

ON THE DIVINITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST
St. Thomas Sunday, 2020
by Archpriest Peter Olsen

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the central object of our faith. The early Christians centered all their faith and worship on their belief in the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God. In the Book of Acts, when the Sanhedrin forbids the Apostles from preaching in the name of Jesus, St. Peter replies that there is no saving name other than the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12). All of the Mysteries (Sacraments) of the Church are centered on Christ. Baptism, as explained by St. Paul, is the burial and resurrection with Christ (Romans 6:3-5). Marriage is a union representing that of Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:25-32). The Eucharist above all is the center of all worship and life. Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeev) of Volokolamsk said this year during his sermon on Holy Thursday that “After our Lord Jesus Christ was betrayed and condemned to death, after He died on the Cross and rose from the dead, the disciples would gather together in order to remember Him according to His commandment, ‘Do this in remembrance of Me [Luke 22:19].’” “This is not only about remembering something that took place in the past. It is not some kind of a lesson in history. It is not merely a remembrance of a historical event. It is a sacred remembrance that continues from that time up until the present time in our own days and continues into the future as well. In this remembrance we become real participants in this historical event every time the Divine Liturgy is served and every time we receive Holy Communion. Every prayer in the liturgy tells us that the liturgy of the past is united with the present and the future.” Participation in the Holy Eucharist, after the proper preparation of repentance in Holy Confession, together with fasting and prayer, is our Lord’s generous gift to us for the forgiveness of sins and health of soul and body— in a word, salvation.

All moral exhortations as well are centered on Christ. We must flee fornication because our bodies are the members of Christ (I Corinthians 6:15) and our bodies are living temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). We must be generous after the example of Christ (II Corinthians 8:9). We must be humble like Christ, who in the form of God humbled Himself and took the form of a slave (Philemon 2:6-7). Husbands must love their wives as Christ loved the Church (Ephesians 5:25). Subordinates must obey those in authority as to Christ (Ephesians 6:5). We are called to suffer as Christ suffered: “Christ suffered for us, leaving you an example that you should follow his steps” (Philippians 2:21, 3:18, 4:1,13,14).

The Gospel of St. John is unique. In the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) the Divinity of Jesus is more of an underlying theme on which these Gospels are based, whereas St. John’s Gospel makes it a point of proving that Jesus Christ is the Divine Son of God. This great mystery is set forth in the very prologue itself of John’s Gospel, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” The end of John’s Gospel, like a bookend, echos the prologue with the cry of the Apostle Thomas, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). Sandwiched between these bookends is John’s attempt to prove to us that Jesus Christ is the Divine Son of God who died for us on the Cross and rose from the dead, granting everyone who believes in Him forgiveness of sins and eternal life. In His discourse on the Bread of Life (John 6:22-71), Jesus tells the Jews that He is the bread of life who has come down from heaven and that we must *eat* his flesh and *drink* his blood. There is no room for misunderstanding or misinterpretation. The original Greek used in the New Testament is very clear that when Jesus said this, He was not speaking figuratively or symbolically. It is very clear that he was speaking literally, to actually **eat** His flesh and **drink** His blood [τὴν σάρκα φαγεῖν, τὸ αἷμα πίνειν]. During the discourses pronounced by Jesus at Jerusalem on the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:11-36) and at the Feast of the Dedication of the Temple (John 10:22-39), He again makes clear His Divinity as the Son of God. It was also very important that Jesus made sure that He was condemned not for sedition but because of His

claim to be the Divine Son of God. Even to the very end the Jews tried to have Jesus condemned for sedition. Jesus makes it clear that He is not guilty of sedition when He tells Pilate, "My Kingdom is not of this world." Pilate reacts by telling the Jews that he finds no fault in Jesus and no reason to condemn him. Every time the Jews tried to lead Jesus to speak of sedition in their capricious questioning, Jesus wisely and calmly leads the discussion back to His great affirmation that He is the Divine Son of God. Jesus draws all to himself as He hangs on the Cross. Those who were won by him contemplate not only His passion, but His whole life, in the splendor of His glory: "we saw his glory, the glory as it were of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth " (John 1:14). They remember the words of Jesus about His Divinity: "Before Abraham was made, I am *" (John 8:58), "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30), "He that seeth me seeth the Father also" (John 19:9), "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world, again I leave the world and I go to the Father" (John 16:28).

In our participation in the Eucharist we, *par excellence*, "partake of the Divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4) of our Lord. Our current grievous situation temporarily excludes the laity from receiving Holy Communion. Currently only the clergy continue to serve in the Church and receive Holy Communion. The rest of the faithful are excluded because of social distancing as a means to control the spread of the corona virus. Metropolitan Hilarion concludes his Holy Thursday homily with these words: "Today many of us feel like the Mother of God felt when she stood apart and watched her Son, our Lord Jesus Christ betrayed to death, and like the women disciples must have felt when they stood apart when the Mystical Supper was celebrated, like many felt who were not permitted to participate in it. ** Let us ask the Lord to bestow on us His mercy, to our city, to our country and to our people. Let us ask the Lord that this trial which He has sent to us would end as soon as possible so that we can all again be united in our churches and in the Chalice of our Lord Jesus Christ.....Take care of yourselves and may God protect all of us! " Amen!

* "I Am" is the sacred named of God revealed to Moses, Yaweh [יהוה] in Hebrew. When Jesus calls Himself "I Am," the name of God which is so sacred that it was forbidden for anyone to even utter except the High Priest once a year in the Holy of Holies, Jesus is declaring that He is God.

** Metropolitan Hilarion is alluding to the Mystical Supper (Last Supper) at which the Eucharist was instituted by our Lord and at which only the Twelve Apostles participated. No one else was present, not the Mother of God, not the women disciples who so faithfully followed our Lord, none of the other disciples of the Lord, only the Twelve. It was only after the Crucifixion and the Resurrection that everyone else participated in the Eucharist.