



THE HOLY TRADITION (2)

THE IMPORTANCE OF HOLY TRADITION

The Church cannot at all do without its holy tradition which it received from the Lord and preserved it in its generations. It is the source of our living faith and the secret of its power and unity over the extent of the ages.

The apostolic Church tradition is the keeper of the Church's living legacy because: first, it is that which witnesses to the Holy Bible and secondly, explains the Holy Bible to us. In the lesson about the Holy Bible, there will be more details about this. But in addition to this, the holy tradition preserved for us the Orthodox faith.

By way of tradition, we received the faith living and pure, and the fathers of the Church, by way of their knowledge of the sound Apostolic faith, were able to isolate every strange teaching and invalidate it in the councils, whether local or ecumenical, preserving for us the Apostolic faith pure as they received it, recording it in the Creed, the declarations of faith, and the decisions of those canonical councils. So how were they able to differentiate those strange teachings and refute them unless the true faith had truly been present, clear, and known through holy tradition thus establishing it in those councils?

Actually, it is as St. Irenaeus, one of the fathers of the 2nd century A.D. and disciple of St. Polycarpus, said: "The apostles made the Church a plentiful treasure house of the truth, and they delivered wholly to it all that pertains to it" (his commentary on 2Tim. 1:14). Also as St. Basil said in the 4th century: "The beliefs and preaching preserved in the Church, some of them taken by the written teaching and some of them which we have received in detail from the tradition of the apostles, both matters have potency in worship" (his commentary on 2Thess. 3:6).

Likewise, tradition: explained to us the rites of the Church and all the details of the order of Christian worship. The Apostolic tradition explains to us the:

1 – Glory of the day of Sunday and how it became our principal weekly feast because its glory exceeded the glory of Saturday. Truly there are numerous indications in the Holy Bible that demonstrate the appearance of the glory of Sunday, however there is not found one clear Biblical passage that demonstrates that Sunday in Christianity is the new Sabbath and that it is the day consecrated for Christian worship... However we knew that by way of the apostolic tradition and the unanimity of the Church from the beginning in sanctifying the day of Sunday and freeing it from all the worldly labor and its consecration for general worship in the Church.

2 – Details of practicing the rites of the sacraments in the Church – the measures that should be taken for catechumens, steps of practicing the sacrament of baptism, necessity of baptizing infants, preparation and anointing with the Holy Myron, repentance and confession, the Eucharist, unction of the sick, holy matrimony and monogamy, and the priesthood.

3 – Like it are the rites specific to the Church and its structures, divisions, content, vessels of service in it, various orders ... and the rites of the prayers, fasts, prostrations, and feasts, and likewise the Church readings in the various divisions of the year...etc.; facing the east in all of our prayers; the rite (way) of making the sign of the cross and the power that we draw from constantly practicing it; placing the icon of the cross in the place of honor and pride and the preeminent position whether in our churches, our homes, or our bodies, the rite of the ceremony of praying over the departed before their burial and holding remembrances for them, etc...

Surely, all the rites of the Church have their roots in the apostolic tradition and in the orders of the early fathers of the Church inspired by the Holy Spirit who laid down these orders and documented them according to what they received from the teachings of the apostles. If the Lord wills, we will go into more detail about these rites when their respective lessons are given.

THE MEANS THAT PRESERVED FOR US THE HOLY TRADITION

After it is shown to us how the Holy Tradition is the living faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and that it encompasses all the Church's relationship with His blessed Person and all the divine rites related to worship will we be able to comprehend the level of pride of the Church fathers in its holy traditions and their strong avidity for delivering it without distortion or change from generation to generation, because it is the living faith in Himself. Furthermore we will be able to know how the holy tradition came to us clear of every fault.

First: Because the Church in itself is represented by its teachers, it preserved the divine teachings and what the apostles handed down. It was able to do this by way of the lineage of apostolic succession and succession of bishops in it. Since the order of Christian priesthood has the utmost link to this Holy Tradition, it is steadfast and founded by God for practicing, preserving, and spreading it because the traditions as we said encompass all the faith of the Church and all its rites.

One famous quote about this is that of St. Irenaeus from the fathers of the 2nd century A.D. who gives an account of St. Polycarpus the Apostolic saying: "I am able to describe the very place in which the blessed Polycarp sat as he discoursed, and his goings out and his comings in, and the manner of his life, and his physical appearance, and his discourses to the people, and the accounts which he gave of his intercourse with John and with the others who had seen the Lord. And as he remembered their words (the words of the apostles), and what he heard from them concerning the Lord, and concerning his miracles and his teaching, having received them from eyewitnesses of the 'Word of life,' Polycarp related all things in harmony with the Scriptures. These things being told me by the mercy of God, I listened to them attentively, noting them down, not on paper, but in my heart. And continually, through God's grace, I recall them faithfully" (History of the Church, Eusebius, book 5, chapter 20:6-7).

St. Irenaeus also explains how the Church preserves its traditions unadulterated and pure saying: "True knowledge is [that which consists in] the doctrine of the apostles, and the ancient constitution of the Church throughout all the world, and the distinctive manifestation of the body of Christ according to the successions of the bishops, by which they have handed down that Church which exists in every place, and has come even unto us, being guarded and preserved without any forging of Scriptures, by a very complete system of doctrine, and neither receiving addition nor [suffering] curtailment [in the truths which she believes]; and [it consists in] reading [the word of God] without falsification, and a lawful and diligent exposition in harmony with the Scriptures, both without danger and without blasphemy; and [above all, it consists in] the pre-eminent gift of love, which is more precious than knowledge, more glorious than prophecy, and which excels all the other gifts" (Adver. Haer. IV, 33-8, II, 11).

Second: The Sayings and Writings of the Early Fathers of the Church— in particular, the Apostolic Fathers in the 1st and 2nd centuries A.D. and likewise the fathers of the 3rd, 4th, and 5th centuries A.D. due to their proximity to the apostolic age and their including in their writings the sayings and teachings of the apostles that circulated in the Church by the oral tradition.

In order to be certain of the extent of the zeal of these fathers in making sure their writings whether doctrine, commentary, admonition, contemplative, etc... contain the sayings of the apostles, we mention here what St. Clement, the dean of the Theological School in Alexandria in the 2nd century A.D., says in the introduction of his book (Stromata) saying: "This work is not a writing artfully constructed for display; but my notes are stored up for old age, as a remedy against forgetfulness; an image without art, and a rough sketch of those powerful and animated words which it was my privilege to hear, as well as of blessed and truly remarkable men (speaking of the successors of the apostles who he met)... " then says, "These men, preserving the true tradition of the blessed doctrine, directly from the holy apostles, Peter and James and John and Paul, the son receiving it from the father, have come by God's will even to us to deposit those ancestral and apostolic seeds" (History of the Church, Eusebius, book 5, chapter 11:3, 5).

For this reason we take pleasure in the sayings of the saintly fathers of the Church and their writings because they are actually documentation of the teachings of the Lord Himself as He

delivered them to His saintly apostles.

Third: The Writings of the Early Church Historians such as Eusebius, Socrates, and Sozomen who were ardent in recording the details of the history of the early Church. Their historical writings included many of the sayings and writings of the Church fathers who preceded them. From this is shown the importance of this history in that it delivered to us many of the writings of the saints of the Church that had been lost in the ages of severe persecution. Through this, history preserved for us a living, ecclesiastical, apostolic legacy.

Fourth: The Definitions and Canons of the Holy Councils: Whether the local councils held in the first four centuries or the three ecumenical councils which were held to investigate problems or to refute innovations and heresies, it was able to give solutions to the problems in accordance with the apostolic teachings steadfast in the Church. The canons of the holy councils are added to the living legacy of the Church and considered as keepers of the apostolic tradition sound from every attempt of the heretics and is rightly the apostolic legacy from the angle that it is a written definition of the oral apostolic faith.

Fifth: The Prayers of the Church and its Rites:

It is rightly numbered as one of the important means which preserved for us the ecclesiastical tradition. For example, all of the ancient liturgies in addition to what the apostles themselves laid down (if not in detail as in the Liturgy of Saint Mark... then altogether in all of the liturgies which the early fathers of the Church laid down) are in accordance with the apostolic tradition. In addition to this, the ancient liturgies, whether specific to the sacraments of the Eucharist or baptism, or the liturgy of the Laqqan and the prayers specific to consecration of the orders of the priesthood, are all considered a rich ecclesiastical legacy documenting these rites and preserving the apostolic tradition recorded in them.

Reference:

The Holy Tradition by Fr. Shenouda Maher Ishak

QUESTIONS:

- 1) Please give examples of how our Lord Jesus Christ's way of preaching was by tradition.
- 2) As was mentioned, Christianity is a religion of tradition and discipleship. Please give at least one verse from St. Paul's epistles that teach this principle.
- 3) What are the means by which the Holy Tradition has been delivered to us?
- 4) Explain at least one teaching/practice in the Old Testament that was passed by tradition before it was written in the Mosaic Law.