

Day 36

PILGRIMAGE OF GRACE

LITURGICAL RITE



Elements of the Celebration of the Greek Orthodox Mystery (Sacrament) of Confession

- Confessing sins openly to God is an act of worship. Like the physical act of bowing down and prostrating oneself, acknowledging our wrongdoings is a gesture of submission and vulnerability
 - The very name of the Sacrament of Confession in Greek, Exomologesis, picks up on the idea that naming one's faults is an act of praise. In other contexts, we translate this same word "O give thanks [unto the Lord]!" (cf. Psalm 136:1—Ἐξομολογεῖσθε τῷ Κυρίῳ). The Sacrament of Confession is really a kind of liturgy. For this reason it is customarily performed—not in a special little booth off to the side—but in the sanctuary proper, like any other service in the Orthodox Church.
 - Confession of sins to God implies that God has the right and the authority to dictate our behavior: it is an expression of His greatness and Lordship. It also expresses a trust in God, that He will not use our self-exposure against us, but will forgive. Far more than any words of doxology or deeds of humility, confession of sins demonstrates to God that we see ourselves and Him in the proper perspective.
 - There is, then, a double motive in coming forward to confess one's sins openly. The first is the desire of the Christian heart to give all glory to God; the second is the desire to receive a blessing from Him in spite of ourselves. When we acknowledge our faults, we overturn the sin of our ancestor Adam, who sought to put himself in the place of God. By saying, "I have sinned," we affirm the proper relationship between ourselves as servants and God as master.
- In the Sundays leading up to the start of Great Lent, the Gospel readings contain a pronounced element of "confession as praise."
 - On the Sunday of Zacchaeus, we see the once ruthless tax collector became a changed man, openly acknowledging to the Lord Jesus that he had defrauded others wrongly (Luke 19:8).

- On the Sunday of the Canaanite Woman, we hear a woman of idolatrous belief own up to her spiritual poverty, and receive grace from the Lord (Matthew 15:21-28).
 - On the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, we learn from Christ the simplest words of confession that unlock the storehouse of divine forgiveness, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” (Luke 18:13).
 - On the Sunday of the Prodigal, we understand the two dimensions of repentance, the vertical and the horizontal: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you!” (Luke 15:18).
- In all these cases, we see that confession is more than simply feeling bad about one’s sins. True confession—God-glorifying and grace-bringing confession—involves necessarily the verbalization of one’s faults.

You have to say it. Out loud. This is what God wants. He wants us to speak

- aloud our sins. This is not for His sake—as if we could tell Him something He doesn’t know! Confession is for our sake. Confession is a therapeutic necessity; it is a critical part of a complete regimen of spiritual hygiene. Just as we might take an emetic or an expectorant to help rid our bodies of a nasty bug, so too we eject the spell of sin by expelling it through the windpipe and vocal cords. There is something spiritually powerful about vocalizing our transgressions, with the result of cleansing our souls.



What happens at Greek Orthodox Confession?

- ... Generally the priest wearing an epitrichion or stole, will say an introductory prayer and then invite us to stand or sit facing an icon of Christ and make our confession... We come to describe to the priest our sins which are the symptoms of our spiritual disease as honestly and as openly as we can so that he can pray to God for our forgiveness and also advise us as to how to tackle and overcome these sins in everyday life...
- At the end of our confession the priest may advise us and sometimes give us an epitimio or penance which is not a punishment, rather a ‘medicine’ to help eradicate sin from our life. He will then ask us to kneel while he places the epitrichion over our head and reads the prayer of forgiveness encouraging us to be confident in God’s mercy and love for us.
- ...we come before the holy icon of Christ, to whom we confess, and are guided by the priest, our spiritual father, not a judge waiting to hand out punishment but a healer and helper, helps us through a cleansing inventory of our lives. When we tell God all, naming our sins and failures, we hear those glorious words of freedom which

announces Christ's promise of forgiveness of all our sins. We resolve to "go and sin no more" (John 8:11)

- The Greek term for repentance *metanoia* denotes a change of mind, a reorientation, a fundamental transformation of outlook, of man's vision of the world and of himself, and a new way of loving others and God... an attitude, a state of mind.

"For this life," states John Chrysostom, "is in truth wholly devoted to repentance, *penthos* and wailing. This is why it is necessary to repent, not merely for one or two days, but throughout one's whole life..."



Greek Orthodox Prayer for Forgiveness (From the Order of Confession)

O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, the Shepherd and the Lamb, Who takest away the sins of the world, Who gavest remittance unto the two debtors, and didst grant remission of her sins unto the harlot:

Do Thou Thyself, O Master, loose, remit and pardon the sins and transgressions and iniquities, whether voluntary or involuntary, whether known or unknown, whether by mistake or disobedience, which Thy servants have wrought, and whatever they have done as men bearing flesh and living in the world, being beguiled by the devil;

If by word or deed, in knowledge or in ignorance they have sinned, or have despised the word of a priest, or are under a priestly anathema, or are fallen under their own anathema, or are bound under oath, do Thou Thyself, as Thou art good and gentle, O Master, be pleased that these, Thy servants, be loosed by Thy word, forgiving them their own anathema and oath, according to the greatness of Thy mercy.

Yea, O Master and Lord, O Lover of mankind, hearken unto us who are entreating Thy grace for these Thy servants; and, as the greatly merciful One, overlook all their transgressions, and deliver them from eternal torment.

For Thou hast said, O Master, "Whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

For Thou art sinless and unto Thee do we ascribe glory: To the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages.

Amen.

