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Eucharist in the Byzantine liturgy, the liturgical manifestations of the reverence of the Eucharist; guarding the Eucharist.

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It is with distinct pleasure that I convey the patriarchal blessings and paternal prayers of His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to all the esteemed and learned participants and organizers of this International Scientific Congress on the Eucharist. Needless to say, *eucharistia* – that is, thanksgiving – is not something that takes place in isolation. Rather, it is a shared experience, a communal event. It is the personal conviction of His All Holiness that a thankful heart is never despondent but always holds fast to the joy of the Spirit and to the hope of life eternal. This spirit of thanksgiving and sharing, of joy and hope, characterizes the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, rooted as it is in the teachings of the Holy Fathers, such as Saint Ignatius of Antioch, who can rightfully be called the first *Doctor Eucharistiae* of the Holy Church. It this early martyr of the faith in Christ and successor of the Apostles who especially urged the Christians to: “Take heed ... often to come together *to give thanks to God*, and show forth His praise (Σπουδάζετε οὖν πυκνότερον συνέρχεσθαι εἰς εὐχαριστίαν Θεοῦ καὶ εἰς δόξαν). For when you come frequently together in the same place, the powers of Satan are destroyed, and his ‘fiery darts’ urging to sin fall back ineffectual. For your concord and harmonious faith prove his destruction, and the torment of his assistants.” (*Epistle to the Ephesians*, 8). Elsewhere he admonishes the faithful: “Let us labor together with one another, compete together, run together, suffer together, lie down together, and be raised up together as the household slave attendants, and servants of God” (*Letter to Polycarp*). This, dear friends, is our common quest and endeavor.

Along the way, many guides have lead us through unknown, yet well known, locations. One such attendant of recent times was the friend of Christ, the late Robert F. Taft. This man of great learning, who fell asleep in the Lord earlier this month, helped many students of Liturgy to understand the Byzantine tradition, tracing out its liturgical history in all its fascinating and often complicated details, through hundreds of publications over a period of more

than fifty years. Though a Roman Catholic priest and Jesuit he helped shape the thinking of many Orthodox students of Theology on questions of worship, most especially on the Eucharist, through his multivolume series of monographs under the general title, *A History of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*. We express our deep sorrow for his passing and our thanksgiving for his active presence in our dialogue today.

We begin our discussion on the liturgical manifestations of the reverence of the Eucharist with a reference to the doctoral dissertation of Robert Taft on the Great Entrance. In it he cites an Eastertide sermon of St Eutychius (512-582), twice patriarch of Constantinople (552-565, 577-582) and common Saint of our two Churches. There Eutychius stated the following (PG 86.2, 2400-2401):

They act foolishly, who have taught the people to sing a certain psalmic chant when the ministers are about to bring up to the altar the bread of oblation and the recently mixed chalice. In this hymn, which they consider suitable to the action being performed, the people say that they “bear in the king of glory” and refer in this way to the things being brought up, even though they have not yet been consecrated by the high-priestly invocation – unless perhaps what is sung means something else to them. For as Athanasius the Great says in his sermon to the baptized: “You will see the Levites (= the deacons) bearing in breads and a chalice of wine and putting them on the table. And as long as the supplications and prayers have not been completed, it is nothing but plain bread.”¹

Patriarch Eutychius is unambiguous, as was St Athanasius before him: there is to be no confusion between the consecrated and unconsecrated gifts, between the Body and Blood of Christ and the offerings of bread and wine. Of course, in history there has often been a disparity between theological precision and popular devotional practices, between the *consensus patrum* and the *sensus fidelium*. Hence, despite Eutychius’ injunction, it is evident, from subsequent sources, that reverence to the pre-consecrated gifts at the Great Entrance continued apace.

By the middle Byzantine period, the ritual aspect of the Great Entrance, along with the development of a separated Prothesis rite and the sacrificial imagery that evolved along with it, rendered this moment of the Eucharistic formulary a distinct climax of the Divine Liturgy, especially for the laity. With a lack of

¹ *The Great Entrance*, 84-85.

frequent participation in Holy Communion, the visual obstruction caused by the ever-expanding icon screen, and the increasing aural exclusion from the priestly prayers, the closest experience of the Eucharistic elements for the laity occurred as the bread and wine were processed through the nave as they were being brought to the Altar. Moreover, the bread and wine were accompanied, as Symeon of Thessaloniki expressively notes, “with splendor.” Deacons, bearing *rhipidia* overhead, flanked the clergy carrying the chalice and paten, while a large liturgical veil (*aer*) depicting the dead body of Christ was also carried through the midst of the faithful participating in the Divine Liturgy. The chalice and paten were themselves covered by smaller embroidered veils, as the entire procession, preceded by candle-bearers, was perfumed by deacons—or even the emperor, at times—carrying censers. It is quite clear, therefore, that the Great Entrance performed in such a way was to have a powerful impact on those present. Sources attest to worshippers even blocking the path of the procession, literally throwing themselves on the ground and interrupting the priest’s movement and his prayers, while straining to touch the sacred objects.

In the context of the full ritual development of the Great Entrance, figures such as Symeon of Thessaloniki champion the expression of reverence offered to the pre-consecrated gifts. This late Byzantine liturgical commentator writes the following, in his *Explanation of the Divine Temple* (65):

It is right that all the faithful prostrate themselves before the priests, asking for their prayers, and requesting to be remembered in the sacred-service, and also honoring the divine gifts. For even if the gifts have not been consecrated yet, they have been offered to God in the Prothesis, when the priest offered a prayer at that point and asked that they be received on the Altar on high. So, although they are not yet consecrated, they have been prepared for the consecration and are offerings to God and antitypes of the Lord’s body and blood.

Symeon goes on to counter the argument that by prostrating themselves before the pre-consecrated gifts the faithful commit idolatry, further comparing those who level such accusations against the Orthodox, presumably Latin theologians of the day, “with the most impious iconoclasts.” Symeon goes so far as to defend those who express adoration before the gifts to be offered and to the priests who carry the divine vessels,

some of which may even be empty, since “all of them (i.e., the vessels) partake of the sanctification of the divine gifts consecrated in them.”

Today one would be hard-pressed to find a Christian thinker who would reiterate some of Symeon’s theologically more questionable statements, formulated, presumably, at a time of heightened Eucharistic debate. The astute liturgical theologian, however, would be remiss to ignore the above reference entirely, for in it issues of Eucharistic devotion are linked to the charge of idolatry. Notably, the accusation of idolatry was especially pervasive during yet another period of intense theological dispute, namely, the age of the iconoclastic controversy. At that time, the proper understanding of the Eucharist was to take center stage once again. This is true inasmuch as the question of the relationship between the second Commandment of the Decalogue and the bloodless sacrifice, worship befitting God and worship of creatures, was to come up again and again in the relevant antirrhetic literature.

St John of Damascus, for example, was one of the first to argue in favor of the reverence shown to icons by taking recourse to the Eucharist. “If you say,” he writes in his *Apologia against those who decry Holy Images*, “that only intellectual worship befits God, take away all corporeal things: light and fragrance, prayer itself, through the physical voice, the very divine mysteries, which are offered through matter, bread, and wine, the oil of chrism, the sign of the Cross, for all this is matter.”² Conversely, the iconoclasts argued that the Eucharistic gifts do not justify the veneration of icons but were in fact the only true image of Christ. The *Horos* of the Council of Hieria (754) clearly states that (Mansi 13, 264BC), “The bread of the Eucharist, *as true image of his natural flesh through the coming of the Holy Spirit* (= the epiclesis), becomes consecrated divine body, while a priest who makes the anaphora mediates in the transferring (of the bread and wine) from the realm of the profane to the realm of the holy.” This line of thinking concerning the Eucharist was to come to a head particularly during the second wave of iconoclasm.

As Stephen Gero noted, “... this second phase of Byzantine iconoclasm is characterized by the emergence of the so-called Christological dilemma: the image-maker either divides the two natures of Christ, and thus falls into Nestorian error, or else he confuses the two natures of Christ, and thus

² Part I: Commentary on St Basil’s *Thirty Chapters to Amphilochios on the Holy Ghost*, ch. xviii.

becomes a monophysite heretic.”³ Of course, John of Damascus, in his dogmatic treatise entitled, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, had already anticipated this line of argumentation.⁴ He thus pointed out the following with respect to the proper understanding of the term *antitype* in the Divine Liturgy of St Basil the Great (Book IV.13 “Concerning the holy and immaculate Mysteries of the Lord”):

But if some persons called the bread and the wine “antitypes” of the body and blood of the Lord, as did the divinely inspired Basil, they said so not after the consecration but before the consecration, so calling the offering itself. Participation is spoken of; for through it we partake of the divinity of Jesus. Communion, too, is spoken of, and it is an actual communion, because through it we have communion with Christ and share in His flesh and His divinity: yea, we have communion and are united with one another through it. For since we partake of one bread, we all become one body of Christ and one blood, and members one of another, being of one body with Christ.

The Fathers of the 7th Ecumenical Council would follow John of Damascus on this point to the letter (see the 6th Act of the Council: Mansi 13, 265D), as would St Theodore the Studite in subsequent decades (cf. PG 99, 340BC).

The question concerning Eucharistic symbolism vs. Eucharistic realism was definitively settled for the Church in the West, especially by the 11th century condemnations of Berengarius Turonensis (c. 999-1088). In reacting against what he took to be extreme realism, including such Eucharistic miracles as bleeding hosts,⁵ Berengarius, reminiscent of the iconoclastic line of thinking, argued that the body and blood of Christ were present at the Eucharist *in signo* alone. The sanctions against Berengarius, and parallel theological reflection, would ultimately lead to the canonization of the term “transubstantiation” in the West at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215).

³ “The Eucharistic Doctrine of the Byzantine Iconoclasts and Its Sources,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 68 (1975) 4-22, here at p. 4.

⁴ Cf. Joannes Damascenus, *Fragmenta in Matthaeum*. PG 96, 1409: “Οὐκ ἔστι τύπος ὁ ἄρτος καὶ οἶνος τοῦ σώματος καὶ αἵματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, μὴ γένοιτο, ἀλλ’ αὐτὸ τὸ σῶμα καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ αἷμα εἰς σύστασιν τῆς ἡμετέρας ψυχῆς τε καὶ σώματος χωροῦν, οὐ δαπανώμενον, οὐ φθειρόμενον, οὐκ εἰς ἀφεδρῶνα χωροῦν, ἀλλ’ εἰς τὴν ἡμῶν οὐσίαν τε καὶ συντήρησιν. Εἰ δὲ καὶ τινες ἀντίτυπα τοῦ σώματος καὶ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ Κυρίου τὸν ἄρτον καὶ τὸν οἶνον ἐκάλεσαν, οὐ μετὰ τὸ ἁγιασθῆναι εἶπον, ἀλλὰ πρὶν ἁγιασθῆναι, τὴν προσφορὰν οὕτω καλέσαντες.”

⁵ See the stories documented by Peter Browe, *Die eucharistischen Wunder des Mittelalters*, Breslau 1938, 111-138.

Subsequently, the focus of Eucharistic theology shifted from the whole action of the Eucharist to the Eucharistic host itself, culminating in the institution of the feast of Corpus Christi in 1264 by Pope Urban IV.

The recounting, however, of Eucharistic miracles was not simply a medieval Western aberration but, to a certain degree, an ancient Christian theological motif. Hagiographical material of the sort was not entirely unknown in the early and middle Byzantine East either. For example, the story in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* related by Daniel the Abbot, which he heard from Abba Arsenius, concerning the disbelief in the change of the Eucharistic elements on the part of an old unlearned hermit or the analogous event concerning the disbelieving Jew, documented in the 8th-9th century *Vita* of St Basil by pseudo-Amphilochius, all speak to the faith in the “real presence” of Christ, to use an anachronistic term, in the Eucharistic gifts. Chrysostom himself, in his 82nd Homily on Matthew (4), speaks to this point clearly when he states (PG 58, 743):

How many now say, I would wish to see His form, the mark, His clothes, His shoes. Behold! You see Him, you touch Him, you eat Him. And you indeed desire to see His clothes, but He gives Himself to you not to see only, but also to touch and eat and receive within you. Let then no one approach it with indifference, no one faint-hearted, but all with burning hearts, all fervent, all aroused.

Moreover, this “real presence” is presupposed in the prayer prior to the Elevation and Fraction in the Byzantine Liturgy of both Chrysostom and Basil:

*Hearken, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, from Your holy dwelling place and from the throne of glory of Your Kingdom, and come to sanctify us, You Who are enthroned with the Father on high **and are present among us invisibly here**. And with Your mighty hand, grant Communion of Your most pure Body and precious Blood to us, and through us to all the people.*

In the Eucharist, therefore, Christ is manifest in the Holy Gifts, while being, at the same time, enthroned in glory at the right hand of the Father. This has great implications with respect to the nature of the Eucharistic sacrifice and to Christological doctrine.

In this context we must note a phrase in yet another prayer of Byzantine Divine Liturgy, namely, the Prayer of the Cherubic Hymn. In referring to

Christ, this prayer reads, in part, “For You are the One Who both offers and is offered, the One Who is received and is distributed.” This phrase was at the center of a theological dispute in Byzantium during the mid-12th century. The conflict was stimulated by the accusations against Basil, a deacon of the Church of the Holy Wisdom (Sancta Sophia) who held the position of didaskalos and the chair of the Gospels. In particular, Basil’s opponents accused him of stating that “the one and only Son of God is both the victim and the recipient of the sacrifice at the same time as the Father.” This, they suggested, seemed to be dividing the human from the divine within Christ leading to a Nestorian Christology.

The patriarch-elect of Antioch, Soterichos Panteugenos (Παντευγενός), was the main protagonist of Basil’s accusers. Without formally sanctioning Basil’s formula, a Council held on 26 January 1156 issued a statement (σημείωμα) that directed condemnation against those who affirmed that the sacrifice of Christ was offered to the Father alone, and not to the other two persons of the Holy Trinity. Panteugenos, who for some unknown reason was not present at the Council, responded by publishing a tract, in the form of a Platonic dialogue, in which he refuted the decision of the Council. A new Council, held at the Blachernae Palace on 12 May 1157, under the presidency of emperor Manuel I Komnenos, re-affirmed the previous decision. According to the Council, the hypostatic union of the incarnate Logos “offered” the sacrifice according to the humanity assumed by him and “received” it according to his divinity, together with the Father and the Spirit. Panteugenos recanted his position, yet he never was ordained nor assumed the post of Patriarch of Antioch. The Synodicon of Orthodoxy eventually included five anathemas against the condemned doctrines, based, in part, on the treatise of Nicholas of Methone, *Against Soterichos*. It is the same Nicholas who would write essays against the use of unleavened bread, the procession of the Holy Spirit, as well as the primacy of the pope, all issues gaining importance at the time.

Overt liturgical manifestations of the reverence of the Eucharist in the East in subsequent centuries was rather subdued. Of course, some references to practices, analogous to the feast of Corpus Christi can be found in sources of the Byzantine rite, but mostly under the direct influence of Western practice,

in places, that is, such as the old Byzantine monastery of Grottaferrata.⁶ The fact that this form of Eucharistic devotion is foreign to the Byzantine Liturgy can be seen, for example, in the 7th article of the so-called Union signed in Brest in 1596, which states:

That we should not be compelled to take part in processions on the day of Corpus Christi—that we should not have to make such processions with our Mysteries inasmuch as our use of the Mysteries is different.

Nevertheless, without a doubt, Ruthenian practice did come to know the feast of Corpus Christi, at least as early as the 17th century.⁷

From time and time certain unique expressions of Eucharistic reverence do make an appearance in the post-Byzantine Orthodox East. One such noteworthy example is found in the *Typikon* of the Athonite Monastery of St Paul written in the year 1850. According to the rubrics of this document, during the procession of the *Epitaphios* on Holy Saturday, “the abbot takes up the Gospel upon his head, *having the Lamb of Great Thursday*; the rest (of the priests) hold as heavenly, the sacred veil (πέπλον) of the *Epitaphios threnos*.” Traditionally, on Holy Thursday, when in Orthodox practice we celebrate the “Mystical Supper (that is, the handing down of our dread Mysteries),” two Lambs are consecrated, one for the Divine Liturgy of the day and one to be kept throughout the year as the so-called reserved sacrament, used in cases of necessity such as illness. Priest take great care with these sacred gifts to make sure that they are in no way compromised. It seems as though, at least at St Paul’s Monastery, this was seen as a particular time to revere the consecrated, Eucharistic Body and Blood of Christ. This is a unicum, as far as I am aware, not found in other Athonite liturgical sources.

We close with a word on the Great Entrance of the Divine Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts. As we know, this is a service of the Byzantine Rite connected to Vespers. Currently, it is performed solely on the weekdays of

⁶ Stefano Parenti, “Una Diataxis inedita dei XIV secolo per la solennità dei Corpus Domini,” in *Mille anni di rito greco alle porte di Roma: raccolta di saggi sulla tradizione liturgica del Monastero italo-bizantino di Grottaferrata*, Stefano Parenti – Elena Velkovska, eds. (Analekta kryptopherres 4), Grottaferrata 2004, 149-170.

⁷ See Maria Takala-Roszczenko, “The ‘Latin’ within the ‘Greek’: The Feast of Corpus Christi 17th-18th century Ruthenian Practice, in Church,” in: *State and Nation in Orthodox Church Music. Proceedings of the Third International Conference Music University of Joensuu, Finland, 8-14 June 2009*, Jyväskylä, Finland, 2010, 76-87.

Great Lent. During the Presanctified, Holy Communion is received from gifts consecrated at a previous, complete Divine Liturgy. At the Entrance, the priest carries the gifts above his head, which is covered with a veil (*aer*), holding the Lamb with his right hand. All the faithful kneel deeply and in silence prostrate themselves as the gifts are processed before the icon-screen to be placed on the Holy Altar Table. This is certainly the most solemn example of Eucharistic devotion in the Byzantine Divine Liturgy.

Needless to say, the Eucharist is indeed the focal point of the Byzantine liturgy. The consecration of the Eucharistic gifts constitutes the apex of the Eucharistic rite. Yet the work of the Holy Spirit does not end there. It extends to the faithful who participate in this sanctifying event. To illustrate this, I leave you with the words of St Nicholas Cabasilas, a late Byzantine lay theologian who continues to inspire believers in both East and West to this day. In his *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, he begins by saying:

The essential act in the celebration of the holy mysteries is the transformation of the elements into the Divine Body and Blood; its aim is the sanctification of the faithful, who through these mysteries receive the remission of their sins and the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven.

May the Lord Jesus Christ, who voluntarily offered Himself as a blameless sacrifice for the salvation of the world, grant us remission of our sins and life everlasting, through our participation and communion in His broken body and His precious and life-giving blood.

Thank you for your attention.