

Sunday, November 20, 2016

## I Confess, I Confess to You, I Confess You

The words “confess” or “confession” are words commonly found in the Bible and in our prayers. These words can have different meanings depending on the context, so it is worthwhile for us to review these different meanings together.

### The First Meaning:

The most common meaning of **confession is the acknowledgement of sins**. As it is mentioned in the Psalms, *“I acknowledged my sin to you and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD’ and you forgave the iniquity of my sin”* (Psalms 32:5) or as St. John says in his first epistle, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (I John 1:9).

Also, St. James when speaking of Holy Unction, indicated that in order for a sick person to gain complete healing, besides calling for the presbyters of the church to come and pray over them and anoint them with oil, they should also confess their sins and iniquities to the priest in order to attain physical and emotional healing as well as forgiveness of sins: *“and the prayer of faith will save the sick and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed”* (James 5:15-16). It is also evident from this passage that the sick person is the one confessing sins, and it is the presbyters (elders) who will pray for them for their healing and forgiveness of sins. The verses do not imply that anybody can confess to anybody, as some try to allege!

### The Second Meaning:

“I confess to you” also means **“I acknowledge your goodness and thank you.”** This meaning is repeated very often in the psalms. In the Coptic and Arabic, the words “I will confess to you” and “I will give thanks to you” are the same words, and thus in our Coptic Agpeya, we find them sometimes used interchangeably:

*“I will give thanks to you [confess to you] O Lord with my whole heart for you have heard all the words of my mouth”* (Psalm 137 in the Agpeya).

*“Begin the song to the Lord with thanksgiving [confession], sing praises to our Lord on the harp”* (Psalm 146 in the Agpeya).

*“Give thanks [confess] to the Lord for He is good and His mercy endures forever”* (Psalm 117 in Agpeya).

*“It is good to give thanks [confess] to the Lord, and to sing praises to your name O Most High...”* (from “Graciously Accord” in 12<sup>th</sup> Hour).

*“Let us praise with the angels saying ‘Glory to God in the highest...’ we praise you we bless you...we confess to you...”* (The Gloria in Matins).

So confession in this context denotes thanksgiving.

We also use the word confession in this context in the hymn sung during the Offering of the Lamb in the Divine Liturgy **“Alleluia Je efnev-?”** which means **“The thoughts of man shall confess to you [i.e. “give thanks to you”] O Lord and the rest of [his] thoughts shall celebrate a feast to You,”** In this hymn we are offering thanks to God with all our thoughts and senses when we celebrate the Liturgy.

### The Third Meaning:

“Confession” can also mean **stating the faith or stating the truth**. For example, we see the “confession” of priest towards the end of the Liturgy where he says **“I believe and confess to the last breath that this is the life giving flesh...”** This is an important statement of the faith that we will always confess to the last breath of our lives. And we also say that the Lord Jesus Christ **“confessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate”** meaning that He spoke the truth before him, and confirmed His own divinity and witnessed that His Kingdom is not of this world (John 19).

Also, the phrase **“the good confession”** was one used in the Early Church to describe **professing the faith in front of several witnesses before accepting baptism**, as also St. Paul wrote to his disciple Timothy saying *“Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses”* (1 Tim. 6:12). This profession of the faith is an established and authentic practice in the rite of an Orthodox baptism where the catechumen (the person about to accept baptism) or their godparent would recite a short form of the creed after the denouncing Satan: **“I confess You, O Christ my God, and all your saving laws, and all your life-giving service, and all your life-giving works, I believe in one God, God the Father...”** Also notice that the profession begins with **“I confess you”** (i.e. I profess) and **not** “I confess to you...” as is sometimes erroneously printed in some liturgical books.

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