

## St. Maximus the Confessor: On the Grace of the Holy Spirit in the Divine Liturgy



*Photo: St. Maximus the Confessor, (c. AD 580 - AD 662), monk, scholar, and defender of the Orthodox faith.*

*Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maximus\\_the\\_Confessor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maximus_the_Confessor)*

### The Church's Mystagogy, Chapter 24:

What mysteries the enduring grace of the Holy Spirit effects and brings to completion through the rites accomplished in the holy synaxis in the faithful and those gathered in the church out of faith.

## St. Maximus the Confessor

This indeed, is why the blessed old man believed that every Christian should be exhorted--and he never failed to do this--to frequent God's holy church and never to abandon the holy synaxis accomplished therein because of the holy angels who remain there and who take note each time people enter and present themselves to God, and they make supplications for them; likewise because of the grace of the Holy Spirit which is always invisibly present, but in a special way at the time of the holy synaxis. This grace transforms and changes each person who is found there and in fact remolds him in proportion what is more divine in him and leads him to what is revealed through the mysteries which are celebrated, even if he does not himself feel this because he is still among those who are children in Christ, unable to see either into the depths of the reality or the grace operating in it, which is revealed through each of the divine symbols of salvation being accomplished, and which proceeds according to the order and progression from preliminaries to the end of everything.

Thus we see effected in the first entrance the rejection of unbelief, the increase of faith, the lessening of vice, the bestowal of virtue, the disappearance of ignorance, and the development of knowledge. By the hearing of the divine words there is effected the firm and unchangeable habits and dispositions of the realities just mentioned, that is, of faith, virtue, and knowledge. Through the divine chants which follow there is effected the deliberate consent of the soul to virtue as well as the spiritual delight and enjoyment that these arouse in it. By the sacred reading of the holy Gospel there is brought about the end of earthly thinking as of the world of sense. Then by the closing of doors which follows there is effected the passage and transfer of the soul in its disposition from this corruptible world to the intelligible world, whereby having closed its senses like doors it renders them cleansed of the idols of sin. By the entrance into the holy mysteries we see the more perfect and mystical and new

teaching and knowledge of God's dispensation toward us. By the divine kiss there is seen the identity of concord and oneness and love of all with everyone and of each one with himself first and then with God. By the profession of the symbol of faith there is seen the fitting thanks for the marvelous ways of our salvation. By the Trisagion there comes about the union with the holy angels and elevation to the same honor, as well as the ceaseless and harmonious persistency in the sanctifying glorification of God. By the prayer through which we are made worthy to call God our Father we receive the truest adoption in the grace of the Holy Spirit. By the "One is holy" and what follows, we have the grace and familiarity which unites us to God himself. By holy communion of the spotless and life-giving mysteries we are given fellowship and identity with him by participation in likeness, by which man is deemed worthy from man to become God. For we believe that in this present life we already have a share in these gifts of the Holy Spirit through the love that is in faith, and in the future age after we have kept the commandments to the best of our ability we believe that we shall have a share in them in very truth in their concrete reality according to the steadfast hope of our faith and the solid and unchangeable promise to which God has committed himself. Then we shall pass from the grace which is faith to the grace of vision, when our God and Savior Jesus Christ will indeed transform us into himself by taking away from us the marks of corruption and will bestow on us the original mysteries which have been represented for us through sensible symbols here below. To make it easier to remember, if you wish, let us recapitulate thus the meaning of what has been said by running over it briefly.

Thus the holy church, as we said, is the figure and image of God inasmuch as through it he effects in his infinite power and wisdom an unconfused unity from the various essences of beings, attaching them to himself as a creator at their highest point, and this operates according to the grace of faith for the faithful, joining them all to each other in one form according to a single grace of and calling of faith, the active and virtuous ones in a single identity of will, the contemplative and gnostic ones in an unbroken

and undivided concord as well. It is a figure of both the spiritual and sensible world and the nave as a symbol of the world of sense.

It is as well an image of man inasmuch as it represents the soul by the sanctuary and suggests the body by the nave. Also it is a figure and image of the soul considered in itself because by the sanctuary it bears the glory of the contemplative element and by the nave the ornament of the active part. The first entrance of the holy synaxis which is celebrated in the church signifies in general the first appearance of Christ our God, and in particular the conversion of those who are being led by him and with him from unbelief to faith and from vice to virtue and also from ignorance to knowledge. The readings which take place after it signify in general the divine wishes and intentions in accordance with which everyone should conform and conduct himself, and in particular the teaching and progress in the faith of those who are believers, and the firm disposition of virtue of those who are active in accordance with which, by submitting themselves to the divine law of the commandments, they set themselves bravely and unshakenly against the devil's wiles and escape his adversary works; finally it signifies the contemplative habits of those who have knowledge, in accordance with which, by bringing together as much as possible the spiritual principles of sensible realities and of Providence in what concerns them, they are borne without error to the truth.

The divine melodies of the chants indicate the divine delight and enjoyment which comes about in the souls of all. By it they are mystically strengthened in forgetting their past labors for virtue and are renewed in the vigorous desire of the divine and wholesome benefits still to be attained.

The holy Gospel is in general a symbol of the fulfillment of this world; in particular it indicates the complete disappearance of the ancient error in those who have believed, in the active, the mortification and the end of the law and thinking according to the flesh; and in those who have knowledge, the gathering and ascent from the numerous and various principles toward

the most comprehensive principle, once the most detailed and varied natural contemplation has been reached and crossed.

The descent of the bishop from the throne and the dismissal of the catechumens signifies in general the second coming from heaven of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ and the separation of sinners from the saints and the just retribution rendered to each. In particular it means the perfect assurance of believers in faith which is produced by the Word of God become invisibly present to them, whereby every thought which still limps in some way regarding faith is dismissed from them as are the catechumens. Thus for the active ones there results perfect detachment by which every passionate and unenlightened thought departs from the soul, and for those with knowledge the comprehensive science of whatever is known by which all images of material things are chased away from the soul.

The closing of the doors and the entrance into the holy mysteries and the divine kiss and the recitation of the symbol of faith mean in general the passing away of sensible things and the appearance of spiritual realities and the new teaching of the divine mystery involving us and the future concord, unanimity, love, and identity of everyone with each other and with God, as well as the thanksgiving for the manner of our salvation.

In a particular way it means the progress of the faithful from simple faith to learning in dogma, initiation, accord, and piety. The closing of the doors indicates the first thing, the entrance into the holy actions the second, the kiss the third, the recitation of the creed the fourth. For those at the active stage it means the transfer from activity to contemplation of those who have closed their senses and who have become outside the flesh and the world by the rejection of activities for their own sake, and the ascent from the mode of the commandments to their principle, and the connatural kinship and union of these commandments in their proper principles with the powers of the soul and the habit which is adapted to theological thanksgiving. For those who have knowledge, it involves the

passing of natural contemplation to the simple understanding according to which they no longer pursue the divine and ineffable Word by sensation or anything that appears and the union with the soul of its powers and the simplicity which takes in under one form by the intellect the principle of Providence.

The unceasing and sanctifying doxology by the holy angels in the Trisagion signifies, in general, the equality in the way of life and conduct and the harmony in the divine praising which will take place in the age to come by both heavenly and earthly powers, when the human body now rendered immortal by the resurrection will no longer weigh down the soul by corruption and will not itself be weighed down but will take on, by the changes into incorruption, potency and aptitude to receive God's coming. In particular it signifies, for the faithful, the theological rivalry with the angels in faith; for the active ones, it symbolized the splendor of life equal to the angels, so far as this is possible for men, and the persistence in the theological hymnology; for those who have knowledge, endless thoughts, hymns, and movements concerning the Godhead, which are equal to the angels, so far as humanly possible.

The blessed invocation of the great God and Father and the acclamation of the "One is holy" and what follows and the partaking of the holy and life-giving mysteries signify the adoption and union, as well as the familiarity and divine likeness and deification which will come about through the goodness of our God in every way on all the worthy, whereby God himself will be "all in all" alike to those who are saved as a pattern of beauty resplendent as a cause in those who are resplendent along with him in grace by virtue and knowledge.

He used to call faithful, virtuous, and knowing the beginners, the proficient, and the perfect, that is slaves, mercenaries, and sons, the three classes of the saved. The slaves are the faithful who execute the Lord's commandments out of fear of threats and who willingly work for those who are obeyed. Mercenaries are those who out of a desire for promised

benefits bear with patience “the burden and heat of the day,” that is, the affliction innate in an yoked to the present life from the condemnation of our first parents, and the temptations from it on behalf of virtue, and who by free choice of will wisely exchange life for life, the present one for the future. Finally, sons are the ones who out of neither fear of threats nor desire of promised things but rather out of character and habit of the voluntary inclinations and disposition of the soul toward the good never become separated from God, as that son to whom it was said, “Son, you are always with men, and everything I have is yours.” They have become as much as possible by deification in grace what God is and is believed by nature and by cause.

Let us, then, not stray from the holy Church of God which comprehends in the sacred order of the divine symbols which are celebrated, such great mysteries of our salvation. Through them, in making each of us who conducts himself worthily as best he can in Christ, it brings to light the grace of adoption which was given through holy baptism in the Holy Spirit and which makes us perfect in Christ. Instead, let us with all our strength and zeal render ourselves worthy of the divine gifts in pleasing God by good works not being occupied as are “the pagans who know not God,” with the passion of concupiscence, but as the holy Apostle says, “putting to death our members which are rooted in earth: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness which is idolatry, from which comes God’s wrath on the sons of disobedience, and all wrath, animosity, foul language, and lying, and to sum up, putting aside the old man which is corrupted by the lusts of illusion with his past deeds and lusts, let us walk in a manner worthy of God who has called us to his kingdom and his glory, having clothed ourselves with heartfelt compassion, with kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another in love and forgiving one another if one has a complaint against the other just as Christ has forgiven us, and over all these let us clothe ourselves with love and peace, the bond of perfection wot which we have been called in one body, in short, the new man who is constantly renewed in full knowledge according to the image of the one who created him.” For if we lived in

this way we would be able to arrive at the goal of the divine promises with a good hope and to be filled “with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, ...being fruitful and increasing in the knowledge of the Lord, strengthened with all power according to the might of his glory for edification and long-suffering with joy, giving thanks to the Father for having made us worthy to share the inheritance of the saints in the light.”

The clear proof of this grace is the voluntary disposition of good will toward those akin to us whereby the man who needs our help in any way becomes a much as possible our friend as God is and we do not leave him abandoned and forsake but rather that with fitting zeal we show him in action the disposition which is alive in us with respect to God and neighbor. For a work is a proof of a disposition. Now nothing is either so fitting for justification or so apt for divinization, if I can speak thus, and nearness to God as mercy offered with pleasure and joy from the soul to those who stand in need. For if the Word has shown that the one who is in need of having good done to him is God--for as long, he tells us, as you did it for one of these lest ones, you did it for men--on God's very word, then, he will much more show that the one who can do good and who does it is truly God by grace and participation because he has taken on in happy imitation the energy and characteristic of his own doing good. And if the poor man is God, it is because of God's condescension in becoming poor for us and in taking upon himself by his own suffering the suffering of each one and “until the end of time,” always suffering mystically out of goodness in proportion to each one's suffering. All the more reason, then will that one be God who by loving men in imitation of God heals by himself in divine fashion the hurts of those who suffer and who shows that he has in his disposition, safeguarding all proportion, the same power of saving Providence that God has.

Who, then, is so slow and lazy with regard to virtue as not to desire divinity when one can acquire it at such small cost and so readily and easily? For a firm and secure protection of these things and an easy way to salvation



outside of which none of these benefits will be kept truly without harm by the one who has them is the personal attention to our actions whereby in learning to regard and consider what concerns us alone we free ourselves from the hollow hurt caused by others. For if we learn to see and examine ourselves alone we will never interfere in another's concerns whatever they might be because we acknowledge God as the only wise and just judge who judges wisely and justly all things that exist according to the principle of their being not according to the manner of their appearance. Men might also make a judgment by looking vaguely at appearances but the truth and meaning of existing things are not at all to be found there. God, on the other hand, who looks at the soul's hidden motivation and its unseen desire and the principle of these by which the soul is drawn, and its goal, that is, the foreseen end of every action, judges rightly, as was said, all the actions of men. And if we are zealous in succeeding in this and stay within our limited compass without becoming involved in external things we shall not permit the eye, ear, or tongue either to see, hear, or speak at all, if possible, what is the business of others, or at least in getting involved with compassion rather than with passion, we allow ourselves to see, hear, and speak them for our profit and only insofar as it seems good to the divine Word who controls them. For nothing slips more easily toward sin than these organs when they are not disciplined by reason and on the other hand nothing is more apt to salvation when it commands, controls, and leads them toward where it ought and chooses to go.

Therefore, let us to the best of our ability not be careless in obeying God who calls us to eternal life and to a blessed end through the observance of his divine and saving commandments "to receive mercy and find grace as an aid in time of need." "For grace," says the divine Apostle, "is with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruptibility," that is, those who love our Lord with the incorruptibility of virtue and the pure and sincere dignity of life, or to speak more clearly, those who love the Lord by doing his will and by not transgressing any of his commands.

[ Source: **Maximus the Confessor: Selected Writings**, Classics of

Western Spirituality, Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ, 1985, pp. 206-213.]