



# THE LITURGICAL LIFE OF THE CHURCH

THE THIRD ANNUAL TEACHER'S RELIGIOUS CONFERENCE  
OF THE METROPOLITAN COUNCIL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION  
COMMITTEES — LECTURES AND DISCUSSIONS

ST. VLADIMIR'S ORTHODOX THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
JULY 25, 26, 27, 1963



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The Third Annual Church School Conference sponsored by the Metropolitan Council Religious Education Committee was held July 25-26-27, 1963 at Sarah Lawrence College, Yonkers, New York.

Lectures were held at the college with Vesper Services and Divine Liturgy at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary Chapel. The Seminary, located at 575 Scarsdale Road, Tuckahoe, Crestville, New York near Yonkers, has recently purchased this location and is now in the process of erecting a new building to house dormitory, classrooms, library. The new building will be completed September, 1964.

Lecturers at the Third Conference included V. Rev. Alexander Schmemmann; two of his lectures are printed herewith, and Father Nicholas Kiryluk, Major Chaplain in the United States Air Force who spoke on the Divine Liturgy and demonstrated with a film. Mrs. Sophie Koulomzin also held demonstration Church School classes.

Three field trips were held during the Conference (1) to St. Basil's Academy (2) to Tolstoy Farm (3) to Novo Diveevo Convent.

Serving on the Metropolitan Council Religious Education Committee are the following members:

V. Rev. John Kivko, Chairman  
V. Rev. Paul Shafran, Assistant Chairman  
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Miss Carol Loch, FROC Representative  
Stephen Shostak



## THE SANCTIFICATION OF LIFE

Very Rev. Alexander Schmemmann

As I was preparing this lecture I was thinking of my impressions of the last two weeks which I spent in Montreal where I attended a meeting of theologians from almost every country of the world. I was amazed at the great interest shown by non-Orthodox towards our liturgical tradition. Sacraments, liturgy, liturgical year, the feasts--all this is being rediscovered by those who for centuries have led an extremely limited liturgical life. This is an event of tremendous importance. Yet, I always have the impression that, as they are recovering this, we are losing our liturgical tradition. They are coming back to understanding the importance of the liturgical life of the church, not only the Sunday morning liturgy, but the liturgical life in general, that life which is the real application of grace to our lives. They are hungry and thirsty for this liturgical fullness. And at this precise moment we Orthodox in the West, especially in America, have virtually reduced our church life to Sunday morning attendance. As they go up, we go down, and that gives my subject a tremendous importance. How can we be witnesses of Orthodoxy in the Western world in which God has decided we should be a testimony to Him if we ourselves have no experience in the liturgical tradition?

My first lecture deals with the sanctification of time through the liturgical cycle of the year. I must stress immediately that we speak of the sanctification of time and not simply of the various feasts and holy days. It would be very easy to give you a full list of the feasts of the church with their dates and some indication of how to celebrate these feasts and then to say, "Now go ahead and keep all this." But it is one thing to memorize all those dates, to have lists and enumerations, and quite a different thing to understand them. Christ did not become man--He did not die on the cross that we should simply keep some dates as dates of obligation and that we should be able to say, "We are Orthodox because on March 25 we celebrate the Annunciation and on December 25 we celebrate Christmas". Something happens through all these celebrations. Something happens not only in the Church but also in my life, in our lives as individuals, as members of families, as members of human society. We describe this "something" as sanctification of time and life. The proper approach to the liturgical life of the Church includes not only a descriptive approach which is so frequently used in teaching liturgics: "...and then the priest takes the censor...and then he goes out...and then he does this and that", it includes the question, Why is he doing all this? Teaching is explanation. Learning is understanding, not simple description. "Why?" is our real question. Of course, I cannot open up for you all this tremendous treasure in one short lecture. I hope that I can give you a taste for further studies. I can hint at something so beautiful, so heavenly, so crucial for real Orthodoxy that when we lose it--even if we can still build beautiful churches with domes and three-barred crosses and still know certain Orthodox melodies--we cease to be Orthodox.

What is time? What is it that it has to be sanctified and how is this to be done? Time is the all embracing form of our life. We live in time. Whenever we wake up in the morning, it is either Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, or some other day; it is spring or fall or summer. We cannot escape time. It is in time that we find the real condition of our existence. Our time goes toward an end. In terms of the individual life, it means that it goes toward our death. People who study human psychology have discovered long ago that one's whole life is shaped to some extent by his constant desire to escape this inevitable thought of death. What is man doing? He is trying to forget that time, day after day, month after month, year after year, brings him to his end. To be in time is to know that things are not



stable in this world. You are young, but you grow old. You know someone, and the person you know dies or disappears. Time is the very icon, the picture of our fallen world. If you would think of all the generations that preceded us on this earth and of the shortness of our own lives, you would understand why, in spiritual terms, time is the most important, the most obvious condition of man. We live in time, and that means the moment we are born we are already progressing toward our death. Of course, the majority of people do not think about death constantly. They are busy. They expect something from time. The one who is dating a girl expects that next Saturday he will see her. The one who will take his vacation next week thinks in terms of next Monday when he will be free to leave. We will always have those little ends which help us to forget the ultimate end. We fill time with futile things which continually take our attention away from the ultimate end. And this is what the philosophers, the great man of all ages, those who go to the depth of their human experience, discover when they come to the ultimate questions of existence that life is meaningless. Whether I die tomorrow or in thirty years, all I am trying to do, all that I am trying to be, is void of meaning because I will disappear. So, as I said, the time of human existence is meaningless unless there is something which can escape its destiny.

This is the starting point for our understanding the sanctification of time, for it is the Orthodox experience, going back to the apostles themselves, that in the center of our liturgical life, in the very center of that time which we measure as year, we find the Feast of Christ's Resurrection. What is Resurrection? Resurrection is the appearance in this world, completely dominated by time and therefore by death, of a life that will have no end. The One who rose again from the dead does not die anymore. In this world of ours, not somewhere else, not in a world that we do not know at all, but in our world, there appeared one morning Someone who is beyond death and yet in our time. This meaning of Christ's Resurrection, this great joy, is the central theme of Christianity and it has been preserved in its purity by the Orthodox Church. There is much truth expressed by those who say that the real central theme of Orthodoxy, the center of all its experience, the frame of reference of everything else, is the Resurrection of Christ.

At this point I want to make a footnote. I think there is danger that we Western Orthodox are losing this resurrection spirit of Christianity. We are very much concerned with death, but we are not too much concerned with resurrection. I would say that our church life reflects sometimes more the funeral than the resurrection type of piety. Yet no one can understand the real structure of the liturgical cycle of the year unless he understands that the center, the day that gives meaning to all days and therefore to all time, is that yearly commemoration of Christ's Resurrection at Easter. This is always the end and the beginning. We are always living after Easter, and we are always going toward Easter. Easter is the earliest Christian feast. The whole tone and meaning of the liturgical life of the Church is contained in Easter, together with the subsequent fifty-day period which culminates in the feast of the Pentecost, the coming down of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles. This unique Easter celebration is reflected every week in the Christian Sunday which we call in Russian "Voskresenie" (Resurrection Day). If only you would take some time to read the texts of Sunday Matins you would realize, though it may seem strange to you, that every Sunday we have a little Easter. I say "Little Easter", but it is really "Great Easter". Every week the Church comes to the same central experience: "Having seen they Resurrection...". Every Saturday night when the priest carries the Gospel from the altar to the center of the church, after he has read the Gospel of the Resurrection, the same fundamental fact of our Christian faith is proclaimed: CHRIST IS RISEN! St. Paul says, "If Christ is not risen, then your faith is in vain." There is nothing else to believe. This is the real center, and it is only in reference to Easter as the end of all natural time and the beginning of the new time



in which we as Christians have to live that we can understand the whole liturgical year. If you open a calendar, you will find all our Sundays are called Sundays after Pentecost, and Pentecost itself is fifty days after Easter. Pentecost is the fulfillment of Easter. Christ ascended into heaven and sent down His Holy Spirit. When He sent down His Holy Spirit into this world, a new society was instituted, a body of people whose life, though it remained of this world and was shared in its life, took on a new meaning. This new meaning comes directly from Christ's Resurrection. We are no longer people who are living in time as in a meaningless process which makes us first old and then ends in our disappearance. We are given not only a new meaning in life, but even death itself has acquired a new significance. In the Troparion at Easter we say, "He trampled down death by death". We do not say that He trampled down death by the Resurrection, but by death. A Christian still faces death as a decomposition of the body, as an end; yet in Christ, in the Church, because of Easter, because of Pentecost, death is no longer just the end but it is the beginning also. It is not something meaningless which therefore gives a meaningless taste to all of life. Death means entering into the Easter of the Lord. This is the basic tone, the basic melody of the liturgical year of the Christian Church. Christianity is, first of all, the proclamation in this world of Christ's Resurrection. Orthodox spirituality is paschal in its inner content, and the real content of the Church's life is joy. We speak of feasts; the feast is the expression of joyfulness of Christianity. When you teach children, you convey to them not only certain knowledge but also the spirit which is behind this knowledge. You know very well that the only real thing, especially in the child's world, which the child accepts easily, is precisely joy. We have made our Christianity so adult, so serious, so sad, so solemn that we have almost emptied it of that joy. Yet Christ Himself said, "Unless you become like children, you will not enter the Kingdom of God". This does not mean that you should forget mathematics, geography, etc. To become as a child in Christ's terms means to be capable of that spiritual joy of which an adult is almost completely incapable. To enter into that communion with things, with nature, with other people without suspicion or fear or frustration. We often use the term "grace". But what is grace? Charisma in Greek means not only grace but also joy. "And I will give you the joy that no one will take away from you...". If I stress this point so much, it is because I am sure that, if we have a message to our own people, it is that message of Easter joy which finds its climax on Easter night. When we stand at the door of the church and the priest has said, "Christ Is Risen", then the night becomes, in the terms of St. Gregory of Nyssa, "lighter than the day". This is the secret strength, the real root of Christian experience. Only within the framework of this joy can we understand everything else.

I shall return to Easter at the very end, but let us keep in mind at this point that Easter is the beginning of the liturgical year. The official beginning is the first of September, but I am speaking in terms of the principle, the foundation, not the chronological beginning. It is at the moment of Easter that our understanding of time comes to us in existential terms. The world was dark, and Someone brought in light. The world was cold, and Someone brought in warmth. The world was sad because it was a cemetery, and Someone said, "Death is no more". This is what Christ did in this world. It was cold and sinful and cruel, and Someone entered and said, "Rejoice!" This is the way Christ addressed His disciples. "Rejoice! Peace Be With You!" Paschal joy is, therefore, the beginning of Christian experience.

What is a year? It is a period of 365 days. It is also a natural cycle, a complete revolution of nature: spring, summer, fall, and winter. In other terms it is a sort of natural representation of the whole history of the universe.



It has a beginning and an end, and then it begins and ends again. Living through the year, we go through this whole cycle of nature. How does the church react to this cycle of nature? It is important for you to know that the liturgical year developed in connection with this natural cycle. It is not accidental that Christmas is celebrated on the twenty-fifth of December. We know nothing about the exact date of Christ's birth. The twenty-fifth of December in the pagan world which Christianity had to Christianize was the feast of the natural victory of light over darkness. On the twenty-fifth of December the pagans, the non-Christians, celebrated the end of darkness and the beginning of light, for it is then the days begin to get longer and the light returns to the world. It is at that time that nature seems completely dead, icy, cold. There is nothing but darkness and cold and then, little by little, the light increases and within this dead nature the spring arrives. The natural resurrection begins. The liturgical year of the Church was shaped within this context of nature, and so to understand the relationship between time and the feasts is to understand the meaning of those feasts. The Church fills the natural time of the year with certain commemorations. The first series of commemorations deals with Christ's life. Within this framework of Easter and the fifty-two Sundays, the fifty-two Easters, this one fundamental paschal joy, we have more specialized commemorations. This cycle of commemoration begins in the fall. The first great theme of the year is the coming of Christ into the world. We shall call this the cycle of Christmas and Epiphany. It begins forty days before Christmas with the Advent or Christmas Lent. Later on I shall give you a detailed explanation of why all feasts are preceded by fasting periods. From the very beginning of this fall season we are given the first theme of our Christian existence: the Coming of Christ. From that point of view the old Western name for that season, Advent, is an excellent one--for Advent means coming. Who are the Christians? The Christians are those who expect Christ and who know that He will return. What gives the meaning to this day through while we live, the twenty-fifth of July, 1963? It is one out of an innumerable sequence of days I shall have to live through. The first meaning of the day that I am living today comes from the past. It is 1963 years after someone came and changed human fate. As a Christian, I am first of all related to the first coming of Christ. As a Christian I first of all remember. I can forget it; I can wake up in the morning and say, "Oh, I have to pay taxes today". But even this experience of paying taxes must be a very different experience if you remember that you are not simply John Smith who pays taxes, but you are John Smith to whom Christ has come, whose life Christ has assumed, to whose life Christ has given new meaning. And my day today, the Twenty-fifth of July, receives a second meaning because it is a day before Christ's second coming. I am always living between the two comings of Christ: the one in the past, the one in the future. Finally, the meaning of my day today comes to me from the words of Christ that He will never leave me alone: "And Lo, I am with you till the end of time". Past, present, future--we see already that the time in which we live is not only the time of the calendar but it is a time which is shaped from inside by certain doctrine, by certain faith, by certain experience. The twenty-fifth of July, 1963, is a day related to the past coming of Christ, to the future coming of Christ, and finally to the presence of Christ in His Body and Blood, His Spiritual Presence at the Divine Liturgy. It is quite a different time from that of a person whose only concern in life is to mow his lawn, to get some money in the bank and then to change his Chevy to a Cadillac, and the Cadillac to something else, and finally to die saying, "Well, I had all this and nothing has a meaning". It is sad, it is tragically said, not to know that in the past, in the present, and in the future, something has happened and something is happening.

The first theme of the liturgical year is this theme of Christmas, not just the



theme to which we tend to reduce Christmas--the sentimental little story about the baby in the manger, this western idea of Christmas as a sentimental scene: "Come and look at the sweet baby Jesus". The Orthodox Church has never reduced Christmas to that one moment of nativity. What happened there in Bethlehem was not just a sentimental story about the oxen and sheep that come to worship Christ. It was God Himself coming to man. It was the participation of man in this coming, of Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the wise men. It was the participation of all of nature in this. There is one wonderful hymn about Christmas that is sung in church: "What shall we bring to Thee, O Christ? Skies have brought the stars. Earth has brought that Cavern. And what we men can do, we bring to Thee, Mary, Thy Mother". This is a tremendous mystery, a glorious event and not a sentimental story about an old man and a nice young woman and all that we find in the windows of big department stores. Forty days of preparation and then comes Christmas, and Christmas in the past had the same name as the Baptism of the Lord: Epiphany, Manifestation, Coming, Theophany, The Coming of God. In this world, and this is a specific content of the Christian faith, God Himself has entered. The God in whom we believe is not a god somewhere out there, nobody knows where, but it is the God who has taken upon Himself to go through our life, to enter into our time, to be one of us, to be the Emanuel, God With Us. This results in the celebration of Christmas and with it of the next feast, Epiphany. When Christ entered the water of the Jordan, He made water and the whole nature part of His Incarnation. At the same time, He received the baptism of repentance, thus identifying Himself with us simple men. Not only does He come to us to bring us His teaching, not only does He come to us to reveal God, He comes to us to take on Himself all the sins and tragedies of this world, to become not only God to us, but also man to God. This means someone who will suffer, someone who will know all the frustrations and tragedy of human existence, and from inside transform them into joy. On Epiphany, the second wonderful theme of the liturgical year, we see Christ as the Lamb of God, and John the Baptist pointing to Him and saying, "Here is the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world".

The feasts of the Epiphany and Christmas make us face the cosmical dimension of Christian faith. Both involve more than me, more than the I-God relationship, more than the terrible individualism in which we live. We are always interested in our individual fate. "When I die, Father, what will happen to me? For nine days I will be here and for forty days...". We fail to understand that God does not save us individually. God, first of all, restores the whole Creation. God "so loved the world" and the world is the cosmos, the beautiful entity that He has created, that proclaims His Glory. In Christmas and Epiphany, not only the relationship between me and my Lord is revealed, but the whole world of Christ. Christ appears on the waters; Christ appears among the whole creation that glorifies Him and that means that our destiny as men and as members of the church is not simply to preach individual salvation: "Go to confession; go to communion; be a good girl; be a good boy and you will save your life". We Christians, we, the Church, have been made the very center of this whole creation. We are those who, on behalf of the whole creation, bring it back to God and we know that God has loved the world, created it after His own fashion, and He wants it back. This is the real theme of Christmas. This is the cycle of Christmas.

At the end of the liturgical year, almost at the very end, in the midst of the summer, we have the feast of Christ's Transfiguration. This is another of the fundamental feasts of Orthodoxy. It is a feast which is not kept too much anymore. It falls on a weekday usually, and the attitude seems to be "Who knows about it?" Yet in it there is something that reveals the true spirit of Orthodoxy more than anything else. Christ took His Disciples and went up on the mount, and there His face was shining and His vestments were white and one of the disciples said, "Lord,



it is good to be here". People are always asking me, and probably every priest has the same experience, "When should we go to church? What is the minimum of our obligation? How much should we do?" I often wonder: suppose someone were to ask Peter how long he should remain on Mount Tabor to fulfill his obligation. Our questions amount to: "Well, may I leave now, Lord? May I go watch television now? I've had enough of that Transfiguration; I want to go back, but I want to be sure also that I'll get to Paradise someday, so I'll watch you transfigured for awhile, Lord, and then I'll go back to my life". Peter said, "Lord, it is good for us to be here". This was the end of all human desires. The feast of Transfiguration reveals that, if I desire something very much, be it a Coca Cola, be it an hour of television, I always desire God behind all this. Nothing in this world can satisfy my desires unless I see this Transfigured Life. Christianity again is joy. This is the meaning of Transfiguration. It is not a book of precepts: on Monday do this; on Tuesday do this. And when you have done everything, the heavenly bookkeeping will reveal that, if you have 51% good deeds, you will go to Paradise; if it is 49% you go to Hell. God has not given to us a set of prescriptions and regulations; He has given Himself to us and this means Love and Transfiguration. He has given us the power of going with Him to Mount Tabor.

★ What is the Church? The Church is the reflection of this world of Mount Tabor. Ask our people in the old country. They would never understand what it means that they must go to church. Today, when they cannot go to church, the only thing they want is to go to church. We are still asking, "How much?" and "How long?" They would give everything they have in the world just for the opportunity to be in church, for the church is not a place where we fulfill our religious obligations but rather the place where we find our real home, where joy and light are given to us. The beginning of the liturgical year, Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, are themes concerning the coming of Christ and all that He gives us, all the dimensions of Christianity, individual social, cosmical. Our Christian life appears as a climbing up that mountain to follow Christ. Sometimes it is very hot; sometimes it is very cold. Sometimes we become tired of getting up, and we go down a little bit and we forget about all this. But if there is a meaning in Christian life, then Christian life is always following Christ on Mount Tabor, so that at the end we can say, "Lord, it is good for us to be here". Then Christ will reveal to us as St. Paul said, "...what the eyes have not seen, what the ears have not heard and what has not yet come into the heart of man, what God has prepared for all those who love Him". Love Him! Not simply those who follow His prescriptions, but those who love Him. To love Him means to want to follow in spite of all difficulties, in spite of everything--to want that joy of being in Christ. It includes also Easter, the Passion Week, the Suffering, the Entrance into Jerusalem, but I shall speak of this at the very end.

What I have described so far is not the only content of the liturgical year. We also have the second cycle, and this is the cycle of Mary, the Mother of God. It includes the following main feasts: her Nativity on the eighth of September, the feast of her Presentation to the Temple on the twenty-first of November, the feast of the Annunciation on the twenty-fifth of March, the feast of the Presentation of Our Lord to the Temple on the second of February, and finally the feast of Our Lady's Assumption on the fifteenth of August. I could spend practically an endless time explaining the meaning of these feasts. They remind us of the various moments in the life of Mary, but they are not mere commemorations. They show what human life is at its perfection, for Mary is, to us, the Mother of God, the climax, the best, the perfection of humanity. She is the one in whom we know what God wanted when He created a human being. When we look at her purity, her love of God, her perfection, we know that all our thoughts: "I am good; I am bad; I am better; I am



worse", are meaningless when they are taken in terms of her life. We know that the Church uses light blue vestments for Mary, for blue is the color of purity. When we think of the heavenly love of Mary, of her whole existence, we know that this is the real human life and how far we are from it. The feast of her nativity is not only the commemoration of her birth but somehow the real meaning of each man's entrance into the world. She is born, and we take a sort of magnifying glass to see what it means for a human being to be born. The moment he is born he is already beginning to fulfill his human destiny, and human destiny is to do, in our own terms and conditions, what she did. What did she do? First of all, she was presented to the temple and that happens to us too; we also are presented to the temple. The presentation to the temple means that we are taken out of this world and enter into the real life which is with God. She was dedicated to God. The Presentation to the Temple is the feast in which we learn to understand what our own dedication to God means. Then comes the feast of Annunciation which marks the time when God announces to us, to every one of us, what we have to do in this world. As men we all have a definite vocation which is not simply to have so many children, to acquire so much money, but to fulfill the Will of God, when He announces it to us. What did Mary say? She said, "Yes, let it be according to Thy Word". She was the fulfillment of the Lord's Prayer: Thy Will Be Done, in joy, in obedience.

Next, we have the feast of the Presentation when she takes her baby in her arms and offers Him to God. This feast has meaning not only for mothers but for all of us human beings. We should offer all that is of importance to us. Sometimes we say, "This is my baby!", speaking of something we care for, even a bank. Whatever "baby" we have, we must offer it to God. Real human life is a realization that everything belongs to God and that there is no greater joy than to offer to God what belongs to Him. We say in the Liturgy, "Thine own of Thine own, We offer unto Thee...". Finally, the last feast of the cycle is the Assumption. Some of you have had the joy of taking part in a real celebration of Assumption, when the summer has already come to an end, when apples are so beautiful, when the leaves are turning gold and red but are not yet dead, when nature has fulfilled itself, and when everything is at its perfection. In the midst of this beautiful world we celebrate, in a joyful way, the death of Mary, and we sing that she has not been abandoned in death. So great was the love in her heart, so great was the power of the light she had in herself, of the life that came from God, that she was taken out of death by Christ, and in this, her assumption, the resurrection of all of us has begun. When we die it is always something which is tragically irreparable. When she died, the meaning of death changed because the Resurrection of Christ was operative in her in a real way. The contemplation of all the feasts of Mary is the contemplation of our own life through her, the perfect human being. The same applies to the contemplation of each day of the year of the saints, of St. John the Baptist, of the Apostles. We belong not only to a time about which we read in the NEW YORK TIMES, the time of the cold war, of Khrushchev, and of Hoffa, but we belong also to a time in which generation after generation has produced those whom we call saints. We belong to them, and during the Divine Liturgy we commemorate all of them when we put particles of holy bread on the Paten. We have the whole Church of God, triumphant, the saints and us sinners, in one wonderful unity around Christ.

The liturgical cycle of the year is not only a calendar in the sense that some days have to be kept in a religious way, that you have to go to church with the question in the back of your mind, "Father, what are the feasts of obligation?" The priest will say, "On Transfiguration try to be in church, but you can skip Saints Peter and Paul." My dear friends, if you want to skip something, skip the whole thing because in Christianity you cannot speak of skipping or not skipping. You can speak only in terms of loving or not loving. No one has yet come to God or to a priest or to someone else and asked him, "What is the minimum of my love for



my wife?" To put love in terms of a minimum would be abnormal. The only real thing in liturgical life of the Church is the image of what God has given us. He has given us all these feasts and in each one of them the wonderful gift of His Joy and His Light. What is the celebration? The celebration is the appropriation by us, by the Church, of that joy that God gives. From one point of view, the whole life of the Church is one feast, not with just certain days on which we should be joyful, but on these days it is the real sacrament of joy that is being performed by the Church. This is why each celebration of the Church is built after the pattern of a preparation and fulfillment. We reach Easter not by looking at the calendar and saying, "This is the third of May". We have to go through Lent. Before Christmas we have to go through Advent. Before each feast there is always that preparation, fasting. Even when we go to Holy Communion which is the greatest joy a man can have, we must fast. I want you to understand the structure of what we mean by celebration. We go to church, but what does it mean to go to church? I can go to church very easily; take the car out of the garage, drive to church, stand there forty-five minutes making the sign of the cross while thinking about my own business and say, "Well, I was in attendance". Attendance means nothing. What is meaningful indeed is the participation. Yet we know, and this is my main point, that no one can reach the real joy, the real grace, the real meaning of the Church unless he prepares himself. You cannot jump out of a quarrel with your wife immediately into the Christian joy. You cannot, after a big lunch, a good cigar and some whiskey, all of a sudden become spiritual. We are fallen men. Our appetites, our bodies, everything throws us to the earth. For us it is simpler to be sitting than standing, sleeping than awake, to read the comics than to read a good novel, and to read a good novel is simpler than to read the Gospel. All the joy and the glorious things that God has given to us somehow we do not accept. We do not accept it; it is difficult for us. We have to make an effort. That is why we can never celebrate any feast without going through the effort of preparation, and preparation is fasting. Fasting in the Christian sense of the word is not simply a change of diet. You can fast that way and be quite surprised when you enter the Kingdom of God and say, "Lord, I have eaten fish on all the Fridays of my life", and the Lord will say, "You will go to Hell because you have not loved anyone. You do not know what Christianity is. All you know about religion is fish and so go and eat fish for eternity". Fish is a symbol of something quite different. Fasting must be bodily and spiritual. Why? Because this is the only way that we can become light again, get rid of that spiritual fat. Look at what women do when they want to get rid of the unnecessary. They go through dieting; they are ready to suffer. There is no possibility of entering into the Kingdom of God unless we get rid of spiritual fat and spiritual fat means the superficial interests, the little ambitions that fill our lives. The rhythm of the life of the Church is always preparation and then fulfillment. Whatever we remember in the Church, Saint Seraphim of Sarov or the Assumption of Our Lady, or the Crucifixion of Our Lord, the first thing the Lord says is, "Prepare yourselves! Get rid of unnecessary things! Force yourselves to do some exercise! Get rid of this world and then you will enter into the joy and the joy will be given to you".

The sanctification of time is the transformation of our natural time, of the time in which we live, the time which is often so exciting and sometimes so dull. Sometimes we expect someone or have something to do which makes up happy and then the event is gone. Everything is finished and the time becomes dull. Sometimes you are sitting in a taxi cab and all that comes to you as wise advice is: Sit back and relax. Between all the rushing in our lives, working here, working there, a few minutes of relaxation is not life either. To sanctify time is to transform this life which is so frustrating into a meaningful time, and by meaningful time, I mean a time which is related through the Church, through



liturgical life, to these three aspects of Christ: the Christ who has come, the Christ who is with us, and the Christ who will come. We are living Anno Domini 1963 which means we are living after He has come. In His first coming, we discover the meaning of our lives. Why did He come? He came in order to change my life from darkness into light, to give me the direction of those efforts, and finally to inform me that my real destination is the Kingdom of God. This is what I get from His first coming. All this is impossible unless He Himself does it and He is present and He is doing it. What is the Church? The Church is the presence of Christ in our lives. It is Christ always standing by, helping and guiding and filling us with His Grace. And finally the transformation of time is the expectation of the future. Remembrance--Presence--Expectation.

Real Christian life, in my opinion, is best expressed on Saturday before Easter when Christ's grave is still in the church. He is dead and yet already the rays of light appear. It is no longer death; it is no longer the place at which we cry and weep. The tomb in the midst of the church with all those flowers is already the life-giving tomb. He sleeps. With him to some extent we, all Christians, are going through one long Holy Saturday. Human life is the expectation of what is at the end, and at the end is the joy of the bridal chamber, the joy of the Resurrection. At the end are Mary and John and all the saints; at the end is this wonderful fullness of life. When I see this end, I want to reach it, to move in its direction. I have to make an effort, and when I make an effort my whole life becomes an exercise. I meet a man in whom I am not interested, but I realize that this man has been sent to me by God, and the encounter becomes meaningful. I am working at meaningless work, but that work is the one by which my body, my spirit, my life is to be changed in that life of expectation. Everything acquires a meaning; everything becomes sanctified because everything is a step in that long procession to Mount Tabor. Thus the whole liturgical cycle has but one meaning: to make us capable of being like Peter on Mount Tabor, capable of saying, "Lord, it is good to be here", and to say it with all our hearts.

The restoration of the liturgical life of the year is not only a problem for religious education. I would say personally that it is the problem of greatest importance in our church life today. We are very poor Orthodox if we think that we can squeeze our Orthodoxy between 10:00 and 12:00 on Sunday morning. If the whole life of the week, Monday through Sunday, the whole life of the month, the whole life of the year, is not referred to Mount Tabor, to Resurrection, to Easter, to Pentecost, then the morning of Sunday has no meaning either. It is to your generation that belongs the tremendous task of restoring not only the externals, not only the dates and the names of the feasts, but also the secret knowledge of how to celebrate, of how to go to church, and how to find in church the possibility of being in the joy of the Lord.



## The Sanctification of Life

V. Rev. Alexander Schmemmann

We spoke yesterday about the sanctification of time and in a logical continuity we come today to the sanctification of life in and through the Church. This Sanctification of Life is the fundamental meaning and purpose of the sacraments. Before I enumerate the sacraments, I want to say a few words about the notion of "sacrament" as such.

Although we limit that term "sacrament" to seven specific ecclesiastical and liturgical actions, we can say that the whole approach to life in the Orthodox Church is sacramental. What does this mean? Sacrament is an act which transforms. This is the first definition that I would suggest, for transformation is the real purpose of God in His acts of saving. God not only saves us in Christ, He not only forgives our sins, but He also transforms our life. It is in the Feast of Transfiguration that we find the real pattern of the Orthodox idea of salvation. When we say "salvation" we often have the tendency to use the word in the sense of "salvation from something". This is certainly the first meaning of the word; it is salvation from sin, from death, from the slavery to this world. Once we have been redeemed by Christ, the second purpose appears which is that of transfiguration or transformation. Christ came not only in order to save us from sin but also to give a new shape, a new meaning, a new destination to our life. One of the Fathers of the Church put it in a wonderful way when he said, "God became man so that man might become God." This is the old Orthodox doctrine of deification, of becoming divine by grace. All the experience of holiness in the Church, the whole experience of those men whom we call saints, is an experience of entering into that deification. In the end of history and the creation, the final destination of everything that exists can be summed up in the words of the Liturgy of St. Basil: "that He might fill all things with Himself". These words are the starting point for the proper understanding of sacraments. They are the fundamental actions of the Church by which she transforms our life. It is in this perspective that we shall now spend a few minutes on each sacrament.

We'll divide the Sacraments into the following groups: first the two sacraments that we will call the sacraments of initiation, the sacraments by which we begin our Christian life, Baptism and Chrismation with the Holy Chrism or Myrr; then the sacrament which in patristic terminology would be defined as the "sacrament of all sacraments" in which all Christian life finds its climax--the Divine Liturgy, the sacrament of Holy Eucharist. These first three sacraments deal with us in the Church. As you will see in a few minutes, Baptism integrates us in the Church, Chrismation gives us the gifts necessary for being members in the Church, and the Eucharist fulfills our membership, integrates us into the people of God. Then we have the two sacraments which can be described as the sacraments of healing. Man unfortunately doesn't keep that wonderful new life which he receives in Baptism, he falls from it, he remains open to sin even after he has been given the white robe of incorruption and thus he has to be restored again and again to this Christian state which he has received. The first sacrament of healing is the sacrament of Holy Oil which deals with the physical weakness of man. The second one is that of repentance and forgiveness--the Sacrament of Confession. Spiritual restoration and physical healing--this is the purpose of those two sacraments. Then comes the sacrament of Holy Matrimony which indicates that the Church gives a special attention to the family, to the man within the family, to human love, to procreation, to this basic unit of man's social life. And finally



the seventh sacrament, Holy Orders, which could also be the first, for on this sacrament to some extent depend all other sacraments in the sense that they are impossible without it. This sacrament is always performed within the Eucharist and supplies the Church with ministers, bishops, priests, and deacons.

Now let's try to understand why we speak about the sacraments from the point of view of the sanctification of life. Baptism in Greek means immersion in water, and from the very beginning water was the element of this sacrament. Unless, Christ says, you be born from the water and spirit, you cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. The first question we have to answer is "why water?" Why does the most fundamental act of Christian existence, Christian life, the Church itself depend on such a material element? It is at this point that the whole problem of matter as such of our attitude towards matter is to be clarified. You will find this material element present in almost all sacraments: water in Baptism, a precious oil in Chrismation, oil in the sacrament of healing. Christ, when He wants to heal a blind man uses again something material. If you read the Gospel with open eyes, if you understand the proper attitude of the Bible, of the Old and New Testaments towards matter you will understand that our present attitude which is Western and recent that of an opposition of the spiritual to the material is in fact not a Biblical one. God has created matter as well as spirit. God has created the world and every ounce of the matter belongs to Him. He is the author and we know from the Bible that whatever He created was good. This is what God said at the end of each day of creation. A certain tendency in religion which despises material things, which says this is matter and religion is spiritual, is a wrong perspective. So many tragedies today in our Christian life, social and individual, would find their solution in the understanding that God did not create the spirit alone, that He is author of this wonderful combination of spirit and matter which is our world. The real perspective, the real purpose of God for the world, is that all of this material life acquire a spiritual meaning and all that is spiritual be incarnate in things material. The pattern of the Divine Salvation is God become Man, in the terms of St. John, "And the Word became Flesh". God Himself assumes material existence in order to bring matter to God. The real sin of which we speak so much is not that man become material, for he was created material from the very beginning, but that he forgot this connotation of the spiritual and the material. Precisely through this division between the material and the spiritual he became a slave of matter instead of being its master, a sacramental master of matter bringing it back to God. This is why all our sacraments are always expressed in something material, in rites, in matter itself, in oil, water, wine, bread. This is a sort of holy materialism in the Church which, if we grasp it, will guide us in the proper understanding of our life in this world as Christians.

Water, in Biblical symbolism in all ancient religions, in the whole of the pre-Christian world, always stands for life itself. It was called the "prima material", the prime matter and indeed without water, without humidity, nothing can exist. We can survive many days without food but not without drinking. Water is the central symbol of life, not only of life in its positive meaning but also in its negative meaning. There are three fundamental symbolisms of water in the Bible which help us to understand Baptism. The first is that of life itself. All that exists, exists by water. If you read Psalms you will find this symbolism of life wonderfully expressed: "My soul is thirsty of the Living God". Secondly, water is used as a symbol of judgment. Water is indeed matter that kills. In the great biblical story of the flood it is by water that God punishes; it is by water that death and judgment come. Finally, water means regeneration and cleanliness. Water is what makes us clean, restores us to cleanness. You can already see from this



short analysis that this symbolism is deeply rooted in the Bible, in the whole primitive mentality of man. And when I say primitive, I don't mean anything derogatory. I think we should become much more primitive than we are because our civilization has cut us from this direct experience of what is bread, what is water, what is earth. We are living in a homogenized and pasteurized world without a real contact with nature. The Bible was born and the Revelation of God came to man living in communion with nature and for him those words: water, bread, wine, oil were self-evident symbols, self-evident realities. This is why that sacrament which is the first and fundamental sacrament of the Church is performed through water.

As we come to baptize a member of the Church he is, first, a catechumen, the one who already believes but who is not yet integrated in the Church. In Baptism a man comes from darkness, from the old life, the life which is completely enslaved to death and sin. He comes to die with Christ, to be buried, immersed--the first symbolism of water. He comes to be revealed, washed, forgiven for his sins, the second symbolism of water. Then he has to be born again out of water, receive a new life. This is the rich meaning of Baptism. Everyone of us here, whether we know it or not, has died with Christ, has accepted the judgment, the accusation, the condemnation and then reborn in this water which was blessed by the priest, which was anointed with the Holy Spirit, which was sanctified, purified, which in other terms has become the new creation, the new world, which God created in the very beginning when He took man and put him in Paradise and said: Of all this you eat, all this is your home. This is what holy water is. We are put in that world, that new world of God and out of it new life appears. We come out of the baptismal font and are given the white robe which signifies that we are new men, new beings, that something old has been taken away from us. Immediately after this we are given the wonderful gifts of the Holy Spirit in the second sacrament, that of Chrismation. What is this Chrism, that the bishops alone can bless? It is a precious oil and again, just as we began with an understanding of what water is, in baptism we must understand the meaning of oil.

In the Bible, in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament, and in the whole religious world of man, oil is, first of all, the symbol of healing. It was the fundamental element of old primitive medicine. When the Samaritan found the man on the road covered with blood and half dying he poured wine and oil on his wounds. This was the medical treatment. Secondly, oil is joy. Why is it joy? Today we just push a button and we have light. Before, light in a room depended on oil. Oil lamps are to be found in the catacombs and old temples before Christianity. The more oil, the more joy. "Polyelei"--"abundance of oil"--we call that solemn moment in the Vigil Service when the whole Church is filled with light.

So the second meaning of oil is joy, light entering into darkness bringing joy. The third meaning of oil is that of peace. After the tragedy, condemnation, death and destruction of the flood, God wanted to show man that His anger was ended, that He forgave that He was restoring the covenant with man and He sent a dove with an olive branch. It was a sign of peace. In Chrismation we have all these elements combined and they point to the gift of the Holy Spirit. We say that in the Sacrament of Chrismation man receives the gifts of the Holy Spirit and those gifts are precisely those of peace, of healing, of joy and of strength.

In the life of every Christian the sacrament of Chrismation corresponds to Pentecost. The Holy Spirit, the spirit of peace and joy, as St. Paul describes him, is given to us and will be with us, comforting us, giving us the possibility within the tribulations of life to be joyful and also to be witnesses to Christ and to His acts.



If Baptism is the sacrament of birth, if it introduces us to that new humanity that Christ Himself has created, uniting us with Him in the mysterious death and resurrection of the baptismal font, then the gift of the Holy Spirit in Chrismation is the gift of being a person in the Church. Let me explain what I mean. The priest makes the sign of the Cross on almost all the parts of the body of man saying, "The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit". My hands, my nose, my eyes, my feet, my whole body has been sealed. When you have something that is very precious to you, a book, a document, you put your seal on it. The seal is something which makes it valid, full and which also indicates the ownership. This is what happens to us in the sacrament of Chrismation. God takes us, receives us as His own property. He puts His seal on our whole body. We are His as the Epistle to the Ephesians says: "Of His bones and of His flesh". We do not belong to ourselves anymore. It is wonderful, and sometimes very awful to know that we belong to God, that God has put His seal on us. But there is more to it. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit each one of us receives the possibility to be fully himself. How many people exist in the world and yet not one is identical with anybody else. God has created everyone to be unique. Behind each man, from all eternity, there is a Divine Plan. You are free, all of you, to say yes and to say no. It's so difficult to be one's self, to be what God wants me to be. In those gifts of the Holy Spirit, as Baptism refers to nature. Chrismation refers to the person. I belong to human nature. That means that I am a man like any other man. We have everything in common: our body, our reason, our understanding. But within this unity there is a personal vocation, a personal, unique vocation of each man. One is called to be a priest, one is called to be a mother, one is called to be something else, but in all that a human being does, he is to glorify God, to live by the Holy Spirit, the spirit of joy and peace and not by himself. To be fully what you have to be means that you are constantly transforming your life into a service to God, so Chrismation can be summed up as the ordination of a man to be a Christian. Just as a priest is ordained to be a priest, every Christian is ordained to be a Christian. When I was ordained a priest I received the Holy Spirit, the gift to be a priest, but before that, I and you, we all have received the grace to be Christians, to be fully Christians, to be ascending to God bringing with us our whole life and we are told by the Gospel itself that God does not measure grace. This fullness of spirit, this outpouring of grace and joy and peace has been given to all of us and to each one of us in fullness. Therefore, a Christian is the one who has received and has been ordained to transform his life into a liturgy, that all his life may be a constant ascension to God, a constant transformation.

In the early Church Baptism and Chrismation was not performed as today, in little private ceremonies in some corner of the church after the Liturgy with just one man singing. It was performed on the most solemn night of the year, Easter night. Even today it's difficult to understand the services of Holy Week and of Great Lent unless you understand that it is a preparation for Baptism. And so on that holy night after the Easter Vigil the Bishop would take all the catechumens, all those who were prepared for Baptism, out of the church into the Baptistery. They were Baptised there while the congregation was sitting in the church waiting for them reading. Then they would appear from Baptism, in their white robes with candles, led by the Bishop with the cross. This is the origin of our Paschal Procession around the church. The catechumens, the new people of God returning to the church, find the door locked. It is locked because that door leads to the Kingdom, to the Table of the Lord. What opens the door of the church? Baptism. Chrismation. The Holy Spirit. The Bishop on behalf of all those baptised people, those who have received the Holy Spirit, whose sins were forgiven,



who have received the robes of incorruption would say, "Christ is Risen!" And then they would enter that church in which the celebration of the Paschal Eucharist would begin with all the newly baptised receiving Holy Communion for the first time, being integrated into the Church of Christ in this world. This wonderful night would be the real anticipation, the real full taste of the end of the world, for this is the end of the world--Paradise, the entrance into the bridal room at the marriage banquet of the Lord. And so you see how those three sacraments belong together. We first die and then are risen. Then comes Pentecost which transforms our lives into a sort of liturgical ministry to God Himself, and then we are led and we are fed. When a baby is born, it receives life and then it receives food. But the food we eat is not only a means of strengthening our body. Food is also communion with death, for in order to eat something we have to kill first that which we eat. We think that we are eating life and yet we are always in communion with death. But that food which Christ gives is a transformed food. The one who eats of that bread and drinks of that Chalice will die, but his death itself, because of that food, will be transformed into life eternal, into resurrection.

These are the three sacraments through which we become Christians and are given membership in the Church. More than this they reveal to us the very meaning of what it is to sanctify our life. To sanctify life is first of all to always remember that we were Baptised. This means that we have renounced the devil, evil, that we have accepted a citizenship in Christ, that although we may be Romanians or Bulgarians or Americans or Carpatho-Russians, we first of all, above anything else, belong to the new Kingdom which God Himself has inaugurated. We are no longer slaves of anything in this world. The sanctified life means to test everything in this world. Whatever I have to do, whether it's a small thing or a great thing, must be tested by Baptism, Chrismation, and Eucharist. Take food for an example. When I eat something, a piece of bread or whatever it is, it has become in Christ a sort of reminder that real food is Communion. In other words, eating is no longer an end in itself. I'm eating in order to be a Christian, not just in order to be filled with food. When we meet men, when we live with them, when we go to our offices in the morning, to some entertainment, we always do this remembering the words of St. Paul: "Don't you know that your bodies have become the temple of the Holy Spirit and that you are not your own." Can't you see what implication this has for the daily life of man? If my hand has really been Chrismated, it has become just as the Church is Chrismated. I will not do anything bad in the Church because it is sacred. Will I smoke in the Church? Will I use bad language in the Church? Will I do anything bad? No. Because it's the Church. But the whole point of Christ, the whole point of St. Paul, is that you are much more sacred than the Church. The Church is nothing compared to what your body has become in Chrismation, and yet is not our body the very source of all sin? Everytime we use our hands, eyes, our tongue or anything else for something bad we are not simply committing a sin, we are committing a blasphemy, for God has bought my hand, God has bought my heart, my body. It belongs to Him. It has been sanctified, sealed. It is a temple and I cannot desecrate a temple because this is a catastrophe.

The second group of sacraments are the healing sacraments. We have to begin their study by recognizing that in spite of this wonderful entrance into the joy and peace of the Kingdom, we know that our life is dark and sinful, that for us it's so easy to commit sins and so difficult to remain on that level of holiness into which we have been introduced. The Church, in Her loving care for us has instituted the sacraments of reconciliation and healing.



What is the original meaning of the sacrament of penance? It is the reconciliation of man with God in the Church. Every sin that we commit excommunicates us whether there is a solemn excommunication with a special letter, or a decision of some special council or not. Everytime we sin, we are not in Christ. Everytime we sin we betray our nature of baptized, confirmed members of the Church. We are outside of Christ. We can go to church we can kiss the icons, we can put up candles. This doesn't help if we are outside of Christ, so we have to be reconciled and this is a sacrament. This sacrament depends entirely and absolutely on my repentance. Repentance is not simply going to the priest and saying I have sinned on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. Repentance is first of all a crisis within the man. The real image of repentance is in the Gospel, in the parable of the Prodigal Son. The Prodigal Son remembered what he had, how much he had lost, and then he wanted to recover it. So wrong are those who would explain the Sacrament of Penance in terms of a sort of objective power. What the priest says is always valid, but if you do not repent it does not apply to you. What God wants is a broken heart. What God wants is a man who will say, "I have received so much, I remember that white robe I received in Baptism. Look how dirty it is." When a man has a dirty shirt he wants a clean one, so he goes and buys one or he has the shirt laundered. This is exactly the same idea as repentance. It is only when we are disgusted with sin, when we repent, change, that the absolution takes place, that final moment when the priest signifies that God has reconciled this man with the Church, that the Prodigal Son has returned, and here is the Father waiting, offering him complete reconciliation, killing the fatted calf and reintroducing him at the banquet. This is the Orthodox understanding of the sacrament of Penance, not the formal, objective, juridical, Roman idea. God has forgiven all sins once in Christ and all sins are forgiven, but that forgiveness doesn't apply to me unless I want it, unless I want with all my heart this Communion with God, life with God, the restoration of that joy and peace without which nothing is valid or of any interest in Christianity.

Man is not only a simple being, he is also a suffering being. You may not have had much experience with physical suffering and yet I am sure you have had some already. Each one of us has visited a hospital. Each one of us, especially priests, when he enters a hospital knows that he is in a world apart, a world of pain and suffering. We try to forget about it. We try to live in this world as if there were no suffering and no death. We open magazines and we find glorious pictures of glorious he-men and she-women and those wonderful bodies and the whole picture is that of complete well-being. Just buy that little pill and you'll feel even better. Yet everyone knows that the real life is that of which the hospital is an unavoidable part. That's where you come to human physical suffering. The man who was so young and happy at one time here he is struggling with this terrible condition, decomposition, suffering. This is reality. It's the magazine advertisement that lies. It's the hospital that's true, the hospital in all its significance. This suffering awaits all of us sooner or later and makes us all united in the definition of man as a suffering being. Therefore, the sacrament of healing, this Divine answer to human suffering, is not simply a sort of supplement, it is the fundamental task of the Church. Christ spent more time in healing than in anything else. He never organized conventions. He spent more time with those who suffered, with those who were brought to Him all the time, sick and maimed and in pain. That's the sphere where He was at home, because He went to those who suffered.

What is the sacrament of healing? It would be a mistake if you understood it as a constant performing of miracles, though we do not deny the possibility of a



miracle. When God wants to perform a miracle He does perform it. But even Christ, when a suffering man was brought to Him usually told him "Thy sins are forgiven" and only when he asked for more would He perform the healing, and that healing was a temporary one. The man would suffer again and die again. To understand the Orthodox idea of healing you have to think of transformation. For example, two men are dying in the same hospital room in agonizing suffering and you come to them. There are two possibilities. The terrible suffering of a dying man can be, and very often is, the final defeat of the man, his final surrender. You come to him and he says, Father this is too much, I haven't deserved this. His suffering therefore is his final collapse. And there is the other man who dies from the same disease and yet through that disease, through that sickness, in suffering, he begins to understand the meaning of life. As long as he was happy, driving his Cadillac, smoking his cigars, eating steaks, getting money, having women, etc., he never thought about God. Never. Life was fun, plenty of fun. But then God visited him. That's the way the Orthodox piety mentions disease: visitation. God visits him. We have to understand that we are so weak spiritually, so materialistically minded, so deeply separated from the life of spirit that sometimes there is no other way for God to teach us what life is than by taking away from us this life. So the same disease can be a victory, can be a real transformation of the man, and every priest can witness that sometimes it is in disease that all of a sudden you see the beauty of the spiritual birth, you see how little by little all human happiness is taken away and the spiritual reality appears. This is the purpose of the sacrament of healing. You should read sometime after this lecture the texts of all the sacraments. We are praying about the deep, real healing, the healing of the sinful man whom God has visited and who is whole, who is holy only when he restores his relationship with God. This is the real victory and the real transformation of the disease. We know that this world will never become a world without suffering, without disease, without hospitals, but what we do know that what Christ tells us at the end of St. Mark is that even though suffering can become a victory of God Himself, Christ died and therefore death was transformed; Christ suffered and therefore suffering was transformed; Christ lives and therefore life was transformed. And what happens to the men in the sacrament of Oil is precisely this possibility of saying you suffer but someone else, someone who loves you more than anyone can ever love you, suffered with you and is now suffering with you. This is the point at which He was waiting for you.

Our Christian life is a constant transformation of defeats into victories and if this is true then this is truly a wonderful sacrament and this has to be restored in our lives.

It is in the liturgical structure of matrimony that we find the answer to the question: What is the sacramental character of matrimony? Why, of all the normal states of life, has the Church selected just one, matrimony, and given it a sacramental meaning? Why, not death, but matrimony? The answer comes from the Liturgy itself. You know that we have here a double ceremony. There are actually two services in one in the Service of Holy Matrimony: one which we call betrothal, which takes place just outside of the Church in the vestibule, the exchange of rings; and then the procession into the church and the crowning which constitutes the climax of this second part. It is by briefly analyzing the relationship between those two services that we will understand the sacramental significance of marriage. The first part, the betrothal, corresponds to the marriage as instituted by God and is not specifically Christian in its meaning. Marriage existed before the Church existed or before Christ. Marriage was instituted in Paradise itself. Marriage in other terms belongs to the structure



of the world. It exists among Christians as well as among non-Christians and the basic teaching about the marriage is a common one--we could speak here about a natural law. What is the marriage? We don't need to believe in God or be Christian to understand that marriage is, first of all, based on love, that here are two human beings who pledge unity of life, love, support, etc. So there is a sort of natural teaching about marriage, and when you go to the judge to be married he doesn't say anything fundamentally different from what the Church says. You will support the wife, she will support the husband, you will pledge a common life, you will educate your children, and you will have a common existence. This the Church has always accepted and of this, the service of betrothal is the expression in the Church. The rings also were a sign of marriage even before Christ, the ring being the symbol of eternity, of faithfulness, of something precious, of something which has no end; it was always the natural symbol of marriage. Therefore, the Church accepts marriage as something natural. When a boy meets a girl and loves her and she loves him, that eternal story doesn't change too much in time, it acquires new forms but not a new essence, the same miracle happens which God has put in the center of the world from the very beginning, the miracle of love. When, when there are so many nice people, just one becomes unique to me and I become unique to him, and this love is the real essence which will keep us together; but, and this is where the second part of the service comes into existence, marriage, as everything else, belongs to the fallen world. Marriage also has been deteriorated because everything has been spoiled by sin. So, just as man, his body, the matter, anything good in this world has been spoiled by sin and therefore has to be redeemed, has to be transformed, the natural marriage of which that long kiss on all the screens of all the movies is the symbol, is also to be transformed.

When this first part has been completed the priest takes the couple and leads them into the church. This procession, this entrance into the church, is extremely important liturgically because it means the real transformation of the marriage from being something natural, something which is a contract, something which is just two happy people living together and having nice children and a nice little car and vacationing together, the marriage all of a sudden acquires a new significance, a new dimension. The new dimension which is added to the marriage through the sacrament is Christ and it becomes a marriage of three. Christ becomes the center of that relationship. It is no longer a dead end: education, money, happiness, pursuit of happiness. The marriage acquires an eternal significance in reference to Christ. When the priest has crowned the couple and led them around the Analogion three times, we sing three hymns, and the triple symbolism of the crowns reveals that new dimension of Christ.

Crowns mean, first of all, a royal nature of marriage. Through marriage man is restored to be the king of the world. He becomes the king of a little world. He will have children. It will be possible for him through the Grace of God to establish a center of the real Christian life and love and peace and joy. That is why the Church has always called the family a little Church. It reflects that Heavenly Fatherhood of God Himself. This world was created as a family and then division entered and love was replaced by hatred. Through matrimony comes the restoration of that integrity of love. What do we remember from our childhood? Whether it was good or poor or bad, we remember the family as a paradise. That's where we had a world which was full of love and light and then we left it and it became cold and dark. This is a Christian family and this is the first meaning of the crown. The second meaning of the crown is the crown of the martyrs. I don't want to make any bad jokes here about the husband



and wife being martyrs, but they must be. The collapse of the family today in our world, the rate of divorce, this constant divorce because of mental cruelty--he doesn't eat the way I like him to eat, or I like milk and he likes something else--this is a complete misunderstanding of what the martyrdom is. We are all spoiled by this vulgar, cheap idea of marriage that comes from the movies. We won't be eternally young, it's not a matter of loving the same things even if it's a constant struggle that I as a husband have to love in my wife the best, the image of God and she has to love in me the image of God. There will come the day when sex won't be that important, there will come the day when the physical appearance will not be the way it was. All these things which we make the symbols of marriage will disappear. There was a French poet who said that the moment when the real happiness will appear will be when that love is not attached to something material, specific, to the body, to its youthfulness, when in the eyes of my partner for eternity I'll find more than that mad love, when we find that we are indeed one flesh and one flesh in Christ. This is the real martyrdom. It requires an effort. Marriage, as everything else, is a progress. It is only in the Kingdom of God that it will be fulfilled and this is why the third meaning of the crowns are the crowns of the Kingdom. As the priest removes the crowns from the husband and wife after the ceremony he says: Accept these crowns in Thy Kingdom. That is where all that is partial in this world, fragmentary, will be fulfilled. Human love acquires eternal significance.

In the early Church the real sign of marriage was not all this. The real sign of marriage was the participation by the husband and wife in the Eucharist. That wine that we drink now during the ceremony was not a symbol as it is understood today. It was the Chalice of the Eucharist. It was the giving to those who were married the only thing which will keep them in this wonderful Christian idea of marriage. What unites us is not passion, love, adjustments of all kinds, what unites us is this mystical marriage of Christ with the Church. It is the Body and Blood of Christ and this was the early Christian sign of matrimony. This procession of which I spoke in the beginning was introducing the couple into the Eucharist and there, just as in the Eucharist, all of human life acquires a new dimension. The Christian marriage was receiving its real seal. As they were leaving the church, those newly married, they knew what to do; they had to be witnesses through their married life, their children, through education; through all this they had to fulfill what was given at the beginning, this eternal wonderful connection between Christ and the Church, Christ and man. Christ is the husband of the Church. He loves Her. And though the Church betrays Him so often, and everyone of us betrays Him, He still loves us. It is this love that transforms by forgiving, and so in the marriage, through this martyrdom, through being martyrs, we grow together as to constitute in the end the very image of that Divine Love between God and man.

Finally, we have the sacrament of Holy Orders, which is the sacrament which some people might think applies only to some of us because to be ordained is to be ordained a priest of the Church. The priest is ordained to be what Christ was: prophet, king and priest. What did Christ do? What was the ordination of Christ? He was ordained when St. John the Baptist put his hand on him and the Holy Spirit descended. He was ordained to have no personal life, to be identified with every man as to be able to say: I take upon myself the sins of the world.

What is the Christian ministry? We always think, speak and understand it in terms of power, authority, teaching, respect, but what is the essence of priesthood? Is it authority? Is it privileges? Is it the possibility for me to stand there a few steps above you? No. The real essence of the ministry is this: If each man



is to find in Christ his own life, if Christian engineers find in the Church what it means to be a Christian engineer, if a Christian novelist finds in the Church through the sacraments the idea of what is Christian art, if a Christian father and a Christian mother find in the Church the essence of Christian parenthood, there must be someone in the center of the community who, just as Christ, should have nothing of his own but in whom everyone can find his own picture in Christ. The real meaning of priesthood is not so much a positive as a negative. To be all to all says St. Paul. To be everything to everybody. Christ had no personal life. Christ had no time for His own. It's only as He gave Himself completely on the night on which He was betrayed, or rather gave up Himself for the life of the world, it's only when He ceased to exist that He became the Lord, the Master, the Teacher and He saved us. Oh, of course we are not capable of this. But this is the tendency, this is the ideal, that makes a man priest. A man who likes to serve is not yet a priest. A man who likes very much to discuss the services, the vestments, is not yet a priest. The real priest is the one who has felt at least once in his life the very real meaning of Christ's words, "I have come into this world to bring down fire and I'm waiting for that fire to put the whole world afire". The priest who is ordained in the center of the Church, in the Holy Eucharist, the priest, whether he is a priest or the bishop, is the one who makes Christ present--represents, but in a very real sense, Christ's care, Christ's love, Christ's teaching. The one who is in the middle and says, Let us all be in Christ, the one who is always the center of that unity is the one therefore who has the power of transforming, transforming a group of men into the parish, a meal into a sacrament, a rite or a symbol into reality. That's why the sacrament of Order is not simply the private business of the one who is ordained. The priest is the essential, not only an essential, need of the condition for the very existence of the Church. The priest, and this is the understanding of the Church, is not someone who says I will be a priest. We must believe that there is a mystery of vocation. Christ did not say I need twelve volunteers--who are they? He went to Peter and He said "Follow Me", and to Andrew, "Follow Me".

The initiative is not man's but God's. We believe in the Holy Church, we have to believe in the priest. Yes, his physical appearance, his actions sometimes are so human, so completely human. Yet we must believe that even in his weak voice, human weaknesses and all these things, the power of God is being performed.

This is an introduction to the study of sacraments. We could continue, but this is sufficient for now that even if you have felt this much--that a sacrament is an act of transformation that it transforms me, a simple man into a Christian and a Christian is the one who has received the gift of the Holy Spirit and that gift of the Holy Spirit makes me capable of giving a new meaning to all situations, to all relations, to every minute of time. It has transformed me into an apostle of Christ. My world can be very little--just a few people who I meet every day. It can be a dull office, I can be a typist, I can be nothing at all. In all these conditions God wants to triumph. God wants to be present. As we go from the Liturgy hearing the final words "Let us depart, let us go forth in peace", it may sound like "Oh, it's finished, let's have breakfast, it's the end"....it must sound rather as the beginning. As we go out from the church we sing "We have seen the True Light, we have received the Holy Spirit". Why do we see it? Why do we receive all this?--in order to do what the apostles did. Christ says, "And ye are witnesses to all this." Of what



am I a witness? I am a witness of all that I saw this morning, of what I have received in my mouth, of what happened to me in my Baptism; I am the witness that God has loved me and therefore has loved everyone here present, that God has created this world and when this world has forgotten Him, insulted Him, He did not forget it. He came down, He suffered on the Cross, He died. He loved us so much that He gave His Holy Spirit to us. He was Risen from the dead. All this He gave to us as a possibility, as a promise, as a free gift, use it. Of all this I am made witness by the sacraments and so when I go to man, to the one who is happy, to the one who suffers, to the young to the old, I am not bringing any programs, any ideas, but I must first of all know how to take them into that movement of Divine Love and Transformation and this is the sanctification of life.

His own. It's only as He gave Himself completely on the night on which He was betrayed, or rather gave up Himself for the life of the world, it's only when He ceased to exist that He became the Lord, the Master, the Teacher and He saved us. Oh, of course we are not capable of this. But this is the tendency, this is the ideal, that makes a man priest. A man who likes to serve is not yet a priest. A man who likes very much to discuss the services, the sacraments, is not yet a priest. The real priest is the one who has felt at least once in his life the very real meaning of Christ's words, "I have come into this world to bring down fire and I'm waiting for that fire to put the whole world alive." The priest who is ordained in the center of the Church, in the Holy Eucharist, the priest, whether he is a priest or the bishop, is the one who makes Christ present--represents, but in a very real sense, Christ's care, Christ's love, Christ's teaching. The one who is in the middle and says, let us all be in Christ, the one who is always the center of that unity is the one therefore who has the power of transformation, transforming a group of men into the parish, a meal into a sacrament, a rite or a symbol into reality. That's why the sacrament of Order is not simply the private business of the one who is ordained. The priest is the essential, not only an essential, need of the condition for the very existence of the Church. The priest, and this is the understanding of the Church, is not someone who says I will be a priest. We must believe that there is a mystery of vocation. Christ did not say I need twelve volunteers--who are they? He went to Peter and He said "Follow Me", and to Andrew, "Follow Me".

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