

The Communion
Re-Catechism 4
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1. This section of the Liturgy begins with words which call us to attention, "Let us be attentive!"

The priest prays silently just before saying "Let us be attentive" the following prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, our God, hear us from Your holy dwelling place and from the glorious throne of Your kingdom. You are enthroned on high with the Father and are also invisibly present among us. Come and sanctify us, and let Your pure Body and precious Blood be given to us by Your mighty hand and through us to all Your people."

After blessing the congregation, the priest then lifts the Amnos, the consecrated Body of Jesus, and calls out loud: "Let us be attentive! The Holy Gifts for the Holy People of God."

This is like a warning: "Holy things are for the holy." The Priest says this reminding us of the words of Jesus that pearls are not to be thrown down before the swine to trample upon (ref Matt 7:6). In other words, you can't give something holy to those who are unworthy or undeserving. So then, we need to ask, if this is the case, "who *is* worthy, who *is* holy enough to approach the Chalice and partake of the Body and Blood of the Lord?"

We, the people, give the answer: "One is Holy, One is Lord, Jesus Christ, to the Glory of God, the Father. Amen." This hymn reminds us that what we are about to receive is not a game. It's serious stuff. It's Jesus Himself. And that means that we need to prepare to receive Holy Communion. None of us is ever worthy, and yet all of us are invited to

commune with Jesus and to become one with Him through the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist.

2. The Priest prepares the elements (bread and wine-body and blood) and himself for Communion.

The priest breaks the Amnos, the Lamb of God, the Body of Jesus, into four parts. This "breaking" dates back to the early Christian Church and even back to the Last Supper (it refers to the suffering body of Christ on the cross). While doing this, the Priest says: **“The Lamb of God is broken and distributed; broken but not divided. He is forever eaten yet is never consumed, but He sanctifies those who partake of Him.”**

He takes one part of the Consecrated Bread or Amnos (IC) and places it in the Chalice and says: **“The fullness of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”**

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3. Then he blesses a cup of boiling water (the zeon) and pours it into the Chalice, saying **“Blessed is the fervor of Your saints, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.”**

The zeon is symbolic of the water that poured out from Jesus' side when he was stabbed at the cross. It also symbolizes the zeal of the Saints, who are joined with Christ as the water is poured into the Chalice also, and also the warmth of our faith and of the Holy Spirit.

And so while pouring the water into the Cup crosswise, he says: “The warmth of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

4. The Priest follows the preparation of the Chalice with a preparation of himself, through the reading of a number of prayers before Holy Communion.

It’s a good idea to participate in this part of the Liturgy by silently reading the prayers before Holy Communion, especially if you are planning to receive Holy Communion.

5. Communion Prayer

“I believe and confess, Lord, that You are truly the Christ, the Son of the living God, who came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the first. I also believe that this is truly Your pure Body and that this is truly Your precious Blood. Therefore, I pray to You, have mercy upon me, and forgive my transgressions, voluntary and involuntary, in word and deed, known and unknown. And make me worthy without condemnation to partake of Your pure Mysteries for the forgiveness of sins and for life eternal. Amen.

How shall I, who am unworthy, enter into the splendor of Your saints? If I dare to enter into the bridal chamber, my clothing will accuse me, since it is not a wedding garment; and being bound up, I shall be cast out by the angels. In Your love, Lord, cleanse my soul and save me.

Loving Master, Lord Jesus Christ, my God, let not these holy Gifts be to my condemnation because of my unworthiness, but for the cleansing and

sanctification of soul and body and the pledge of the future life and kingdom. It is good for me to cling to God and to place in Him the hope of my salvation.

Receive me today, Son of God, as a partaker of Your mystical Supper. I will not reveal Your mystery to Your adversaries. Nor will I give You a kiss as did Judas. But as the thief I confess to You: Lord, remember me in Your kingdom.”

6. In some Churches the Royal Gates are closed at this point while the Priest is preparing to receive Communion.

At this point, the priest says, “Behold, I approach Christ, our immortal King and God.”

“The precious and most holy Body of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ is given to me (*Name*) the priest, for the forgiveness of my sins and eternal life.”

And then he then partakes of the sacred Bread from the paten. Immediately, he then says:

“The precious and most holy Blood of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ is given to me (*Name*) the priest, for the forgiveness of my sins and eternal life.”

And he then drinks from the holy Cup. Afterwards, he wipes the holy Cup, kisses it, and says:

“This has touched my lips, taking away my transgressions and cleansing my sins.”

The priest continues saying:

“Having beheld the resurrection of Christ, let us worship the holy Lord Jesus, the only Sinless One. We venerate Your cross, O Christ, and we praise and glorify Your holy resurrection. You are our God. We know no other than You, and we call upon Your name. Come, all faithful, let us venerate the holy resurrection of Christ. For behold, through the cross joy has come to all the world. Blessing the Lord always, let us praise His resurrection. For enduring the cross for us, He destroyed death by death.”

When he has completed his own Communion, the doors are opened, and the Priest comes forward with the Chalice raised high. It is symbolic of how the rock at the tomb was moved away and we too see the Resurrected Lord before us. We should all bow at this point as if beholding the very risen Saviour Himself before us.

7. The Priest calls those who are prepared to approach “**With fear of God, with faith, and with love.**” I like one translation that puts it this way: “With awesome reverence of God, with faith and with love, draw near!”

As we approach to receive the risen Christ, we should do so knowing that we are about to be united with Christ, "who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His Blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father." And that is truly awesome.

This is why we should line up faithfully, quietly and orderly, without chatting with friends and being distracted. And those who are not receiving should also be quiet and respectful of what their brothers and sisters are about to receive.

When offering Holy Communion, the priest says: “The servant of God *(Name)* receives the Body and Blood of Christ for forgiveness of sins and eternal life.”

After receiving the Holy Mysteries, we should return to our place. And again, knowing what we just received should change our whole attitude so that we too should be able to say like St. Paul did: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

8. This brings us to the question of how frequently we should partake of Holy Communion

I know that most of us have grown up thinking that we should receive Holy Communion only a few times a year. And yet, St. Basil said: “We should receive Holy Communion as often as three times a week.” And in the times of the Apostles, Christians received Holy Communion at every Divine Liturgy. This after all is the main reason why we come to church on Sunday; that is, to partake, to participate in true worship and union with Jesus Christ our God.

We should all be conscious of our sinfulness and fear our own unworthiness, and have "respect" for the holy, from fear of one's own unworthiness. We can't be watching gratuitous sex and violence on TV and the next day come for Communion. We can't be partying Saturday night and then come for Communion. There has to be prayer and silence and preparation.

Listen to the Second Prayer of the Faithful, from the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom (before the Lord's Prayer):

“Unto Thee we commend our whole life and our hope, O Master who lovest mankind. We ask Thee, and pray Thee, and supplicate Thee: Make us worthy to partake of the heavenly and awesome mysteries of this sacred and spiritual table with a pure conscience: for remission of sins, for forgiveness of transgressions, for the communion of the Holy Spirit, for the inheritance of the Kingdom of Heaven, for boldness towards Thee, but not for judgment or condemnation.”

Let’s also remember the words of St Paul when he writes to the Corinthians: “... as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord In an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we should not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are chastened so that we may not be condemned along with the world.” (1 Co 11:26-32)

Now, having said all this, the Church always knew that there is no one who is *worthy* through his own spiritual effort, through his own "worthiness," to partake of the body and blood of Christ. "One is Holy. One is the Lord Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father." But having said this, God knows our unworthiness and this is why we are invited to partake of Christ’s holiness and in this way become worthy in Him.

9. When everyone has partaken of Holy Communion, the priest lifts up the chalice and says “Save, O God, Your people and bless Your inheritance,” and then returns the chalice to the altar table.

In the meantime, the choir or chanter at this point joyfully sing (and so should all of us): “We have seen the true light; we have received the heavenly Spirit; we have found the true faith, worshiping the undivided Trinity, for the Trinity has saved us.”

The priest then covers the chalice and censes them, while saying “Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let Your glory be over all the earth.”

The priest then comes in front of the Royal Doors and blesses the faithful with the chalice and paten by lifting them up high as if to show the Ascension, and then returns them to the Prothesis or Preparation Table. As he does this, the Priest prays silently, "Blessed is our God," and then aloud, "Always now and ever and unto ages of ages." The Priest returns to the Holy Table.

We, on the other hand, should be singing, along with the chanter or choir, “Let our mouths be filled with Your praise, Lord, that we may sing of Your glory. You have made us worthy to partake of Your holy mysteries. Keep us in Your holiness, that all the day long we may meditate upon Your righteousness. Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.”

10. This section now ends, with a Short Litany or Thanksgiving:

The priest calls us to attention again: “Let us be attentive. Having partaken of the divine, holy, pure, immortal, heavenly, life giving, and awesome Mysteries of Christ, let us worthily give thanks to the Lord.” In other words, we should begin to be changed people because we now have God living inside us and knowing that should change the way we relate to other people, the way we live out our day and week, both at home and at work. And the priest continues praying, Having prayed for a perfect, holy,

peaceful, and sinless day, let us commit ourselves and one another, and our whole life to Christ our God. At which point, we should all say “To You, O Lord.”

In the meantime, the priest prays, “We thank You, loving Master, benefactor of our souls, that on this day You have made us worthy once again of Your heavenly and immortal Mysteries. Direct our ways in the right path, establish us firmly in Your fear, guard our lives, and make our endeavors safe, through the prayers and supplications of the glorious Theotokos and ever virgin Mary and of all Your saints.”

The priest while reciting the prayer above, folds up the antiminson and placing it on the Gospel, says “For You are our sanctification and to You we give glory, to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages.”

Again, at this point, we should all say together, “Amen.”

This indicates that the Liturgy has finished and that we should leave the Church at peace with all.

11. And now comes the last part or the Dismissal.

The priest goes out to the icon of Christ, in front of the iconostasion, (icon screen) and asks us “to go in peace.” It is known as the "prayer from behind the ambon (pulpit)." Historically, many centuries ago, the pulpit was in the center of the Church and the priest spoke in all directions to the people who stood around him. So what would happen is the priest would walk down from the Holy Table to the Pulpit, and this way be in the middle

of all the worshippers. Then turning towards the Altar, he would say the prayer on behalf of the people.

So the priest then says a beautiful closing prayer:

“Lord, bless those who praise You and sanctify those who trust in You. Save Your people and bless Your inheritance. Protect the whole body of Your Church. Sanctify those who love the beauty of Your house. Glorify them in return by Your divine power, and do not forsake us who hope in You. Grant peace to Your world, to Your churches, to the clergy, to those in public service, to the armed forces, and to all Your people. For every good and perfect gift is from above, coming from You, the Father of lights. To You we give glory, thanksgiving, and worship, to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages.”

It is a good idea for all of us to read this prayer together and in this way be more involved in the liturgy. This prayer is said by the Priest in front of the icon of Christ at the Iconostasis, but it still is a prayer said on behalf of the whole body of Christ, the Church. As the Priest prays for us, we should open our hearts to receive God's blessings. Because after receiving Holy Communion we are at that point, more than ever, "the people of God"; "sons and daughters of God;" "His Body"; we are "The Church."

So again, we should join the Priest, then, as he completes this prayer, praying with him for the peace of the world, and all who are in it, recognizing that "every perfect gift is from above."

And if we really understood and digested these words, then we too would break out in song with the choir and joyfully and gratefully sing together these words of praise 3 times: “Blessed is the name of the Lord, both now and to the ages.”

The priest, on the other hand, goes back to the Prothesis and prays:
“Christ our God, You are the fulfillment of the Law and the prophets. You have fulfilled all the dispensation of the Father. Fill our hearts with joy and gladness always, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.”

12. And now comes the final ending (I know) where the priest asks us to pray one last time and we respond by asking him to give us the final blessing.

“May the blessing of the Lord and His mercy come upon you through His divine grace and love always, now and forever and to the ages of ages.”

“May Christ our true God who rose from the dead, as a good, loving, and merciful God, have mercy upon us and save us, through the intercessions of His most pure and holy Mother; the power of the precious and life-giving Cross; the protection of the honorable, bodiless powers of heaven; the supplications of the honorable, glorious, prophet, and forerunner John the Baptist; the holy, glorious, and praiseworthy apostles; the holy, glorious, and triumphant martyrs; our holy and God-bearing Fathers (name of the church); the holy and righteous ancestors Joachim and Anna; Saint (of the day) whose memory we commemorate today, and all the saints.”

While the priest is saying this, we should be singing along with the choir, that God “grant long life to him who blesses and sanctifies us.” We should offer a prayer for our priests so that they do God’s will and work faithfully.

13. At the conclusion, the priest with a cross in his hand, ends the same way all our services end: “Through the prayers of our holy fathers, Lord Jesus Christ, our God, have mercy on us and save us.”

In other words, through the prayers of all the saints of our church (both the great church fathers like Basil and Chrysostom, as well as those in the monasteries), we ask God to be with us always.

At which point we all say “Amen,” (in other words, that we agree) and the priest blesses us by asking that “the holy Trinity protect all of us.”

14. The priest then comes down and offers us the antidoron or “instead of the Gift”, which along with his morning greetings, says “may the blessing and mercy of the Lord be with you.” It used to be that only those who did not receive Communion took the antidoron , but today it is offered to everyone.

The antidoron is cut up either by the altar boys or the altar helpers and it comes from all the prosfora that people bring that are not used for Holy Communion, since obviously only one can be used.

So in a sense, everyone present shares in the meal aspect of the Holy Eucharist through the Antidoron. So we should receive the blessed bread, with a prayer that God will always make us worthy to be present and to share in this holy Service-the celebration of the Mystery of the Eucharist!

15. What happens to Holy Communion that is left in the chalice? Well, at the end of the Divine Liturgy our priest consumes whatever is left in the chalice. The Chalice is then left ready for the next Divine Liturgy.

16. Conclusion. The important thing to remember is that the Divine Liturgy is here for us to be able to become one with Christ, and through Christ to become one with each other as a true body of Christ, as a true church. And knowing that should compel us to live holy lives every day of the week, not just on Sunday morning. And the life that we receive from Christ should also compel us to share this life with everyone in the world. It is not something just for us. This is not a personal thing. When we truly participate in the liturgical life of the church, it should light a flame in us and move us out to share Christ's love with the whole world.