

of the Rule; the habit, the veil or *skufia*, the *paraman*, the prayer-rope (chotki/rosary), the candle, the cross, etc. All of these visible signs and symbols indicate the internal readiness of a person to radically devote himself or herself to live at the service of God and Church according to the evangelical counsels and Beatitudes. The consecrated person is received by the Church and enjoined to attend wholeheartedly to the matters of God within their order or congregation. By their example, they are to be a sign of the heavenly kingdom toward which the People of God are striving. The rite of initiation into the monastic (consecrated) life is an integral part of the liturgical tradition of the Church. Thus, it is usually joined to the Divine Liturgy.

504 The Church consecrates the places where the faithful gather or live (church buildings, chapels, homes), as well as places of their repose (cemeteries). In the churches themselves, all the articles and furnishings of liturgical use (icons, crosses, the altar, church bells, etc.) are necessarily consecrated. Through such consecration "the life of the world to come" is manifested in this world and reveals that "this world" has a future. Consecrated by the Church, the world of people and nature become a sign of the new world, transfigured by grace.

c. Blessings

505 A blessing is an action of God for the good of human persons and their salvation. God blesses Adam and Eve so that they might grow and multiply (see *Gn 1:28*); and after the Flood he blesses Noah (see *Gn 9:1*). God blesses Abraham to become a blessing for all the nations of the earth (see *Gn 12:2-3*). This divine blessing is realized in Jesus Christ (see *Gal 3:14-16*). Through the liturgical act of blessing, the Church communicates the blessing of Christ to the whole world. When the priest blesses with his hand, he configures his fingers to form the letters IC XC, which is the Greek abbreviation for "Jesus Christ." "This means that through the priest it is the Lord who blesses, "because it is not the human being that blesses, but God who blesses by his hand and words."³⁷³

506 The Church, as a caring Mother, embraces persons with prayers and blessings on the very first day that they come into the world. She then prays on the eighth day after birth, when they receive their name, and also blesses the mother and child with special prayers on the fortieth day. When children begin going to school the Church blesses their educational endeavors. If a couple does not have children, the Church blesses them for fertility with a blessing of the nuptial bed. Those striv-

³⁷³ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilies on 2 Corinthians*, 2, 8: PG 61, 404.

ing on the path of sanctification in marriage³⁷⁴ are blessed by the Church on the twenty-fifth and fiftieth anniversaries of their marriage. When people are sick, the Church prays at their bedside; and she accompanies the dying with "Prayers at the Soul's Separation from the Body."

507 When people suffer from drought, intemperate weather, or other natural calamities, the Church appeals to God for help in these trials. In that which concerns the procuring of "daily bread," the Church blesses the circumstances and means of people's labour: fields, buildings, and farms. Desiring that people might possess material means according to their needs, the Church blesses bread, wheat, wine, and oil during the Lektoria service of Vespers. In the past, these gifts were distributed to the needy on the eve of Church feasts, so that they too might be able to participate in the celebration.

508 In blessing medicinal herbs on the feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God, the Church blesses people for their health and for protection against infirmities. In blessing the first fruits of the new harvest, the Church blesses the consumption of God's gifts which derive from the earth. Likewise, in blessing bread, meat, butter, cheese, and eggs on Pascha (Easter), the Church blesses the consumption of the fruit of people's labour.

509 On the feast of the Encounter of our Lord, the Church blesses candles to remind us of Christ, who is "light for revelation to the nations" (see Lk 2:32). On Palm Sunday she blesses branches to remind us to adorn ourselves with "the branches of virtues." With these we greet Christ coming. The Church teaches the need to love God's creation when she consecrates water at Theophany (Jordan), when she decorates homes with greenery at Pentecost, and adorns churches with the best creation of church art. All of this is done so that every person might understand that every moment of their lives is God's blessing—a gift from God for the sanctification and salvation of this life.

2. Services for the Deceased

510 In funeral rites and memorial services, the Church asks the merciful God to forgive the deceased their sins and to grant their souls "repose in the land of the living, in the place of light, where all the saints and righteous have their rest." For this the Church also makes "atonement for the dead, so that they might be delivered from their sin" (2 Mc 12:45).

³⁷⁴ See Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1642.