

# **A Message from the Patriarch of the Apostolic Orthodox Church**

*For unto you is given to know the Mysteries of the Kingdom of God . . . (Mark 8:10)*

As a child growing up in the Roman Catholic Church in the late 1940's and early '50's, no passage from the Holy Bible inspired more awe—and curiosity—in my young mind than that above. Those were the days of the beautiful *Tridentine* Mass celebrated in the then-liturgical language of Latin, with its beautiful and stately ritual and vestments, Gregorian Chant and, yes, mystery. A mystery then was what it is to the majority of Christians today: something that cannot be understood, unknowable, belonging solely to God. Indeed, questions concerning our Faith that were often answered, "It's a mystery." In other words, "You can't understand it—end of discussion." But take another look at that quote. Isn't it a paradox? If the Mysteries are unknowable, how could Jesus tell His Apostles that they are to *know* them? They were simple men, fishermen and the like—no geniuses here. Did Jesus bestow upon them a special gift of knowledge, that they might comprehend the incomprehensible? This doesn't seem to be the case, as in the Gospel of Saint John, when Saint Philip states, "Lord, show us the Father and it is enough for us," provoking the obviously exasperated reply, "Have I been so long a time with you, and you have not known me?" Had the gift of discernment been given, surely Saint Philip would have had no need to ask the question, as he would have perceived that Jesus and the Father were one. So, where does this leave us? The Apostles were not geniuses, it seems as if they were not given any gifts of discernment—how were they to know the unknowable? Let us see.

As you may know, the official language of the ancient Church was Greek, chosen because it could convey seemingly ethereal concepts with great exactitude. Unfortunately, it is in the translation from the Greek that much of this exactitude disappears, usually because of the ignorance of the translator. In this regard, I am reminded of the time when Coca-Cola was introduced into Japan. When the translators had rendered the famous slogan, "Coke adds life," into Japanese, it read, "Coke brings your ancestors back from the dead." Also, as the centuries separate the author from his readers, the original concepts blur, even completely forgotten. And so it is with "mystery." The original Greek word used in the Scriptures was *mysterion* (μυστηριον), which does not mean "unknowable," but rather a "*silence* imposed by virtue of Initiation." And the Apostles *were* Initiates. It must be remembered that Christianity was founded as an initiatic religion, that there were definite steps to membership, culminated by the Initiation (Baptism and Chrismation), and once a member, degrees of membership. Having previously been members of the Essenes, the Apostles were well-acquainted with this structure, hence Jesus chose them for the foundation of the *His* "Mystery School," that which is known to us as "Christianity."

Indeed, the Mysteries are knowable, but that knowledge is not given freely; it must be *earned* through discipline and dedication. And even then, it is fully imparted to only a

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relative few who will preserve it as a sacred trust for succeeding generations. Throughout the world, those “relative few” are scattered, the monasteries of the East being a prime example. And there are others, such as the Apostolic Orthodox Church, that exist “in the world.” By definition, we are not monastic; by selection of members and training, we are. For we, too, have been given the task of maintaining the Mysteries in their pristine form, passing them to others, and training a few to take our place. We are an extremely small Church, and likely to remain such, for our demands upon our members are great, as related in my last *Message*, and they are tested almost daily to prove their worthiness to bear the Great Light within them. Like their Spiritual Father, the Blessed Apostle Saint Thomas, they reach out their hands to touch the Holy Wounds of Christ; nay, not only to touch them, but to take those Wounds upon themselves. With Saint Paul, they utter one of the greatest of Mysteries, “I die daily . . . in our Lord Jesus Christ,” for they know that only by sharing in His Passion and Death, by sharing in the Price He paid, can they also share in His resurrection and glory. Amen.

May the Light of Lights enfold you.

Mathias Mar Yusef, Patriarch

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