

Gospel of St. Matthew, Chapter 5

1 And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. **2** Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: **3** "Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. **4** Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted. **5** Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth. **6** Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled. **7** Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy. **8** Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God. **9** Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God. **10** Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. **11** "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. **12** Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. **13** "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. **14** You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. **15** Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. **16** Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. **17** "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. **18** For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. **19** Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. **20** For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. **21** "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' **22** But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire. **23** Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, **24** leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. **25** Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. **26** Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny. **27** "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' **28** But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. **29** If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. **30** And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. **31** "Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' **32** But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery. **33** "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' **34** But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; **35** nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. **36** Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. **37** But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one. **38** "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' **39** But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. **40** If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. **41** And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. **42** Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away. **43** "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' **44** But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, **45** that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. **46** For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? **47** And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? **48** Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Romans Chapter 1

1 Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God **2** which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, **3** concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, **4** and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. **5** Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, **6** among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; **7** To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **8** First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole

world. 9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, 10 making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. 11 For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established— 12 that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. 13 Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. 14 I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. 15 So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.” 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, 21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. 24 Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, 25 who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. 26 For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. 27 Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. 28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, 30 backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, 31 undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; 32 who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

Romans Chapter 12

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. **2** And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. **3** For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. **4** For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, **5** so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. **6** Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; **7** or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; **8** he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. **9** Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. **10** Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; **11** not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; **12** rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; **13** distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. **14** Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. **15** Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. **16** Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. **17** Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. **18** If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. **19** Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. **20** Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." **21** Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Ephesians Chapter 5

1 Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. **2** And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. **3** But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; **4** neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. **5** For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. **6** Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. **7** Therefore do not be partakers with them. **8** For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk

as children of light **9** (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), **10** finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. **11** And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. **12** For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. **13** But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. **14** Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light." **15** See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, **16** redeeming the time, because the days are evil. **17** Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. **18** And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, **19** speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, **20** giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **21** submitting to one another in the fear of God. **22** Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. **23** For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. **24** Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. **25** Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, **26** that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, **27** that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. **28** So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. **29** For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. **30** For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. **31** "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." **32** This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. **33** Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

**St. George, the Holy and Great Martyr
Commemorated on April 23**

(from "The Prologue from Ochrid" of St. Nikolai Velimirovich at

<http://98.131.104.126/prolog/my.html?month=April&day=23&Go.x=17&Go.y=9>)

This glorious and victorious saint was born in Cappadocia the son of wealthy and virtuous parents. His father suffered for Christ and his mother then moved to Palestine. When George grew up, he entered the military, where in his twentieth year, attained the rank of a Tribune and as such was in the service of the Emperor Diocletian. When Diocletian began the terrible persecution against Christians, George came before him and courageously confessed that he is a Christian. The emperor had him thrown into prison and ordered that his feet be placed in a stockade of wooden hobbles and that a heavy stone be placed on his chest. After that, the emperor commanded that George be tied to a wheel under which was a board with large nails and he was to be rotated until his entire body became as one bloody wound. After that, they buried him in a pit with only his head showing above the ground and there they left him for three days and three nights. Then George was given a deadly poison to drink by some magician. But, through all of these sufferings, George continuously prayed to God and God healed him instantly and saved him from death to the great astonishment of the people. When he resurrected a dead man through his prayer, many then accepted the Faith of Christ. Among these also was Alexandra, the wife of the Emperor Athanasius, the chief pagan priest and the farmers: Glycerius, Valerius, Donatus and Therinus. Finally the emperor ordered George and his wife Alexandra beheaded. Blessed Alexandra died on the scaffold before being beheaded. St. George was beheaded in the year 303 A.D. The miracles which have occurred over the grave of St. George are without number. Numerous are his appearances, either in dreams or openly, to those who have invoked him and implored his help from that time until today. Enflamed with love for Christ the Lord, it was not difficult for this saintly George to leave all for the sake of this love: rank, wealth, imperial honor, his friends and the entire world. For this love, the Lord rewarded him with the wealth of unfading glory in heaven and on earth and eternal life in His kingdom. In addition, the Lord bestowed upon him the power and authority to assist all those in miseries and difficulties who honor him and call upon his name.

**The Martyrs Adrian and Natalia of Nicomedia
Commemorated on August 26**

(From the OCA website at <http://www.oca.org/saints/lives>)

The Martyrs Adrian and Natalia were married in their youth for one year prior to their martyrdom, and lived in Nicomedia during the time of the emperor Maximian (305-311). The emperor promised a reward to whoever would inform on Christians to bring them to trial. Then the denunciations began, and twenty-three Christians were captured in a cave near Nicomedia.

They were tortured, urged to worship idols, and then brought before the Praetor, in order to record their names and responses. Adrian, the head of the praetorium, watched as these people suffered with such courage for their faith. Seeing how firmly and fearlessly they confessed Christ, asked: "What rewards do you expect from your God for your suffering?" The martyrs replied: "Such rewards as we are not able to describe, nor can your mind

comprehend." St Adrian told the scribes, "Write my name down also, for I am a Christian and I die gladly for Christ God."

The scribes reported this to the emperor, who summoned St Adrian and asked: "Really, have you gone mad, that you want to die? Come, cross out your name from the lists and offer sacrifice to the gods, asking their forgiveness."

St Adrian answered: "I have not lost my mind, but rather have I found it." Maximian then ordered Adrian to be thrown into prison. His wife, St Natalia, knowing that her husband was to suffer for Christ, rejoiced, since she herself was secretly a Christian.

She hastened to the prison and encouraged her husband saying: "You are blessed, my lord, because you have believed in Christ. You have obtained a great treasure. Do not regret anything earthly, neither beauty, nor youth (Adrian was then 28 years of age), nor riches. Everything worldly is dust and ashes. Only faith and good deeds are pleasing to God."

On the pledge of the other martyrs, they released St Adrian from prison to tell his wife about the day of his execution. At first St Natalia thought that he had renounced Christ and thus had been set free, and she did not want to let him into the house. The saint persuaded his wife that he had not fled from martyrdom, but rather had come to give her the news of the day of his execution.

They tortured St Adrian cruelly. The emperor advised the saint to have pity on himself and call on the gods, but the martyr answered: "Let your gods say what blessings they promise me, and then I shall worship them, but if they cannot do this, then why should I worship them?" St Natalia did not cease to encourage her husband. She asked him also to pray to God for her, that they would not force her into marriage with a pagan after his death.

The executioner ordered the hands and the legs of the saints to be broken on the anvil. St Natalia, fearing that her husband would hesitate on seeing the sufferings of the other martyrs, asked the executioner to begin with him, and permit her to put his hands and legs on the anvil herself.

They wanted to burn the bodies of the saints, but a storm arose and the fire went out. Many of the executioners even were struck by lightning. St Natalia took the hand of her husband and kept it at home. Soon an army commander asked the emperor's approval to wed St Natalia, who was both young and rich. But she hid herself away in Byzantium. St Adrian appeared to her in a dream and said that she would soon be at rest in the Lord. The martyr, worn out by her former sufferings, in fact soon fell asleep in the Lord.

The Life of St. Mardarije of Libertyville (1889-1935)

(from <http://www.westsrbdio.org/en/events/canonization/hagiography/965-the-life-of-st-mardarije-of-libertyville>)

Born in village of Kornet, Ljesani County, in Montenegro, on November 2, 1889, to pious parents Petar and Jela Uskokovic, he was baptized in his village church dedicated to St. George and received his baptismal name Ivan. His mother was from the well-known Bozovic family. Both of his parents were well respected in their community holding the office of leadership and particularly his father was a captain of their clan.

Considering his parents' status, young Ivan was sent to further his education, first in Rijeka Crnojevic, Cetinje, and then in Belgrade, Serbia. While in Belgrade, young Ivan advanced his childhood desire to serve God and the Church, and so from there he headed to monastery Studenica where after a short period of novice life he gets tonsured to monasticism having received the name Mardarije. With the decision of the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church, now young hierodeacon Mardarije is sent to Russia where he spent twelve years (1905-1917) furthering his theological education and growing in wisdom. From there, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church sent him to the United States of America to organize the Serbian Orthodox Church. On December 1, 1923, now archimandrite Mardarije is appointed as administrator of the Serbian American-Canadian diocese with the see in Chicago and that same year he purchased around ten acres of land in Libertyville, Illinois, where later St. Sava monastery was built. He was elected by the Holy Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church as the first bishop for the newly established diocese in America on December 7, 1925, and his consecration took place on Palm Sunday, the Feast of the Entrance of Our Lord Jesus Christ into Jerusalem, on April 25, 1926.

From then on His Grace Bishop Mardarije, the first bishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church in North and South America, labored tirelessly in building churches, St. Sava monastery in Libertyville, sowing Christian love, spread peace, preached and witnessed the Gospel of Christ throughout his diocese. In spite of inescapable worldly trends, he lived spontaneity of truth and a provision of grace, just because Life has dawned from the Tomb, and is dawning still. Having labored as bishop for a little over nine years he died peacefully on December 12, 1935, hospitalized in Ann Arbor, Michigan, while writing his last Nativity Encyclical to his beloved flock. His earthly remains were laid to rest at St. Sava monastery in Libertyville. The Holy Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church during its regular session held from May 14-29, 2015 brought forth a decision that his name be added to the Diptych of saints of the Holy Orthodox Church.

From the Holy Hierarch Mardarije, we see how the grace of God reaches the heart of our cities, bringing to the confusion of the world the breeze of the Spirit and the serenity of the Age to come.

The Life of St. Sebastian of Jackson (1863-1940)

(from <http://www.westsrbdio.org/en/events/canonization/hagiography/966-the-life-of-st-sebastian-of-jackson>)

This apostle of North America was the first American born Orthodox priest. His parents, Ilija and Jelena Dabovic, were the first recorded immigrants on the West Coast. They lived in San Francisco, operated a small shop, and were blessed with seven children. St. Sebastian was their fourth child who at baptism received name John. He was born on June 21, 1863. His ministry in the Church started at early age. After he finished high school he served his parish as a reader and teacher. Before he was sent to Russia, he spent time in Sitka, Alaska, assisted with parish ministries at St. Archangel Michael Cathedral. After three years of study at the St. Petersburg and Kiev Theological Academies, John was tonsured a monk and received monastic name Sebastian in 1887.

That same year he was ordained a hierodeacon. He served as deacon at the San Francisco Cathedral until Bishop Nicholas ordained him a priest on August 16, 1892. As newly ordained Hieromonk Fr. Sebastian tirelessly preached the Gospel, served Divine Liturgies, counseled and established many parishes throughout the country. During his life he conveyed the light of liturgical certainty and calm to a world that was spiritually hungry and suffering. Archbishop Tikhon asked Fr. Sebastian to lead a Serbian mission in the North American diocese, elevated him to archimandrite on August 15, 1905, and sent him to Chicago, Illinois, where this holy man served as parish priest. In 1910, he asked for release from the parish so that he could return to missionary work. Having spent three years at the newly opened St. Platon Seminary in Tenafly, New Jersey, he went back to Serbia to serve as a chaplain in the Serbian army in the Balkan Wars and WW I. After his brief visit to the United States of America in 1915 and 1917, the rest of his life he spent in Serbia where he peacefully reposed in monastery Zicha on November 30, 1940, having his earthly remains laid to rest there until they were exhumed and translated to Jackson, California, on September 1, 2007, at St. Sava Church, the oldest and one of many Serbian Orthodox Churches in America that he founded in 1894. Fr Sebastian built up souls, organized the Church, erected houses of prayer, and was devoted to charitable work. In addition to establishing many churches, St. Sebastian also wrote many articles and sermons. His last spoken words and wish were: The Heavenly Kingdom without end! Meaning: the kingdom of the virtues whence the miracle of eternal surprises bursts forth. The Holy Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church during its regular session held from May 14-29, 2015 inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit decided that his name be added to the Diptych of saints of the Holy Orthodox Church. From the Holy archimandrite Sebastian Dabovich (1863-2013) we realize how historical predicaments become a starting point for knowledge of God and spontaneous praise.

From the celebration of the glorification of Sts Mardarije and Sebastian may droplets of consolation fall upon the heart of those who, living in the heart of America, seek what is fair and honest.

From "The Sacramental Life of the Orthodox Church" by Fr. Alciviadis C. Calivas in A Companion to the Greek Orthodox Church

MARRIAGE

Christian Marriage. Orthodox theology has always presented Christian marriage as something absolutely unique, and indeed, eternal. In marriage, human love "is being projected into the Kingdom of God" (John Meyendorff), reflecting the intimate union between Christ and the faithful which St. Paul speaks of (Ephes.5). Married life is a special vocation which requires the grace of the Holy Spirit; and it is this very grace which is conferred in the Marriage Service.

The contemporary Marriage Service of the Orthodox Church is itself divided into two parts: the office of betrothal and the office of crowning. In the first, the rite includes the exchange of rings, demonstrating that both partners enter into marriage of their own volition. At the second, "crowns" placed upon the heads of the partners signify the grace of the Holy Spirit. These crowns are crowns of both joy and martyrdom. Because the couple has been united for eternity, there is joy; but because every marriage involves enormous self-sacrifice on the part of each partner, both also become "martyrs" in their own right.

The complete love each of the partners has for the other, should be the motivating factor in Christian marriage. In such a context marriage exists not only for the procreation of children, but also that a mutual love may be expressed, sustained and extended to others. While it is not to be denied that God commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply, children must always be considered a gift from God and not the sole reason for marriage. Certainly, children do contribute to making marriages an authentic image of the Trinity; and St. John Chrysostom spoke of the family as "a little Church"

Divorce. Because marriage implies a decision of free will on the part of both partners, there will always be the possibility of error. When a marriage fails, the Orthodox Church has generally declared that . . . the bond did not demonstrate its necessarily eternal character. It would not be totally accurate, however; to say that the Orthodox Church grants divorces, although such a practice has crept into the practice of some local Churches. Divorce is actually a civil matter which recognizes the breaking of a legal contract; the Church can merely recognize that an attempt at building up a true marriage has failed. Without going into an exhaustive analysis of the historical and

canonical developments, it should be mentioned that the Orthodox Church today normally allows the laity three attempts at establishing a true marriage. A fourth marriage is positively forbidden. Clergy, however, are permitted to marry only once and this must be prior to ordination. Finally, it remains only to comment upon the penitential character assigned to a marriage rite in which both partners are being married for the second or third time. A special service exists for these situations in which the prayers are more somber and the entire service far more subdued. In this way, the Church reminds both the partners and the entire people of God that one lasting marriage is the Christian norm.

Addendum by the 2011 Bible and Church History Tournament Committee

According to the canonical tradition of our Church, an Orthodox Christian should marry only another Orthodox Christian. This is the ideal. However, by the principle of Orthodox economy, an Orthodox Christian is permitted to marry a Catholic or Protestant Christian who has been baptized by water in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Holy Trinity. This marriage must take place in the Orthodox Church. If an Orthodox person marries his/her Catholic, Protestant or even Orthodox spouse in a Catholic or Protestant wedding or in a civil ceremony, the Orthodox person chooses to excommunicate him/herself from the Church—please see what this means below. (S)he may reinstate him/herself in the Orthodox Church by the Sacrament of Holy Confession and by having his/her marriage blessed in the Orthodox Church.

An Orthodox Christian may not marry in the Church a member of a non-Christian religion (Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, etc.) or a member of the following cults who deny the Holy Trinity or in any other way depart from traditional Christianity: such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons (Church of Latter-Day Saints), Christian Science, Quakers, Seventh Day Adventists, some Pentecostal groups who do not baptize their members in water in the Name of the Holy Trinity, etc. An Orthodox Christian who marries any member of these religions chooses to excommunicate him/herself from the Church and may not receive Holy Communion. (S)he also may not serve as a sponsor at a wedding or at a baptism, and (s)he may not have an Orthodox funeral. (S)he may be reinstated in the Church by the Sacrament of Holy Confession.

The Church and Ecological Problems

(from <https://mospat.ru/en/documents/social-concepts/xiii/>)

XIII. 1. The Orthodox Church, aware of her responsibility for the fate of the world, is deeply concerned for the problems generated by the contemporary civilisation. Ecological problems occupy a considerable place among them. Today the face of the Earth has been distorted on a global scale. Damaged are its bowels, soil, water, air and fauna and flora. Nature around us has been almost fully involved in the life support of man who is no longer satisfied with its diverse gifts, but exploits without restraint whole ecosystems. Human activity, which has reached the level of biospheric processes, constantly grows due to the accelerated development of science and technology. The pollution of the environment by industrial wastes everywhere, bad agricultural technology, the destruction of forests and top-soil — all result in the suppressed biological activity and the steady shrinking of the genetic diversity of life. The irreplaceable mineral resources are being exhausted; the drinking water reserves are being reduced. Great many harmful substances have appeared, not included in the circulation and accumulated in biosphere. The ecological balance has been violated; man has to face the emergence of pernicious processes in nature, including the failure of its natural reproductive power.

All this happens against the background of an unprecedented and unjustified growth of public consumption in highly developed countries, where the search for wealth and luxury has become a norm of life. This situation has obstructed the fair distribution of natural resources, which are common human property. The consequences of the ecological crisis have proved painful not only for nature, but also for man as organically integral to it. As a result, the Earth has found itself on the verge of a global ecological disaster.

XIII. 2. Relations between man and nature were broken in pre-historic times because of the fall of man and his alienation from God. Sin that was born in the soul of man damaged not only him himself, but also the entire world around him. «For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason, of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now» (Rom. 8:0-22). The first human crime was reflected in nature like in a mirror. The seed of sin, having produced an effect in the human heart, gave rise to «thorns and thistles», as Holy Scripture testifies (Gen. 3:18). The full organic unity that existed between man and the world around him before the fall (Gen. 2: 19-20) was made impossible. In their now consumer relations with nature, human beings began to be more often guided by egoistic motives. They began to forget that the only Lord of the Universe is God (Ps. 23:1), to Whom belong «the heaven... and the earth also, with all that therein is» (Deut. 10:14), while man, as St. John Chrysostom put it, is only a «housekeeper» entrusted with the riches of the earth. These riches, namely, «the air, sun, water, land, heaven, sea, light, stars», as the same saint remarks, God «divided among all in equal measure as if among brothers». «Dominion» over nature and «subjection» of the earth (Gen. 1:28), to which man is called, do not mean all-

permissiveness in God's design. It only means that man is the bearer of the image of the heavenly Housekeeper and as such should express, according to St. Gregory of Nyssa, his royal dignity not in dominion over the world around him or violence towards it, but in «dressing» and «keeping» the magnificent kingdom of nature for which he is responsible before God.

XIII. 3. The ecological crisis compels us to review our relations with the environment. Today the conception of man's dominion over nature and the consumer attitude to it has been increasingly criticised. The awareness that contemporary society pays too high a price for the blessings of the civilisation has provoked opposition to economic egoism. Thus, attempts are made to identify the activities that damage the natural environment. At the same time, a system of its protection is being developed; the present economic methods are being reviewed; efforts are made to create power-saving technologies and wasteless plants which can be fit at the same time into the natural circulation. The ecological ethics is being developed. The public consciousness guided by it speaks against the consumer way of life, demanding that the moral and legal responsibility for the damage inflicted on nature be enhanced. It also proposes to introduce ecological education and training and calls for joined efforts in protecting the environment on the basis of broad international co-operation.

XIII. 4. The Orthodox Church appreciates the efforts for overcoming the ecological crisis and calls people to intensive co-operation in actions aimed to protect God's creation. At the same time, she notes that these efforts will be more fruitful if the basis on which man's relations with nature are built will be not purely humanistic but also Christian. One of the main principles of the Church's stand on ecological issues is the unity and integrity of the world created by God. Orthodoxy does not view nature around us as an isolated and self-closed structure. The plant, animal and human worlds are interconnected. From the Christian point of view, nature is not a repository of resources intended for egoistic and irresponsible consumption, but a house in which man is not the master, but the housekeeper, and a temple in which he is the priest serving not nature, but the one Creator. The conception of nature as temple is based on the idea of theocentrism: God Who gives to all «life, and breath, and all things» (Acts 17:25) is the Source of being. Therefore, life itself in its various manifestations is sacred, being a gift of God. Any encroachment on it is a challenge not only to God's creation, but also to the Lord Himself.

XIII. 5. The ecological problems are essentially anthropological as they are generated by man, not nature. Therefore, answers to many questions raised by the environmental crisis are to be found in the human heart, not in the spheres of economy, biology, technology or politics. Nature is transformed or dies not by itself, but under the impact of man. His spiritual condition plays the decisive role here, for it affects the environment both with and without such an impact. The church history knows of many examples when the love of Christian ascetics for nature, their prayer for the world around them, their compassion for all creatures made a beneficial impact on living things.

Relationships between anthropology and ecology are revealed with utter clarity in our days when the world is experiencing two concurrent crises: spiritual and ecological. In contemporary society, man often loses the awareness of life as a gift of God and sometimes the very meaning of life, reducing it sometimes to the physical being alone. With this attitude to life, nature around him is no longer perceived as home and all the more so as temple, becoming only a «habitat». The spiritually degrading personality leads nature to degradation as well, for it is unable to make a transforming impact on the world. The colossal technological resources cannot help humanity blinded by sin, for, being indifferent to the meaning, mystery and wonder of life, they cannot be really beneficial and sometimes become even detrimental. In a spiritually disorientated man, the technological power would beget utopic reliance on the boundless resources of the human mind and the power of progress.

It is impossible to overcome the ecological crisis in the situation of a spiritual crisis. This does not at all mean that the Church calls to curtail the preservation activity, but in her hope for a positive change in the man-nature relationships, she relies rather on society's aspiration for spiritual revival. The anthropogenic background of ecological problems shows that we tend to change the world around us in accordance with our own inner world; therefore, the transformation of nature should begin with the transformation of the soul. According to St. Maxim the Confessor, man can turn the earth into paradise only if he carried paradise in himself.

"Marriage: The Great Sacrament"

By Archimandrite Amilianos of Simonopetra, Mount Athos
(from <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/47495.htm>)

Nobody would dispute that the most important day in a person's life, after his birth and baptism, is that of his marriage. It is no surprise, then, that the aim of contemporary worldly and institutional upheavals is precisely to crush the most honorable and sacred mystery of marriage. For many people, marriage is an opportunity for pleasures and amusements. Life, however, is a serious affair. It is a spiritual struggle, a progression toward a goal— heaven. The most crucial juncture, and the most important means, of this progression is marriage. It is not permissible for anyone to avoid the bonds of marriage, whether he concludes a mystical marriage by devoting himself to God, or whether he concludes a sacramental one with a spouse.

Today we will concern ourselves primarily with sacramental marriage. We will consider how marriage can contribute to our spiritual life, in order to continue the theme of our previous talk.^[1] We know that marriage is an

institution established by God. It is "honorable" (Heb 13.4). It is a "great mystery" (Eph 5.32). An unmarried person passes through life and leaves it; but a married person lives and experiences life to the full.

One wonders what people today think about the sacred institution of marriage, this "great mystery", blessed by our Church. They marry, and it's as if two checking accounts or two business interests were being merged. Two people are united without ideals, two zeros, you could say. Because people without ideals, without quests, are nothing more than zeros. "I married in order to live my life", you hear people say, "and not to be shut inside four walls". "I married to enjoy my life", they say, and then they hand over their children—if they have children—to some strange woman so they can run off to the theater, the movies, or to some other worldly gathering. And so their houses become hotels to which they return in the evening, or, rather, after midnight, after they've had their fun and need to rest. Such people are empty inside, and so in their homes they feel a real void. They find no gratification there, and thus they rush and slide from here to there, in order to find their happiness.

They marry without knowledge, without a sense of responsibility, or simply because they wish to get married, or because they think they must in order to be good members of society. But what is the result? We see it every day. The shipwrecks of marriage are familiar to all of us. A worldly marriage, as it is understood today, can only have one characteristic—the murder of a person's spiritual life. Thus we must feel that, if we fail in our marriage, we have more or less failed in our spiritual life. If we succeed in our marriage, we have also succeeded in our spiritual life. Success or failure, progress or ruin, in our spiritual life, begins with our marriage. Because this is such a serious matter, let us consider some of the conditions necessary for a happy, truly Christian marriage.

In order to have a successful marriage, one must have the appropriate upbringing from an early age. Just as a child must study, just as he learns to think, and take an interest in his parents or his health, so too must he be prepared in order to be able to have a successful marriage. But in the age in which we live, no one is interested in preparing their children for this great mystery, a mystery which will play the foremost role in their lives. Parents are not interested, except in the dowry, or in other such financial matters, in which they are deeply interested.

The child, from an early age, must learn to love, to give, to suffer deprivation, to obey. He must learn to feel that the purity of his soul and body is a valuable treasure to be cherished as the apple of his eye. The character of the child must be shaped properly, so that he becomes an honest, brave, decisive, sincere, cheerful person, and not a half, self-pitying creature, who constantly bemoans his fate, a weak-willed thing without any power of thought or strength. From an early age, the child should learn to take an interest in a particular subject or occupation, so that tomorrow he will be in a position to support his family, or, in the case of a girl, also to help, if this is necessary. A woman must learn to be a housewife, even if she has an education. She should learn to cook, to sew, to embroider. But, my good Father, you may say, this is all self-evident. Ask married couples, however, and you'll see how many women who are about to marry know nothing about running a household.

Once we reach a certain age, moreover, the choice of one's life partner is a matter which should not be put off. Neither should one be in a hurry, because, as the saying goes, "quick to marry, quick to despair". But one should not delay, because delay is a mortal danger to the soul. As a rule, the normal rhythm of the spiritual life begins with marriage. An unmarried person is like someone trying to live permanently in a hallway: he doesn't seem to know what the rooms are for. Parents should take an interest in the child's social life, but also in his prayer life, so that the blessed hour will come as a gift sent by God.

Naturally, when he comes to choose a partner, he will take to account his parents' opinion. How often have parents felt knives piercing their hearts when their children don't ask them about the person who will be their companion in life? A mother's heart is sensitive, and can't endure such a blow. The child should discuss matters with his parents, because they have a special intuition enabling them to be aware of the things which concern them. But this doesn't mean that the father and mother should pressure the child. Ultimately he should be free to make his own decision. If you pressure your child to marry, he will consider you responsible if things don't go well. Nothing good comes from pressure. You must help him, but you must also allow him to choose the person he prefers or loves—but not someone he pities or feels sorry for. If your child, after getting to know someone, tells you, "I feel sorry for the poor soul, I'll marry him", then you know that you're on the threshold of a failed marriage. Only a person whom he or she prefers or loves can stand by the side of your child. Both the man and the woman should be attracted to each other, and they should truly want to live together, in an inward way, unhurriedly. On this matter, however, it is not possible to pressure our children. Sometimes, out of our love, we feel that they are our possessions, that they are our property, and that we can do what we want with them. And thus our child becomes a creature incapable of living life either married or unmarried.

Of course, the process of getting acquainted, which is such a delicate issue—but of which we are often heedless—should take place before marriage. We should never be complacent about getting to know each other, especially if we're not sure of our feelings. Love shouldn't blind us. It should open our eyes, to see the other person as he is, with his faults. "Better to take a shoe from your own house, even if it's cobbled", says the folk proverb. That is, it's better to take someone you've gotten to know. And acquaintanceship must always be linked with engagement, which is an equally difficult matter.

When I suggested to a young woman that she should think seriously about whether she should continue her engagement she replied: "If I break it off, my mother will kill me". But what sort of engagement is it, if there's no possibility of breaking it off? To get engaged doesn't mean that I'll necessarily get married. It means that I'm testing to see whether I should marry the person I'm engaged to. If a woman isn't in a position to break off her engagement, she shouldn't get engaged, or, rather, she shouldn't go ahead with the marriage. During the engagement, we must be especially careful. If we are, we will have fewer problems and fewer disappointments after the wedding. Someone once said that, during the period of getting to know me another, you should hold on to your heart firmly with both hands, as if it were a wild animal. You know how dangerous the heart is: instead of leading you to marriage, it can lead you into sin. There is the possibility that the person you've chosen sees you as a mere toy, or a toothbrush to be tried out. Afterwards you'll be depressed and shed many tears. But then it will be too late, because your angel will have turned out to be made of clay.

Don't choose a person who wastes his time at clubs, having good time, and throwing away his money on traveling and luxuries. Neither should you choose someone who, as you'll find out, conceals his self-centeredness beneath words of love. Don't choose a woman as your wife who is like gun powder, so that as soon as you say something to her, she bursts to flames. She's no good as a wife.

Moreover, if you want to have a truly successful marriage, don't approach that young woman or man who is unable to leave his or her parents. The commandment of Christ is clear: man leaves his father and mother, and is united to his wife" (Mk 10.7). But when you see the other person tied to his mother or father, when you see that he obeys them with his mouth hanging open, and is prepared to do whatever they tell him, keep well away. He is emotionally sick, a psychologically immature person, and you won't be able to create a family with him. The man you will make your husband should be spirited. But how can he be spirited when he hasn't realized, hasn't understood, hasn't digested the fact that his parents' house is simply a flower-pot in which he was put, to be taken out later, and transplanted somewhere else?

Also, when you're going to choose a husband, make sure that he's not an uncommunicative type—in which case he'll have no friends. And if today he has no friends, tomorrow he'll find it difficult to have you as a friend and partner. Be on your guard against grumblers, moaners, and gloomy people who are like dejected birds. Be on your guard against those who complain all the time: "You don't love me, you don't understand me", and all that sort of thing. Something about these creatures of God isn't right. Also be on your guard against religious fanatics and the overly pious. Those, that is, who get upset over trivial things, who are critical of everything and hypersensitive. How are you going to live with such a person? It will be like sitting on thorns. Also look out for those who regard marriage as something bad, as a form of imprisonment. Those who say: But I've never in my whole life thought about getting married.

Watch out for certain pseudo-Christians, who see marriage as something sordid, as a sin, who immediately cast their eyes down when they hear anything said about it.^[2] If you marry someone like this, he will be a thorn in your flesh, and a burden for his monastery if he becomes a monk. Watch out for those who think that they're perfect, and find no defect in themselves, while constantly finding faults in others. Watch out for those who think they've been chosen by God to correct everyone else.

There is another serious matter to which you should also pay attention: heredity. Get to know well the father, the mother, the grandfather, the grandmother, the uncle. Also, the basic material prerequisites should be there. Above all, pay attention to the person's faith. Does he or she have faith? Has the person whom you're thinking of making the companion of your life have ideals? If Christ means nothing to him, how are you going to be able to enter his heart? If he has not been able to value Christ, do you think he will value you? Holy Scripture says to the husband that the wife should be "of your testament" (Mal 2.14), that is, of your faith, your religion, so that she can join you to God. It is only then that you can have, as the Church Fathers say, a marriage "with the consent of the bishop,"^[3] that is, with the approval of the Church, and not simply a formal license.

Discuss things in advance with your spiritual father. Examine every detail with him, and he will stand by your side as a true friend, and, when you reach the desired goal, then your marriage will be a gift from God (cf. 1 Cor 7.7). God gives his own gift to each one of us. He leads one person to marriage and another to virginity. Not that God makes the choice by saying "you go here", and "you go there", but he gives us the nerve to choose what our heart desires, and the courage and the strength to carry it out.

If you choose your spouse in this way, then thank God. Bring him into touch with your spiritual father. If you don't have one, the two of you should choose a spiritual father together, who will be your Elder, your father, the one who will remind you of, and show you God.

You will have many difficulties in life. There will be a storm of issues. Worries will surround you, and maintaining your Christian life will not be easy. But don't worry. God will help you. Do what is within your power. Can you read a spiritual book for five minutes a day? Then read. Can you pray for five minutes a day? Pray. And if you can't manage five minutes, pray for two. The rest is God's affair.

When you see difficulties in your marriage, when you see that you're making no progress in your spiritual life, don't despair. But neither should you be content with whatever progress you may have already made. Lift up your

heart to God. Imitate those who have given everything to God, and do what you can to be like them, even if all you can do is to desire in your heart to be like them. Leave the action to Christ. And when you advance in this way, you will truly sense what is the purpose of marriage. Otherwise, as a blind person wanders about, so too will you wander in life.

What then is the purpose of marriage? I will tell you three of its main aims. First of all, marriage is a path of pain. The companionship of man and wife is called a "yoking together" (syzygia), that is, the two of them labor under a shared burden. Marriage is a journeying together, a shared portion of pain, and, of course, a joy. But usually it's six chords of our life which sound a sorrowful note, and only one which is joyous. Man and wife will drink from the same cup of upheaval, sadness, and failure. During the marriage ceremony, the priest gives the newly-weds to drink from the same cup, called the "common cup,"^[4] because together they will bear the burdens of marriage. The cup is also called "union,"^[5] because they are joined together to share life's joys and sorrows.

When two people get married, it's as if they're saying: Together we will go forward, hand in hand, through good times and bad. We will have dark hours, hours of sorrow filled with burdens, monotonous hours. But in the depths of the night, we continue to believe in the sun and the light. Oh, my dear friends, who can say that his life has not been marked by difficult moments? But it is no small thing to know that, in your difficult moments, in your worries, in your temptations, you will be holding in your hand the hand of your beloved. The New Testament says that every man will have pain, especially those who enter into marriage.

"Are you free from a wife?"—which means, are you unmarried?—asks the Apostle Paul. "Then do not seek a wife. But if you do marry, you are not doing anything wrong, it is no sin. And if a girl marries, she does not sin, but those who marry will have hardships to endure, and my aim is to spare you" (1 Cor 7.27-28). Remember: from the moment you marry, he says, you will have much pain, you will suffer, and your life will be a cross, but a cross blossoming with flowers. Your marriage will have its joys, its smiles, and its beautiful things. But during the days of sunshine, remember that all the lovely flowers conceal a cross, which can emerge into your sunshine at any moment.

Life is not a party, as some people think, and after they get married take a fall from heaven to earth. Marriage is a vast ocean, and you don't know where it will wash you up. You take the person whom you've chosen with fear and trembling, and with great care, and after a year, two years, five years, you discover that he's fooled you.

It is an adulteration of marriage for us to think that it is a road to happiness, as if it were a denial of the cross. The joy of marriage is for husband and wife to put their shoulders to the wheel and together go forward on the uphill road of life. "You haven't suffered? Then you haven't loved", says a certain poet. Only those who suffer can really love. And that's why sadness is a necessary feature of marriage. "Marriage", in the words of an ancient philosopher, "is a world made beautiful by hope, and strengthened by misfortune". Just as steel is fashioned in a furnace, just so is a person proved in marriage, in the fire of difficulties. When you see your marriage from a distance, everything seems wonderful. But when you get closer, you'll see just how many difficult moments it has.

God says that "it is not good for the man to be alone" (Gen 2.18), and so he placed a companion at his side, someone to help him throughout his life, especially in his struggles of faith, because in order to keep your faith, you must suffer and endure much pain. God sends his grace to all of us. He sends it, however, when he sees that we are willing to suffer. Some people, as soon as they see obstacles, run away. They forget God and the Church. But faith, God, and the Church, are not a shirt that you take off as soon as you start to sweat.

Marriage, then, is a journey through sorrows and joys. When the sorrows seem overwhelming, then you should remember that God is with you. He will take up your cross. It was he who placed the crown of marriage on your head. But when we ask God about something, he doesn't always supply the solution right away. He leads us forward very slowly. Sometime[s] he takes years. We have to experience pain, otherwise life would have no meaning. But be of good cheer, for Christ is suffering with you, and the Holy Spirit, "through your groanings is pleading on your behalf" (cf. Rom 8.26).

Second, marriage is a journey of love. It is the creation of a new human being, a new person, for, as the Gospel says, "the two will be as one flesh" (Mt 19.5; Mk 10.7). God unites two people, and makes them one. From this union of two people, who agree to synchronize their footsteps and harmonize the beating of their hearts, a new human being emerges. Through such profound and spontaneous love, the one becomes a presence, a living reality, in the heart of the other. "I am married" means that I cannot live a single day, even a few moments, without the companion of my life. My husband, my wife, is a part of my being, of my flesh, of my soul. He or she complements me. He or she is the thought of my mind. He or she is the reason for which my heart beats.

The couple exchanges rings to show that, in life's changes, they will remain united. Each wears a ring with the name of the other written on it, which is placed on the finger from which a vein runs directly to the heart. That is, the name of the other is written on his own heart. The one, we could say, gives the blood of his heart to the other. He or she encloses the other within the core of his being.

"What do you do?" a novelist was once asked. He was taken aback. "What do I do? What a strange question! I love Olga, my wife". The husband lives to love his wife, and the wife lives to love her husband.

The most fundamental thing in marriage is love, and love is about uniting two into one. God abhors separation and divorce. He wants unbroken unity (cf. Mt 19.3-9; Mk 10.2-12). The priest takes the rings off the left finger, puts them on the right, and then again on the left, and finally he puts them back on the right hand. He begins and ends with the right hand, because this is the hand with which we chiefly act. It also means that the other now has my hand. I don't do anything that my spouse doesn't want. I am bound up with the other. I live for the other, and for that reason I tolerate his faults. A person who can't put up with another can't marry.

What does my partner want? What interests him? What gives him pleasure? That should also interest and please me as well. I also look for opportunities to give him little delights. How will I please my husband today? How will I please my wife today? This is the question which a married person must ask every day. She is concerned about his worries, his interests, his job, his friends, so that they can have everything in common. He gladly gives way to her. Because he loves her, he goes to bed last and gets up first in the morning. He regards her parents as his own, and loves them and is devoted to them, because he knows that marriage is difficult for parents. It always makes them cry, because it separates them from their child.

The wife expresses love for her husband through obedience. She is obedient to him exactly as the Church is to Christ (Eph 5.22-24). It is her happiness to do the will of her husband. Attitude, obstinacy, and complaining are the axes which chop down the tree of conjugal happiness. The woman is the heart. The man is the head. The woman is the heart that loves. In her husband's moments of difficulty, she stands at his side, as the empress Theodora stood by the emperor Justinian. In his moments of joy, she tries to raise him up to even higher heights and ideals. In times of sorrow, she stands by him like a sublime and peaceful world offering him tranquility.

The husband should remember that his wife has been entrusted to him by God. His wife is a soul which God has given to him, and one day he must return it. He loves his wife as Christ loves the Church (Eph 5.25). He protects her, takes care of her, gives her security, particularly when she is distressed, or when she is ill. We know how sensitive a woman's soul can be, which is why the Apostle Peter urges husbands to honor their wives (cf. 1 Pet 3.7). A woman's soul gets wounded, is often petty, changeable, and can suddenly fall into despair. Thus the husband should be full of love and tenderness, and make himself her greatest treasure. Marriage, my dear friends, is a little boat which sails through waves and among rocks. If you lose your attention even for a moment, it will be wrecked.

As we have seen, marriage is first of all a journey of pain; second a journey of love; and, third, a journey to heaven, a call from God. It is, as Holy Scripture says, a "great mystery" (Eph 5.32). We often speak of seven "mysteries", or sacraments. In this regard, a "mystery" is the sign of the mystical presence of some true person or event. An icon, for instance, is a mystery. When we venerate it, we are not venerating wood or paint, but Christ, or the Theotokos, or the saint who is mystically depicted. The Holy Cross is a symbol of Christ, containing his mystical presence. Marriage, too, is a mystery, a mystical presence, not unlike these. Christ says, "wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am among them" (Mt 18.20). And whenever two people are married in the name of Christ, they become the sign which contains and expresses Christ himself. When you see a couple who are conscious of this, it is as if you are seeing Christ. Together they are a theophany.

This is also why crowns are placed on their heads during the wedding ceremony, because the bride and groom are an image of Christ and the Church. And not just this, but everything in marriage is symbolic. The lit candles symbolize the wise virgins. When the priest places these candles into the hands of the newly-weds, it is as if he is saying to them: Wait for Christ like the wise virgins (Mt 25.1-11). Or they symbolize the tongues of fire which descended at Pentecost, and which were in essence the presence of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2.1-4). The wedding rings are kept on the altar, until they are taken from there by the priest, which shows that marriage has its beginning in Christ, and will end in Christ. The priest also joins their hands, in order to show that it is Christ himself who unites them. It is Christ who is at the heart of the mystery and at the center of their lives.^[6]

All the elements of the marriage ceremony are shadows and symbols which indicate the presence of Christ. When you're sitting somewhere and suddenly you see a shadow, you know that someone's coming. You don't see him, but you know he's there. You get up early in the morning, and you see the red horizon in the east. You know that, in a little while, the sun will come up. And indeed, there behind the mountain, the sun starts to appear.

When you see your marriage, your husband, your wife, your partner's body, when you see your troubles, everything in your home, know that they are all signs of Christ's presence. It is as if you're hearing Christ's footsteps, as if he was coming, as if you are now about to hear his voice. All these things are the shadows of Christ, revealing that he is together with us. It is true, though, that, because of our cares and worries, we feel that he is absent. But we can see him in the shadows, and we are sure that he is with us. This is why there was no separate marriage service in the early Church. The man and woman simply went to church and received Communion together. What does this mean? That henceforth their life is one life in Christ.

The wreaths, or wedding crowns, are also symbols of Christ's presence. More specifically, they are symbols of martyrdom. Husband and wife wear crowns to show that they are ready to become martyrs for Christ. To say that "I am married" means that I live and die for Christ. "I am married" means that I desire and thirst for Christ. Crowns are also signs of royalty, and thus husband and wife are king and queen, and their home is a kingdom, a kingdom of the Church, an extension of the Church.

When did marriage begin? When man sinned. Before that, there was no marriage, not in the present-day sense. It was only after the Fall, after Adam and Eve had been expelled from paradise, that Adam "knew" Eve (Gen 4.1) and thus marriage began. Why then? So that they might remember their fall and expulsion from paradise, and seek to return there. Marriage is thus a return to the spiritual paradise, the Church of Christ. "I am married" means, then, that I am a king, a true and faithful member of the Church.

The wreaths also symbolize the final victory which will be attained in the kingdom of heaven. When the priest takes the wreaths, he says to Christ: "take their crowns to your kingdom", take them to your kingdom, and keep them there, until the final victory. And so marriage is a road: its starts out from the earth and ends in heaven. It is a joining together, a bond with Christ, who assures us that he will lead us to heaven, to be with him always. Marriage is a bridge leading us from earth to heaven. It is as if the sacrament is saying: Above and beyond love, above and beyond your husband, your wife, above the everyday events, remember that you are destined for heaven, that you have set out on a road which will take you there without fail. The bride and the bridegroom give their hands to one another, and the priest takes hold of them both, and leads them round the table dancing and singing. Marriage is a movement, a progression, a journey which will end in heaven, in eternity.

In marriage, it seems that two people come together. However it's not two but three. The man marries the woman, and the woman marries the man, but the two together also marry Christ. So three take part in the mystery, and three remain together in life.

In the dance around the table, the couple are led by the priest, who is a type of Christ. This means that Christ has seized us, rescued us, redeemed us, and made us his. And this is the "great mystery" of marriage (cf. Gal 3.13).

In Latin, the word "mystery" was rendered by the word sacramentum, which means an oath. And marriage is an oath, a pact, a joining together, a bond, as we have said. It is a permanent bond with Christ.

"I am married", then, means that I enslave my heart to Christ. If you wish, you can get married. If you wish, don't get married. But if you marry, this is the meaning that marriage has in the Orthodox Church, which brought you into being. "I am married" means I am the slave of Christ.

[Archimandrite Aimilianos](#)

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[1] I.e., "Spiritual Life", which appears below, on pp. 147-163.

[2] 2. See, for example, John Chrysostom, *Homily on Colossians* 12.6 "What shame is there in that which is honorable? Why do you blush over what is undefiled? In so doing, you slander the root of our birth, which is a gift from God" (PG 62.388).

[3] Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to Polycarp* (PG 5.724B).

[4] Symeon of Thessaloniki, *Dialogos* 277 (PG 155.508B).

[5] C. Kallinikos, *The Christian Temple and its Ceremonies* (Athens, 1968), 514.

[6] St. Gregory the Theologian, Letter 193: "I place the hand of the one the other, and place both in the hand of God" (PG 37.316C).