

Preparation for Holy Communion in the Orthodox Church in the British Isles and Ireland.

When did you last go to Confession ?

Take a moment to think about this question.

Remember the last time you came.

Greek priests, Russian priests, Romanian priests, English priests and other Orthodox priests around the world have taught different customs and practices about Confessing our sins.

When Orthodox from abroad come to England they find these different customs and practices confusing, unsettling, bewildering.

They are not sure what it is right for them to do.

For that reason the **Assembly of Orthodox Bishops in Great Britain and Ireland** met together in March 2014 and issued guidelines for all Orthodox in this country.

The Bishops tell us first of all that the Orthodox Christian people should regard the **frequent reception** of Holy Communion at the Liturgy as right, proper and normal.

It is to be desired that Christian people should receive the Holy Communion often, even every Sunday.

Not just at the Nativity and at Pascha.

Why should Christian people receive the Holy Communion frequently ?

Firstly we receive the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ because Christ himself commanded and taught us to do this. We receive the Holy gifts in

obedience. Christ commands - and - if we love Him - we obey.

Secondly, the Bishops tell us, that frequent and regular Communion **protects the faithful** from the temptations and devices of the enemy. Holy Communion, rightly received, nourishes the soul.

You would not starve your body to death.

Why would you want to starve your soul ?

The Bishops tell us, however, that it is dangerous to receive the Holy Communion without careful and strict preparation, as Saint Paul teaches us.

The Assembly of all Orthodox Bishops in this country tells us exactly how we must prepare for Holy Communion.

They tell us:-

1. We should prepare by **fasting**.
2. We should prepare by going to **confession**.
3. We should prepare by **reading** some of the traditional prayers of preparation before we come to the Temple.
4. If we are **married** we should **not have sexual relations** on the night before we are to take Holy Communion.
5. If we are **not married** we should **never** have sexual relations. We should be chaste and celibate.
6. All of these preparations must be done with **sincerity, repentance** and **humility** - not done mechanically and thoughtlessly.

1. Concerning the Fast before Communion the Bishops tell us this:-

If you are regularly keeping the Fast from all animal products (*meat, milk, butter, cheese and eggs*) every **Wednesday** and **Friday** through the year and keeping the Great Fasts of Lent , the Apostles and the Dormition, and the Advent Fast then you only need to fast before Communion by taking nothing to eat or drink **from Midnight** before the Liturgy until after the end of the Liturgy.

You are not required to fast for a whole week, or even for 3 days.

It will be sufficient to fast from midnight.

So if you are taking Communion on Sunday morning you make a total fast from Midnight on Saturday until the end of the Liturgy at which you take Communion.

The Bishops also remind us that Fasting does not just mean giving up certain foods. They remind us that **St John Chrysostom** tells us that we should fast not only with the mouth - but also with the **eyes, the ears, the feet and the hands.**

Fast from looking at thing no Christian should look at.

Fast from listening to gossip, slander and dirty jokes.

Fast from going to places you should not go to.

Fast from hurting anyone with hand or fist.

And the mouth itself should not only fast from food but also from telling lies, repeating gossip and slander and running down or criticising other people. “ **Let me not**

judge my brother or sister ! “ So St Ephrem the Syrian teaches us in his Lenten Prayer.

2. What about Confession ?

The Bishops tell us that Confession and Communion belong together.

let me read you **the exact words** of the Bishop's Recommendations.

They say “ **Today in the Orthodox Church sacramental Confession should always be linked with our participation in the Eucharist.** *(that is to say, with the Holy Communion.) (“ Eucharist “ is another name for the Divine Liturgy or Mass)*

However the Bishops also tell us that if a Christian is coming to confession regularly through the year - and if that Christian's conscience is not accusing him or her of a grave and serious sin - then it is **not of obligation - not necessary - not compulsory** - to come to confession **every time** before Communion.

Confession should be regular throughout the year but it need not be done every time before every Communion.

BUT.... if a person has not been keeping the Fasts for a long time - and **IF** that person has not been to Confession for a long time - then they **MUST** keep a strict and longer fast agreed with by their spiritual father or parish priest - and **MUST** go to confession before beginning to receive Holy Communion again.

3. So much for Fasting and Confession before Communion. **What about the prayers of preparation and thanksgiving ?**

The Bishops suggest that for ordinary Christian people it will be sufficient that for **3 days before Communion** they read one of the traditional preparation prayers each day and for three days after receiving Holy Communion they read one of the thanksgiving prayers each day.

So, **if you are going to receive Holy Communion on Sunday** you should read one Prayer of Preparation on **Thursday**, one Prayer of Preparation on **Friday**, and one Prayer of Preparation on **Saturday**.

Then **on the Monday after Holy Communion** you should read one Prayer of Thanksgiving and on **Tuesday** one Prayer of Thanksgiving and on **Wednesday** one Prayer of Thanksgiving. By this means you will enable the Grace of Holy Communion to nourish your soul **every day of the week** and not just on Sunday !

Finally, the Bishops tell us that there is one time of the year when **EVERYONE** must go to Confession.

And that is before the Holy Communion at **Pascha**.

NO ONE should dare or presume to approach the Holy Gifts and receive the Communion at the great Feast of Pascha without first going to Confession.

This is the recommendation, teaching and advice of all the Bishops in this Country... Russian, Greek, Serbian, Romanian and English. There is now one teaching for all the Orthodox in England. Let us be faithful to it.