



CATECHETICAL SUNDAY 2022
EASTERN CATHOLIC CHURCHES *of* AMERICA

THE GIFT *of* CHRIST

Poured Out for the Life of the World

God has offered Himself as a gift to us through His Son. The title of this year's theme for Catechetical Sunday is inspired by the Liturgy of St. Basil. During the Epiclesis, the priest calls down the Holy Spirit, that He may "come upon us and these gifts here offered." He prays that the bread and wine be revealed as truly the precious body and blood of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, "poured out for the life and salvation of the world" (cf. Liturgy of St. Basil). The gift of Christ's flesh and blood, poured out, is related to the call of each one of us: to be an offering poured out for the life of the world. In the Divine Liturgy, we remember, we re-present, we mystically participate in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. In the Divine Liturgy, Christ is among us to give us the gift of communion with Him and life in abundance.

CHRIST, THE GIFT FREELY GIVEN

A true gift is given freely, with love and for the good of the one who receives it. Earthly parents give their children good things (cf. Mt. 7:11). They give them things that are good for them. Loving parents give good things without expecting anything in return, only the joy and gratitude of their children. Any gift given freely communicates love. Gift giving and receiving reminds us that we are not alone. A good gift is good for the one who receives it and brings about an enrichment of life.

The Lord knows what is good for us more than we know ourselves. God gives Himself to us freely. He makes the rain fall on the just and the unjust (cf. Mt. 5:45). He provides for us; He is Our Father and we are His sons and daughters. God the Father gives us the gift of His Only Begotten Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit who proceeds from Him. In Christ, born of a woman by the power of the Holy Spirit, God is among us. In the gift of Himself, God communicates love to us. Christ is the true gift of the Father, given freely, with love and for our good.

THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST Poured OUT FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD

The world receives the gift of Christ first in the Incarnation, and then in the Cross and the Resurrection. In Christ, God has become one of us. He has united Himself to us. He has entered into our suffering. Christ is pure, innocent, loving, just and meek. The poor love Him. His friends love Him. He speaks with authority. He is courageous when He teaches openly against the sins of corrupt religious and political leaders. He serves and teaches freely and willingly, without compulsion. In His ministry, He gives Himself as a gift in love. He gives Himself as a gift to all, but He is not received by all with joy. Whether out of envy or malice or greed, the Lord God made flesh, the gift of Christ, is betrayed, slandered, mocked, spit upon, beaten, scourged, abandoned, falsely accused, and cruelly put to death. The gift given freely is received without gratitude. On the night before the horror of the Crucifixion took place, He revealed to His disciples the purpose of His sacrificial offering.

On the Cross, Jesus gives His life for our life. God, in His flesh, willingly suffers on the Cross. He pours out His body and blood for the life and salvation of the world. Before the Divine Liturgy begins, the priest prepares

bread and wine for the Eucharistic offering with prayers and a ritual. The service is called the Proskomide. The seal on the bread is in the form of a square with the letters inscribed, "ICXC NIKA," or "Jesus Christ Conquers." The seal is called the Lamb. Taking the lance, the priest traces the sign of the cross over the lamb and says, "In remembrance of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ." Then, symbolically, mystically rather, the priest cuts the lamb out of the bread according to the ritual with particular prayers such as, "Like a sheep, He was led to the slaughter," "Like a spotless lamb, silent before its shearer, He opens not His mouth," etc. Christ is not re-sacrificed, but rather His sacrifice is re-presented. In the Eucharist, the gift of Christ, the one who offers and is offered, is made present at the hands of the priest.

THE EUCHARIST GIVES LIFE IN ABUNDANCE, BOTH NOW AND FOREVER

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life...He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him...he who feeds on Me will live because of Me" (John 6:54-57). Christ gives Himself



as a gift. He is a sacrifice, an offering, for the life of the world. His life is poured out that we may have life in Him. Jesus calls Himself, "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6). We have life in Christ when we receive the gift of Christ, His flesh and blood, the Eucharist, with joy and gratitude, "Holy gifts for the holy" (Divine Liturgy of St. Basil). Christ is the true vine (cf. John 15:1). We are the branches of the vine (cf. John 15:5). To eat the flesh and blood of Christ in a worthy manner is to abide in Christ as the branch abides in the vine. Our life is life in Christ.

Life in abundance is eternal life. We will abide with Christ in the resurrection and into the ages of ages in heaven. But, the life that Christ gives is also the fullness of life, here and now. The gift of Christ is a life of love, beauty, holiness, peace, and joy. Christ calls us to be free of worldly fear and anxiety. Life in Christ gives peace through the grace of the Holy Spirit; if we abide in Christ, we will neither be afraid nor anxious (cf. John 14:27; 20:19). Life in Christ means forgiving and being forgiven (cf. Mark 11:25). Life in Christ means communion in love with one another. Life in Christ is full, free and abundant. God has given His life for our life as a gift freely given, to be freely received.

GIFTS FREELY RECEIVED ARE TO BE FREELY GIVEN

Christ has given Himself as a gift and poured out His flesh and blood for the life of the world. We, who are His disciples, partake of communion with Him by eating His flesh and blood. We have received the gift of Christ: life in abundance. So then, what can we give in return that would be fitting and right? We too may give ourselves as a gift. We too may give our lives in love for the good of those for whom we are responsible. We too may promote life in abundance for those around us. We too may pour out our life for the life of our neighbor. In this way, we will be mystically united to Christ and His Eucharistic sacrifice poured out for the life of the world.