

"The Mysteries of the Church"

"The word 'mystery' can be quite baffling...cannot be described, something that lies beyond the place where the mind can make sense of things." (from opening line of the book)

"Being orthodox in mind requires that one expect ambiguity, uncertainty, mystery and paradox." Dr. Eugenia Constantiniou "Thinking Orthodoxy"

"The Orthodox position is: when in doubt punt to mystery" Dr. Michael Hyatt

"There are some things that you will never truly understand until you DO them."
-Dcn. Michael Hyatt

When we discuss the mysteries, please keep these quotes in your mind! In fact, maybe try and ignore your mind to some degree and open your nous to the stillness that comes from an encounter with the Living God. Christ is in our midst!

Birth and Baptism (Chapter 8)

Women after childbirth: "too holy" "has participated in the co-creation of a human life...it releases her from obligation." The 40 days of exclusion has a practical purpose. p112

Godparents: responsible for religious upbringing. Relationship equals blood relations. The spiritual role is serious.

Water is tied to life, death, purification, and resurrection. "Baptism: an act of God leaving an indelible mark" Which is a new identity. p116 A Physical and Mystical Act.

Why: to be a disciple through the Holy Trinity. We baptize because Jesus told us to. God meets us on a personal level. The point is to find our identity in the Savior. We find our identity as part of the body of Christ and become enlightened. This includes taking a new name (The Servant of God N.)

"Even an adult does not understand what happens in the Holy Mysteries." Not to comprehend but to apprehend
All illumined as full disciples of the Lord.

Baptism has to be made in the name of the Holy Trinity. Big "T". Tradition =2000 year of continuous practice

Catechumens: a period of preparation with the service started in the narthex as the person is still outside of the Church. Exorcism: deliver us from evil to start the transformation as death has been overthrown.

Baptismal prayer shares language with Theophany. The life of the church is all tied together.

Actual Act of baptism is brief: as are most other mysteries. There is a period of prayer/preparation/repetition that occurs in this and all other parts of the Holy Mysteries.

Chrismation: Oil (Chrism) is blessed by the head of the church. It is tied to the Holy Spirit who seals the candidate and all mysteries.

"The candidate is exchanging enslavement of this world to enslavement to God."
p128

The mystery is only complete with the reception of Holy communion.

The Mystery of Chrismation (Chapter 9)

No worthiness: Just a free gift

we're invisibly marked for God for life and to be "in Communion and in Christ" and given "the gift of the Spirit."

Sealing makes us special despite our fallen condition.

Dividing the mysteries is unnecessary as they are interdependent.

Reception through Chrismation: makes previous baptism Orthodox >not a rejection of it but a "come home"

Divine Liturgy & Holy Communion

The Divine Liturgy is the eternity in time...the experience of the Kingdom

A deeply personal encounter

The Liturgy is the living expression of the presence of God in His World

The person receiving communion "is changed", because any meeting with God involves both judgement and change."

Within the Kingdom, nothing is empty

Strong theme of transformation

Reading of the Epistle/Gospel: "There are times when the entire Church listens to the voice of God."

People standing in Church are an offering to God and are intimately linked to the gifts.

Put aside all cares of this life: A reminder to be present as this offering

Faith depends on love: Jesus commands us to be righteous not right

Everything within the Liturgy builds to Holy Communion

Holy Communion should be the high point of the week and "received with care"

Silence: "to be found in the hearts of the worshippers" Focus on being present
"Let us Attend"

The Mystery of Confession & Forgiveness

Forgiveness is not natural in this world and remains a mystery...but is a free gift.

Allows us to start with a clean slate >sanctified, restored, transfigured, changed, forgiven

Confession is a place of safety

Priest not a judge but a witness, He must listen and be present throughout

It is God who hears the confession

No theme of crime and punishment.

Confession is about telling God the sins we have committed >There is power in doing thus before a witness "It is the last thing in the world we want to do"

Logic assumes that there must be "a catch" to forgiveness.

Confession takes back to our baptism "The eternity-in-time of pristine innocence"

to which we are invited to return "Again and Again" and is available to us "as often as we require it"

Use extreme caution when looking at rules and regulations!!! Leave canon to experts in the field.

"Do not be quick to apply any rules to yourself or to anyone else without consulting someone who is deeply within the tradition of the Oorthodox Church.

The Mystery of the Anointing the Sick

"We're all dying. That's what defines the condition of living."

– Sir Winston Churchill, *The Crown*

Sickness/Illness/Pain and ultimately death shows us that we do not control our lives. (Despite the many measures we take to avoid them!)

Illness and death "are factors through which God may be glorified" and help us to learn to be dependent on God.

Sickness exists in order that God may be glorified. >Theme of transformatrion. Placing oneself into the hands of God. Sickness is an opportunity for spiritual growth.

"Health is the state of balanced perfection we receive from God, it is something with which we are entrusted." In other words wellness/sickness requires our participation in synergy with God. But we still need to surrender to God.

We often attempt to treat the symptoms of pain and sickness without getting to the root of the problem> our spiritual illness which ties back to our prayer life and our life in the Church.

When receiving anointing we hear "For the healing of soul and body" Most of the time we will recover but some day we will not and the Mystery remains and is "not doomed for failure"

The Mystery of Marriage

"The wedding is the beginning of the WORK, not the crowning achievement." The Crown "Nothing less than hard work will keep the marriage going."

Love is "not essentially a feeling...but a decision." Genuine love starts "where infatuation leaves off."

It is better to go into marriage "knowing that it will be difficult...it is impossible without God's help."

"a Marriage relationship is, and remains, a matter of choice on a daily basis." it is "created each day, not fashioned in the marriage ceremony."

"Rings have all sorts of symbolism, but the one that the Church concentrates on is the role rings have played in various biblical stories. This sets the tone of both the betrothal, and the marriage, since both are packed with references to events, and both the old and New Testament. In order to appreciate the full depth of what is being said, it might be good for the bridal couple (and anyone else involved) to spend some time reading the various episodes in the Bible referred to in the service. When listen to with inner stillness, such reading is most beneficial to spiritual development." p175

Two themes within the crowning during the marriage service: Glory & honor and Martyrdom.

Marriage at Cana transformation theme: alone we are "like ordinary water" In marriage, we can be transformed into "the good wine" Through the mysterious intervention of God. "The heart knows that mystery is the fullest expression of our relationship with God."

The Procession is the couple "first steps together blessed by God.

After the ceremony..."And the real work of being married begins."

P178-179: The Orthodox Wedding service does not need to be "dressed up" or modernized/individualized.

Remember that the mystery is the focus not the ceremony on the trappings of the day.

The Mystery of Ordination

Very much dependent upon the Divine Liturgy which is the place the clergy find their roles.

"No one is worthy of the grace of ordination" The person is ordained in spite of their own desires"

There is no call of vocation as this would imply man's certainty of the will of God which is foreign to Orthodoxy

Not a response to an inner call but rather a response to a request from the Church

and its needs.