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The Holy Eucharist – Source of Sanctifying Power and Sacrificial Love for God

Abstract

In the Eucharist, crucified and resurrected Christ makes us partake of His permanent state of sacrifice, as eternal High Priest. Out of Christ's pure state of sacrifice we receive the power to offer ourselves to the Father in the Eucharist, together with Him. Taking the Body and Blood of Christ as food and drink, we grow into Christ, that is, in His humanity full of the Holy Spirit or in His likeness.

Receiving the Eucharistic Christ, the life of the faithful ascends towards holiness, as fulfilment of humanness. Once they have taken communion, they are fully transposed in the sacrifice state of Christ and therefore they are able to suffer for the divine law and to rise up to a superior level of existence. An illustration of this is



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given by Christian martyrs, who faced hardships bravely, proving allegiance to moral order.

Keywords

Eucharist, sacrificial love, Body of Christ, communion

1 The Eucharist and the continuous sacrifice state of the divine Archetype

Since the whole life of the Church, as edifice accomplished by God the Logos in the Holy Spirit, is an extension of Christ's life, then salvation definitely means a restoration of God's image in man, through Christ. In Church, through the Holy Mysteries, we are attracted, integrated and reborn in Christ, we partake of the exemplar life of Christ, the principle and the one who actually accomplishes the Mysteries. This is forever possible, as He offers Himself even in heaven, ceaselessly, in a sacrifice state, before the Father¹. Christ, Who sacrificed Himself on Golgotha, imprints in the Holy Mysteries the urge or impulse of bringing ourselves as sacrifices to the Father together with Himself. Bringing ourselves as sacrifices to Him, through the Liturgy of our inner life, Christ receives our sacrifice, assimilating it to His, and thus He also brings us as sacrifices to the Father, together with Himself.

In heaven, Christ entrusts spiritually and completely His humanness to the Father, in order to be filled in a thorough way by divinity. This way, he remains in an endless solidarity with the creature, with its condition. He lives incessantly the destiny of the creature through His Sacrifice and Resurrection, creating the possibility of the perpetual renewal of the profound and

¹ Olimp Căciulă, *Dumnezeiasca Euharistie ca jertfă*, Athens, 1932, p. 334.

delicate dialogue between the creature and transcendence². Out of boundless love and out of His generous wish to transfer us His own existence, Christ sacrifices Himself in a mysterious way in heaven, before the Father, with each one and in each one of the ones that reveal His *image*. He lives and dies in each of us (according to Hebr. 2, 9), is active in our ontological entity, allowing us to follow, together with Him, “the way of the growth of our nature”³, that is the way of our coming out of our rottenness and out of the “valley of the shadow of death” towards the state of purity and of “sons of resurrection”.

In the Holy Liturgy, we “unite with Christ in an ontological way”⁴, through the Eucharistic communion. Christ dwells in the inner side of the human being as a bishop inside an altar, receiving there the sacrifices of the respective person and taking them with him to God the Father. Thus, He reveals our union with Him in love, as a common love towards His Father, that he made our Father, too, through grace. All the Mysteries, having the Eucharist at the centre, represent the anamnesis, re-actualise the Archetype and give us the power to sacrifice ourselves from Christ’s present sacrifice state, which is a completion of His entrusting Himself as a Man to the Father. All the Sacraments have not only a character of Mystery, but also one of sacrifice; these two aspects intermingle and cannot be

² Dumitru Stăniloae, *Transparența Bisericii în viața sacramentală*, in “Ortodoxia”, XXII (1970), nr. 4, p. 512: “The Eucharist unites us with Christ in the sense that His blood, that flows out of His Body on the Cross, in order to cause in this body the death and spiritual state of resurrection, passes into us with the tendency to cause in us the same death and resurrection. Christ, as a subject that dies and rises from death, becomes the subject who causes a mysterious death and resurrection in our subjects”.

³ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Dumnezeiasca Euharistie în cele trei confesiuni*, in “Ortodoxia”, V (1953), nr. 1, p. 100.

⁴ John of Kronstadt, *Liturghia – cerul pe pământ. Cugetări mistice despre Biserică și cultul divin ortodox*, translated by Boris Buzilă, introduction by Ioan I. Ică jr., Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, 2002, p. 169.

separated, just as they are not separated in the Lord's life, because in all, He offers Himself to the Father, but also to us. Through the Mystery, God partakes us of His work as grace and gift, and through sacrifice we offer God all we have and our own being. "The mysterious presence of grace in the sacraments involves, at the same time, the offering or the sacrificial human subject, who receives grace, while the sacrifice offered calls the grace, the spiritual values he is dedicated to and which consecrate it. Sacrifice and sanctification represent an indivisible whole, a unique divine and human act, and they illuminate, at the same time the meaning of the suffering and glorification of our being"⁵.

Keeping alive in the life of the faithful in Christ the power of sacrificing themselves, the Holy Mysteries support in them a dynamic movement of permanent progress towards the aim of "likeness"⁶, which is participation to the infinity of the trinitarian being and love. The double movement from us to God and from God to us is present in a complex and obvious way in the Holy Eucharist, whose character of sacrifice is combined with that of mystery.

Each Mystery is thus a relation with the crucified and resurrected Christ. "The Eucharist represents the culminating point of this relation. Whereas all the Mysteries give us the possibility to take part in a mysterious way in Christ's Passion and life, it presents us this relation to His Passion in the most direct and definite way, as it makes the Lord present among us

⁵ Constantin N. Galeriu, *Jertfă și Răscumpărare* – PhD thesis, in "Glasul Bisericii", XXXII (1973), nr. 1-2, p. 182.

⁶ Pannyotis Nellas, *Biserica – un loc pentru a renaște. Fundamentele teologice, sacramentale și liturgice ale spiritualității*, translated by Maria-Otilia Oprea, in "Credința ortodoxă", VI (2000), nr. 2, p. 169: Nellas affirms that "the Holy Mysteries are the concrete points of space and time in which the divine life encounters human life, unites with it and transfigures it".

in the state of His death, present in a substantial way with His Body and Blood, that is *Christus passus et mortuus*⁷.

The Eucharist is made of the multiple sensations, acts and meanings that start from us towards God and from God to us. Here, through consecration the bread changes, it becomes forever Lamb and offers us the new and pure life of the Lamb. Therefore, the sacrifice is a Mystery, for, offering ourselves to God, we partake of his consecration and blessing. The Eucharist offers the Church the possibility and the condition of experiencing Christ's Pascha in a concrete and complete way, of receiving the Spirit, of remembering and re-experiencing Christ's whole work and of going, in Him, towards the Father, offering itself together with Christ to the Father⁸. The Eucharist is the climax of all the Mysteries of the Church, as through it, we are offered not only the irradiance of Christ's state of sacrifice and resurrection, but His own Body, that is permanently in this state.

Hence, the sacrifice on the altar is a sacred bond between Christ's life of sacrifice and the believer's daily life; his life is and becomes sacramental. This state of Christ, that also becomes our own, is a mystical death (mysterious) of man with Christ, a burial together with Him. Being an immersion in the infinite source of life, the mystical death with Christ is at the same time resurrection or receiving a new, unchangeable life, in Christ or in the Spirit of Christ that pervades His Eucharistic Body and Blood. "The one who believes in Christ, dying together with Christ in the Eucharist, or dying in Christ, the One Who dies in a permanent display of His sacrifice to the Father, receives, in secret, the life of resurrection in Christ's

⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Transparența Bisericii în viața sacramentală...*, p. 512.

⁸ Philippe Ferlay, *Jesus notre Pâque. Théologie du mystère pascal*, Ed. Le Centurion, Paris, 1977, p. 107.

resurrection”⁹. Hence, out of Christ’s pure sacrifice state we receive the power to offer ourselves to the Father in the Eucharist, together with Him, Who incessantly gives Himself to the Father so as to offer us the power of giving ourselves together with Him. “Therefore, in Christ we gain the ability of appearing before God, as He makes us worthy of His regard even now, as ones who are made holy”¹⁰, or “For, always and absolutely, we will be received in a favourable way by the Father, if Christ introduces us to Him as Priest”¹¹.

2 The faithful’s offering through virtuous and sacrificial living

If sin meant a perversion of meanings and senses altogether, redemption brings back man’s spirit to his ontological centre, placing him again in that world of the spiritual reasons rooted in the eternal Logos that is permanently in a state of offering. In order for us to appropriate the sacrifice state of the Archetype, we must prepare to receive the Holy Gifts with great care, by fasting, by examining our conscience and by confession. The believer must examine himself before receiving the Mystery and not take communion unworthily, “not discerning the Lord’s Body” (acc. I Cor. 11, 28-29). But however hard man might try, it is impossible for him to make his unworthy self-worthy of Christ’s gift. Through repentance, man, indeed, does not change himself, but offers himself to God, Who turns the unworthy into worthy¹².

⁹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Euharistiei*, in *Ortodoxia*, XXI (1969), nr. 3, p. 352.

¹⁰ Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *Închinare în Duh și adevăr*, cartea XVII, P.G. 68, 1096 B.

¹¹ Idem, *op. cit.*, cartea XVI, P.G. 68, 1016 B.

¹² Saint Gregory Palamas, *Homily 5*, in “Oikonomos”, *Doužeci și două de omilii*, Athens, 1861, (in Greek), p. 205; The Orthodox Bishop Dmitri of Dallas (U.S.A.) states: “We are never worthy of receiving the Holy

In order to become worthy of God's grace, the Christian should approach the Holy Gifts with deep faith, so that he should penetrate the spiritual significance of the sacrament, as Saint Gregory Palamas says: "For the consecrated bread is like a veil concealing divinity (...). If one pays attention only to its exterior appearance, it is of no use to oneself; but if one catches its spirit and regards it spiritually, then, partaking of it, one will be given life"¹³. Dying to the world through the mortification of the body, we live for God through the evangelical life, and rising, through the Lord's sacrifice, we will diffuse a most agreeable fragrance and will be able to go to the Father through the Son. The gift descends only in a heart full of faith and in a state of sacrifice. The content of the *metavoli* in Christian life is the rebirth into a spiritual life, a becoming from sons of the body to sons of the kingdom (acc. Rom. 8, 9), guided by the presence of the Holy Spirit. From the personal *metanoia* of each believer and acquiring "the mind of Christ" (I Cor. 2, 16), we grow into everybody's *homonoia* (the same mind) and into the transfiguration of the body, of the soul, of the person and of the community¹⁴.

Bringing ourselves sacrifice to the Father through our sacrifice together with Himself, our sacrifice is part of Christ's sacrifice, and His sacrifice is part of ours, who are comprised in Him, Who brings Himself. Our going to the Father can only take place through the good fragrance of the state of sacrifice which springs from Christ and which pervades all His Body and all who believe in Him and partake of Him, so as to ascend from

Eucharist, but, as Christ accomplished salvation for us, we ought to prepare ourselves as much as possible in order to take communion with Him in the Holy Eucharist" (Bishop Dmitri, *Orthodox Christian Teaching*, Ed. Department of Religious Education – Orthodox Church in America, New York, 1983, p. 34).

¹³ Saint Gregory Palamas, *Homily 5...*, p. 205.

¹⁴ Archimandrite Vassilios, *Intrarea în Împărăție*, translated by Fr. Ioan Ică and Rev. Fr. Paisie, Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, 2007, p. 36.

them towards the Father. The good fragrance is exclusively connected to the sacrifice state, for Saint Cyril of Alexandria says: "Christ's death has all the good fragrance, because it was done for the life of the world and for the annulment of sin"¹⁵.

Nevertheless, the Lord does not cease, not only on the throne of glory, at the right side of the Father, to intercede for the Church, that is to be its High Priest before the Father, in a continuous offering to the Father, for and together with the Church (acc. Heb. 9, 14; 8, 1). Therefore, the Eucharist is not only an anamnesis of Christ, but also the sacrifice of Christ Himself for the Church and together with His Church. "After he rose from the dead, Emanuel, the new fruit of humanity in incorruptibility, He ascended into heaven, so that He should present for us before God and the Father (Heb. 9,24), not bringing Himself to His sight (for He is always with Him He never misses the Father as God), but bringing us in Himself under the Father's eyes, especially us, who were out of the sight of His face and under his wrath, because of Adam's disobedience"¹⁶.

"Sacrifice means offering, but also participation to what is offered as a sacrifice. Hence the ontological connection between the aspect of sacrifice and that of Sacrament or Mystery of the Eucharist, between which there cannot exist a strict separation. Moreover, these fulfill and express mutually. Only in the New Testament can one refer to a separation between the sacrifice and partaking of it, because the persons were distinct from the sacrifices offered. However, in the Eucharist, the persons are, in a way, united to the offerings and with Christ, in Whom they transform"¹⁷. The One Who sacrifices Himself for us is One

¹⁵ Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *op. cit.*, book XV, P.G. 68, 970 C - 972 B, 974 C.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, *cartea XVI*, P.G. 68, 1013 D.

¹⁷ Saint Symeon of Thessalonica says: " As through all He brings Himself as sacred sacrifice, being High Priest, Victim and Celebrant altogether. And He makes this through us, so that He can reach all, He Himself being present everywhere... The vivid rock sanctifies them, making them reach theosis" (see Ioan I. Ică jr., *De la Dionisie Areopagitul la*

Who, through incarnation, became our fundamental hypostasis. Only appropriating ourselves His sacrifice for us in a subjective way, does Christ appropriate our sacrifice in a current way, bringing it as His sacrifice. “For we are brought in Christ and we approach through Him, we the impure. But we amend through faith and we offer ourselves to the Father for a smell of a sweet savour, no longer having us, but Christ in us, a spiritual sweet savour”¹⁸.

The offerings of bread and wine, which enhance man’s being and life, brought by the faithful at the altar, and which are transformed through consecration, into the Body and Blood of Christ, express the inclusion of the faithful in Christ’s sacrifice. In the act of the sacrifice, the faithful feel united with Christ, not in an indistinct, but in a distinct way, but they want to achieve a greater progress in love and resemblance to Christ. This is accomplished when the faithful take communion personally, and His Body and Blood become their true food and drink, and they grow into Him, that is in His humanness full of the Holy Spirit. Offering the gifts of bread and wine, the community show their determination to place their life in the hands of God. This bread or life offered becomes the Body of Christ through the descent of the Holy Spirit, and taking communion, the life of the faithful reaches a high degree of theosis, reaches the *resemblance to God*¹⁹.

The bread offered by the community is a sacrifice of it, which Christ takes in Himself and changes it into His Body. Only offering ourselves to God does Christ actualise His sacrifice for

Simeon al Tesalonicului – integrala comentariilor liturgice bizantine, Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, 2011, p. 422).

¹⁸ Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *op. cit.*, book XV, P.G. 68, col. 973 B.

¹⁹ Bishop Dmitri, *op. cit.*, p. 33: “Offering the gifts of bread and wine “in his memory”, we become co-members of the royal priesthood with Him (I Pt. 2, 9). Christ’s absolutely sufficient sacrifice is constantly actualised on the table of the Altar, allowing us to take part in the redemption He accomplished for us”.

us or appropriates this sacrifice, the Eucharist thus being a climax of the encounter of gifts between people and God in Christ. “Every person offers his life as a gift to the all-ruling God”²⁰, actualising thus Christ’s sacrifice for us, which contains our life. The gift or sacrifice of the community, present in the Body of Christ sacrificed in the Eucharist is presented in Himself to the Father. By taking communion the community fills more and more with the sacrificed Body of Christ, rising to an absolute unification with him through the epiclesis of the Spirit over its life.

3 The power and holiness of the Eucharist offered to the ecclesial community

Christ’s presence in the Eucharist is not a presence contained by some images of objects, “but a radiant presence that binds the community with this presence in a mysterious way”²¹. There is a reciprocity between Christ and the community in putting forward the sacrifice. Christ brings Himself as sacrifice in the moment of the consecration of the Gifts, and putting forward the sacrifice also involves a moment of Mystery, as the community is sanctified through the descent of the Holy Spirit. The faithful’s offering the eucharistic elements represents bringing the substance of their life or their spiritual commitment to God²². The necessity of the eucharistic sacrifice

²⁰ Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *op. cit.*, book XVI, P.G. 68, col. 1013.

²¹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Euharistiei...*, p. 345.

²² A co-sacrifice of the faithful is one of the topics of the *Document Eucharist*, prepared in the committee “Foi et constitution” of WCC, together with the one regarding *Baptism and Ministry*: “United to our Lord and in communion with all the saints and martyrs, we are renewed in the covenant sealed by the blood of Christ.” (Conseil Oecumenique des Églises. Commission „Foi et constitution”, *Baptême, eucharistie, ministère: la reconciliation des Églises*, Ed. Presses de Taizé, Paris, 1974, p. 34).

is related to the life of the Church, that is its life, more and more complete and always rekindled in Christ. Only through it, is the Church connected to the Father, through Christ, Who sacrifices Himself in order to give us the spirit together with His Body and Blood²³. The faithful's intention of bringing themselves in the offered gifts is also shown through the prayers accompanying it, prayers through which they implicitly offer themselves to God.

Through the efforts of a life of sacrifice, received out of the power of Christ's sacrifice through the grace of the Mysteries, the faithful prepare in order to take the Lord's Body and Blood. Their complete sanctification, that is the accomplishment of the Eucharist as Mystery, is an effect of the faithful's receiving the sacrifice, for which they prepare in fervent prayers. Once they have taken communion, they are transposed more completely in Christ's sacrifice state. The moment of taking communion is only an intensification of benefitting the Eucharist as Sacrament and sacrifice. Christ, Who sacrifices Himself on the altar, involves in His sacrifice the Church, as His Body, that cannot be estranged from the actions of its Head, and in a certain way, He involves each member of this Body that is related to the Head of the Body. "Practically, only through the act of taking communion is the Eucharist finished as sacrifice and Mystery, because only now is fulfilled its purpose of sacrifice brought to the Father, but also for the sanctification of the faithful; only

²³ John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, Fordham University Press, New York, 1983, p. 207: "As divine-human communion and «synergy», the Eucharist is a prayer addressed in «Christ» to the Father and fulfilled through the descent of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the epiclesis is the fulfillment of the eucharistic action, just as the Pentecost is the fulfillment of the «economy» of salvation; salvation is always a trinitarian action".

now is the name of each faithful uttered, as it is the case in all Mysteries”²⁴.

In the Eucharist, the whole Church and each of its members is attracted in Christ’s state of kenosis. Therefore, the Eucharist attracts the whole Church in Christ’s sacrifice state, in order to thank God and glorify Him, together with Christ in His Spirit. “The community’s spirit of sacrifice, nurtured by the Spirit of Christ, expressed in its praise and represented by the gifts, is a condition for the Holy Spirit to descend over the gifts and the community, so that, turning them into Christ’s sacrificed Body and Blood, it should fill the faithful with an even greater spirit of sacrifice after they receive them. Until the community’s rising towards a state of sacrifice does not encounter Christ, in a sacrifice state, welcoming it, to form only one sacrifice of Christ and of the community, its sacrifice and that of each member, is not complete, just as until fire did not come down on the bulls cut and brought as offering for Israel by the prophet Elijah, that sacrifice did not really reach God”²⁵. In the Eucharist, the sacrifice is complete and plenary only when the Lamb – the community’s incomplete sacrifice until the consecration – became, through the consecration, the Body and Blood of Christ, full of the Holy Spirit²⁶.

Mark the Ascetic makes a remarkable observation, showing that if those who took communion are brought to Christ through

²⁴ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 3, EIBMBOR Publishing House, București, 1978, p. 114.

²⁵ Idem, *Teologia Euharistiei...*, p. 351.

²⁶ Nicholas Cabasilas asserts, in *P.G. 150, col. 440 D*, that the moment of Christ’s offering as sacrifice coincides with the consecration of the gifts, as Christ’s body, which replaces the bread in that moment, is His sacrificed body. M. Jugie calls this solution “subtle and ingenious” (see Fr. Ene Braniște, *Explicarea Sfintei Liturghii după Nicolae Cabasila*, EIBMBOR, București, 1997, p. 232). Practically, this is a traditional and constant precept of our Church regarding the permanentisation of the sacrifice state of Christ after resurrection, in order for us to constantly take from His sacrifice the power to sacrifice ourselves, in turn, and to engrave His most beautiful image in our being.

deeds as speaking sacrifices, through this they offer themselves, on the altar of the heart, to Christ as food, just as Christ offered us His Body in the eucharistic Liturgy of the community. “Just as at the beginning of faith through baptism, the Body of Christ was made food for the faithful, in the same way, now the mind, become strong in faith and pure, abandoning thoughts and full of the reasonable hope, will be made food for Jesus”²⁷. But the intimacy between us and Christ cannot be explained and neither can it last without Christ’s mysterious death and resurrection, present only in the Eucharist and in taking communion. This is the reason why Saint John Chrysostom affirms that “we cannot have our share of the redeeming blood, unless we touch with our lips the divine and blameless rib”²⁸. Nevertheless, when the moment of taking communion draws near, one is dominated by fear and shudder, experienced by the faithful before the divine fire he is receiving, as well as by the feeling of the great responsibility of a life of sacrifice and holiness that one assumes on receiving Christ. Upon receiving the Lord’s Body with devoutness and living in the light of the commandments of the eucharistic Christ, the believer grows into overcoming passions and, taking advantage of the eucharistic grace, full of Christ’s love, he makes himself a pleasant food for Him. “Out of Christ’s love for us, communicated to us with His Body in the Eucharist, there grows our love for Him, manifested in offering all our thoughts exclusively to Him. This meaning our offering to Christ, He welcomes us now with a love that receives, whereas in offering His Body He showed us a love that gives. In the Eucharist He is

²⁷ Saint Mark the Ascetic, *Răspuns aceloră care se îndoiesc despre Dumnezeiescul Botez*, in «Filocalia», vol. 1, translation and introduction by Fr. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Institutul de Arte Grafice “Dacia Traiana”, Sibiu, 1947, p. 287.

²⁸ Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilia IX De poenitentia*, P.G. 49, 345.

the One that descended to us, now He raises us to Him”²⁹. The effusion towards sacrifice is greater and more plenary with each Eucharist celebrated and received. But the progress towards sacrifice also means a plus in the communion with Christ and the others, and, through this, acquiring the image and likeness of Christ in us.

4 Martyrdom – expression of the loving loyalty for God

Indwelling in us through the Eucharist, “Christ produces in us a disposition or a sacrifice state not through imitation, but through the irradiation of His state in us. Moreover, He is in us in a sacrifice state”³⁰. The true disciple is called to follow the way of Christ the crucified One, Who said: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me”(Lk. 9, 23). The fervent love for God can lead the believer to the supreme confession of martyrdom which is nurtured from Christ’s sacrifice, reactualised in the Divine Liturgy. Throughout history, many Christians died as martyrs, confessing their faith and love for the divine Teacher and refusing to abjure Him. Thus, they followed Jesus, Who, before Caiaphas and Pilate, “witnessed a good confession” (I Tim. 6, 13), strengthening the truth of His message by giving their life. This is possible through Christ, Who at Baptism sits in the altar of our heart as High Priest³¹, waiting for us, partaken of His sacrifice, to bring Him our sacrifices in turn.

Martyrs refrained from any acts contrary to God’s love and to confessing faith. In obedience, like Christ Himself, they entrusted their life to the Father, “the One that could save them

²⁹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Liturghia comunității și jertfa interioară în viziunea filocalică*, in “Ortodoxia”, XXX (1978), nr. 1-2. p. 396.

³⁰ Idem, *Iisus Hristos, Arhiereu în veac*, in “Ortodoxia”, XXXI (1979), nr. 2, p. 222.

³¹ Saint Mark the Ascetic, *op. cit.*, p. 283.

from death” (acc. Heb 5, 7). Through the Eucharist, Christ dwells in us as sacrifice, so that, contained in His sacrifice, we can bring ourselves as sacrifices to the heavenly Father. Through martyrdom is glorified the absolute *humanness* and the true *life* of the person, as Saint Ignatius of Antioch testifies. Addressing Christians in Rome, the place of his martyrdom, he said: “Him I seek, who died for us: Him I desire, who rose again for our sake. This is the gain which is laid up for me. Pardon me, brethren: do not hinder me from living, do not wish to keep me in a state of death; and while I desire to belong to God, do not give me over to the world. Allow me to obtain pure light: when I have gone there, I shall indeed be a man of God. Permit me to be an imitator of the passion of my God”³². The Christian receives such an extraordinary power when he is united with Christ, the One that is in a permanent state of sacrifice or of completely yielding to the Father as a man.

Through martyrdom one testifies at the cost of one’s life about the loyalty towards the holy Law of God. Martyrdom means a missionary commitment, so that the brightness of the moral truth should not be darkened by lie, falsity and hypocrisy. Martyrs, through their eloquent and outstanding example of a life transfigured by the grandeur of the moral truth, illuminate all the epochs of history, awakening their moral spirit³³. Testifying the good, without hesitation, martyrs are a living rebuke to all who trespass the divine Law (acc. Wisdom of Solomon 2, 12-20). All who suffered persecutions and died in humiliation and ordeal for their right faith constitute the blooded and holy crown of the Church, the proof of its truth, justice and power. Their blood bore fruit, because they gained

³² Saint Ignatius Theophorus, *Către Romani*, chap. VI, in col. PSB, vol. 1, “Scrierile Părinților Apostolici”, EIBMBOR, București, 1979, p. 176.

³³ Indeed, the sacrifice of martyrs bore fruit in history, as it is asserted by the Church apologete Tertullian: “The seed is the very blood of Christians” (Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, chap. L, 13, in “Apologeți de limbă latină”, col. PSB, vol. 3, București, EIBMBOR, 1981, p. 109).

the respect and admiration of many and it strengthened the courage of Christians. Undoubtedly, the blessed voivode Constantin Brâncoveanu knew that a great number of Christians accepted persecution and death rather than accept idolatry and “enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (Heb. 11, 25). This is illustrated by the words of encouragement addressed to his sons: “My sons, have courage! We have lost everything in this earthly world. At least, let us save our souls and wash our sins with our blood!”³⁴.

The martyrical death makes the martyrs worthy of holiness and of being honoured by the Church, being its part of sacrifice and saving suffering. United with Christ in the Eucharist, they received power and exhortation to confess even at the cost of suffering or hard sacrifices. Receiving with love the eucharistic blood, they came to “love the hardships of this world for the eternal reward”, as Saint Gregory the Great teaches us³⁵. Christ’s suffering and death on the cross of Golgotha are the culminating manifestation of divine economy. Saint John Chrysostom shows that the expiatory sacrifice of the Son of God is “the greatest good through which the world was saved”³⁶. Following the same way that He followed, the martyrs of Christianity become His brothers, they become other Christs. This power is especially received at Baptism, where we put on Christ (acc. Gal. 3, 27), and, in the Eucharist, through which we dwell in Christ and He in us (acc. Jn. 6, 56). Through martyrdom, Christians become the copy of Christ in suffering. Therefore, their painful sacrifice represents a teaching for the world, a testimony of the divine truth.

It is hopeful for us to know that, from heaven, Christ “exerts the power of sanctifying all those who want to partake of his

³⁴ See L. S. Desartovici (ed.), *Martiriul Sfinților Brâncoveni*, Publishing House Sophia, București, 2007, p. 279.

³⁵ Saint Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, VII, 21, in P.L. 75, 778.

³⁶ Saint John Chrysostom, *Sur la Providence*, chap. 15, in “Sources chrétiennes”, vol. 79, Ed. du Cerf, Paris, 2000, p. 215.

sacrifice, of all who want to be perfected through Him” (acc. Heb. 10, 14)³⁷. The Saviour permanently holds His sacrifice before the Father, so that we, associating ourselves with it, should be able to offer ourselves as sacrifice to the heavenly Father. This is exactly what the Holy Brâncoveanu Martyrs did when they let themselves be caught by Christ in His effusion of sacrifice towards the Father³⁸. Such an experience is possible only for the one who participates in the sacramental life of the Church, for that who receives Christ, “the Lamb that was slain and Who sits upon the throne” (acc. Rev. 5, 12-13) at the Holy Liturgy. Receiving the Divine Eucharist, after previous proper preparation, which means a virtuous and sacrificial life, we grow stronger. Then, out of the Eucharistic Christ we assimilate the power of His sacrifice, in order to dedicate our life to God and to the ecclesial community. Receiving frequently the Body and Blood of the Lord, we become able to suffer for God and for our neighbours, and to rise, through this, to a superior way of existence.

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³⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Iisus Hristos, Arhiereu în veac...*, p. 226.

³⁸ Their example remains forever alive for the Romanian whose faith was many times subject to ordeals. The sacrifice of Saint Constantin Brâncoveanu revigorated the national spirit and gave power to the faith of our Church, being the example of the martyr and hero par excellence” (Ion Stoica, *Brâncovenii – eroi, martiri și sfinți ai Neamului românesc și ai Bisericii Ortodoxe*, in vol. “Iubitor de cultură, protector al Bisericii și martir al credinței ortodoxe – Sfântul Martir Constantin Brâncoveanu”, Arhiepiscopia Târgoviștei Publishing House, Târgoviște, 2013, p. 275).

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