



61st Year

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THE CHURCH AND MAN

The theology of the Church has placed man in the highest level of evaluation. Man for the Church of Christ is, according to the expression of the Apostle, "a temple of the living God".

This theological truth is based on: 1) The Biblical witness "let us make man in our image and in our likeness" (Gen. 1:26), in other words man was made with logic and free will, in the image of God and in order to resemble God by grace. 2) In man's physiology, in the natural gift of the inner and articulate word, in the quality which he has to think, to ponder, to judge, to speak and to document his thoughts. 3) In man's personal behavior who strays from the narrow boundaries of the instincts, creates his own character, becomes a unique and unrepeatable person. Mainly however, in the sacramental event that he was anointed with the seal of the Holy Spirit and he becomes a communicant of the sanctifying grace of the Creator.

The holiness of God and the holiness of man

The mysteries are performed on the one hand in churches made by hands, however man reaps their grace, both in soul, as well as in body, and becomes a living, alive temple of divine grace and sanctification. In this manner the phrase becomes understandable that God "does not dwell in temples made by hands" (Acts 17:24). He is made to pursue, with respect to the person of the true God, the sanctified way of life, as the apostle Paul writes, "performing holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1).

One of the divine qualities of God is holiness. Christ calls His Father in His High Priestly prayer "holy Father" (Jn. 17:11). And the prophets of the Old Testament saw the Angels hymning God saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord of Sabaoth..." (Is. 6:3). And it is the will of God for man to commune of His holiness as is mentioned in the Bible: "Become ye holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 19:2).

How the possibility of man's sanctification becomes action

So it is self-evident that man, because he is a creature of holy God, strives in his life to become holy. It is not, however, self-evident if he wants to become holy. Because holiness is not a natural gift

in man, as it is in God. It is a capability which he has by grace, if of course, he utilizes it. The words of the apostle Peter are characteristic: "Prepare yourselves spiritually and remain vigilant. Since you have made the decision to obey God, do not allow the desires, which you had before you met him, regulate your life now. On the contrary, let all your behavior be holy, as God also is holy who called you" (1 Peter 1:13 – 15).

Spiritual vigilance in order for us to not be swayed by sinful desires and passionate thoughts, for us to not revert back to actions of the past but for us to persist in the obedience of the commandments of Christ and of the Church is the first step of our sanctification. Let us cleanse, says the apostle Paul, our own selves "from every defilement of flesh and spirit", in other words, from everything which defiles our body and soul. Because the desire of the first created humans gave birth to disobedience and led to the fall. The first created humans lost the grace of sanctification which they had earlier on in the area of Paradise.

The second and important step is our active participation in the worship life of the Church. Because sanctification is not only theory, but mainly action, it is personal experience. It is the experience of the whole of the human being, when holy God the Father with His sanctifying grace makes the believing person a son by grace, a relative of His holiness. Because as the apostle Paul again characteristically mentions "I will be for you the Father and you will be my sons and daughters" (2 Cor. 6:17 – 18). This relationship is cultivated in the worship area of the Church, because they are the thanksgiving (eucharist) of God's love for man and of man's love for God, the bloodless sacrifice of Christ is performed. There the whole congregation calls upon the God the Father and recites the Lord's prayer: "Our Father who art in the heavens hallowed be Thy name".

The meaning of holiness for contemporary man

In our age the word "holiness" has various interpretations many of which do not agree with the interpretation which the Church gives.

Many, moved by emotionalism, give to persons kind to them, the characterization holy, because, in some moments, their behavior and actions moved them and caused an impression and admiration. And often the phrase is heard "he or her are holy people" because their courtesy or probably their forbearance and kindness impressed them.

Others consider holiness unreachable or even unnecessary for man. They do not relate, either due to lack of belief or due to ignorance, man with perfection and with the holiness of God. They are people "bearing flesh and dwelling in the world" but do not perceive the spiritual hypostasis of man. They believe in the fleshly man.

Others again, who belong to various confessions of faith or to other religions have their own measures of characterizing a person as holy. There are, finally, also those who reject the meaning of holiness because they do not believe in the existence of God.

In all these perceptions and positions the Church deposits the sanctifying experience of the sacred mysteries, where the believers receive the grace and energy of the Holy Spirit and they feel the presence of the comforter in them, as God himself explains, "that I shall dwell in them and walk among them, and shall be their God" (Lev. 26:12). In other words, that the grace of the perfect God dwells inside the believers, which makes up for their deficiencies and sanctifies them.

Archim. Ch. N.