



The Bride in the Jewish Wedding Tradition

Part III: *Nissuin* (The Wedding)

“Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. ² In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. (John 14:1-3)

“The culminating step in the process of the Jewish wedding ceremony is known as *nissuin*. This is based on the Hebrew verb *nasa*, which literally means “to carry.” *Nissuin* was quite a graphic description, as the bride would be waiting for the groom to carry her away to their new home. There was great anticipation as the bride waited for the arrival of her betrothed one. This was to be expected, especially when taking into consideration an element unique to the biblical Jewish wedding; that is, the time of the groom’s arrival (and hence the whole wedding party) was to be a surprise. Any bride who took seriously the betrothal period would be expecting the groom at the end of their year-long engagement. However, the exact hour of the ceremony was uncertain, as it was the father of the groom who would give the final approval for the *nissuin* to begin.”

(from God’s Appointed Customs by Rabbi Barney Kasdan p 51)

In the scripture quoted at the beginning of this essay Jesus is clearly alluding to the events following the *Eyrusin*, that is, the bridegroom returning to his father’s house to prepare a place for his bride. He also alludes to the *Nissuin* when the bridegroom returns “to carry” his bride back to his father’s house whereupon the wedding (*nissuin*) celebration will commence, and the couple will then live together in marital fulfillment. The marvelous thing about all this is that Jesus is the Bridegroom and it is the Church who is the Bride! Often times, when people speak of these events they are referring to the “Second Coming,” or the “Return of the Messiah,” not recognizing that this is the culmination of the much prophesized union between God and His people that we discussed earlier in the essay “The Bride in Scripture.” They confuse this return of the Lord for His Bride with His return to judge the nations and to establish His Kingdom on earth “as it is in heaven.” This distinction will become clearer when we discuss this in the series of essays under the title of “The Return of the Bridegroom and His Bride.”

All of this may be new to you and you very well may, and should, have questions regarding the authenticity of the ideas presented in this and previous essays that I have written. May I suggest the following questions for discussion regarding the *Nissuin*.

Some Questions and Answers

(1) “So where else in the scripture does it speak about the *nissuin*, that is, being “carried away” by the Bridegroom?”

³⁰ *And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming upon the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹ And he will send out his angels with a trumpet blast, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. (Matt 24:30-31 NABRE, emphasis added)*

²⁵ *“And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, ²⁶ men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ And then they will see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ Now when these things begin to*

take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” (Luke 21:25-28, emphasis added)

Saint Paul spoke of the Church being “carried away” in his letters to the Thessalonians:

*¹³ But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵ For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. **And the dead in Christ will rise first; ¹⁷ then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord.** ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1Thess 4:13-18/NABRE, emphasis added)*

As you might expect, the Book of Revelation also speaks of the “carrying away” of the saints (the Bride):

¹⁴ Then I looked, and lo, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. ¹⁵ And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat upon the cloud, “Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.” ¹⁶ So he who sat upon the cloud swung his sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped. (Rev 14:16-18/RSVCE)

Undoubtedly, you recognized the similarities between these verses of scripture as they speak of the Lord descending (from His Father’s house in heaven), His coming in the clouds with great glory and a trumpet blast, and the carrying away of His saints, the Bride. These scriptures sound very much like the *Nissuin* of the traditional Jewish wedding ceremony, do they not? In fact, some of this may sound familiar and you may be asking yourself...

(2) Are you talking about the “Rapture?” I thought that was a Protestant thing, do Catholics believe in the Rapture also?

Many Protestants, especially Evangelicals and Pentecostals often refer to this “carrying away” as the “Rapture” while most Catholics and Eastern Orthodox are either unfamiliar with the term or have difficulties with some of the ideas that certain Protestant groups have attached to it. Interestingly enough, the “rapture” is very much a Catholic term having come from the Latin Vulgate of St. Jerome (342-420 AD). Saint Jerome used the Latin word, *rapiemur*, when he translated the Greek word ἀρπάξω (transliterated: *harpazó*), which means *to seize, catch up, snatch away* when he translated verse 17 of chapter 4 of 1Thessalonians:

*Deinde nos qui vivimus qui relinquimur simul **rapiemur** cum illis in nubibus obviam Domino in aera et sic semper cum Domino erimus. (1Thess 4:17/Latin Vulgate, emphasis added)*

which when I put it into Google Translate rendered:

*Then we which are alive and remain shall be **caught up** together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord (1Thess 4:17/Google translation of the Vulgate)*

I’d say that’s pretty close to the NABRE translation quoted earlier. The word *rapiemur* is also translated to mean *snatch, grab, carry off, and abduct*, and there are several words in English that have their etymological origin in the word *rapiemur* including *rapt, rapture, and ravish*. In the *Nissuin* the bridegroom returns unexpectedly from his father’s house to “carry



away” his bride. In the case of our Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, who ascended into heaven, we expect that He will come as He left:

And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes,¹¹ and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:9-11)

So we should expect Him to appear in the sky on clouds of glory to “carry away” his Bride and this “carrying away” would appear as the Bride being “caught up” and meeting our Lord in the air as the Scriptures attest. Perhaps, then, if anyone has difficulty with the term Rapture they might just call it the *Nissuin*.

(3) “Rapture” and “ravish” sound so unseemingly and carnal, is it really appropriate to use such terms when speaking about spiritual things?

I suppose my first response to this question would be that I hope that sometime in my forty years of marriage with my wife that she felt ravished by me (if my children are reading this they are now say, “Eew, Dad. TMI.). God made us body, soul, and spirit and the power of the love of Him who is Love cannot be sequestered within the confines of the soul and spirit alone, but must breakthrough to our physical bodies imbuing them with immortal life. It is best that I allow St. Theresa of Avila to describe her experiences of being ravished by our Lord and then we can all ask ourselves if it is appropriate to believe that the God who fills all in all (Eph 1:23) can be allowed only into that which is deemed sacred while denying Him access to that which in our *Fallenness* we have declared profane. The following is taken from Our Lady of Mercy Lay Carmelite Community’s website (<https://olmlaycarmelites.org/reflections/transverberation-saint-teresa-avila>). The photograph is of Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s sculpture, “The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa of Avila” which is located in Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome.

August 26th, Carmelites around the world celebrate the feast of the Transverberation (piercing) of St. Teresa of Avila’s heart. Transverberation is a mystical grace wherein the Saint’s heart was pierced with a “dart of love” by an angel. In Teresa’s own words from her autobiography we read:

“Our Lord was pleased that I should have at times a vision of this kind: I saw an angel close by me, on my left side, in bodily form. This I am not accustomed to see, unless very rarely. Though I have visions of angels frequently, yet I see them only by an intellectual vision, such as I have spoken of before. It was our Lord’s will that in this vision I should see the angel in this wise. He was not large, but small of stature, and most beautiful—his face burning, as if he were one of the highest angels, who seem to be all of fire: they must be those whom we call cherubim. Their names they never tell me; but I see very well that there is in heaven so great a difference between one angel and another, and between these and the others, that I cannot explain it.

“I saw in his hand a long spear of gold, and at the iron’s point there seemed to be a little fire. He appeared to me to be thrusting it at times into my heart and to pierce my very entrails; when he drew it out, he seemed to draw them out also, and to leave me all on fire with a great love of God. The pain was so great, that it made me moan; and yet so surpassing was the sweetness of this excessive pain, that I could not wish to be rid of it. The soul is satisfied now with nothing less than God. The pain is not bodily, but spiritual; though the body has its share in it, even a large one. It is a caressing of love so sweet which now takes place between the soul and God, that I pray God of His goodness to make him experience it who may think that I am lying.



“During the days that this lasted, I went about as if beside myself. I wished to see, or speak with, no one, but only to cherish my pain, which was to me a greater bliss than all created things could give me.

“I was in this state from time to time, whenever it was our Lord’s pleasure to throw me into those deep trances, which I could not prevent even when I was in the company of others, and which, to my deep vexation, came to be publicly known. Since then, I do not feel that pain so much, but only that which I spoke of before—I do not remember the chapter—which is in many ways very different from it, and of greater worth. On the other hand, when this pain, of which I am now speaking, begins, our Lord seems to lay hold of the soul, and to throw it into a trance, so that there is no time for me to have any sense of pain or suffering, because fruition ensues at once. May He be blessed for ever, who hath bestowed such great graces on one who has responded so ill to blessings so great!”

(St. Teresa of Avila, The Book of Her Life, Chapter XXIX.)

(4) So why do Catholics and Orthodox have problems with the “rapture?”

Before answering this question it must first be understood that among Protestants who believe in the Rapture they do not all agree on how it happens, or rather *when* it happens. This “when” of the rapture is relative to a period of time during the “end of the age” that Jesus discusses with His apostles during His Olivet Discourse. This period of time is known as the Tribulations. You can read about this in Matthew chapter 24-25, Luke 21, and Mark 13. The most widely held position regarding the Rapture is that it occurs before the Tribulation (this is known as the Pre-Tribulation Rapture); this “Pre-Trib Rapture” position was popularized in the book series, “Left Behind,” written by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. It basically suggests that Christian believers will be “caught up” by Jesus before all the Tribulations that will befall humanity so that they will not experience its horrors.

The next Rapture hypothesis is known as the “Mid-Tribulation Rapture” which believes that the Tribulations will last for seven years or two 3½ year intervals separated by a dramatic event known as the “Abomination of Desolations.” According to the Mid-Trib theory Christians will experience 3½ years of Tribulation, but will then be raptured thereby missing out on the worst of the Tribulations. Finally, there is the “Post-Tribulation Rapture” which posits that Christians will experience the entire seven-year period of the Tribulations and then be raptured.

So, what is it about the Rapture that bothers so many Catholics and Orthodox? Catholics and Orthodox teach that the Church must go through the Tribulations:

The Church will enter the glory of the kingdom only through this final Passover, when she will follow her Lord in his death and Resurrection. The kingdom will be fulfilled, then, not by a historic triumph of the Church through a progressive ascendancy, but only by God’s victory over the final unleashing of evil.... (CCC 677)

and since the Rapture is most often identified as occurring Pre-Tribulation they tend to automatically reject it, but their teachings are not necessarily inconsistent with either Mid or Post-Tribulation hypotheses. So, do I believe that Catholics and Orthodox theologians should give the Rapture a second look? Absolutely! The Church owns the “rapture,” especially when you consider that one of her greatest saints, Saint Jerome, “coined” the term; furthermore given that the Church is the Bride she ought to see the Rapture in the context of the *Nissuin*.

(5) So what happens after the Rapture?

The first part of the *Nissuin* is the “carrying away” of the bride whereupon she is brought back to the father’s house where shortly thereafter the marriage ceremony will begin. In the context of Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom, and the Church, His Bride, after we are *caught up together...in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air*, we are brought to the Father’s house (heaven) and then sometime thereafter the marriage ceremony will begin. Chapters 14 and 19 of the Book of Revelation supports this scenario of “end of the age” events when understood in the context of the *Nissuin*.

¹⁴ Then I looked, and lo, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. ¹⁵ And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat upon the cloud, “Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap

has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.”¹⁶ So he who sat upon the cloud swung his sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped. (Rev 14:16-18/RSVCE)



*⁶ Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying,
“Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.
⁷ Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;
⁸ it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure”—
for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.
⁹ And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are true words of God.” (Rev 19:14-9/RSVCE)*

To be sure there is a lot happening between these two events as recorded in chapters 14 and 19 in Revelation, but that will not be a subject of this discussion; this will be addressed in the series of essays, “The Return of the Bridegroom.”

You might have thought of this question already, if not then I’ll bring it up now,

(6) Which church is the Church who will be “carried away” for the “marriage of the Lamb and his Bride?”

There is probably no way I can answer this question in such a way that will satisfy everyone. First of all, I am not going to name denominations rather I am going to rely on one of the parable that Jesus told during the Olivet Discourse because it is the most relevant to this discussion.

“Then the kingdom of heaven shall be compared to ten maidens who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³ For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; ⁴ but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵ As the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. ⁶ But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ ⁷ Then all those maidens rose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ ⁹ But the wise replied, ‘Perhaps there will not be enough for us and for you; go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’ ¹⁰ And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast; and the door was shut. ¹¹ Afterward the other maidens came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ ¹² But he replied, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ ¹³ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. (Matt 25:1-13/RSVCE)

The bridesmaid were to keep watch for the return of the bridegroom, and upon hearing or observing his approach alert their mistress, the bride, and prepare her for the *carrying away* of the *Nissuin*. They would then accompany the bridegroom and the bride to the father’s house and participate in the great wedding feast. These ten virgins can represent the Church, churches, and even individuals Christians. The first lesson we should learn is that being a virgin (pure or righteous) does

not necessarily get you into the wedding feast. So just because you go to church, even the ____ Church, (I let you fill in the blank) it does not mean that you automatically get a ticket to the wedding feast. So what does? Watchfulness, preparation, and making sure the bridegroom knows who you are!

Watchfulness

Are we watching with expectation for the return of the Bridegroom? When was the last time you heard a homily or sermon on the topic of Jesus returning or that you spent time reading or studying about it? And if perhaps you have, did you think to yourself, “Well, I hope He doesn’t come back soon because there’s still a lot of things I want to do.” So how would grade yourself after considering these questions? Did you give yourself a “W” for “wise” and “watchful,” or an “F” for “foolish” virgin?

The story I like to tell as an example of how a “wise and watchful” virgin ought to behave is how my Mom waited for my Dad to return home from the War in Europe. My father, Master Sargent Leo J. McMahon Sr., was stationed in Charleston, South Carolina in 1944. My mother, Caroline H. Finger, a Southern Belle from Charleston was working at the U.S. Post Office when my father arrived to deliver and pick up mail. For both of my parents it was love at first sight. As was so often the case during the War, hasty arrangements were made and they were married within a few weeks of their meeting. A couple of days after their marriage my father was shipped over seas to participate in the invasion of Europe. They would not see each other for nearly two years.



I have my mother’s trunk that she had used when she went to Brenau College in Gainesville, Georgia. Inside the trunk there is a box filled with letters, mostly letters that had been written by my parents to each other during the War. It is hard to imagine what it must have been like to be separated from each other like that. How my Mom must have checked the Post each day to see if she had gotten another letter from my Dad. Was he okay? What was he doing? Could he even tell her? Was he even still alive? The joy she must have experienced when a letter arrived from him at the Post Office or in her mailbox, and the apprehension she must have felt when opening the letter. He would say everything was fine; that he wasn’t in any danger, but she knew better, she would have to try and read between the lines. I have a picture of my Dad reading a letter from my Mom while sitting on a bench, in a tent, somewhere in France—his little corner of sanity in the midst of the maelstrom of madness that was World War II. What bound them together against the horror, fear, the desperate loneliness, and even the monotony of the day after day, month after month of waiting was this singleness of mind: “He will come back to me,” and “Nothing, not Hell itself, will keep me from returning to my beloved.”

Do we love Jesus like this? The scripture tells us that in the Last Days the love of many will wax cold. (Matt 24:12) Our churches and pastors should be encouraging us to hold fast to the promise of our Betrothed return.

²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful; ²⁴ and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Heb 10:23-25/RSVCE)

Are we writing letters to Jesus in our thoughts, prayers, reading of scripture, church attendance, and preparing our wedding dress for His return? Do we run out to our “mailboxes” to see if there is any sign of His return?

Preparation

The time between the end of the *Erusin* ceremony after the bridegroom and the bride were separated and before the *carrying away* of the *Nissuin*, the bride prepared her wedding garment. She had at least nine months to finish it, but it was up to the bridegroom’s father to decide when everything was ready before he would send his son to bring home his bride. One of the items on the father’s list of things to be completed before the *Nissuin* could begin was the completion of the bride’s wedding dress. I’m not sure how the bridegroom’s father would know this, but perhaps the bride’s parents kept him apprised of her progress. In the case of the heavenly Father is very keenly aware of the Church’s progress on her wedding dress as He has no need to consult with anyone on this matter,

¹³ *And before him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do. (Heb 4:13/RSVCE)*

Perhaps that's why our Father has delayed sending His Son, our Bridegroom...we seem to be making very slow progress on our wedding garment! Obviously, in the case of Jesus, the Bridegroom, and the Church, the Bride, we are speaking figuratively with respect to the wedding garment. There is actually some deep theology here which is described in Genesis 3:21 on how God clothed Adam and Eve in "garments of skin" after the Fall. Through Christ we take off this "garment of skin," that is, old nature, and we put on the wedding garment that has been "granted her [the Bride] to be clothed in" which is the *likeness* of God.

²² *Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, ²³ and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph 4:22-23)/RSVCE)*

We know that Christ is the only perfect "image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15) and so it is that this new nature, this wedding garments to replace the "garments of skin," which has been granted to us to put on is Christ Himself. Indeed, St. Paul exhorts us to "put on our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 13:14). How do we do that? As a Catholic it begins with baptism which occurred for me while I was an infant. Remember, a couple of essays ago I wrote of the *Shiddukhin*, the first part of the Jewish wedding ceremony, when the parents of the bridegroom and the bride agreed that their children would be married. That's what my parents did. I was baptized into Christ's Church, His Bride, so that I might be married for all eternity to Him, and it is through this Church that I have all that I need to be clothed in righteousness and holiness. Thanks Mom and Dad! It is up to us through grace to take full advantage of all that God has made available to me through the Church so that we who make up that Church may be "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing...holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:25-27).

Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.

This is what we don't want to hear, and we won't hear it if we are *like* Him.

² *Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears **we shall be like him**, for we shall see him as he is. ³ And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. (1John 3:2-3/RSVCE, emphasis added)*

We have this hope within us and we have faith that through Christ we have all things pertaining to a life of godliness even to the partaking of the divine nature.

³ *His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, ⁴ by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature. (2Peter 1:3-4)*

And how is it that we may partake of the divine nature so that we may be *like* Him? Christ in us is the hope of our glory (Col 1:27), which is our being conformed to the *likeness* of Him to whom we are betrothed (Rom 8:29). The life of the Trinity flowing from Christ to us as from a vine to its branches we abide in Him as He in us.

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples. (John 15:4-8)

It is the fruit of our abiding with Christ that proves we are His disciples, and we will not be cast away or rejected as one not invited to the wedding feast. Christ as provided his bride with everything she needs to cloth herself in the likeness of her Bridegroom, even His very flesh and blood.

⁵³ So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; ⁵⁴ he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. ⁵⁶ He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever.” (John 6:53-58)



The Church provides these mysteries to the faithful through the Mass and Divine Liturgy where the Bride washes her wedding garment in the Word (in the Liturgy of the Word) and in the Blood of the Lamb (in the Liturgy of the Eucharist). As it so beautifully says in the Extraordinary Form of the Mass:

Oh God, Who in creating man didst exalt his nature very wonderfully and yet more wonderfully didst establish it anew: by the mystery signified in the mingling of this water and wine, grant us to have a part in the Godhead of Him Who hath vouchsafed to share in our manhood, Jesus Christ, Thy Son, Our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee in the unity of the Holy Ghost, God; world without end. Amen. (from Father Lassance, *The New Roman Missal*, 1945)

As Adam’s bride, Eve, was birthed from his side so the Second Adam, Jesus Christ, birthed through His pierced side His bride. The mingled water and blood, which flowed from His side like amniotic fluid of birth, is both the Word and Eucharist that sustains and transfigures the Church so as become His Bride,

*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, **having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,** ²⁷ that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.* (Eph 5:25-27/RSVCE, emphasis added)

¹³ Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and whence have they come?” ¹⁴ I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And he said to me, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; **they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.**

¹⁵ Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night within his temple; and he who sits upon the throne will shelter them with his presence.

¹⁶ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.

¹⁷ For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” (Rev 7:13-17, emphasis added)

(7) Is there any precedent in Scripture and Tradition for the *Rapiemur*?

I’m so glad you asked—Yes! The very first Christian was “caught up” and taken into heaven by the angels. In her case we call it the “Assumption,” that’s right, we are talking about Mary. The Church’s Tradition of the Assumption of Mary dates back to the earliest centuries of the Church although it was not officially made a dogma of the Church until 1950 by Pope Pius XII when he stated that the Virgin Mary *“having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory”* (from the Apostolic Constitution: *Munificentissimus Deus*). There is a distinct difference between that of the Ascension of Jesus Christ and that of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin and that is of the strong parallel that the latter has to that of the *rapiemur*, particularly that it is mediated by the action of angels (Matt 24:31), and secondly as St. Paul’s tells us that the dead in Christ will rise first (1Thess 4:16). Mary, unique among Christians in holiness and for being the mother of our Lord, having “fallen asleep” it was not fitting that she lie in the tomb until the “end of the age.” Saint John of Damascus eloquently articulated the theology of the Assumption in the 6th century:

It was fitting that she, who had kept her virginity intact in childbirth, should keep her own body free from all corruption even after death. It was fitting that she, who had carried the Creator as a child at her breast, should dwell in the divine tabernacles. It was fitting that the spouse, whom the Father had taken to himself, should live in the divine mansions. It was fitting that she, who had seen her Son upon the cross and who had thereby received into her heart the sword of sorrow which she had escaped in the act of giving birth to him, should look upon him as he sits with the Father. It was fitting that God's Mother should possess what belongs to her Son, and that she should be honored by every creature as the Mother and as the handmaid of God."

~ St. John of Damascus

(Encomium in Dormitionem Dei Genetricis Semperque Virginis Mariae, Hom. II, n. 14)



RAPIEMUR... IN NUBIBUS OBVIAM CHRISTO
IN AERA

**“Caught up...in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”
(1Thess 4:17)**

The *Nissuin* Cup— Two Shall Be One

Just as in the *Eyrusin* ceremony a glass of wine is shared between the bridegroom and the bride at the conclusion of the *Nissuin*. You are probably familiar with the tradition that after drinking the wine the glass is wrapped in a towel, placed on the ground and then the bridegroom stomps on the glass crushing it into pieces. The origin of this tradition is unknown, but there are a number of explanations regarding its significance for the Jewish couple. The following explanation is taken from the Chabad website, an Orthodox Hasidic Jewish organization, in response to a question regarding this tradition:

Question:

I understand that the reason I will be breaking a glass with my foot at the end of the wedding ceremony is to commemorate the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem some 2,000 years ago. This was indeed a significant event in Jewish history, but it doesn't seem to have any relevance to me. What does a destroyed building have to do with my wedding?

Answer:

The destruction of the Holy Temple has extreme personal relevance. It happened to you. It is true that shattering the glass primarily commemorates the fall of Jerusalem; however, it is also a reminder of another cataclysmic shattering—that of your very own temple, your soul.

Before you were born, you and your soulmate were one, a single soul.



Then, as your time to enter this world approached, G-d shattered that single soul into two parts, one male and one female. These two half-souls were then born into the world with a mission to try to find each other and reunite.

At the time, the split seemed tragic and incomprehensible. Why create fragmentation where there was once completion? Why break something just so it could be fixed? And if you were meant to be together, why didn't G-d leave you together?

It is under the chupah, the wedding canopy, that these questions can be answered. With marriage, two halves are reuniting, never to part again. Not only that, but you can look back at the painful experience of being separated and actually celebrate it. For now it is clear that the separation brought you closer than you would otherwise have been.

Ironically, it was only by being torn apart and living lives away from each other that were you able to develop as individuals, to mature and grow. Your coming together is something you had to achieve

and choose, and therefore it is appreciated deeply. With the joyous reunion at the wedding, it becomes clear that your soul was split only in order to reunite and become one on a higher and deeper level.

And so you break a glass under the chupah and immediately say the congratulatory wish of "Mazel Tov!" Because now, in retrospect, even the splitting of souls is reason to be joyous, for it gave your connection the possibility for real depth and meaning.

We see a parallel story in the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.

The Temple was not merely a building; it was the meeting place of heaven and earth, the ideal and the real, G-d and creation. When the Temple was lost, so was the open relationship between G-d and the world. Our souls were ripped away from our Soulmate.

The only antidote to fragmentation is unity. And the deepest unity is experienced at a wedding. Every wedding is a healing, a mending of one fragmented soul, a rebuilding of Jerusalem in miniature. Our sages teach us, "Whoever celebrates with a bride and groom, it is as if he rebuilt one of the ruins of Jerusalem." When soulmates reunite in a holy marriage, an energy of love and oneness is generated, elevating the world and bringing it one step closer to mending its broken relationship with G-d.

So you see, your personal story and the story of Jerusalem's destruction are inextricably linked. The shattering that happened to Jerusalem happened to your soul, and the joy you are experiencing now will one day be experienced by Jerusalem, too.

One day soon, when the Temple is rebuilt, our souls will reunite with G-d, our Soulmate, in a true relationship that we built together. We will no longer mourn the destruction, but looking back we will finally understand its purpose, and we will celebrate.

Then, even the shattering will deserve the blessing of "Mazel Tov."

https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/542288/jewish/Why-Break-a-Glass-at-a-Wedding.htm

Catholics as well as most Christians believe that God creates the human soul at the moment of conception and therefore rejects the idea of the "pre-existence" of souls let alone the shattering of one soul into two, nevertheless there are still elements of this tradition of the breaking of the *Nissuin* cup that parallel Christian theology and can facilitate an appreciation of the profound depths and beauty of the *Nissuin* between Christ and His Church.

The destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD was a seminal event in the history of the Jewish people that still resonates to this day. The Temple was the meeting place between God and His people. The glass that is shattered in the wedding ceremony serves as a reminder of what was lost and what they believe will be restored. In many ways the Temple was like the Garden of Eden where God walked with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day. It is here that Christian theologians see the shattering of the relationship between God and humanity, within humanity itself, and between humanity and creation with the disobedience of Adam and Eve. Yet, God promised that a savior, the *seed of the woman*, would restore the former unity and harmony that had been shattered by sin.

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." (Gen 3:15/RSVCE)

This passage is known as the *Protoevangelium*, the First Gospel, because Christian theologians believe it is a prophesy of the coming Messiah who would crush Satan's head with His heel which, in a way, reminds us of the tradition of the bridegroom in the Jewish wedding tradition who shatters the *Nissuin* cup under his foot. When Christ shatters the head of Satan, He not only destroys the work of the serpent of Eden,

For this purpose, the Son of God appeared, that he might destroy the works of the devil. (1John 3:8/ Douay Rheims)

but He restores and unites all things in Him:

⁹That he might make known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in him, ¹⁰In the dispensation of the fullness of times, to re-establish all things in Christ, that are in heaven and on earth, in him. (Eph 1:9-10/Douay Rheims)

We discussed earlier in this essay that Saint Jerome was responsible for translating both the Old and New Testaments from their original languages to produce the Latin Vulgate Bible. Scholars in the late 16th and early 17th centuries would

translate the Latin Vulgate to produce the English language bible known as the Douay Rheims which has been the most frequently used bible in Catholicism until the mid-20th century (I quoted the two scriptures above from the Douay Rheims translation). Now, I'm going to quote Genesis 3:15, but this time from the Douay Rheims version and I want you to see if you can spot the difference between this version and the RSVCE (Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition) quoted on the previous page.

I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel. (Gen 3:15/ Douay Rheims)

Did you see the difference? Saint Jerome had translated the Hebrew in which Genesis was written into “*she* shall crush thy head” while almost all other bibles translate this same passage as “*he* shall crush thy head.” So who’s right? The amazing thing is...they’re both right as Dr. Andrew Minto, professor of Biblical Exegesis at Franciscan University of Stuebenville beautifully articulated in *Genesis 1-11: Exegesis and Patristics*, 2005. (Incidentally, Dr. Andrew Minto was my professor for Biblical Exegesis when I was working on a Masters of Theology some years earlier.) What follows is Dr. Minto’s exegesis of Genesis 3:15 beginning with a direct translation of the Hebrew. Please remember that Hebrew is read from right to left:



“This passage is striking! A message of hope is given humanity, for, even though God begins to punish the offenders, he speaks of mankind having offspring - so his blessing on future generations of mankind has not been removed. This is in itself a declaration of mercy.

God informs the serpent he will put enmity between the serpent and the woman. This is reinforced by the second part of the sentence, “between your offspring and hers.” The Hebrew word זָרַע - zera - is the same for “offspring” and “seed”, accounting for the difference in English translations, but in both cases the word is masculine.

*The second sentence begins with the personal pronoun הוּא. The word may refer either to the “woman”, or to the “offspring” of the woman. This is often translated in two ways. Both the Latin Vulgate and the Douay-Rheims translations convey this passage as “**she** will crush your head, while you strike at his heel “... whereas the Revised Standard Version, New American Standard, and the NIV read “**he** will crush your head...” In view of the epicene personal pronoun (one form to indicate both male and female sex) as described above, both are correct!” (<http://bible scripture.net/First.html>)*

We all know who *the woman* is in this passage; she is Mary the mother of our Lord, Jesus Christ. He is the seed of *the woman* who crushes the head of the serpent destroying the works of the devil (1John 3:8). Yet, the pronoun used for the person who crushes the head of the serpent may in fact apply to *the woman*, the *seed of the woman*, or both. In this regard both the Latin Vulgate (and its the Douay Rheims translation) are correct. This is why it is Catholic Tradition to see both Mary and Jesus as crushing the head of Satan; Mary in her *fiat* (“I am the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy word.”) becomes the obedient New Eve counterposing the disobedient Eve of the Garden, and Jesus in His Passion and Resurrection destroys the consequence of sin and reconciles us to the Father.

⁸ *All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. (2Cor 5:18-19)*

But I will take this pronoun, **she**, a step further by suggesting that the “she” who crushes the head of the serpent is also the Bride of the Lamb. Is this too bold a suggestion? I don’t believe so given the testimony of Scripture:

...then the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. (Rom 16:20)

Then there is the final battle between Christ, His Bride, and Angels against the Dragon, his Anti-Christ, False Prophet, and the Nations who have allied themselves with this unholy Anti-Trinity. This story takes place in the Book of Revelation just after the wedding of the Bride and the Lamb:

¹¹ *Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed which no one knows but himself. ¹³ He is clad in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, followed him on white horses. ¹⁵ From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of kings and Lord of lords.*



Virgin of the Apocalypse
Note that the Woman and her Seed both have their feet on the head of the Serpent.

¹⁷ *Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly in midheaven, “Come, gather for the great supper of God, ¹⁸ to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great.” ¹⁹ And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who sits upon the horse and against his army. ²⁰ And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had worked the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with brimstone. ²¹ And the rest were slain by the sword of him who sits upon the horse, the sword that issues from his mouth; and all the birds were gorged with their flesh. (Rev 19:11-21/RSVCE, emphasis added)*

Does this surprise you that the Bride dressed in white linen is also an army and who follow her Bridegroom into the final battle at Armageddon? Perhaps you think that this is all just metaphorical. Maybe, but we will consider that position in another essay. Either way, the point is that our Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords, allows us to participate in His victory over evil and the final and definitive crushing of the head of Satan.

To conclude I would like to make just one more comment with respect to the “reuniting” into a single soul the souls of the man and woman symbolized by the shattering of the *Nissuin* cup. Christianity offers a very different understanding of the oneness achieved in matrimony than that perceived in Orthodox Judaism. We agree that the two become one because Jesus explicitly states this to be true:

⁶ *But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ⁷ ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, ⁸ and the two shall become one.’ So they are no longer two but one. ⁹ What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.” (Mark 19:6-9)*

The foundation for the unity that is to be found in Christian marriage is the same as that which is to be found between Christ and His Church and that is the *perichoresis* (the indwelling love) between the Persons of the Trinity. The unity possessed in the Trinity is beyond both human comprehension and ability to produce it. Yet, Jesus prayed that we would have the unity that is shared between Him and the Trinity and so I know that not only is it possible, it is inevitable.

²⁰ *“I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. ²² The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them,*

that they may be one even as we are one, ²³I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me. ²⁴Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵O righteous Father, the world has not known thee, but I have known thee; and these know that thou hast sent me. ²⁶I made known to them thy name, and I will make it known, that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.” (John 17:20-26)

And it is to this end that our Lord offered His Body and Blood to His Father on the Cross and gave it to us as the Sacrament of Abiding in Him.

⁵⁶ He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me. (John 6:56-57)

This is the *Nissuin* cup that the bridegroom and the bride share in the Rite of Marriage in the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. This is the *Nissuin* cup the Church, the Bride of Christ, drinks so that she may be found without spot or wrinkle, holy and without blemish (Eph 5:27) having washed her robes in the Blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:14).



The Unveiling of the Bride

Before we start our discussion about the bridal veil and the unveiling of the bride I thought it might be a good idea to share some thoughts on what it means when something or someone is “veiled.” Now these are my thoughts, not a formal definition as defined by Webster, Google, or other such adjudicator of the meaning of words. To me something that is veiled is only partially seen or known. It could be that what is “veiled” is known more fully by others, and I just don’t know it, then again it might be unknowable, or it possesses depth which cannot be fully plumbed by the human mind. Yet the fact that something is veiled and therefore mysterious makes my desire all the more resolute to know it fully or have it reveal itself to me. This desire is the starting point within the mind of science and reason where it seeks to unveil the unknown, while desire of the heart waits in faith and hope for the veiled to unveil itself. The mind tests and proves while the heart waits in silence; this synthesis calls to mind the words of Saint Theophan the Recluse, “The principal thing is to stand before God [the *Mysterium Tremendum*] with the mind in the heart.” Both the knowing of the mind and of the heart

are essential as we stand before the veil that separates the known from the unknown; this is the epistemology of the Church, Reason and Faith, acting together to produce *Scientia* and *Sepentia*, Knowledge and Wisdom.

The Scripture often speaks of Wisdom not in terms of “it,” but as a Person, often in the feminine, and she does not unveil herself to just anyone, but to him who has proven himself worthy of her.

*Listen, my child, and take my advice;
do not refuse my counsel.*

²⁴ *Put your feet into her fetters,
and your neck under her yoke.*

²⁵ *Bend your shoulders and carry her
and do not be irked at her bonds.*

²⁶ *With all your soul draw close to her;
and with all your strength keep her ways.*

²⁷ *Inquire and search, seek and find;
when you get hold of her, do not let her go.*

²⁸ *Thus at last you will find rest in her,
and she will become your joy.*

²⁹ *Her fetters will be a place of strength;
her snare, a robe of spun gold.*

³⁰ *Her yoke will be a gold ornament;
her bonds, a purple cord.*

³¹ *You will wear her as a robe of glory,
and bear her as a splendid crown. (Sirach 6:23-31)*

Now let's return to the bride that I introduced in my essay “The *Shiddukhin*,” Rebekah, the espoused of Isaac, the son of Abraham and Sarah. Rebekah was to become the icon of all brides for the Children of Israel because she is their mother. It is in this encounter between Rebekah and Isaac that the veiling of the bride enters the Jewish Wedding Tradition, and subsequently into Christian weddings.



⁶⁴ *And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she alighted from the camel, ⁶⁵ and said to the servant, “Who is the man yonder, walking in the field to meet us?” The servant said, “It is my master.” So she took her veil and covered herself. ⁶⁶ And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. ⁶⁷ Then Isaac brought her into the tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her. (Gen 24:64-67)*

It was not the custom of Jewish women to veil their faces in the presence of men as evidenced by the fact that Rebekah did not wear her veil in the presence of Eliezer, the servant of Abraham. Why then did Rebekah veil herself when she caught sight of her bridegroom, Isaac, approaching? May I suggest that in this first meeting between herself and Isaac, that Rebekah's veiling herself was sending several messages to her soon to be husband, one of which was, “There is more to me than meets the eyes.” Rebekah was more than just a pretty face and the Scripture testifies to this (Gen 24:16). It was

Rebekah not Isaac who discerned the will of God regarding which of their sons should receive their father's blessing and inheritance. God had chosen that it would be through Jacob (whom God was later call Israel) that the seed of the woman (Gen 3:15) would pass, but Isaac had chosen Esau to receive his blessing. It was only through the cunning of Rebekah that Jacob received the blessing of Isaac thus assuring that God's will was accomplished (Gen 27). As the mother of Israel a special anointing rested upon Rebekah, one that was veiled from her husband Isaac.

In explaining the tradition of the veiling of a Jewish bride the Rabbis also refer to the Scriptures which discuss the use of veils not only when coming into the Divine Presence, but also with people and objects that have become holy by virtue of their proximity to the *Shekinah* glory.

¹⁸ Moses said, "I pray thee, show me thy glory." ¹⁹ And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord'; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. ²⁰ But," he said, "you cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live." ²¹ And the Lord said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand upon the rock; ²² and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; ²³ then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen." (Exo 33:18-23)

God would not allow Moses to see His Face, even so the experience of the Divine glory left so great an imprint upon Moses that he changed through his participation in the divine nature albeit only for a time. Nevertheless, during this time Moses had to wear a veil for the glory of God shone upon him.

²⁹ When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tables of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. ³⁰ And when Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. ³¹ But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses talked with them. ³² And afterward all the people of Israel came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. ³³ And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; ³⁴ but whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he took the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, ³⁵ the people of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone; and Moses would put the veil upon his face again, until he went in to speak with him. (Exo 34:29-35)

In the construction of the Tent of Meeting God had instructed that a veil be placed between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. The Ark of the Testimony (Covenant) was kept in the Most Holy Place and the Shekinah Glory of God rested upon the Mercy Seat of the Ark. The veil reminded all who entered the Holy Place that the Ark of the Testimony was Holy and could only be approached by the High Priest and only at specified times while carefully following the instruction given by God.



³¹ "And you shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet stuff and fine twined linen; in skilled work shall it be made, with cherubim; ³² and you shall hang it upon four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, with hooks of gold, upon four bases of silver. ³³ And you shall hang the veil from the clasps, and bring the ark of the testimony in thither within the veil; and the veil shall separate for you the holy place from the most holy. (Exo 26:31-33)

In fact, great care had to be taken to follow precisely these instructions when the High Priest entered the Most Holy Place lest they look upon the Glory of God and die.

The LORD spoke to Moses, after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the LORD and died; ² and the LORD said to Moses, “Tell Aaron your brother not to come at all times into the holy place within the veil, before the mercy seat which is upon the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat. ³ But thus shall Aaron come into the holy place: with a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. ⁴ He shall put on the holy linen coat, and shall have the linen breeches on his body, be girded with the linen girdle, and wear the linen turban; these are the holy garments. He shall bathe his body in water, and then put them on. ⁵ And he shall take from the congregation of the people of Israel two male goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering. (Lev 16:1-5)

You will find these traditions of Jewish worship are still present within the liturgies of the Catholic (at least prior to the *Novus Ordo Mass*) and Orthodox Churches. In the Catholic Church Tabernacles and chalices were (and sometimes still are) veiled, and even statues and crucifixes were veiled during Holy Week to remind Catholics that they are in a holy place and that these objects are themselves made holy by their proximity to our Eucharistic Lord. In the Orthodox Church an *iconostasis* separates the sanctuary from the rest of the church just as the veil separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Tent of Meeting and in later years, the Temple in Jerusalem. For both the Western and the Eastern Churches of Christendom the most holy object, the *Shekinah* glory of God Himself, is the Eucharist, the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ and He is veiled in the forms of bread and wine save for those who see with the eyes of faith. It is in the context of this sacred reality and in reflecting upon the sons of Aaron that St. Paul warned the Corinthians that those receiving the Eucharist unworthily were becoming ill while some died (1Cor 11:29-30). This warning is still relevant to believers today.



In this same chapter in First Corinthians St. Paul also gives instruction that when the community gathers together in worship that women should wear a veil, one that covers the head, but not the face. Paul was bringing forward a Jewish tradition into the Church while Christianizing it by explaining that the woman wears a veil on her head as a symbol that she is in submission to Christ, who is the head of the Body and her Bridegroom. This beautiful tradition (mostly abandoned in the *Novus Ordo Mass*) is a setting apart of women and girls as icons of the Bride, handmaidens of the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, as Mary is of her Bridegroom, the Holy Spirit. The veil also is a reminder to both men and boys that women and girls are to be treated with the dignity and respect such as that afforded to one who is esteemed by her Bridegroom and King. Alas, these were the days when fathers taught their sons chivalry, and women had the self-worth to expect it. But, I digress.



Now, back to the veiled bride. All of these ideas of mystery, sacredness, reverence, and unapproachability, are understood to be present in the *kiddushin* (sanctification) that occurs during the *Erysin* (Betrothal) ceremony under the *Huppah* where the bridegroom presents his bride with the rings. In the traditional wedding ceremony the bride and bridegroom are essentially married, but do not live together nor consummate their marriage until a year later. Traditionally, when the

Eyrusin and the *Nissuin* were ceremonies separated by a year the bride remains veiled from her bridegroom and is set apart as *hekdesch*, a term used to describe a consecrated object in the Temple.

The veil is symbolic of her new unapproachability to others, not only sexually, but as hekdesch, a sanctified object in the temple. The sacred objects of the tabernacle were "veiled" before being taken up to be carried by the Levites. The betrothal ceremony is likened, in a legal sense, to those sanctified objects of the temple. This is the significance of the term kiddushin: the groom, in marriage, sets the bride aside as hekdesch. The analogy strikes deeper if we compare it to the face of Moses, which radiated light after he received the commandments. Moses placed masveh (a veil) over his face as though to imply separateness, withdrawal, almost an other-worldliness. (by Maurice Lamm from:

https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/313719/jewish/The-Jewish-Veiling-Ceremony-Bedeken.htm)



I have argued that we can find elements of the Traditional Jewish Wedding (*Shiddukhin*, *Eyrusin*, and *Nissuin*) in the New Testament as they pertain to Christ the Bridegroom and the Church the Bride. As we have previously discussed, after the Betrothal (*Eyrusin*) the bridegroom would return to his father's house to prepare a place for his bride while the bride would stay with her parents as she prepared herself and her wedding garment for the bridegroom's return to carry her off to the *Nissuin*. The bride was set apart or veiled to her bridegroom until the *Nissuin* ceremony. This is not, however, the model for Christ and His Church. Christ began the unveiling after the completion of the *Eyrusin* ceremony after He drinks the *Eyrusin* cup and dies on the cross.

²⁸ *After this Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the scripture), "I thirst." ²⁹ A bowl full of vinegar stood there; so they put a sponge full of the vinegar on hyssop and held it to his mouth.*

³⁰ *When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, "It is finished"; and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19:28-30)*

And behold, the veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth quaked, rocks were split, (Matt 27:51)

By the rending of the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place (the Holy of Holies) Christ restored access to God that was lost in the Garden through sin.

¹⁹ *Therefore, brothers, since through the blood of Jesus we have confidence of entrance into the sanctuary ²⁰ by the new and living way he opened for us through the veil, that is, his flesh, ²¹ and since we have "a great priest over the house of God," ²² let us approach with a sincere heart and in absolute trust, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water. (Heb 10:19-21)*

Christ has sprinkled and washed us with the blood and water that poured forth from His side on Calvary so that we may enter the sanctuary of His Glory with confidence not fearing that in seeing His Face that we would perish like the sons of Aaron. Instead, Christ begins to lift the veil of His bride in Baptism and through Word and Sacraments through His Church we are conformed into His image (Rom 8:29), that is, from glory to glory becoming *like* Him.

¹⁸ *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2Cor 3:18)*

This is what the Eastern Church calls *theosis* and it begins here as it cannot wait until we get to heaven. Why?—because the sanctification of the Bride has to begin here and now as She prepares herself for the return of her Bridegroom. As John the Beloved said,

¹⁶ *So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. ¹⁷ In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so are we in this world. (1John 4:16-17, emphasis added)*

This is the end-game, the *telos*, that draws the Church towards her eternal destiny in Christ. This is our heavenly vocation, to be the Bride of the Lamb as each believer presses towards this fulfillment.

I press towards the mark, to the prize of the supernal [heavenly] vocation of God in Christ Jesus. (Phil 3:14/ Douey Rheims)

I leave this essay with this final question. Will we, the Bride, ever attain *“unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the age of the fullness of Christ?”* (Eph 4:13/Douey Rheims)? I believe we will, but it may not be in the way that we imagine. The best times of my life have always involved learning and changing especially with the ones that I love. I cannot image an eternity where there isn’t something new to learn, or a change to be made in which somehow through it I become a better, more loving person in my relationship with God and with my family and friends. God is infinite, omniscient, perfect and never changing; how can I a finite being ever encompass such a magnitude of being? Perhaps our Bridegroom is forever unveiling His Bride to ever increasing wonders of His Beauty, Truth, and Goodness. Fortunately, I am not alone in thinking this way and I’d like to share the words of Kallistos Ware, the Eastern Orthodox Bishop of Diokleia. This is for me, a most beautiful vision of our eternal life as the Bride with her Bridegroom, Jesus Christ our Lord, Who for all eternity is unveiling His Bride:

“Here below,” says Newman, “to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.” But is this the case only here below? St. Gregory of Nyssa believed that even in heaven perfection is growth. In a fine paradox he says that the essence of perfection consists precisely in never becoming perfect, but is always reaching forward to some higher perfection that lies beyond. Because God is infinite, this constant “reaching forward” or epiktasis, as the Greek Fathers termed it, proves limitless. The soul possesses God, and yet still seeks him; her joy is full, and yet grows always more intense. God grows ever nearer to us, yet he still remains the Other; we behold him face to face, yet we still continue to advance further and further into the divine mystery. Although strangers no longer, we do not cease to be pilgrims. We go forward “from glory to glory” (2Cor 3:18), and then to a glory that is greater still. Never, in all eternity, shall we reach a point where we have accomplished all that there is to do, or discovered all that there is to know. “Not only in this present age but also in the Age to come,” says St. Irenaeus, “God will always have something more to teach man, and man will always have something more to learn from God.” (Bishop Kallistos Ware, The Orthodox Way, 1995 p.138)