

## Sacraments of Initiation in the Orthodox Church

### **Baptism**

The Sacrament of Baptism incorporates us into the Church, the Body of Christ, and is our introduction to the life of the Holy Trinity. Water is a natural symbol of cleansing and newness of life. Through the three-fold immersion in the waters of Baptism in the Name of the Holy Trinity, one dies to the old ways of sin and is born to a new life in Christ. Baptism is one's public identification with Christ Death and victorious Resurrection. Following the custom of the early Church, Orthodoxy encourages the baptism of infants. The Church believes that the Sacrament is bearing witness to the action of God who chooses a child to be an important member of His people. From the day of their baptism, children are expected to mature in the life of the Spirit, through their family and the Church. The Baptism of adults is practiced when there was no previous baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity.

### **Chrismation**

The Sacrament of Chrismation (Confirmation) immediately follows baptism and is never delayed until a later age. As the ministry of Christ was enlivened by the Spirit, and the preaching of the Apostles strengthened by the Spirit, so is the life of each Orthodox Christian sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Chrismation, which is often referred to as one's personal Pentecost, is the Sacrament which imparts the Spirit in a special way.

In the Sacrament of Chrismation, the priest anoints the various parts of the body of the newly-baptized with Holy Oil saying: "The seal of the gifts of the Holy Spirit." The Holy Oil, which is blessed by the bishop, is a sign of consecration and strength. The Sacrament emphasizes the truths that not only is each person a valuable member of the Church, but also each one is blessed by the Spirit with certain gifts and talents. The anointing also reminds us that our bodies are valuable and are involved in the process of salvation.

The Sacraments of initiation always are concluded with the distribution of Holy Communion to the newly-baptized. Ideally, this takes place within the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. This practice reveals that Orthodoxy views children from their infancy as important members of the Church. There is never time when the young are not part of God's people.

### **The Eucharist**

The Holy Eucharist, which is known as the Divine Liturgy, is the central and most important worship experience of the Orthodox Church. Often referred to as the "Sacrament of Sacraments", it is the Church's celebration of the Death and Resurrection of Christ offered every Sunday and Holy day. All the other Sacraments of the Church lead toward and flow from the Eucharist, which is at the center of the life of the Church. The previous pamphlet in this series was devoted to the meaning and celebration of the Eucharist in the Orthodox Church.

Source: Rev. Fr. Thomas Fitzgerald, "Treasures Of Orthodoxy."