

Letter to a person who was chrismated and is being told by some to be baptized.

2018-05-04

Dear in Christ N! Christ is risen!

I've written extensively on the subject and I will try to collate all the things that I've written but I think two things are important right now.

The first is that I pray for you and N. Every day because you pray for my son +Daniel!. I am very grateful for this, and because of this, I will pray for you my poor prayers until the end of my days, and also commemorate you in all of the Divine liturgies that I serve. This is a bond between us and is very important to me.

The second is that you should put your reservations to rest. This is the short answer, but we always need a little bit of a longer answer. Therefore, I will attempt to give it.

It is always best to receive someone by baptism, but there is no partial grace in the church. It is allowed in our books to receive someone by chrismation, but unfortunately in our very lax and theologically ignorant and even indifferent age, people do not understand why they were chrismated and even priests and bishops do not understand, and they say incorrect things such as "you could *not* be baptized because you are ****already**** baptized, so we will only chrismate you". This was the major issue at the Council of Crete, or I should say, the *attempted* counsel of Crete. This will go down in our history as an attempted "robber counsel". It was an attempt to force Latin theology of baptism upon the Orthodox Church, and God did not allow it.

I must take a little bit of a side road here, because it is important to resist heretical thinking, and at the same time it is important to resist calling people heretics until the church judges them. The idea that there is some sort of baptism outside of the church is a heretical idea. It has been fostered by actual heretics, that is Roman Catholics, for almost a century now. For some reason, among some Orthodox, such as the Ecumenical Patriarchate, this idea is an intriguing one and they want to force the Orthodox Church to accept it. May God never allow false ideas about baptism to enter into our dogmatic life. They have already entered into our practical life, that is, there are those who have false ideas about baptism and they teach them. Until they are declared as heretics by a council of the church, we cannot say that they are heretics. We must be patient and understand that history teaches us that there were many times when there were those who taught heretical things and upset order in the church, but eventually God, as is always the case, prevailed.

Unfortunately, the Ecumenical Patriarch is very aggressive in pushing this false theology, and he will most likely continue to be very aggressive. Whenever there is an error in thinking, there are those that oppose this error correctly and there are those that oppose this error too vehemently. I believe this is the case regarding those who insist on baptizing those who been received by chrismation. Sometimes it is also the case that there are those that withdraw from their Bishop and have no bishop whatsoever that they serve under because they say that their Bishop is in heresy. This is a difficult situation, and I am not sure exactly how God judges it. I can only tell you that I hope to never be in a situation in which I feel I with must withdraw from my bishop and find myself

trying to celebrate the liturgy without commemorating any Bishop. That, in my opinion is, is not a heretical situation, but certainly is a situation that is out of order. I am out of order enough in my personal life because of my sins, and I don't ever want to be out of order regarding my service at the altar.

There is no baptism outside of the Orthodox Church. There is the form of baptism, and sometimes the church chooses to accept this form of baptism and chrismate the person and therefore fill the empty form with grace.

Nowadays, there are many questions about the form of baptism outside of the church. There are those who only pour water or even sprinkle, and especially important, there are those who do not baptize in the name of the Holy Trinity, that is, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit". For instance, we have people who because of their political inclinations and their identity politics and their heresies will say such things as: "in the name of the Redeemer and sanctifier and whatever" (I do not remember the exact phrase). I've even heard of those who insist on baptizing using the feminine pronoun for God. Of course, that is because of their personal opinions. We don't baptize people according to our personal opinions. We baptize them according to the teaching of the church.

We have centuries of tradition that have accepted the form of baptism of such as Roman Catholics, and Lutherans, and others. I hope that there will come a time very soon when the church comes to the conclusion that the form of baptism outside of the church is suspect in all cases, but at this point in time, there are many who believe that the form of baptism in such groups as Roman Catholics and Lutherans etc. is acceptable, and according to our canons and received practice, such people can be chrismated. Again, I must emphasize that we always chrismate with the DOGMATIC understanding that the form of baptism outside of the church is filled with grace, and not that it stands in and of itself is a valid baptism. I have found that an enormous amount of people who defend chrismating a person to receive them into the church are very weak in their understanding that this chrismation is possible only because the church may fill an empty form with grace and it is not *****required***** because the previous "baptism" a person received outside the church must be honored as grace filled in some way.

Sometimes a priest understands this theology and communicates to the one that he is chrismating. Unfortunately, many times a priest does not understand this or does not express himself properly and the person is led to believe that they were not baptized because they had "already been baptized". This is never the case. A person would not be baptized if they are already baptized.

Where does that leave you and N.? **You have been received into the church, and you have *****all***** of the **grace of baptism. That is for certain.**** It would've been better for N. to have been received by baptism, because then he would not have any doubts and Satan would not tempt him in any way regarding his reception. This is one of my major reasons for receiving a person by baptism. I don't want a person to be tempted, or to have people tell him that he is not an actual Orthodox Christian or perhaps even say silly things such as he has only "partial" grace. It is not possible to have partial grace in reception into the church. That's like saying that a person who is born is partially alive. A person is either alive or they are not. A person is either reborn or they are not reborn.

The church can receive a person by baptism and chrismation, or by chrismation only. Whatever the matter of reception, the person has received the full grace of baptism.

I'm very sorry that N. has this temptation. He should treat it as a temptation of the Evil One and something that is meant to disquiet his soul and possibly make him doubt. The devil thrives on doubt. If a person believes fully and is struggling to follow the ways of the church, even if he sins, the devil has very little power. When there is doubt, the devil can introduce more doubt. Please tell N. to disregard his doubt as best he can. I know this is very difficult. I remember a little saying that I heard a long time ago: "go sit in the corner and don't think of the big white bear". It is very hard to not think about something. By attempting to not think about it we are actually thinking about it! If a person has doubts it's very difficult to say "I'm going to stop doubting". Somehow by the grace of God, the Holy Spirit will enlighten the person who is struggling against doubts if he is struggling in other ways also.

For instance, N. and you have been very kind and performed a labor of love by praying for my +Daniel. God notices these things. God notices all kindness. God notices all struggle. God notices all fasting and all humbling of ourselves. Even though we sinned immeasurably, if we are struggling, God will fill us with His grace. His grace will dissipate all doubt, and all sadness and all sorrow.

To be from completely honest with you, with absolutely full disclosure, I will tell you that I am struggling with sadness every day because of the death of my son. I cannot say that I feel fully happy, or that I do not have times of grief and regret. I can say emphatically that I believe that there will be a time when I have no regrets – as long as I struggle according to my purpose and struggle to love God and love my neighbor, and humble myself, and I pray. I do all these things, although I do them poorly. God knows how poorly I do them, but whether or not we are saved is not dependent on how well we do things. It is only dependent on whether or not we try to do them.

I'm very sorry that N. has had these temptations. I pray my poor prayers for you and him every day, and although they are not the prayers of a saint, they are the prayers of a grateful man, and God hears them. This must be enough for me. I cannot do more until I am capable of doing more. May it be that you and I and N. are capable of doing much more as we grow over the years, if God allows us them, and are filled with the Holy Spirit.

I will end this small letter with an answer to your very important question: "What shall we do?". I hope you've seen the answer already. You and N. are to be Christians, and humble yourselves, and pray and fast and love your neighbor, and love your enemy, and pray for everyone. You and N. Should attend the church services with as much attention as you are able, and to strive to meet God in the liturgy, and to confess frequently and to commune frequently. In short, you are to do what you should have already been doing.

May God grant you enlightenment, so as to see and feel and live in all of the joy of the resurrection.

http://www.orthodox.net/full-voice/fv_2018+to-a-person-who-was-chrismated-and-is-being-told-to-be-baptized.pdf

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ⁱ <http://www.orthodox.net/daniel>