

The Seven Sacraments of our church

The Eritrean Orthodox Tewahido Church serves the faithful through the seven sacraments. These sacraments are called mysteries because the invisible grace of the Holy Spirit is granted through them.

The Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo church, taking the example of pillars as has been said in the Proverbs of Solomon as a starting point, teaches that there are seven sacraments (Proverbs 9:1). Of the seven, a bishop and a priest can perform the six sacraments. A bishop confers ordination only.

The seven sacraments are:

Baptism

Of the seven sacraments, Baptism is the first. Baptism is the sacrament through which we are reborn and enter the Kingdom of God. (Jn. 3:5). Baptism has a Biblical basis (Mt. 28:19-20).

In our church we baptise children. In the Old Testament children were considered as people of the covenant after they were circumcised. In the New Testament children are baptized in their infancy and become members of the family of Christ. God has never isolated children from His grace. For example Jeremiah was blessed while he was in the womb of his mother. (Jer. 1:5). John the Baptist was likewise filled with the Holy Spirit while in the womb of his mother (Lk. 1:15). Our Lord and Savior during the period of His teaching has blessed children. This shows that the age of children does not prevent them from being brought to God (Mr. 19:13-15; Mk. 10:13-15; Lk. 18:15-17; Acts 16:33; 1Cor. 1:16). In the practice of our Church a boy is baptized on the fortieth day after birth and a girl on the eightieth day after birth.

Confirmation (Mayron)

It is the holy ointment, which one is anointed after Baptism. Confirmation like Baptism is performed once and cannot be repeated. Through the sacrament of confirmation, the believer is granted the gift of the Holy Spirit. In the Apostolic times the baptized person was granted the Holy Spirit by the laying of the hands. (Acts 20:14-17). When the church expanded, however, the bishops who continued the works of the Apostles permitted the replacement of the laying of hands by the anointing of the Holy Oil.

The gift of the Holy Spirit with mayron, confirmation, has Biblical foundation. The believer is anointed with the Holy Oil immediately after Baptism. When the Apostles baptized children and grown ups, the baptized person was granted the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8: 14-17; 19:5-6).

Children should be anointed with Myron as soon as they are baptized so that they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Bible confirms that let alone after birth, there were children who were granted the Holy Spirit while they were still in the wombs of their mothers. (Lk. 1:15; Jer. 1:1-8).

The right to anoint was originally confined to the Apostles but later passed on to bishops, and then priests were also authorized to administer the sacrament.

Holy Communion

Holy Communion is the culmination of all sacraments of the Church. Holy Communion means offering of sacrifice. This is not an offering of man to God but the offering of God for man. The sheep and goats were offered as sacrifices in the altars

during the Old Testament times. However, these were preceding examples of the offering of the flesh and blood of Christ during the New Testament. The offering of bread and cup of grace that Melchizedek offered to Abraham (Gen. 14:18) and the sacrifices, which the Israelites offered during the day of their liberation, exemplify Christ our pascal lamb. Holy Communion has Biblical foundation (Mt. 26:26; 1Cor. 11:23-25). When the priest puts the bread on the paten and the wine in the chalice and conducts liturgical prayer, the bread is changed into the body of the Son of God and the wine into the blood of the Son of God.

What is thus given in our Church is the body and blood of the Son of God. When the priest administers the body, the deacon administers the blood with a cross-spoon. Those who, due to sickness, are not able to come to the Church receive the Holy Communion in their homes during liturgical service. The Holy Communion has to be administered on the same day; it cannot be spared for another time. Holy Communion should be taken after abstinence from food for at least fifteen hours. According to the doctrine of the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahido Church the Holy Communion is real body and blood of Christ. (Jn. 6:51, 52, 53, 55).

Like the other sacraments, bishops who succeeded the Apostles originally performed the Holy Communion, but as the church expanded they authorized the priests to perform the sacrament. The deacons assist the bishops and the priests. The believers who have examined and cleansed themselves through penance can receive the Holy Communion. But those who have not cleansed themselves through penance even if they receive the Holy Communion being unworthy will bring damnation upon them. (Cor. 11:28-29; Liturgy of John Chrysostom).

Ordination / Priesthood

This is the sacrament through which the clergy are entitled to perform the various services of the Church. This sacrament has Biblical basis. (Mt. 28:19,20; Eph. 4:11; Acts 26:20).

There are three hierarchical ranks of Ordination. These are deacon, priest and bishop. Priest: The order of priesthood is conferred either after marriage or after becoming a monk. He can perform all the sacraments except, conferring Ordination, consecration of the Holy Oil used for sacrament of confirmation, consecration of the altar, the Ark of the Covenant, new church and new vessels. If he becomes a priest in celibacy, he can attain the rank of bishop; but if he is married, he will be limited to the rank of priesthood. A priest is ordained by the laying of hands and the breath of bishop. Deacon: Deacons are ordained into this Order before marriage. After marriage, the deacons become priests but if they wish to be monks and be ordained priests they have to remain celibate. The duty of the deacons is to assist priests and bishops. They are ordained by bishops.

In our Church, there are three ranks under the deacon-hood, which qualify one to serve the church. These ranks are conferred through blessing and not by the laying of hands. No payment is made for receiving any of the Ordinations. (acts 8:18-26).

Ordination is not attained through inheritance but through a calling of the Holy Spirit and in accordance with the canons of the Church.

Matrimony

Christian marriage is one of the seven sacraments, which is performed in a church by means of which the grace of the Holy Spirit is obtained. Holy Matrimony is based on the Bible. (Gen. 1:27,28, 2:18, Mt. 19:4-6). The Canon of the Church requires that before matrimony is affected the following conditions should be met.

- Both couples should be Christians to obtain the grace of God
- Both should belong to the Orthodox Tewahido Church. If any one of them is not a member, he/she should first be a member of the Church.
- No pre-marital sexual relationship is permitted.
- Both should consent to be united in marriage.
- No marriage is allowed within seven generations so as not to break the rule of kinship that forbids marriage between close family relations. (Lev. 18:6-21; Deut. 7:3-4).
- As the marriage of Christians epitomizes the unity between Christ and the Church, it shall not be broken. (Eph. 5:32),
- In our Church one to one marriage only is allowed.
- Re-marriage cannot be conducted by any one of the two partners unless divorce is affected because of adultery or one of the partners dies. (Mt. 19:6-9)
- Bishops and priests celebrate the Sacrament of Matrimony.
- Matrimony is not performed without Holy Communion. (Fetha Negest Article 24:899)
- Parents should be consulted and their consent should be secured.

Penance

Penance means to feel remorse, repent and cleanse oneself from sin. Although Christians are reborn through Baptism, men are liable to commit sins. Therefore: Every Christian should have a father confessor (soul-father).

Every one should go to the father confessor and confess his/her sins. (Lev. 14:30, Mt. 8:4; Epiphanius Faith of Fathers Hai. Ab. 59:20). Those who confess their sins and return to God receive the grace of God and by receiving the Holy Communion they will enter to their former place of honor. Confessions and remissions are performed only by bishops or priests only. Penance is based on the Bible. (Mt.16: 19, 8:4). The confession of the penitent made in front of the father-confessor and the tears shed for the sins committed will enable them to be rejuvenated by the Holy Spirit. (Liturgy of Athanasius). Penance is one of the Sacraments that are repeated. The main objectives of the teachings starting from the Prophets, of John the Baptist; Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and his disciples that Apostles is to enable people to inherit the kingdom of God through repentance, ?Repent Ye: for the Kingdom of God is at hand.? On the basis of this truth, the Church teaches the need and virtue of Penance. (Mt. 3:1-2,4:17, Zach. 1:3)

Unction of the Sick

It is one of the Seven Sacraments of the Church. It is an anointment administered to the sick. It has Biblical origin and is administered by bishops and priests. (Mk. 6:13; Jas. 5:13-15).

In our Church, since Unction is proffered to cleanse sins of the flesh as well as of the soul, Unction is administered to one who afflicted by sin. Unction is performed by bishops and priests only.

Each of the Seven Sacraments has its own book of prayer and system of application. The seven Sacraments as a whole are considered as manifestations of the faith and tenets of the religion of the Church.

These Sacraments are all performed in the Church. However, it is not also forbidden if they are performed elsewhere as and when conditions are met. The main aim of all the Sacraments is to redeem mankind.