

THE HOLY MYSTERY OF REPENTANCE

I. DEFINITION, IMPORTANCE AND NAMES

Repentance is the God-instituted Mystery, in which the officiator (Bishop or Priest), in the Name of the Lord, forgives the sins of the faithful that were committed after Holy Baptism and who, with sincere intention, decide to change their sinful ways and follow a virtuous life.¹ The importance and necessity of this Holy Mystery are obvious when one recalls the weakness of human nature and that man easily tends towards evil from his youth. After his Regeneration, man is not immediately raised to the Perfection of Christ but gradually and through constant struggle, abolishes the remaining sinful tendencies and desires. Repentance cleanses the faithful from all stain of sin committed after Baptism. It is the Holy Mystery that was instituted by God's Kindness and *Philanthropia* as He does not want the death of a sinner but rather that he repents and lives.

1. Repentance as a Virtue in the Old Testament and as a Holy Mystery of the New Testament

Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, instituted the Holy Mystery of Repentance and Confession, making it a living Virtue that brings forth fruits. Repentance was always considered a necessary obligation by all men before Christ, who realised their need, not only those who worshipped the One and True God but many pagans as well. St. Paul proclaimed “... *as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them).*”²

Not only did the Jews recognise the necessity for Reconciliation with the Divine but so did the Gentiles. All nations worshipping their gods, offered sacrifices to calm their anger and to secure their favour. The Gentiles too, acknowledged their guilt, which was a form of confession of sins, seeking reconciliation with the Divine. Besides these common practises amongst the pagans, the True Teaching of Repentance by those who were sent by the One and only True God, especially by the Prophets, was heard by them such as: “*I will judge you, O house of Israel, says the Lord, each one according to his way: be converted, and turn from all your ungodliness and it shall not become to you the punishment of iniquity. Cast away from yourselves all your ungodliness wherein you*

¹ Cf. Plato of Moscow, *Orthodox Teaching*, pp. 155-157. Evdokimov, *Orthodoxia*, pp. 388-394. Kefalas, *Catechesis*, pp. 186-187. Frangopoulos, *Christian Faith*, pp. 208-210. Mitsopoulos, *Themata*, p. 320. Labadarios, *Sermons*, v. 1, pp. 115-123. Sophrony, *His Life*, pp. 71-76. Meyendorff, *Theology*, pp. 195-196. Georgopoulos, *Anthology*, pp. 69-76. For more detail on this Holy Mystery see: Galanopoulos, *System*, Athens, 1960.

² Rom. 2:12-15.

*have sinned against Me; and make to yourselves a new heart and a new spirit: for why should you die, O house of Israel? For I desire not the death of him that dies, says the Lord...*³ and *“...Thus said the Lord; as I live, I desire not the death of the ungodly, as that the ungodly should turn from his way and live: turn you heartily from your way; for why will you die O house of Israel.”*⁴ In the Book of Job we read: *“And when they saw him from a distance they did not know him; and they cried with a loud voice, and wept, and rent every one his garment, and sprinkled dust upon their heads, and they sat down beside him seven days and seven nights, and no one of them spoke; for they saw that his affliction was dreadful and very great.”*⁵ King David cried out: *“Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin...”*⁶ *...Do not cast me away from Thy Presence, and do not take Thy Holy Spirit from me.”*⁷

Although in the Old Testament repentance was preached by God’s delegates and included all the elements of true Repentance acceptable to God, it did not give the fruits nor did it have the Power and Strength that was received as a Mystery instituted by Christ and granted to the Church for the use of the faithful after the Sacrifice of the Lord. In the Old Testament the repentant did not become the Regenerated sons of God nor Co-heirs with Christ. They were not freed from the tyranny of death but were released only from the punishments of Divine Wrath, receiving the favour and Protection of God. Repentance as the Mystery that forgives sin and restores the repentant completely in the Rites of Baptism, which ensured Divine Grace upon the newly chosen people of God, did not exist before the Coming of the Messiah, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

2. The Establishment of the Holy Mystery of Repentance by the Lord

When certain Scribes heard our Lord Jesus Christ forgiving the sins of the paralytic, they were scandalised and speculated: *“Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?”*⁸ They were grossly mistaken because they did not recognise the Divine Authority of the Divine Power of Jesus Christ due to their Spiritual blindness and envy. Although their opinion that only God can forgive sins was correct, they did not recognise the Truth despite personally witnessing so much Supernatural evidence proving that our Lord was not merely Man, but God. As Incarnated God, our Saviour proclaimed the Gospel to the world, preaching the forgiveness of sins, clearly explaining that the Son of Man came to *“...seek and save that which was lost...”*⁹ and rightly claiming the Power *“...on earth to forgive sins.”*¹⁰ Upon this Authority, He granted forgiveness to the paralytic¹¹ and to the sinful woman.¹² According to His

³ Ez. 18:30-32.

⁴ Ez. 33:11.

⁵ Job 2:12-13.

⁶ Psalm 50(51):2.

⁷ Psalm 50(51): 11.

⁸ Mark 2:7.

⁹ Luke 19:10.

¹⁰ Mark 2:10.

¹¹ Mark 2:5.

¹² Luke 7:48.

Mission, the Messiah proclaimed “...liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind.”¹³ He constantly seeks that which was lost among “...tax-collectors and sinners...”¹⁴ and therefore, He was accused of being “friend” to these social outcasts by “...eating and drinking...”¹⁵ with them. To the Pharisees and Scribes who criticised Him and His Disciples for associating “...with tax collectors and sinners...”¹⁶ He responded: “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”¹⁷ Quite the opposite are those who approach Christ with faith for they enjoy His Divine Gifts. He grants them the peace of their consciences by telling them with Divine Authority: “Go in peace.”¹⁸ Christ, wanting to pass down this Authority to His Church, instructed us to ask the Heavenly Father, in prayer, to forgive our daily sins.

Our Lord responded to the needs of the faithful by instituting Repentance as a Mystery within the Church¹⁹ because He knew that for us “...it is impossible to cut off the love toward sinful passions.”²⁰ As a result, every Christian continuously experiences Spiritual falls throughout his life even after his Regeneration that occurred at Holy Baptism. Therefore, without Repentance, which is the “...Medicine of offences, Consumer of unlawfulness, Weapon against the devil, Knife that cuts his head, Saving Hope, Refutation of despair...”²¹ all Christians face the direct danger of being completely alienated from the Divine Gifts received at Holy Baptism and Chrismation. Without Repentance we become unworthy of participating in the Divine Eucharist and finally, most tragically, we will be excluded from the Salvation that is offered through Christ. However, even from the beginning, Christ as most Merciful God and foreknowing the hearts of men and their flexibility as well as knowing the wickedness of the devil who ceaselessly attempts to accuse God’s servants of sins so that they may fall with him, granted a second Repentance, after Holy Baptism, to sinners. This is for the forgiveness of all who are tempted into sin and who have repented. Thus, “...all those who want to repent ... can receive the Mercy of God...” because “...God’s Mercy, Philanthropia and countless richness have the repentant as just and sinless.”²²

The ease with which mankind so easily falls into sin and the Power of the Divine Mercy within the Holy Mystery of Repentance provoked St John Chrysostom to remark: “If you have sins, do not despair. If you sin daily, then daily repent...” for we must do as “...we do to the old houses, when they are crumbling... We remove the rotten parts from them and repair them. You have become old today because of sin. Renew yourself through Repentance.” Repentance has so much Power from the *Philanthropia* of the Master that “...you would achieve the forgiveness of your sins.” However, already “...with repentance are mixed God’s *Philanthropia*, for God’s Love for mankind has no limit, neither can His Kindness be interpreted.” Furthermore, although man’s

¹³ Luke 4:18.

¹⁴ Matth. 11:19.

¹⁵ Luke 7:34.

¹⁶ Luke 5:30.

¹⁷ Luke 5:32.

¹⁸ Luke 7:50.

¹⁹ Frangopoulos, *Christian Faith*, pp. 210-212. Mitsopoulos, *Themata*, pp. 320-321.

²⁰ Clement the Alexandrian, *Who is the saved rich man*, § 40, in **B**, v. 8, p. 371.

²¹ St John Chrysostom, *About repentance*, Homily 8, § 1, in Migne, *P.G.*, 49, 337.

²² Clement the Alexandrian, *Stromata*, II, § 13, in **B**, v. 7, p. 328.

wickedness “...is limited... the medicine has no limits...” because “...God’s Philanthropia is indescribable and infinite.” To make this more understandable, St. John Chrysostom used the example of a spark: “Think of a spark falling into the ocean. Can it exist or be seen? As a spark is compared to the ocean, thus is evil compared to God’s Philanthropia. Not as such, but even greater. For the ocean, although large, has its limits but God’s Philanthropia is infinite.”²³

3. The Names of the Holy Mystery

The names ascribed to the Holy Mystery of Repentance reveal either the essential part of the Mystery or the results that it brings. Thus the Holy Mystery was called: “*Repentance*” because of the change in the way of feeling, thinking and will of the repentant, “*Confession*” because the repentant confesses his sins before the officiator, “*Second Baptism*,” “*washing of tears*,” “*washing*,” “*absolution*,” “*purification of sins*,” “*reconciliation*,” “(life-saving) *board of Salvation after the wreck*.”

II. THE DIVINE INSTITUTION OF THE HOLY MYSTERY AND ITS POWER

Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, received the Authority to forgive sins as God and as the Son of Man²⁴ because of the hypostasis of His two Natures. He initially promised this Authority to St. Peter²⁵ and later to all His Holy Apostles.²⁶ On the day of His glorious Resurrection, He breathed upon the faces of the Holy Apostles, giving them the Holy Spirit and the Authority to forgive or not to forgive the sins of the people.²⁷ Thus the Orthodox Church, through the Holy Apostles, received the Divine Authority to forgive not only those sins committed before Baptism but even those committed afterwards and this Authority is practised through her Bishops and Presbyters. This was the practice of the One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and undivided Eastern Orthodox Church as witnessed not only in the New Testament, but in the writings of all ecclesiastic writers and Holy Fathers who proclaimed the Saving Act of the God-instituted Mystery by means of which all sins of those who truly repent are forgiven. Those who do not repent, prevent the Grace of the Holy Spirit from descending and forgiving their sins, thereby simultaneously committing the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ warned us shall not be forgiven in this world or in the world to come!²⁸

1. The Institution of the Holy Mystery By Our Lord

²³ St John Chrysostom, *About repentance*, Homily 8, § 1, in Migne, *P.G.*, 49, 337.

²⁴ Matth. 9:6. Mark 2:10. Luke 5:24; 7:47-48.

²⁵ Matth. 16:19.

²⁶ Matth. 18:18.

²⁷ John 20:22-23.

²⁸ Matth. 12:31-32. Mark 3:28-29.

After the confession of St Peter that our Lord Jesus is “...*the Christ, the Son of the living God...*”²⁹ which was revealed according to Divine Revelation, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, promised to give him “... *the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in Heaven.*”³⁰ With these words, the Lord granted St Peter the Authority to permit entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven to the worthy, while preventing the unworthy from entering. “*To bring in or to prevent the entrance is the work of the key-holder.*” Being entrusted with the keeping of the keys confirms St Peter as having the undoubted right and authority according to the promise of the Lord that he is not simply a door-keeper of the Kingdom of Heaven but a steward, vested with Despotic Authority of Him Who entrusted and gave him the keys of Heaven. It is a full authority and in a measure infinite, which allows St Peter to bring in or to exclude. This Authority was mainly so that “...*whatever sin which will not be forgiven on earth ...shall not be forgiven in Heaven by God; and whatever will be forgiven here, will be forgiven there.*”³¹ This Authority is infinite in that it refers to forgiving whatever sin, either big or small, according to the just judgement of the officiator. He who unjustly judges and binds on earth and not according to the Word of God or forgives not according to the Will of God, the gates of Hades prevail. The Gates of Hades are not obliged to prevail over him who wants to bind or loose because he who, with pride, misuses this Authority “...*not knowing the Will of the Scriptures, has fallen in the sin of the devil...*” unjustly and not according to the Will of God and judging “...*in vain, he binds and looses.*”³²

Whatever the Lord promised in Caesarea to St Peter who was first to confess that our Lord Jesus is “...*the Christ, the Son of the living God...*”³³ He also later promised to the other Holy Apostles as representatives at that time of the entire Church. Furthermore, Christ warned that he who refuses to obey the Church “...*let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.*”³⁴ Furthermore, “...*what we decide on earth, ... God seals in Heaven. For those who are not healed (through Repentance) you cut off from the Church and those who repent, you receive later.*”³⁵

This Sacred Promise was fulfilled on the first day of Christ’s glorious Resurrection when His Disciples were gathered together and He appeared in the midst of them, greeting them with the words: “*Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.*”³⁶ With words the Lord gave the same Mission to the Apostles and made them His successors, reassuring them that He would send them “...*as the Father has sent Me...*” simultaneously revealing the rank of authority given to them.³⁷ In other words, as our Lord was sent by the Father to “...*seek and save the lost...*”³⁸ likewise were they sent by

²⁹ Matth. 16:16.

³⁰ Matth. 16:19.

³¹ Zigabinos, *To Matthew 16:19*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 129, 468.

³² Origen, *To Matthew*, XII, 14, In Migne, *P.G.*, 13, 1013.

³³ Matth. 16:16.

³⁴ Matth. 18:17.

³⁵ Zigabinos, *To Matthew 16:19*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 129, 468.

³⁶ John 20:21.

³⁷ St Cyril of Alexandria, *To Matthew 16:19*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 72, 424 and 709. Zigabinos, *To Matthew 16:19*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 129, 1485.

³⁸ Luke 19:10.

the Risen Lord to continue His Work, seeking as had Christ for the lost sheep and co-operating with God for their Salvation. In order for them to achieve this, they had to be vested with the Authority to forgive and bind sins, similar to the Authority which our Lord had. Therefore, immediately as the Lord pronounced these words, "...*He breathed on them and said to them: 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'*"³⁹

To forgive the sins or iniquities means that the sins are "*abolished*" and they are "*erased*." It also means that the sins are "*covered*" completely in such a way that they no longer appear and they are "*washed*" away so that no trace or spot can be found.

This Authority was given to the Holy Apostles and Disciples, not as a personal *Charisma* but as a permanent institution that was passed down through them to the Church and remains effective until the end of the ages.

2. The Transmitting of the Authority to Forgive

The transmission of the Authority to forgive the sins to the Church, presupposes and suggests *The Didache*, which addresses the commandment to each faithful: "*In church you shall confess your transgressions, and you shall not approach your prayer with an evil conscience. This is the way of life...*"⁴⁰ and urging everyone "...*on the Lord's own day (to) gather together and break bread and give thanks, having first confessed your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure.*"⁴¹

Taking into consideration that the life of the Christians at that time was very strict, their confession was done in public and before the officiators of the Church with all the other faithful present.

Similar advice is found in the epistle of St Ignatius the Theophorus of Antioch to the Philadelphians: "...*the Lord, however, forgives all who repent, if in repenting they return to the unity of God and the council of the Bishop...*"⁴² and "...*for all those who belong to God and Jesus Christ are with the Bishop, and all those who repent and enter into the unity of the Church will belong to God, that they may be living in accordance with Jesus Christ.*"⁴³

St Clement of Rome recommended that those "...*who laid the foundation of the revolt...*" submit themselves "...*to the Presbyters and accept discipline leading to repentance, bending the knees of their hearts.*"⁴⁴

³⁹ John 20:22-23.

⁴⁰ *Didache*, IV, 14, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 152.

⁴¹ *Didache*, XIV, 1, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 157.

⁴² St Ignatius, *To Philadelphians*, VIII, 1, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 108.

⁴³ *Ibid*, *To Philadelphians*, III, 2, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 107.

⁴⁴ St Clement of Rome, *1st Corinthians*, 57, 1, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 60.

St Polycarp of Smyrna advised the “...*Presbyters...* (to) ...*be compassionate, merciful to all, turning back those who have gone astray, visiting all the sick, not neglecting a widow, orphan or poor person, but ‘always aiming at what is honourable in the sight of God and of men,*”⁴⁵ *avoiding all anger, partiality, unjust judgement, staying far away from all love of money, not quick to believe things spoken against anyone, nor harsh in judgement, knowing that we are all in debt with respect to sin. Therefore if we ask the Lord to forgive us, then we ourselves ought to forgive, for we are in full view of the eyes of the Lord and God, and we must ‘all stand before the Judgement Seat of Christ’ and ‘each one must give an account of himself.*”^{46,47}

The Authority to forgive or to bind the sins by the Bishops or Presbyters was evident during the period of persecutions. Thus St Cyprian addressed those who during persecution had renounced their faith and, without repentance and confession, approached Holy Communion. He pointed out to them that others of the faithful were under repentance for minor sins but came to Confession with the laying on of the hands of the Bishop and the clergy, thereby receiving the right to Communion.⁴⁸ He also praised those who had neither sacrificed to any idol nor were bound by any unHoly “*libelli*” but because they had thought about it and even consented within their hearts, they approached the Priests of God with deep contrition, confessing by revealing the depths of their souls. St Cyprian exhorted all to confess their misdoings until they received the forgiveness of the Lord through His Priests.⁴⁹ In another letter the Hieromartyr Bishop, having received letters of recommendation by Confessors of the Faith regarding the fallen, permitted those who were in danger of death, not to wait for his arrival to forgive them as the Authorised Bishop but to request any Presbyter to do so. In their absence a Deacon could receive death-bed confessions and grant them the forgiveness through the laying on of hands so that they may depart in peace to the Lord.⁵⁰

Origen, interpreting the belief of the Alexandrian Church, assured that the officiators and Priests of the Church take up the sins of the people and imitating the Teacher, grant forgiveness of sins.⁵¹ Elsewhere he numbered the ways of forgiveness of sins according to the Gospel.⁵² Interpreting the promise given by the Lord to St Peter, he believed that “...*those who desire the position of the Bishop need to receive the words of the Lord and the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven as Peter, and they teach that whatever they bind are bound in Heaven and those which are loosened, in other words have received forgiveness, are loosened in Heaven.*”⁵³

⁴⁵ Prov. 3:4. 2 Corinth. 8:21.

⁴⁶ Rom. 14:10, 12. 2 Corinth. 5:10.

⁴⁷ St Polycarp, *To the Philippians*, VI, 1-2, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 126.

⁴⁸ St Cyprian, *Epistola* 9, § 2, in Migne, *P.L.*, 4, 257.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, *De lapsis*, 28, 29, in Migne, *P.L.*, 4, 503.

⁵⁰ St Cyprian, *Epistola* 12, 1, in Migne, *P.L.*, 4, 265.

⁵¹ Origen, *In Leviticus*, homily V, 3, in Migne, *P.G.*, 12, 451.

⁵² *Ibid*, *In Leviticus*, homily II, 4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 12, 418.

⁵³ *Ibid*, *To Matthew*, XII, 14, in Migne, *P.G.*, 13, 1012-1013.

St Athanasius the Great of Alexandria commented that “...as a man is Baptised by a Priest and is Enlightened by the Grace of the Holy Spirit, likewise he who confesses with repentance through the Priest receives the forgiveness through the Grace of Christ.”⁵⁴

St Basil the Great warned us that it is “...necessary to confess the sins to those who were entrusted with the *Economia of the Mysteries of God...*” in other words to the Presbyters and Bishops. Justifying this instruction, the Holy Father reminded us that “...in such a manner those who repented practised. For it is written in the Gospel that they confessed their sins to John the Baptist; and in Acts (19:18) to the Apostles, by whom all were Baptised.” For the Confession of virgins who have been dedicated into Sisterhoods (Nuns), it is not permissible for them to confess to the Abbess but instead they may confess in the presence of an older sister to the Presbyter who is able to give the proper medicine.⁵⁵

St John Chrysostom observed that the Priest as “...Judge is sitting on earth and the Despot follows the servant and whatever he considers, that He confirms from Above.”⁵⁶

St Leo, the Great Pope of Rome, in one of his letters, proclaimed that the Mediator of God and men, the Man Jesus Christ, gave the Authority to the Elders of the Church to impose Repentance on those who confess and cleanse themselves through the Saving punishments. Afterwards they were to receive them in the Communion of the Mysteries through the door of Reconciliation.⁵⁷

3. The Relatively Infinity of the Authority

That our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, entrusted the authority to His Church to forgive sins without any restriction is evident from His words: “...whatever you bind...” and “...whatever you loose...”⁵⁸ as well as “...if you forgive the sins of any...” and “...if you retain the sins of any.”⁵⁹ No matter how many sins are forgiven or bound, those who received the Authority from the Lord, the Apostles and through them the Church, have the right to grant the forgiveness of sins. Besides that, the Lord gave this Mission to the Church: “As the Father has sent Me, even so I send you.”⁶⁰ This Mission includes the absolute and infinite Authority to forgive sins. St John Chrysostom believed that “...all the Judgement which the Father has committed to the Son⁶¹... is committed to all ...” the Apostles and Priests.⁶² The Lord using this Authority which He committed to His Church, forgave serious sins, as that of the adulteress,⁶³ that of the sinful woman,⁶⁴

⁵⁴ St Athanasius the Great, in Migne, *P.G.*, 26, 1315.

⁵⁵ St Basil the Great, in Migne, *P.G.*, 31, 1284-1285, 1157.

⁵⁶ St John Chrysostom, *About priesthood*, III, § 5, in Migne, *P.G.*, 56, 130.

⁵⁷ St Leo of Rome, the Great, *Epistola 108 ad Theodorum*, § 2, in Migne, *P.L.*, 54, 1011.

⁵⁸ Matth. 18:18.

⁵⁹ John 20:23.

⁶⁰ John 20:21.

⁶¹ John 5:22.

⁶² St John Chrysostom, *About priesthood*, III, § 5, in Migne, *P.G.*, 48, 643.

⁶³ John 8:3-11.

⁶⁴ Luke 7:36-50.

that of the thief on the Cross⁶⁵ and that of St Peter.⁶⁶ On the other hand St Paul accepted to forgive the one who had fallen and whom the Church of Corinth would forgive. “*Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.*”⁶⁷ Also in his 1st Letter to the Corinthians, he wrote: “*It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles – that a man has his father’s wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. In the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the Power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be Saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*”⁶⁸

Concerning the teachings of the Apostolic Fathers, the *Shepherd of Hermas* noted, that “*...when I recovered myself and remembered the Glory of God and took heart, I knelt down and once more confessed my sins to the Lord, as I had done before. And she came with six young men, whom I had seen before, and she stood by me and listened attentively as I prayed and confessed my sins to the Lord.*”⁶⁹

In Africa some Bishops wanted to exclude those who committed adultery and fornication from Repentance but because their fellow Bishops in the Synod prevailed, they also followed their opinion and did not disrupt the unity of the Church.⁷⁰

Clement the Alexandrian spoke of the one Repentance after Baptism, which he characterised as “*second Baptism*” and demanded that repentance should be sincere and without returning to the old sinful way of life. He quoted the Epistle to the Hebrews: “*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the Heavenly Gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.*”⁷¹ The hardening of the heart into which one can fall makes him unreceptive to sincere repentance. However, for those who with all their heart turn back to God with sincere repentance, the doors are open.⁷²

Origen mentioned Christians who had fallen and who the other faithful mourned “*...as though they were lost and dead for God...*” but who were “*... raised from the dead, if they accepted change.*” Origen believed that for serious sins there can be only one true

⁶⁵ Luke 23:43.

⁶⁶ John 21:15-19.

⁶⁷ 2 Corinth. 2:10-11.

⁶⁸ 1 Corinth. 5:1-5.

⁶⁹ *Shepherd of Hermas*, Vision 3, 5-6, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 200.

⁷⁰ St Cyprian, *Epistola* 52, 21, in *migne, P.L.*, 3, 811.

⁷¹ Heb. 6:4-6.

⁷² Clement the Alexandrian, *Stromata*, II, 13, in *B*, v. 7, p. 329. *Ibid*, *Who is the saved rich man*, 42, 40, 39, in *B*, v. 8, pp. 373, 371, 370.

repentance, whereas daily sins can be forgiven without the intervention of others.⁷³ When he spoke of one repentance for serious sins, he meant that if anyone falls more than once, he may be forgiven but under the condition that he will not fall in the same sins again.⁷⁴

The *Apostolic Orders* repeatedly address the admonition that the Bishop should act with compassion to those who have sinned and not to consider them detestable. “*The one who has fallen once and twice in the same mistake... the Lord did not give up, but ate with the publicans and sinners.*” If one of the sinners “*...returns and shows fruits of repentance...*” then the Bishop is obliged to receive him “*...as the lost son, the prodigal, who consumed the fatherly fortune with sinful women, who became shepherd of swine and ate with them.*”⁷⁵

Parallel to the 52nd Canon of the Apostles that demands that if any Bishop or Presbyter refuses to receive anyone who has repented, he shall be deposed from his position because “*...he has saddened Christ Who said that there is joy in Heaven when a sinner turns with repentance.*”⁷⁶

St John Chrysostom believed that Repentance “*...has much power on him who is Baptised to make (himself) greater, if he wishes. She (Repentance) is able to take away the heaviness of sins and to secure the one who is in danger, even if he has come down to the bottom of sin.*” Elsewhere, encouraging the repentant, he advised that “*...whenever you fall in the market, so many times you must stand. Thus as many times as you sin, repent for your sin; do not despair; even if you sin twice, twice repent... Even if you are in old age and you have sinned, enter; repent, for here is a hospital, which offers forgiveness of sins.*”⁷⁷

St Cyril of Alexandria believed that “*...there is no sin which God cannot forgive for those who sincerely repent.*”⁷⁸

St Athanasius of Alexandria proclaimed that “*...the remarkable repentance looses all sins.*”⁷⁹

Jeremias observed that when the Lord promised St Peter “*...the keys of Heaven ... Peter asked how many times he should forgive the sinners. Seven times? (By this Peter believed that he was achieving a great thing) (until) the Lord responded, not seven, but seventy times seven.*”⁸⁰

⁷³ Origen, *Against Celsus*, III, 51, in *B*, v. 9, p. 213. Ibid, *In Leviticus XV*, 2, in Migne, *P.G.*, 12, 561.

⁷⁴ Ibid, *In Leviticus XI*, 2, in Migne, *P.G.*, 12, 533.

⁷⁵ *Apostolic Orders*, II, 40, 1, and 41, 1, in *B*, v. 2, p. 42.

⁷⁶ 52nd Canon of the Apostles.

⁷⁷ St John Chrysostom, *To Hebrews*, Homily 9, § 4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 63, 80. Ibid, *About repentance*, III, § 4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 49, 297.

⁷⁸ St Cyril of Alexandria, *To Matthew*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 72, 409.

⁷⁹ St Athanasius the Great, *Fragment to Matthew*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 27, 1388.

⁸⁰ Jeremias, A', in Karmeris, *The dogmatics*, v. I, pp. 391 and 396.

If some of the ecclesiastic writers and Holy Fathers of the early Orthodox Church hesitated to forgive mortal sins, this was because they were very concerned that if one repeatedly returned to these sins, he would become used to them and would face the danger of becoming insensitive and developing a condition that could not receive Repentance. This condition is that which our Lord referred to as the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which forever remains inexcusable and unforgiveable. It is called the callousness and hardening of the heart because he who reaches this stage reveals a stubborn resistance to the influence of the Holy Spirit Who urges him towards repentance and the change of the way of life. This resistance is due to the free will of the sinner.⁸¹ “*He who willingly falls into sin and knowingly blasphemes God will not be forgiven.*”⁸² These sins, which were characterised as blasphemies against the Holy Spirit, are inexcusable not because of God or the Church but because of the sinner’s unrepentance and stubbornness.⁸³ The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is inexcusable, unforgiveable and eternal because it falsifies the nature of man and creates a permanent and unchangeable condition. The Eternal Punishment is the result of sin, which hardens the heart of the unrepentant sinner due to his own free will and which has become irreparable and incurable.⁸⁴

III. COMPONENTS OF REPENTANCE

The power and effectiveness of repentance is manifested when it is true and sincere. It is absolutely necessary that sincere Godly sorrow and repentance are expressed before the absolution of sins is granted by the Bishop or Priest. The repentant must be steadfast in his decision not to return to his sinful way of life and to bear fruits worthy of his repentance. The seal of this internal change of thoughts and decisions must follow the recognition and confession of the committed sins, not only in the repentant prayers but with humility revealing before the confessor Bishop or Priest his sins as one who reveals his illness to a doctor in order to receive the medicine for the healing of his Spiritual wounds. After Confession the absolution follows which consists of the remission of sins and the re-establishment in the condition of Grace.

1. Self-condemnation and Contrition as Pre-requirement Terms

Since repentance requires the renouncement and the turning away from sin beforehand as well as the change of the way of thinking and making decisions, it is obvious that the first step of repentance is to “...*know the sins and to acknowledge the iniquities and to condemn oneself.*”⁸⁵ Without this acknowledgement and self-condemnation, repentance is completely inconceivable. Justification of any sin or the passing of the responsibility to others dulls the centre of repentance and prevents the development of the humble and broken heart.

⁸¹ Clement the Alexandrian, *Stromata* II, 13, in *B*, v. 7, p. 329.

⁸² Zigabinos, *To Matthew 12:32*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 129, 381.

⁸³ Androustos, *Dogmatique*, p. 379.

⁸⁴ Trempelas, *Dogmatique*, v. III, p. 258.

⁸⁵ St John Chrysostom, *To I Corinthians*, Homily 28, § 2, in Migne, *P.G.*, 61, 234.

St. Basil the Great observed that: “*Repentance calls someone to live with the recognition of his guilt, followed by a contrite heart.*”⁸⁶ It is not enough that he simply admits “*I have sinned*” but that he acknowledges his own sins through his sincere self-examination. “*The medicine of repentance is prepared at first from the knowing of our own sins.*”⁸⁷

Without the knowing and complete acknowledgement of one’s guilt for committed sins, it is impossible to create a sincere contrite heart and the “*Godly sorrow,*” which comprise the first necessary and essential elements of true repentance. St Paul taught that “*...Godly sorrow produces repentance leading to Salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.*”⁸⁸

St Justin the Philosopher and Martyr, using King David as an example of repentance, observed that “*...he was forgiven ... when he cried and mourned.*” Consequently, “*...if this great King, anointed one and Prophet, received the forgiveness, how can it be possible for ‘the unclean’ to be forgiven ‘unless they cry and mourn.*”⁸⁹

St John Chrysostom accentuated the example of the Ninevites who “*...put on their wounds...*” and “*...vested themselves with sackcloths and ashes and cried.*”⁹⁰ In another example King David “*...cried about his sin with a broken heart, devoutness of soul, and remembered it continuously.*” St Peter repented and his “*...tears cleansed his sin.*”⁹¹

Hence right from the beginning the great importance of the contrite heart was proclaimed by Holy Tradition. This contrite heart makes the repentance sincere and effective. *The Shepherd of Hermas* proclaimed: “*Listen, he said. Your sins are numerous, but not so numerous that you should be handed over to this Angel. But your family has committed great sins and iniquities, and the glorious Angel was incensed by their deeds, and for this reason he ordered that you should be afflicted for a while, in order that they too might repent and cleanse themselves from every desire of this world. So when they repent and are cleansed, then the Angel of punishment will leave.*”⁹² “*So, do you think that the sins of those who repent are forgiven immediately? Certainly not! But the one who repents must torment his own soul and be extremely humble in everything he does and be afflicted with a variety of afflictions; and if he endures the afflictions that come upon him, then assuredly the One Who created all things and endowed them with power will be moved with compassion and will give some healing.*”⁹³

Tertullian considered the humble heart as the primary element of repentance.⁹⁴

⁸⁶ St Basil the Great, *To Isaiah*, ch. 15, § 297; and ch. 1, § 34, in Migne, *P.G.*, 30, 640 and 185.

⁸⁷ St John Chrysostom, *To Hebrews*, Homily 9, § 4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 63, 80.

⁸⁸ 2 Corinth. 7:10.

⁸⁹ St Justin the Philosopher and Martyr, *Dialogue*, 141, in *B*, v. 3, p. 338.

⁹⁰ Jonas 3:5-9.

⁹¹ St John Chrysostom, *To 1 Corinthians*, Homily 4, §§ 5-6, in Migne, *P.G.*, 61, 425-426. *Ibid*, *To 1 Corinthians*, Homily 4, §§ 5-6, in Migne, *P.G.*, 49, 298.

⁹² *Shepherd of Hermas*, Parable 7, § 2, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 251.

⁹³ *Ibid*, Parable 7, § 4, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 252.

⁹⁴ Tertullian, *De poenitentia*, IX, in Migne, *P.L.*, 1, 1354.

Origen presented the one who committed a mortal sin as “...not being able to inhabit with the corps, but being tortured within his heart, not being able to drink or eat because of the pain of repentance, all day scowling and wearing out, yelling with groans from his heart, seeing his sin before him always accusing him, not for one day nor for one night, but for a long time being punished.”⁹⁵

St John Chrysostom presented the tears of contrition as “...uniting the repentant with God...” and as making the sinful woman “...more modest than the virgins.” He used the example of the rain, when after the storm peaceful weather follows. Likewise the tears bring inner peace and abolishes the darkness caused by sins. He also emphasised that these tears should not be shed because of vainglory but for devoutness, without being watched by anyone and in our secret places, shed only for God. “You must groan, when your have sinned...” not because “...you will be punished, for this is nothing, but because you have clashed with your Master Who loved you and gave His Son for you.”⁹⁶

According to the above, the primary and main element of true and sincere repentance is the awareness of one’s mistakes, recognising without justifying his sins before God with absolute humility, contrite heart and Godly sorrow. The reason and cause of this humility and Godly sorrow must be due to not only having disobeyed the Law of God and having fallen into the various offences but due to the fact that we have proved to be unworthy and ungrateful of God’s Love and numerous benefits.

2. The Double Confession as Term of Repentance

Confession follows the contrite heart. When we speak of confession we must remember that it has a double meaning:

1. Confession with a contrite heart, tears with prayers and petitions to God, and
2. Confession before the Spiritual father (Bishop or Priest).

Simultaneously, it is important to emphasise that confession before God expressed in our personal and private prayers does not replace or make the Confession before the Spiritual father (Bishop or Priest) unnecessary. The Holy Mystery of Confession seals and perfects our confessions particularly those concerning mortal sins. Only through the Holy Mystery of Confession can these sins be forgiven and through the pedagogic measures one achieves his healing and restoration.

It is natural that he who recognises his sins with a humble heart turns to God confessing his iniquities, asking for God’s Mercy and Forgiveness. Confession without humility before God becomes completely typical and useless.

⁹⁵ Origen, *To Jeremiah*, homily XIX, 9, in Migne, *P.G.*, 13, 521.

⁹⁶ St John Chrysostom, *To Matthew*, Homily 6, § 5, in Migne, *P.G.*, 57, 68-69. *Ibid*, *To 2 Corinthians*, Homily 4, § 6, in Migne, *P.G.*, 61, 426.

St John Chrysostom, numbering the components of the Medicine of Repentance, initially placed awareness and confession of one's own sins before the Lord. Elsewhere, he stressed that Confession of sins wipes out iniquities. Accentuating the necessity of Confession, he observed that God seeks sinners' confessions so that we, learning the magnitude of His forgiveness of our debts, will offer constant thanksgiving and, by our striving to resist temptation, will become virtuous.⁹⁷

This confession continues:

1. As a natural reaction against the attacks of sinful thoughts, imagination and deeds;
2. the renouncement and forgiveness of sin;
3. the remaining of one's memories concerning his falls and
4. a recognition and admission of our own weakness and the necessity of calling upon the Divine Mercy and Healing Grace of God.

St Basil the Great reassured us that God "...wants to show mercy..." to the repentant sinner whose heart has become humbled and contrite through the sincere Confession of his secret sins, which were made unashamedly known in public. As the result of this God grants His abundant Mercy. After the public Confession it is characteristic for the Bishop or Priests to call upon the faithful to assist the repentant sinner with their prayers for the complete healing of his wounds.⁹⁸

As the crowning necessity for receiving the forgiveness of sins by means of the Holy Mystery of Confession to God, the recognition and admission of sins must be combined with Confession to the Spiritual Father (Bishop or Priest) who uses the Authority of binding or loosing of sins. He then administers the necessary Medicine for the healing of the repentant sinner.⁹⁹ It must be noted that during the early years of the Church, when sins of the faithful did not cause scandals, they were confessed in public and in the presence of the officiators.

Origen advised that one should find an experienced doctor who, amongst other things, will guide and heal the sinner.¹⁰⁰

3. Absolution by the Bishop or Priest

⁹⁷ St John Chrysostom, *To Hebrews*, Homily 9, § 4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 63, 80. *Ibid*, *To Genesis*, Homily 20, § 3, in Migne, *P.G.*, 53, 170. *Ibid*, *To Lazarus*, Homily 4, § 4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 48, 1012.

⁹⁸ St Basil the Great, *To Psalm 32*, § 3, in Migne, *P.G.*, 29, 332. St Irenaeus, *Heresies*, book I, ch. 13, § 5, in Migne, *P.G.*, 7, 588. Cf. in Hadjephraimides, p. 71.

⁹⁹ Cf. Plato of Moscow, *Orthodox Teaching*, pp. 156-157.

¹⁰⁰ Origen, *In Psalm XXXVII*, Homily II, 6, in Migne, *P.G.*, 12, 1386.

After the Confession of our sins, the Absolution or Forgiveness of the confessed sins by the officiator of the Holy Mystery follows. The Bishop or Priest has the Authority, should he find it necessary, to postpone the Forgiveness for a certain period. The officiator offers Absolution or Forgiveness of the confessed sins through prayer. These forgiven sins are completely erased and abolished by the Divine Grace of the Holy Spirit through tears of repentance and no longer exist as an obstacle to the return to the condition of Grace from which he had temporarily strayed because of sin.

Forgiveness is offered “*ex opere operato*” according to the Authority which was given by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to His Orthodox Church. And above all other Holy Mysteries the imploring prayer of the Priest is Justified. This imploring type of prayer in the Orthodox Church is: “...*may the same God forgive you through me a sinner all in this life and in the Life to come.*”¹⁰¹ In the Roman Catholic Church the type of prayer is: “*I absolve you from your sins in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*”¹⁰²

The imploring type of forgiveness in the Mystery of Repentance is Justified not only because the real Officiator within the Holy Mystery is actually the High Priest Jesus Christ. This is due to the fact that forgiveness depends not only on the Absolution offered by the Bishop or Priest but on the sincere repentance of the one who has confessed.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the only One Who is able to search the very depths of man’s heart and soul. Men (Bishops and Priests) make mistakes in their judgement and those who confess their sins hide certain iniquities from the Confessor. Furthermore because of partiality or interest, the repentant sinner may mislead the officiator of the Holy Mystery into a wrong assessment that God does not confirm. However that does not decrease the “*ex opere operato*” Power of the Mystery, neither does the repentant sinner’s Sanctification or Condemnation depend on the degree of his sincerity. Therefore, the Holy Mystery of Repentance acts “*ex opere operato*” only when the repentant sinner approaches with sincere repentance and a humble, contrite heart, confessing his sins to the best of his ability.

IV. THE ABSOLUTION AS AN ACT OF JUDGEMENT AND THE NATURE OF PENANCE

It is obvious that the use of the Authority to bind or to loose and the forgiveness or the postponement of the forgiveness of confessed sins is an act of judgement. The Bishop or Priest looses or not the bonds of sins of the repentant one and imposes pedagogic penances on him depending on the circumstances, with the Authority of Judgement, which “...*the Father has given to the Son...*”¹⁰³ and which the Son has given to His Orthodox Church.

¹⁰¹ Service of Confession, in Euchologion, ed. M. Saliberos, p. 164.

¹⁰² St Augustine, *Sermo* 99, in *Luce* VII, 35, in migne, *P.L.*, 38, 599. Leo I, *Epistola* CLXVIII, 2, in migne, *P.L.*, 54, 1211. *Ibid*, *Epistola* CVIII, 2, in migne, *P.L.*, 54, 1011.

¹⁰³ John 5:22.

One must never forget that the Bishop or Priest as judge, essentially differs from any other worldly judge, since his attribute as a Spiritual Father, Shepherd and Doctor overshadows that of Judge. For this reason, all his actions related to the Authority which he uses, must consider not only the Spiritual punishment of evil but rather the correction and re-establishment of the repentant sinner by means of paternal, compassionate care as well as the skill Enlightenment of a Spiritual Doctor.

The Spiritual Medicine and measurement of the paternal Love used by Spiritual Fathers are known as penances, which are obviously not punishments that satisfy the Divine Justice of God but which are the means and ways of correction, used according to their judgement. They may decide to increase or decrease the penances or even possibly lift them completely from the repentant sinner depending on relevant circumstances.

1. The Spiritual Father

The Spiritual Father officiating in the Holy Mystery of Repentance acts as a judge and this is understandable when we consider that all judgement has three prerequisites:

1. Judicial Authority.
2. That which is judge is according to pre-existing law.
3. The expressed decision.

It is evident that the Spiritual Father is vested with Judicial Authority from the words of institution of the Divine Mystery when our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, gave the Authority to bind or loose the sins through His Holy Apostles to His Holy Orthodox Church, as well as from the verification that “...*the Father gave all the Authority to the Son.*”¹⁰⁴ This means that the Father gave Authority to the Son to Judge by judging men “...*not only as God Who knows their nature, but as Man Who has experienced (human nature).*” Dependent upon and derived from the Authority that Christ received from His Father and according to which, as the Son of Man, He will come again in all His Glory to Judge the living and the dead, is that same Authority that was transferred to Christ’s Orthodox Church by His Holy Apostles. Upon this Authority that Christ received from His Father and according to which, as the Son of Man, He will come again in all His glory to Judge the living and the dead, depends and derives that which was transferred by the Holy Apostles to Christ’s Orthodox Church¹⁰⁵

Hence in the *Apostolic Orders* addressed to the Bishops are admonitions such as: “*Judge, O Bishop, with authority as God...*” and “...*sit in the Church teaching the Word as with authority to judge those who have sinned, because to you, the Bishops, is said: Whatever you will bind on earth will be bound in Heaven and whatever you will loose on*

¹⁰⁴ John 5:22.

¹⁰⁵ Zigabinos, *To John*, in Migne, P.G., 129, 1220.

*earth will be loosed in Heaven...*¹⁰⁶ “*You have the authority, O Bishop, to return and to send those who are crushed with forgiveness. For through you the Saviour said to him who came with sins: Your sins are forgiven, your faith has saved you, go in peace.*”¹⁰⁷

St John Chrysostom observed that “*...Heaven begins its judgement from the earth. Because the judge sits on earth, the Master follows the servant and whatever he judges below, the same He confirms Above.*”¹⁰⁸

Tertullian characterised the judgement of the Bishop or Priest on the sinner as supreme pre-judgement of the future Judgement.¹⁰⁹

In accordance to this Authority with which the Bishop or his representative is vested, he judges the confessed sin and expresses a just decision based upon the Justice and Law of God. Because the Lord, by proclaiming that the Father gave “*...all Authority...*” to Him, it “*...does not exclude the Father from the Authority of Judging, but the Son Judges with the consent of the Father, co-operating with the Holy Spirit...*” so that “*...all the Judgement of the Son is not deprived of the Paternal Will.*”¹¹⁰ Consequently, the officiator of the Mystery of Confession judges the sin of the repentant with Judicial Authority and either positively grants forgiveness or negatively does not forgive.

More characteristically, the *Apostolic Orders* describe the practise of the Judicial Authority of the Bishop or the Presbyter who replaces him, as a judge who sees “*...the sinner and commanding him to be thrown out. Brought out by the Deacons...*” who with sadness hold him “*...outside of the Church and entering...*” they ask the Bishop about him. “*Then the Bishop commands them to bring him in and judging him, if he has repented and if he is worthy to be delivered completely to the Church...*” he gives him the appropriate penance, addressing “*...him, whatsoever is proper to him who has sinned, rebuking, teaching and advising...*” him before releasing him. The form and the method are similar to that of worldly courts.¹¹¹

This Spiritual Authority differs in its nature and prerequisites. The essential and primary difference that separates one from the other, is that the judgement is a Judgement of Grace, Mercy and Compassion, whereas the worldly judicial is a judgement of justice and intolerant retaliation. Furthermore the aims of each have different goals. The Judicial Authority of the state aims primarily to punish the guilty according to the unbending law and to protect other citizens and the community in general from criminals. In some cases, if required by law, it does not hesitate to execute the condemned criminal whereas, on the contrary, the only vital goal of the Authority of the Spiritual Father is to forgive the sinner, to raise him up and to restore him to good spiritual health in the midst of his Brethren in Christ. In addition, the Bishop or Priest does not condemn the sinner but may

¹⁰⁶ *Apostolic Orders*, II, 11, 12, in **B**, v. 2, p. 18.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, II, 20, in **B**, v. 2, p. 25.

¹⁰⁸ St John Chrysostom, *To Isaiah*, Homily 5, § 1, in Migne, *P.G.*, 56, 131.

¹⁰⁹ Tertullian, *Apology* 39, in Migne, *P.L.*, 1, 532.

¹¹⁰ St Gregory of Nyssa, *That there is no three gods*, § 8, in Migne, *P.G.*, 45, 128.

¹¹¹ *Apostolic Orders*, II, 16, in **B**, v. 2, p. 22.

simply refuse to grant forgiveness and absolution. The only reason for the Bishop to excommunicate the ill person from the main body of the Church would be in the case of heresy or major moral sin that scandalized the public. Finally, it is essential that the judgement of Mercy and Compassion of the court of Repentance be freely accepted by the repentant whereas the decisions of the worldly court are compulsory.¹¹²

The attribute of a compassionate and caring father is the primary role of the Spiritual Father. He must be “...as a compassionate doctor towards all sinners...” in order to cure “...not only by cutting and burning, but by binding and putting on sweet medicine which will heal the wounds and with proper words water them...” and not to “...demand the responsibility as in court...” changing the seat of Confession but “...as an inn granting the forgiveness of sins.” Hence, the Spiritual Father receives the repentant sinner with much compassion “...with mercy and pity judging...” them, encouraging them “...to have hope for Salvation and to turn with tears to God.” Furthermore the repentant sinner receives “... the remission (of sin) as from the Good Father (God).” Under no circumstances it is allowed for the officiator of the Holy Mystery of Repentance to deal with the sinner as though he were an abomination by preventing him from Confessing or attending the teachings, since our Lord Himself had not “...resigned from eating and drinking with the tax collectors and sinners.”¹¹³

2. The Nature of Penance

Penances that are imposed upon the repentant sinner by the Spiritual Father, under no circumstances must be regarded as punishments to satisfy Divine Justice. They are pedagogic measures that are imposed by the Spiritual Father either before the Absolution of sins or after the Forgiveness of sins.¹¹⁴

No man can offer anything in order to satisfy Divine Justice. This is clearly evident from the fact that the Son and Word of God had to become Man in order to Save mankind. The God-Man had to shed His Precious Blood on the Cross so as to reconcile sinful man to God the Father. And through the shedding of His Blood, we have been washed clean from all our sins and iniquities.

Penance has a pedagogic nature and is not a necessary component of Repentance¹¹⁵ without which forgiveness would not be granted. It can be increased, decreased or even be completely removed according to the good intention of the repentant sinner.¹¹⁶ Penance is considered healing medicine that is offered for the cure of the ill person, the sinner, who with humility seeks the forgiveness of his sins. Therefore, the Bishop does

¹¹² Balanos, *Crisis*, p. 37. Androutsos, *Dogmatique*, p. 383. St John Chrysostom, *To Genesis*, Homily 20, §§ 3-4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 53, 171. Ibid, *About Priesthood*, II, § 3, in Migne, *P.G.*, 48. Ibid, *To 2 Corinthians*, Homily 6, § 3, in Migne, *P.G.*, 61, 438.

¹¹³ *Apostolic Orders*, II, 12, 16, 40 and 41, in *B*, v. 2, pp. 2, 18, 21, 42 and 43. St John Chrysostom, *About repentance*, 3, § 4; and 1, § 4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 49, 297-298 and 283.

¹¹⁴ Mitsopoulos, *Themata*, p. 322.

¹¹⁵ Mesoloras, v. II, b, p. 308. Karmeris, *Synopsis*, p. 102.

¹¹⁶ St Basil the Great, in Migne, *P.G.*, 31, 205. Ibid, *Epistle* 217, § 74, in Migne, *P.G.*, 32, 804, 808. St John Chrysostom, *To 2 Corinthians*, Homily 4, § 4, in Montfaucon, v. 10, p. 536.

not easily excommunicate anyone but rather, with patience, love and compassion struggle for the sinner's correction. Nevertheless, it is also necessary for the sinner to produce fruits of repentance.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ St Basil the Great, *The principal of morality. Term A'*, ch. 4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 31, 701. Ibid, *To Isaiah 20:9*, § 230, in Migne, *P.G.*, 30, 521. St Symeon, *Euriskomena*, Homily LXIX, pp. 370-375.