

hands, and sit down, and be all ready at the table, and after all refuse to partake; is he not insulting the man who invited him? Were it not better for such a one never to have come at all?"³⁴⁰ For the Christian, the fulfilment of the *commandment* "Observe the Lord's day, to keep it holy" (*see Ex 20:8 and Dt 5:12*) means to take part in the Divine Liturgy on Sundays and holy days. The Church encourages Christians to receive Communion as frequently as possible for the sake of their spiritual growth. But the apostle Paul teaches: "Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup" (*I Cor 11:28*). In preparation for Communion, the faithful examine their conscience and observe the Eucharistic fast.

446 Christians partake of the Most Holy Eucharist "for the forgiveness of his or her sins and life everlasting." "Let us ... partake of the divine coal, in order that the fire of the longing that is in us, with the additional heat derived from the coal may utterly consume our sins and illumine our hearts, and that we may be inflamed and deified by the participation in the divine fire."³⁴¹ The condition for receiving Holy Communion worthily is a clean conscience, repentance for sins before God, and reconciliation with our neighbour: "[On] every Lord's day gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one that is at variance with his fellow come together with you, until they be reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be profaned."³⁴²

2. The Holy Mysteries of Healing

447 As a consequence of our first parents' fall, human will became weakened. The capacity to recognize and choose the good was also enfeebled. In their relations with God and neighbour and in their attitude towards themselves and their environment, human persons began to be guided not by love and self-giving but by an egotistic exploitation of the other for personal and consumeristic gain. A consequence of the Fall is the loss of every person's wholeness. This manifest itself in physical and spiritual suffering, in sickness and death.

448 Christ came into the world to heal and save the human race, to renew the wholeness lost by human persons. During his earthly life, Christ, the healer of human souls and bodies, remitted sins and healed the sick. After his Ascension, he continues to do this in his Church by the

³⁴⁰ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilies on Ephesians*, 3, 5: PG 62, 29.

³⁴¹ JOHN OF DAMASCUS, *An Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 4, 13: PG 94, 1149.

³⁴² *Didache or The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, 14.

power of the Holy Spirit in the Holy Mysteries of Repentance and Holy Anointing.

a. The Holy Mystery of Repentance

- 449 The Holy Mystery of Repentance (or Confession) is a marvelous manifestation of God's love and mercy towards us sinners. This is because the Lord does not reject us and does not turn away from us when we, having been washed of our sins in Baptism and endowed with divine grace, sin again through malice or weakness. Indeed, the Lord awaits our repentance. He forgives us if we repent and confess our sins (*see Lk 15:12-32*).
- 450 In the celebration of the Holy Mystery of Repentance, the Church actualizes the words of the Lord to the apostles: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (*Jn 20:22-23*). Every priest continues the apostolic ministry in the Mystery of Repentance when he absolves the faithful of their sins and reconciles them with the Church. The priest pronounces the prayer of absolution (the loosing from the bondage of sin) and every penitent thereby receives Christ's forgiveness.

1) Spiritual Struggle and Repentance

- 451 the vocation of the Christian to share in the life of Christ and to participate in his mission requires unceasing efforts in the spiritual struggle with passions and sins: "For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (*Eph 6:12*). The spiritual struggle of the Christian begins with the public renunciation of the devil and the joining to Christ in the Holy Mystery of Baptism. Subsequently, the strengthening of the Christian in his or her spiritual growth is realized through participation in the Mysteries of Repentance and the Eucharist.
- 452 In the spiritual struggle, the Christian is not 'left to fend for himself.' Rather, by the power of the Holy Spirit the Christian acts together with Christ (in synergy) under the Church's maternal care. Even though we have been called to grow gradually "to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (*Eph 4:13*), through human weakness we often go astray, lose hope in God's love, or freely and consciously cooperate with the powers of evil. Nevertheless, God does not turn away from the person who sinned. Instead, in his love and mercy he grants the possibility of repenting—that is, to return to the life that flows from Baptism: