

Prayer Is Eucharist

Our doctrine conforms to the Eucharist and the Eucharist in turn confirms our doctrine. (Saint Irenaeus of Lyons)

In the last issue of *ONE*, by way of introduction, I attempted to outline the interrelationship between corporate and personal prayer. Speaking in general terms I tried to convey the fundamental idea that in conjunction with conversion and repentance corporate and personal prayer acquire their supreme form and content within the celebration of the Eucharist.

For some, maybe even for many, hearing that the Eucharist is the locus, i.e. the place where our corporate and personal rule of prayer take on their shape and purpose may sound a bit strange. If the connection between prayer and the Eucharist sounds unfamiliar to us, it is because Orthodox Christians over past centuries and for a variety of reasons have been conditioned to accept the tragic separation between our celebration of the Eucharist and everyday life. The outcome of this horrible divorce has been and continues to be either an unawareness or skepticism that the celebration of the Divine Liturgy provides the formation, content and direction for living day to day. The divorce between liturgy and life is nothing less than the inability to allow our con-celebration of the Eucharist to impact our lives so that the way we pray is perceived as having a direct effect on what we believe and how we live.

When liturgy is disconnected from life the celebration of the Eucharist is all too often reduced to performing a specific liturgical rite. Because of this divorce we witness to something which, when properly "performed", might be aesthetically beautiful but at the same time provides a backdrop for a type of corporate and personal prayer that is unrelated to the words, images, sounds and movements surrounding us. Paradoxically those words, images, sounds and movements \neq intended to reveal to us and incorporate us into the mystery of Life and Truth \neq become redefined and therefore obscured by alien notions, preconceptions and definitions that leave us outside the framework of an Orthodox experience and understanding of life and prayer. Sadly, with this perception of the cult, the Eucharist is relegated to the periphery of life having barely if any real significance for us.

I began this article with a quote from Saint Irenaeus who was a bishop of Lyons in the second half of the second century. These words were chosen because they clearly state that what Orthodox Christians experience and believe about God, creation and humanity is contained and revealed in the Eucharist and that the Eucharistic celebration professes what Orthodox Christians believe. Following this teaching of Saint Irenaeus we can say that all prayer is to be an extension of the Eucharistic celebration and that the form and content of personal prayer comes from the vision of the Eucharist.

Through the Eucharist we can come to know that ultimately prayer is the activity of God actualized in and through us. Prayer is a divine and human endeavor. Like the Eucharistic celebration all prayer \neq no matter how short or simple, formal or spontaneous \neq is an offering coming from the surrender of our will to God's will "for everyone and everything." This Eucharistic dimension of prayer as an extension of divine activity working in and through us is expressed in such a personal and discerning way in one of the prayers attributed to Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow (+1867): "I offer myself as a sacrifice to You. I put all my trust in You. I have no other desire than to do Your will. Teach me how to pray. Pray, Yourself, in me." This is the kind of prayer that changes us and the world.