are one bread and one body; **for we all partake of that one bread**." (1 Corinthians 10:17). **St. Augustine** further adds, "He instituted on His altar the sacrament of our peace and unity¹."

How does the believer view the Divine Liturgy of the Eucharist?

❖ In it we offer God **unique worship** through our union with the Lord Christ who reveals to us **His knowledge** of the Father, so that we may also know Him, comprehend His supreme fatherly love, acknowledge His mysteries and receive unity with Him.

✠ We praise You, Whom the Word... knows You and **reveals You to the Saints**².

Euchologium of Serapion

It is not a purely theoretical or intellectual knowledge. As we participate in the Divine Liturgy, we are reconciled with the Father in the merit of His Son's Blood. Thus our eyes are opened to. In the Divine Liturgy as we acknowledge the Son and He acknowledges us, and we

¹ *Serm. 272 to the newly baptized.*

² *The Eucharistic Prayer.*

receive His knowledge of the Father, **knowledge of our union with Him**. We acquire knowledge of the Father's love; the Father who offered us His own Son in a sacrifice of love for the salvation of everyone personally and for the whole world. In other words, this knowledge inflames the heart of every believer with the desire of participating in Christ's glory and the participation of others' hearts in the same glory. This is the true basis of the Church Unity.

- ❖ In the celebration of the Eucharist, the deeds of our old human nature, such as ungratefulness, are crucified, and **attain the thankful nature of Christ** so that we can thank and praise with all our soul. This new and increasing nature helps the believer to be united with his brethren as a return a favor to Christ Himself.
- ❖ In the celebration of the Eucharist we **acquire the Savior Himself** so that we enjoy His glory and realize our salvation by Him and in Him. And where Christ is present, schism has no place.
- ❖ In the celebration of the Eucharist we **renew our covenant with God**, which is sealed by the Blood that was sacrificed on the Cross. In ancient times, **blood was essential in establishing covenants**. The prophet Jeremiah refers to a tradition for the participants to cut a calf in two and each having to pass between the two parts (Jeremiah 34:18). This carried the meaning of both revenge and sanctity. Slaughtering of the animal represents the killing of the one who betrays the covenant, and at the same time it is a sacrificial offering for the wrongdoer who thus becomes righteous. This took place when God established His covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15). In other words, through this unique Sacrifice, which is the extension of the Sacrifice of the Cross, enmity between man and his God is abolished, consequently enmity between man and his brethren escapes.

The blood also has another significance, namely that **when the two parties eat from one sacrifice they are drawn together into a new kind of relationship**. Even if they are not blood relatives, when they eat from the same sacrifice, the same blood will flow in each of them! In the Divine Liturgy of the Eucharist His Blood flows within us, **making us members of His Body, His holy bride who unites with Him**. We form one Family with God the Father as our One Father, with His Only-Begotten Son as the First fruit Brother, and with each others as eternal brethren.

We do not enter the sanctuary with the blood of animals which cannot purify or sanctify our souls, or bring us closer to God, our Creator; instead, we find the Blood of the Son of God Who offered His life in a sacrifice of love that gives life. In His death, the Lord Christ did not perish like millions of ancient sacrificial animals, rather it was our death that perished and our corruption that was cast away; thus we received the power of resurrection. Accordingly, we see the Divine Liturgy as the confirmation of a unique covenant. It is an agreement for an **eternal, heavenly marriage**, which nothing, not even death, can stop or weaken. With this covenant, we enter into fellowship with the divine family; we become **the household of God** (Ephesians 2).

- ❖ In the Eucharist we rejoice in the **spiritual feast of Passover**, which takes us from our land to His Heaven. We are elevated above time and place, where we receive our Christ, who does not age and is not subjected to time, but allows us entry into His eternity. We come to know **the heavenly nature of the Church** as we meet the heavenly Christ and He carries us to His heavenly canopy as a heavenly Church. **St. Ambrose** said, "They hasten to go to the Heavenly Banquet³," while **Theodore of Mopsuestia** stated "Then each time when the liturgy of this sacrifice is

³ *Myster. 43.*

celebrated, we must consider that we are like one who is in Heaven⁴!" According to **St. Irenaeus** "Let us learn by experience that we possess eternal life from the excelling power of this Being (**the Eucharist**), and not by our own nature."

As **St. John Chrysostom** said, "When you see It set before you, say to yourself: because of His Body I am no longer earth and ashes, no longer a prisoner but I am free. Because of this (Body) I hope for heaven, and to receive the good things therein, immortal life, the portion of angels and converse with Christ⁵!"

In heaven there is love and unity that last forever.

- ❖ In the Eucharist we **practice ecclesiastic life** as a life resurrected in Christ and through which we enjoy union with Him and fellowship with those in Heaven. We cannot enjoy this life separated from any member of the Church, even those who passed away from this world
- ❖ In the Eucharist we **celebrate the marvelous Sabbath**, the true day of the Lord where there is inner rest amidst the pains of this world. It is a mutual Sabbath, the Lord's Sabbath and believers' Sabbath. The Lord finds His rest in the Eucharist for we reconcile with Him and with our each other through the Sacrifice of the Cross. The Believers also has the same feelings as they ascend together to the bosom of their Father. Through this new Sabbath the unity of the Church is realized.
- ❖ In the Eucharist, the bread and wine become **the true Body and Blood of the Redeemer**, Jesus Christ. Whereas in other sacraments the Lord bestows His gifts in accordance with each sacrament, in the Eucharist He offers His entire Self, so that partakers may enter in full and complete communion with Him. Being the sacrifice of Christ for all humanity, the

Eucharist is universal in nature, embracing the living and the dead.

- ❖ The Eucharist is a sacrament of matrimony for the soul with Christ in preparation for the eternal marriage. In this marriage, there is a mutual partnership; we own Him and He owns us. He takes what is ours so that we may take what is His. This matrimonial unity will be realized not through isolation of the soul from her body, nor from her brethren.

As **St. Irenaeus** said: "for we offer to Him His own, announcing constantly the fellowship and union of the flesh and spirit⁶."

- ❖ **KISS OF PEACE** (*Greek, aspasmos*)

A greeting exchanged among the clergy and the congregation during the Divine Liturgy of the Eucharist, as a token of pure love and the one spirit. By the Prayer of Reconciliation the deacon urges us to kiss one another, saying: « Pray for perfect peace, for love and for the holy Apostolic Kiss. We cannot enjoy reconciliation with God in Jesus Christ and the peace with the Holy Trinity unless we have peace one with another. This "Kiss of Peace" which is still exchanged in our Coptic Church, was used from the apostolic age, but it disappeared from other churches. In his epistles, St. Paul repeatedly referred to the "holy kiss," as in Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; and 1 Thessalonians 5:26. Besides St. Peter described it as a "kiss of charity" in (1 Peter 5:14).

St. Justin in the second century, mentioned the liturgical kiss as an immediate preparation for the Eucharist, as a conclusion of the prayers before the Eucharistic celebration, By means of this spiritual kiss, the believers affirmed that they really wanted to be one family. It also means that if one wished to bring a gift to the altar, he ought first to reconcile with his brother.

⁴ *Catech. hom. 15:20.*

⁵ *On 1 Cor. hom. 24.*

⁶ *Adv. Haer. 4:18.*

The Syrian **Didache** of the Apostles⁷ says that the deacon cried aloud, while the kiss was actually being exchanged, «Is there any man who keeps aught against his fellow?» as a final precaution so that even at the last moment the bishop may make peace between them.

Fr. Dix⁸ says that the apostolic kiss of peace « now stands in its primitive position only among Copts and Abyssinians.»

Nikolai Gogol⁹ describes this liturgical kiss saying that a long time ago all those who were present in church kissed one another, men kissed men, women kissed women, saying «Christ is between us,» and others replying, «He is and will be.»

✠ Do not think that this kiss is like that which friends are accustomed to give one another when they meet in the (*agro*). This is not such a kiss. This kiss unites the souls together and destroys all resentment. This kiss is a sign of union of souls.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

3. CHURCH UNITY AND THE SACRAMENT OF REPENTANCE AND CONFESSION

The sacrament of repentance and confession is the sacrament of the **return to God as our own Father**. We confess that we are sinners, not ignoring the work of God in our lives. We condemn ourselves and praise God for His free grace.

The priest, as a father, cares for his children in confession and helps them to open their hearts not just to reveal their faults, sins and transgressions, but also to receive the Savior therein. Repentance and confession have negative and

⁷ Fr. Gregory Dix: *The Shape of the Liturgy*, p. 109, 106. *Syrian Didache* 2: 45.

⁸ Dix, p.10.

⁹ Nikolai Oogal: *Meditation on the Divine Liturgy*, p 36.

positive aspects. The negative is to confess that by themselves they are very weak and sinful, and have no power to live in righteousness. The positive is to acknowledge that by the work of the Holy Spirit they attain the righteousness of Christ as their new Law. In Him we struggle for attaining unity with all men by sharing Jesus Christ His inner glory.

5. CHURCH UNITY AND UNCTION

The sacramental use of anointing the sick with oil is a symbol of the act of cleansing and healing. St. James the apostle says, "Is any among you sick? Let him call for the priests of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven" (Jam. 5:14-15). It is instituted by the apostles, through Jesus Christ who, as testified by Mark 6:13, "they...anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them."

The priests pray together with the sick person's family, declaring the care and love of the whole Church towards everyone, especially when he is sick or in trouble. Church unity is translated practically in this sacrament.

6. CHURCH UNITY AND MARRIAGE

The rite of the **sacrament of matrimony** assures the role of the church as the Family of God who is concerned with the new generation. This allows it to continue in the realization of the unity of the church in Jesus Christ.

- a. **Marriage is a divine workshop.** The priest prays, "O God who created man by His own hands and granted him the woman as a helpmate, may You O Lord receive this couple and work through them..." He signs their foreheads with the cross and prays to God to grant them unity, a bond of love and divine peace that which He grants to His Church. As God Himself performed the rites of the first marriage between Adam and Eve, and took a principal role in the marriage of the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and

blessed the marriage of Cana of Galilee, the priest asks God to preside over the ceremony. He alone can penetrate in the married couples' hearts and grant them unity both with each other and with the whole Church by the work of the Holy Spirit.

- b. The priest anoints the foreheads of the couple with holy oil. He looks to them as a **new church, dedicated to God** through this anointing. As in the Old Testament, they become spiritual priests, kings, queens and prophets, who were anointed by the high priest.
- c. Two crowns are placed on the heads of the couple. The priest prays, "O God who crowns His saints with unfading crowns, and reconciles the heavenly with the earthly ones..." In the moments of the celebration we consider the couple as a **shadow of the eternal marriage, Christ and His Church**.
- d. The rite of marriage starts with a church procession. The whole church sing hymns addressed to the King of Peace. It is **the procession of eternal joy of the church** under the guidance of the Victorious Christ who overcomes through His Church.

Now the sacrament of marriage as we have seen is the sacrament of the unity of the church in this world and in the world to come.

7. CHURCH UNITY AND PRIESTHOOD

There are three orders of clergymen, namely bishops, priests and deacons who are ordained to serve the people of God. The spiritual father (either the bishop or the priest) cares for his children, and raises them. St. John the Apostle calls his people, "my little children" (1 John 2:1). **St. John Chrysostom** says, "O priest, you are a father of the whole world." This is the feeling of the true priest, although he subjects to the church order in his ministry for a local church, but his heart is open to

all men, longing for their salvation and glorification, regardless of their nationality.

Our Lord Christ Himself is the Performer of the church sacraments in Person. At the same time the whole congregation participates with the celebrant and deacons together in the church liturgies.

Many years ago a bishop, deacon and layman came from England to visit some church centers in Egypt, asking the following question, "Why the churches in Egypt are crowded with youths?" One of the main causes I told them is that we still preserve the **fatherhood of the clergymen**. Every believer feels that every priest is a member of his family. Spiritual fatherhood truly is the core of the practical church unity.

THE CHURCH UNITY IN PRACTICE

As we said, the church unity starts with the reconciliation within the believer, which removes every schism between the body and the spirit and between thought, emotion, and scenes. Thus, the believer lives in the inner peace of God under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the giver of unity for the whole man. This unity is the purpose of church sacraments that attracts the believer to the bosom of the Father, so that he may attain the work of the holy spirit and be formed into the icon of our Lord Jesus Christ. The believer will be the object of the Father's pleasure; and all heaven rejoices with him. As the believer is in unity with the heavenly hosts, his heart will be widened to the whole of mankind as much as possible, so that he practices a genuine and deep unity with mankind, which Satan can not destroy.

Now how can we practice these church sacraments in spirit and not just in the literal sense?

1. I remember as an example a lady came to me to confess with all her heart in a genuine repentance. She said to me "the cause of my repentance and my love to the church is

based on two situations that I saw that attract all of my inner person. I behold a priest sitting with a little child and the child was confessing. The priest gave the child special concern with love and while smiling. I was in touch with his true and spiritual fatherhood. I went to the baptistery and I beheld another priest praying near the water of baptism. He was standing in fear and awe. Through this sight, I felt the fear of the Lord. These wonderful views attracted me to the church and I will never forget them”

Practicing the sacraments with love mixed with the fear of the Lord, attracts the believer to the church in spirit to experience the unity with him self and with his own God as well as with his brethren.

2. Our aim in practicing the church sacraments must be very clear, i.e. the meeting with the holy trinity and attaining a personal contact with them. So that God may dwell in us bearing mankind with him into our widened hearts.
3. Acknowledgement of the positive aspects of every sacrament; for the aim of the sacrament is to attain in one-way or another the paradisaal joyful life. Even in the sacrament of repentance and confession God wants us to sing, “may You grant me the delight of Your salvation.” As all the sacraments guide us to our Christ, they enter with us into His joyful kingdom. The removal of the inner joy is a serious sight that occurs when we do not attain the redeeming work of God within us.
4. Together with our subjection to the church rituals we must not be slaves to the literal but we must be in touch with the depth of the ritual and acknowledge its spiritual concepts.
5. In practicing any church sacrament, the heavenly procession of the Church must not escape from our eyes. We long for our participation and the sharing of every human being in the world in this procession. We do not see our brother in

his anger or in his struggling against us visible or invisible, but we behold him crowned in the great day of the Lord, and the brightness of the glory of God is reflected on him. We see him not in his weakness but in his eternal glory, and thus we long for the unity with him.

28th of August 1999

Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty