

10. On Preparing For & Receiving Communion

First and foremost, older children, teens and adults should realize that the Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, which He sacrificed on the Cross for us, giving them to us as Divine Food that brings us eternal life. Before His crucifixion, the Lord took bread and said "Take, eat, this is My Body," and He took the cup of wine and said, "This is My Blood... which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt. 26:26-28). In the Liturgy we address the Lord, saying, "I believe that this is truly Thine own immaculate Body, and that this is truly Thine own precious Blood." Firm faith in this reality is our most basic preparation.

Along with such faith, we prepare for Communion in practical ways, as part of the "prescription" for the "medicine of immortality," as St. Ignatius of Antioch calls it. First of all, we keep a "Eucharistic fast" on the morning of the Liturgy (that is, from at least Midnight until the Liturgy), or at least 6 hours prior to an evening Liturgy. This includes abstaining from both food and drink (those with health concerns should see the priest about exceptions). Married Christians abstain from marital relations as part of the fast; smokers would abstain from smoking. There are also prayers of preparation before Communion, read prior to the Liturgy, which help prepare the heart. These are generally found in Orthodox prayer books. Regular confession (ideally monthly) is also necessary to prepare our hearts; and if there is a sin that especially weighs on us, we should confess it before communing. We should be at peace with those around us, asking forgiveness of anyone we have particularly offended, and granting such forgiveness to everyone, before approaching the Chalice (Matt. 5:23-24). Finally, we *come to the Liturgy on time* if we wish to receive.

We should approach the Chalice prayerfully, and we may make the cross and bow as we get in line to receive. Then we cross our arms (right over left) on our chest, the "universal sign" that we are prepared. After receiving, it is best to let the deacon wipe our lips, then to step away from the chalice before making the sign of the cross (to avoid bumping the chalice). It is also best to wait a couple of hours before chewing gum, brushing teeth, etc.

Children and Communion

We believe that from their early infancy, children are to participate in the Mysteries of the Church, in accordance with the Lord's words, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them" (Matt 19:14). Receiving communion weekly after baptism allows infants naturally to become accustomed to it, so that it never presents an ordeal for the child or godparents. A baby should be held with the head resting on the *right* arm, and the adult's hands covering the baby's hands and feet to avoid jostling the chalice. It is best for the adult not to make the sign of the cross while holding the baby at the chalice; and he or she should allow the deacon to wipe the child's lips. Infants should wear a special bib for communion, which can be given to the clergy to wash if the child spits up after communion.

As children reach age 7 and above, they should begin the practice of periodic confession, which becomes part of regular preparation for Communion. Also, they can gradually begin fasting as a preparation for Communion. Older children should be able to abstain from food or drink on the morning of a Liturgy, or for a reasonable period before an evening Liturgy.