

and knowledge" (*Col 2:3*). Briefly stated, mystery—the Mystery—is Christ, and all that he did and does for us.

404 After his Ascension, Christ continues to remain among his disciples—Christians throughout the ages—and to act for their and the whole world's salvation. We proclaim this in the kontakion of the feast: "You ascended in glory, O Christ our God, in no way distant, but remaining inseparable."³⁰⁴ These words echo the Lord's assurance: "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (*Mt 28:20*). In his Church, Christ continues to teach, feed, heal, forgive, and revive. Thus, the Church herself can be called the mystery of his presence, the place where God and people meet. The fifth-century Pope of Rome Saint Leo the Great explained: "that which till then [Christ's Ascension] was visible of our Redeemer was changed into a sacramental presence."³⁰⁵

b. The Seven Sacramental Mysteries

405 The saving and sanctifying action of the Church is accomplished in seven Holy Mysteries. "These are: Baptism, Chrismation, Eucharist, Repentance, Holy Anointing, Marriage, and Orders. Through these sacred actions of the Church, Christ grants the grace of the Holy Spirit. Through these Mysteries the Church sanctifies the faithful on their journey to the fullness of life in Christ. Through visible signs (e.g., water, chrism, bread and wine, the laying on of hands) Christ builds up his Church in the Holy Mysteries. In the liturgical actions of the Mysteries it is God's grace that acts, and believers enter into God's life. By participating in the visible form of a Mystery, that is, through the liturgical action, we become partakers of God's salvific action of grace. "[The unbeliever], hearing of a laver, counts it merely as water: but I behold not simply the thing which is seen, but the purification of the soul which is by the Spirit."³⁰⁶ The external form of the rite and its material expressions are vital as they signify our deification and manifest the first fruits of transfigured nature.

c. The Holy Mysteries Area Synergy of God and Human Persons

406 the synergy, or joint operation, of God and human persons in the Mysteries, manifests itself as an exchange in which God discloses himself in love, grants his grace—his very life—to human persons, who receive this gift and in turn respond in love. The salvation of men and women

³⁰⁴ Floral Triodion, Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, Kontakion.

³⁰⁵ LEO THE GREAT, Sermon 74, 2: PL 54, 398.

³⁰⁶ OHN CHRYSOSTOM, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, 7, 2: PG 61, 55.

consists precisely in their becoming capable, in Christ, of loving as Christ loved us (*see Jn 13:34*). In opening themselves to the gift of grace, human persons fully abandon themselves to the will of God in order to grow in faith, hope, and love, even "to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (*Eph 4:13*).

d. The Mystical Life of the Church

407 through Baptism, Chrismation, and the Eucharist, called the Mysteries of Christian Initiation, a person becomes a member of the Body of Christ and is enabled to participate in Christ's priesthood, kingship, and prophetic mission. through the Mysteries of Repentance and Anointing, called Mysteries of Healing, we receive both spiritual and physical healing. through the Mysteries of Service, Priesthood and Marriage, Christians are consecrated to the service of the ecclesial community or to the domestic church.

1. The Holy Mysteries of Christian Initiation

408 Participation in the life of the Most Holy Trinity becomes a reality for us through the Holy Mysteries of Baptism, Chrismation, and Eucharist. In other words, we partake of God's life by being united to Christ, receiving the seal of the Holy Spirit, and sharing the Body and Blood of Christ in the community called Church. As a person after birth begins to breathe and then receives nourishment in order to live, so the newly baptized, born to new life in the baptismal font, begins to breathe by the Holy Spirit and receives the nourishment of Holy Communion in order to grow in Christ. through the prayers and sacred actions of the liturgical rite of each of these Mysteries, the Church leads the faithful (the Greek Fathers speak of *mystagogy*—leading into the mystery) into an understanding of the Mystery and perceiving it as a single, unified action of God's grace. This is why in the tradition of the Eastern Church; these three Holy Mysteries are celebrated together.³⁰⁷

a. The Holy Mystery of Baptism

1) Baptism Is the Birth to New Life in Christ

409 the Father reveals and grants us eternal life through his Son in the Holy Spirit. this life of the new creation becomes accessible to us not only after death, but even now Through the Holy Mysteries of Baptism

³⁰⁷ See CONGREGATION FOR THE EASTERN CHURCHES, *Instruction for Applying the Liturgical Prescriptions of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, 51.