

Partakers Of The Divine Nature

By His Eminence Metropolitan Bishoy

1. Our Lord Jesus Christ said, *“I am the resurrection and the Life”* (Jn 11:25). What do these divine words signify?

Eternal life is *in* Christ: salvation from the original sin, and the crucifixion of the old man are obtained in baptism; through which we unite together to Christ in the likeness of His death, so also shall we be in the likeness of His resurrection (Rom 6:5).

The remission of actual sins is through the blood of Christ within the sacrament of baptism, and subsequently the sacraments of repentance and the Eucharist.

During the final confession of the Divine Liturgy the priest exhorts that the body and blood of our Lord: *“Given for us for salvation, remission of sins, and eternal life to those who partakes of Him”*.

Partaking of the body and blood of our Lord is the guarantee of eternal life. We prepare for it by repentance, confession -because the holies are for the holy- and holiness without which no one will see the Lord, as mentioned in the bible,.

In the Divine Liturgy we commemorate the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, His resurrection, and His ascension. We also commemorate His second coming from heaven dreadful and full of glory.

Partaking in the eternal life with God is a precious and great offer which our Lord Jesus Christ requested for His disciples before His crucifixion. He spoke to the Father saying, *“Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.”* (Jn 17:24).

Partaking with God in immortality and eternal life is a great gift which we obtain from Christ and through Christ, by the might of the blood of the life-giving cross, which transferred us from death to life. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (Jn 3: 16).

Our teacher Saint Peter the Apostle explained that partaking in the eternal life requires our flight from corruption that is in the world through lust, estimating the value of our precious salvation, and holding fast to the divine promises. He wrote, “*Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as **His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.***” (2Pet 1: 1-4).

Our teacher Saint Peter the apostle means that the life of holiness is necessary in order to achieve the promised inheritance of the kingdom of God. This necessitates escaping from the corruption which is in the world through lust, leading a life of glory and spiritual virtues.

Saint Peter the Apostle himself emphasized this concept in his first epistle by saying, “*Rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."*” (1 Pet 13-16).

2. Saint Basil the Great wrote: “*We say that we know the greatness of God, His power, His wisdom, His goodness, His providence over us, and the justness of His judgment, but not His very essence... The energies are diversified, and the essence simple, but we say that we know our God from His energies, but do not undertake to approach near to His essence. His energies come down to us, but His essence remains beyond our reach... So knowledge of the divine essence involves perception of His incomprehensibility, and the object of our worship is not that of which we comprehend the essence, but of which we comprehend that the essence exists.*”¹

In view of this explanation of Saint Basil the Great we can understand the teaching of Saint Peter in his second epistle when he mentioned the precious and great promises of God by which the believers can become ‘partakers of the divine nature’ θειας κοινωνοι φύσεως (2 Pet 1:4). Unfortunately, some people corrupt this verse by saying, “Partakers *in* the divine nature”... This is not what Saint Peter wrote! It is not possible by any means that any creature partakes in the nature, being, or essence of God. Whoever claims this is caught in a great theological error against the faith in God, and against the superiority of His essence and nature over all creation. This claim is also the

¹ Saint Basil, *Letter to Amphilochius* 1,2 - Holy Apostles Convent, Dormition Skete. *The Orthodox New Testament: vol.2 Acts, Epistles, and Revelation*. Buena Vista, Colorado: 2nd Ed. 2000 p. 473.

type of pride that the devil previously fell into when he said, “*I will be like the Most High*” (Is 14:14). May the Lord keep us from such destructing pride.

By saying “*partakers of the divine nature*” Saint Peter simply means that we become partakers with God in His eternal life through partaking in His Holiness, paraphrasing the commandment “*Be holy, for I am holy*”. Even being partakers of the holiness of God is relative, and not absolute. Perfection of the creation is relative but perfection of God is absolute. Holiness of God is natural and not acquired but holiness of saints is acquired. Speaking of partaking in the divine life as the saint’s inheritance of eternal life Saint Peter the apostle said, “*through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*” (2 Pet 1:3-4).

We are partakers in the work with God as our teacher Saint Paul said of himself and Apollos, “*We are God’s fellow workers*” (1 Cor 3:9). We partake of the spiritual life with God as mentioned in the apostolic blessing, “*The communion, donation, and gift of the Holy Spirit be will you all.*”

We are partakers of the divine nature in immortality, holiness, kingdom, eternal joy, and love of which our Lord Jesus Christ said in His commune with the Father, “*O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, **that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.***” (Jn 17:26).

Our Lord Jesus Christ asks the Father that the love between Them can be in the disciples. He means here the type of love, not its amount. The Father is infinite and the Son is infinite, therefore the love between them is infinite. We are finite and limited: we obtain as much as we can from divine love. Thus, a communion of love is found between us and God, and we become partakers of the divine nature, but not partakers **in** the divine nature as some dare saying. May the Lord have mercy upon us, to feel our weaknesses and sins, so that we do not fall into pride.