

## THE BLESSING IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH – FEW CONSIDERATIONS

Ioan Valentin Istrati

Lecturer, PhD, „Ovidius” University of Constanța

*Abstract:*In the Orthodox Church, the blessing or the benediction is a permanent gesture. It is present in all the moments of life, in all Mysteries, services and worships of the Church, in all the times of human life, in all seasons of time, in all the moments of the day, in every aspect of life. In addition, the benediction occurs in the Orthodox Church upon all the senses of the body: visual, auditiv, olfactory, tactile and gustatory. The benediction occurs usually in the sign of the Cross made upon the person, being or thing that is to be blessed. That is why the Orthodox Church can be called the church of benedictions.

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The Orthodox Church is not, as commonly believed, a Greek old confession of faith or a Russian one. A lot of westerners believe that the ethnicity of the Orthodox Church is Greek or Russian. The reality is that the Orthodox Church is the undivided Church of Christ that emerged in history at the Pentecost. All the Christian confessions except orthodoxy are a particular, different view that moves away from the original reality of the Church. In the old way of saying there are heresies, meaning confessions that departed from the ecclesial three, changing the dogmatic theology or the dogmas of the belief.

The reality of the Orthodox Church can be seen in all the aspects of life. The belief in one true God as manifested in the Church is not only a personal choice or a weekly duty during Sunday, but a liturgical rhythm of humanity, a permanent prayer, a distinct way of life, a sense of the eternity in every moment. The orthodox man is the one that gives every day a unique character through the calendar where he celebrates other saints every day, worships God from the first moments of the day, sees God in everything, blesses the nature in a unique way, manifests a doxological love for the human beings, for the animals and for the entire creation. All the moments of the day and of the night are sanctified through prayer – that is why Saint Paul the Apostle calls us to pray incessantly – all the works of a human being are performed with the conscience of the presence of God.

The orthodox Christian, unlike every other human, makes the sign of the Cross on everything, on himself very often, when he sleeps, when he awakes, when he eats, drinks, goes to work, when he enters the house, passes by a church, in the front of the graveyard of his/her forefathers, when he remembers the great moments of his life or the sorrows.

The orthodox put the Cross and icons on houses, in cars, inside the wallet, on the grave of his loved ones, on public buildings, in every room of the house, at the beginning of the construction of a house, on a fountain, on a ship. He blesses the car, the house, the crops, the water, the animals, the rooms, himself.

He manifests the presence of the Lord in the Church in all days praying in all the moments of his/her life. He is blessed at the beginning of life, through prayers and most important through Baptism, every childhood years. He blesses his marriage, his children, his death, everything.

The orthodox is conscious of the presence of God and blesses his senses. The eyes are blessed through a permanent marvel for the miracles God creates for us, through icon that is a

painting of the kingdom of God, through Cross that is the centre of his life through the Sacrifice of our Saviour Jesus Christ on her, and the altar of salvation for all and for everyone. The ears are blessed through chants, prayers, liturgical music, psalms, invocation that every child learns from his/her mother. The olfactory sense is blessed in the house, in the church, everywhere through incense, myrrh, that every people receive in the Church. The tactile sense is blessed through benediction, blessing, the sign of the cross, the kissing of the icons, the metanoia (the bows and the prostrations to the earth as spiritual ascetic experience). The gustatory sense is blessed through the most important Mystery of the Church, the Eucharist, where the Christians are feed with the Body and the Blood of Christ.

There is a gesture that is defining for a real Christian: the blessing, the benediction. The term itself means speaking good (*benedictio*-lat., *eulogia*-gr.). The blessing means the invocation of the ubiquitous presence of God to protect and to give life and light to the people blessed. There can be a benediction of the people (fathers bless their children, the priest can bless all peoples *et caetera*), the benediction of the times, of the field, of earth, of the means of existence, the benediction of the house (new or old), of the car, of a certain event. This gesture is performed in the sign of the Cross, over the blessed one. The priest has a greater power to bless the believers, as he is the carrier of the Mysteries of the Church, his hands carrying the blessed Gifts of heaven: the Body and the Blood of our Lord. It can be seen the gesture of kissing the hand of the priest, and the priest gives the blessing on the head of the believer. As in the New Testament, the priest blesses the audience of the Church saying also the words: Peace upon all.

The sign of the Cross is also a benediction of the own body and soul. The orthodox Christian makes the sign of the Cross very often, as a token of his faith in the Cross of the Saviour, but also in the Most Holy Trinity. Making the sign of the Cross on the forehead, on the chest, on the both shoulders, the orthodox would say: In the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. It is a seal of the being with the power of grace of Jesus Christ. This is also a defence against evil spirits, a promise of faith and trust, a witness of the truth, a prove of love and a word of peace.

Usually, but not compulsory, the orthodox Christian will turn to East when he/she worships God. If Jews were turning to Jerusalem as the place of the Temple and the apex of their salvation, if Muslims turn to Mecca as the centre of their religion, the Christians don't have a geographical place for the centre of their belief. They turn east because from the East it will come again Christ with glory, because He is the East from above and the Eden at the beginning of creation was placed toward East. This doesn't mean that the orthodox cannot pray in every position, toward every geographical point, everywhere and always.

The benediction in the Church of Jesus Christ has also a moral and ascetic understanding. It is the theological dimension of love, in which the human being realises that he is standing in the face of God in every moment of his/her life. The blessing is therefore a natural way of expressing love and of entrusting into the hands of God. It must be said that priests bless with their right hand all the other believers, and the bishop, as the full high priest and icon of the priesthood of the Lord can bless with his both hands.

All the Mysteries of the Church contain the blessing of the person that receives them. During the Baptism, the child or grown man/woman is blessed many times, from the exorcisms, to the union with Christ, in the form of a Cross with blessed oil ("the anointment of joy"), with the Saint and Holy Myrrh, during the ritual tonsure, with the Cross, with the Gospel, with the hand of the priest *et caetera*. During the Holy Mystery of Confession, the believer is blessed by the priest when he/she receives the pardon for the sins. The Divine Liturgy, the Eucharist celebrated daily contains many blessings from God through the hand of the priest. The Mystery of Ordination contains many blessing of the bishop for the candidate

for diaconate, priesthood of for bishop. The Mystery of Matrimony or Marriage has unique blessings for love, for understanding, for children, for well being, for prosperity etc.

Therefore we can say that the Orthodox Church is a church of blessing, because she blessed innumerable times and all the time the faithful believers of the Most Holy Trinity. And this is a reality because the Church uses not only the soul and the mind of the people, but sees the human being in his integrity, as body and soul, and sanctifies all the parts of the being, all the moments of life, all the aspects of human work, think and sense.

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