

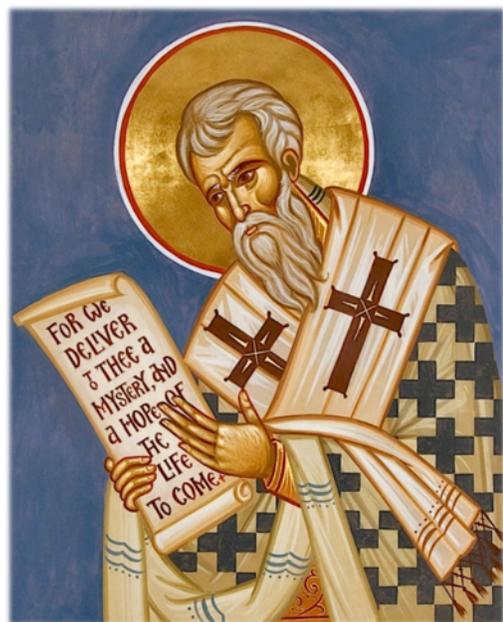
ST. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM, BISHOP AND DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH
C. 315–386 AD
FEAST DAY: MARCH 18—OPTIONAL MEMORIAL

Little is known about Cyril's life other than what was provided by his younger contemporaries or recorded by fifth-century historians. He was likely born in or near Jerusalem around the year 315 and most likely received an education in the Greek classics as well as Sacred Scripture and Christian doctrine. It is thought that he was ordained a deacon around 335 by Bishop Macarius of Jerusalem before receiving priestly ordination at the hands of St. Maximus of Jerusalem around 342. Cyril succeeded Maximus as bishop of Jerusalem and received episcopal ordination around 350. He was engaged in a bitter rivalry with Acacius, bishop of Caesarea in Palestine, over issues of canonical precedence and governance in the Church in Palestine. Tensions also existed between Cyril's adherence to a more orthodox Christology and Acacius' loyalty to the heresy of Arianism. Political maneuvering on the part of Acacius led to Cyril's exile from Jerusalem in 357 before he was called back to his see in 359. Emperor Constans II, favorable to the Arian party and displeased with Cyril's return to Jerusalem, once more deposed Cyril in 360 before Cyril returned upon Julian the Apostate's accession to the throne in 361. Emperor Valens removed all bishops restored by Julian in 367, sending Cyril into exile from Jerusalem for a third time. He once more returned to Jerusalem in 378 upon Valens' death. He attended the First Council of Constantinople in 381 where the Nicene Creed was finalized and adopted by the Church as its authoritative statement of faith. Cyril continued as bishop of Jerusalem until his death around the year 386.

Cyril is most well-known for his surviving *Catecheses*, delivered in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the site of Jesus' crucifixion and burial; after an introductory address, 18 of the catechetical lectures explaining the doctrines of the Church were delivered to catechumens (those entering the Church) during the season of Lent prior to receiving the sacraments of initiation. They were likely written early during Cyril's tenure as bishop (or possibly when he was still a priest) and are grounded in Sacred Scripture and pastoral practice. The five mystagogical catecheses, in contrast, were likely written later in Cyril's episcopacy and elucidate the mysteries (hence "mystagogical") of the sacraments received: baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist. For his contributions to understanding Church doctrine he was named a Doctor of the Church by Pope Leo XIII in 1883.

Jesus then really suffered for all men; for the Cross was no illusion, otherwise our redemption is an illusion also. His death was not a mere show, for then is our salvation also [preposterous]. If His death was but a show, they were true who said, "*we remember that that deceiver said, while He was yet alive, after three days I rise again*" (Mt 27:63). His Passion then was real: for He was really crucified, and we are not ashamed [of this]; He was crucified, and we deny it not, nay, I rather glory to speak of it.... I confess the Cross, because I know of the Resurrection; for if, after being crucified, He had remained as He was, I had not perchance confessed it, for I might have concealed both it and my Master; but now that the Resurrection has followed the Cross, I am not ashamed to declare it.

From Cyril's Catechetical Lecture 13.4.



1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-26 (THE INSTITUTION OF THE EUCHARIST)

READING (LECTIO)

Slowly and prayerfully read the passage from Sacred Scripture. Pay attention to the words or phrases that move your mind or heart. Remain open to what God is trying to communicate to you. What speaks to you?

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, ²⁴ and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁵ In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.

MEDITATION (MEDITATIO)

Reread the passage, pausing on the word or phrase that spoke to you or struck you. Rest with that phrase and ponder its meaning with your mind and heart. Then, read the excerpts below and meditate on their significance.

THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST. Even of itself the teaching of the blessed Paul is sufficient to give you a full assurance concerning those Divine Mysteries, of which having been deemed worthy, you have become of *the same body* and blood with Christ. For you have just heard him say distinctly, *that our Lord Jesus Christ in the night in which He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks He broke it, and gave to His disciples saying, take, eat, this is my Body: and having taken the cup and given thanks, He said, take, drink, this is my Blood.* Since then He Himself declared and said of the Bread, *this is my Body*, who shall dare to doubt any longer? And since He has Himself affirmed and said, *this is my Blood*, who shall ever hesitate, saying, that it is not His blood?— ON THE MYSTERIES 4.1.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE. Wherefore with full assurance let us partake as of the Body and Blood of Christ: for in the figure of Bread is given to you His Body, and in the figure of Wine His Blood; that you by partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, may be made of the same body and the same blood with Him. For thus we come to bear Christ in us, because His Body and Blood are distributed through our members; thus it is that, according to blessed Peter, *we become partakers of the divine nature* (2 Pet 1:4).—ON THE MYSTERIES 4.3.

ASSURED BY FAITH. Consider therefore the Bread and the Wine not as bare elements, for they are, according to the Lord’s declaration, the Body and Blood of Christ; for even though sense suggests this to you, yet let faith establish you. Judge not the matter from the taste, but from faith be fully assured without misgiving that the Body and Blood of Christ have been vouchsafed for you.—ON THE MYSTERIES 4.6.

ELEVATE YOUR MINDS TO HEAVENLY THINGS. After this the Priest cries aloud, “Lift up your hearts.” For truly ought we in that most awful hour to have our heart on high with God, and not below, thinking of earth and earthly things. In effect therefore the Priest bids all in that hour to dismiss all cares of this life, or household anxieties, and to have their heart in heaven with the merciful God. Then you answer, “*we lift them up unto the Lord:*” assenting to it, by your avowal. But let no one come here, who could say with his mouth, “*we lift up our hearts unto the Lord,*” but in his thoughts have his mind concerned with the cares of this life. At all times, rather, God should be in our memory but if this is impossible by reason of human infirmity, in that hour above all this should be our earnest endeavor.—ON THE MYSTERIES 5.4.

PRAYER (ORATIO)

Take what you have received in meditation and bring it to God. Enter into dialogue with him. Surrender your thoughts to him. Allow your heart to do the speaking. Allow these reflection questions to guide you.

1. The Eastern Christian tradition refers to the sacraments as “divine mysteries,” emphasizing the reality that they aren’t fully comprehended by human reason. In what way is God asking for your trust when you approach the sacraments? Does that trust need to be renewed? What might you do when your trust in the Church, holy yet comprised of sinners, wavers?
2. God has gifted us the Body and Blood of his Son because he wishes for us to become partakers in the divine nature. In receiving the Eucharist we are called to conform ourselves to Jesus Christ. How are you being called to conform yourself to Christ more fully?
3. Having attended the Mass many times, it can be easy to become indifferent to the miracle taking place on the altar. Is God asking you to renew your sense of wonder in the Eucharistic sacrifice? How could you go about doing that?

CONTEMPLATION (CONTEMPLATIO)

Once you have spoken to God, allow him to speak to you. Sit with God. Be in his presence. Recognize that simply being with him is enough. Allow his peace to overcome you. Let him act in your heart.

CONCLUDING PRAYER

The collect for the Mass on the memorial of St. Cyril of Jerusalem:

O God, who through the Bishop Saint Cyril of Jerusalem
led your Church in a wonderful way to a deeper sense of the mysteries of salvation,
grant us, through his intercession,
that we may so acknowledge your Son as to have life ever more abundantly.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, forever and ever. Amen.