

The method of receiving with the Communion Spoon

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Concept and prefiguration of the Communion Spoon

The communion spoon, in Greek “λαβίς” from the verb “λαμβάνω” I receive, is defined as the tool with which something is held, e.g. tongs.¹ “It is the long gold or silver-plated spoon, with which the priest administers holy communion to the faithful in both kinds.”² It came into liturgical practice via the Old Testament, from the vision of Isaiah, when he received the prophetic gift after one of the Seraphim took a burning coal and placed it on his lips with tongs.³ This act is a prefiguration of Holy Communion: “Just as one of the Seraphim took the burning coal and gave it to Isaiah, so the priests take the bread, that is, the body of Christ the Master and administer it to the people.” (Ὡς περ Σεραφεῖμ ἔλαβε τόν ἄνθρακα καί δέδωκε τῷ Ἡσαΐα, οὕτως καί οἱ ἱερεῖς λαμβάνουσι τόν ἄρτον, ἥτοι τό Δεσποτικόν σῶμα καί διδούσιν τῷ λαῷ).⁴ Thus the term “λαβίς” or “λαβίδα” was known throughout the history of the liturgical – eucharistic life of the Church, at times it was understood differently on a practical level, until the form by which we know it today, as a communion spoon, prevailed.

¹ Skarlatos D. Byzantios, *Λεξικόν ἀρχαίας ἐλληνικῆς γλώσσης καί καθαρευούσης*, vol. 1, Athens 1964.

² Dem. N. Moraitis, “Λαβίς” in *Θρησκευτική καί Ἠθική Ἐγκυκλοπαίδεια* 8 (1965) 55.

³ Isa. 6:6-7.

⁴ Sophronios Patriarch of Jerusalem, *Λόγος περιέχων τήν ἐκκλησιαστικήν ἅπασαν ἱστορίαν· καί λεπτομερῆ ἀφήγησιν πάντων τῶν ἐν τῇ θείᾳ ἱερουργίᾳ τελουμένων*, PG 87³, 3984C. See also Ioannis M. Fountoulis, *Λειτουργική Α΄. Εἰσαγωγή στή θεία Λατρεία*, Thessaloniki 2000, p. 49.

The Communion of the Apostles

According to the New Testament at the Last Supper, the Mystical Supper, Christ administered His body and blood to the Apostles in this manner: “And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood.” («'Εσθιόντων δὲ αὐτῶν λαβῶν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὸν ἄρτον καὶ εὐχαριστήσας ἔκλασε καὶ ἐδίδου τοῖς μαθηταῖς καὶ εἶπε· λάβετε φάγετε· τοῦτό ἐστι τὸ σῶμά μου· καὶ λαβῶν τὸ ποτήριον καὶ εὐχαριστήσας ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς λέγων· πῖετε ἐξ αὐτοῦ πάντες· τοῦτο γὰρ ἐστι τὸ αἷμά μου»⁵). From this description it appears that the distribution of the bread took place first and then the distribution of the wine. The use of “λαβῶν” refers to administering with the hands. It is depicted in this same manner in Byzantine art - iconography, the icon of the Communion of the Apostles witnesses to this from the 6th c. AD. Within the apse of the sanctuary, mainly from the 11th century on, Christ appears to offer the bread and the cup separately in depictions. The Apostles are divided into two groups of six. On the right, Christ gives a portion of the bread in the hand of each one who approaches. And on the left, Christ communes the other six offering to each the cup with His precious blood.⁶ In depictions from the 16th century Christ appears to commune the Apostles with a communion spoon.

Communion with the “λαβίδα of the hand” and receiving the Holy Gifts separately

The Christians of the first centuries communed according to the model of the Mystical Supper, that is, first they received the bread and then the wine. This model is implied in the text of the *Didache* (1st c. AD)

⁵ Matt. 26:26-28. Cf. Mrk. 14:22-24; Luk. 22:19-20; 1 Cor. 11: 23-25.

⁶ Nikita Passaris, *Ἡ παράσταση τῆς Κοινωνίας τῶν Ἀποστόλων στή βυζαντινὴ τέχνη (6^{ος} αἰ. – α' μισό 15^{ου} αἰ.)*, Vol 1 – Κείμενο, Doctoral Dissertation, Athens, 2015.

where the following is noted: “But let no one eat or drink of your Eucharist, unless they have been baptized into the name of the Lord.” («Μηδείς δέ φαγέτω μηδέ πιέτω ἀπό τῆς εὐχαριστίας ὑμῶν, ἀλλ’ οἱ βαπτισθέντες εἰς ὄνομα Κυρίου»).⁷ St. Justin Martyr (2nd c. philosopher and martyr) in his *Apology*, describes the deacons communing each one who is present “from the bread and wine and water over which the thanksgiving was pronounced, and to those who are not present they bring a portion” («ἀπό τοῦ εὐχαριστηθέντος ἄρτου καί οἴνου καί ὕδατος, καί τοῖς οὐ παροῦσι ἀποφέρουσι»).⁸ The separate offering of the bread and wine is evident. The water refers to the need of the wine to be mixed, but also in accordance with the crucifixion of Jesus when “one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out” («εἷς τῶν στρατιωτῶν λόγχῃ αὐτοῦ τήν πλευράν ἔνυξε καί εὐθέως ἐξῆλθεν αἷμα καί ὕδωρ»).⁹ The Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome has similar information.¹⁰ According to Eusebius of Caesarea (3rd to 4th c.) Sixtus, Bishop of Rome (258 AD) narrating the repentance of a heretic notes that: “he listened to the Eucharist, chanted-along the Amen, participated in the feast and offered his hands to receive the holy sustenance...” («Εὐχαριστίας γάρ ἐπακούσαντα καί συνεπιφθεγξάμενον τό Ἀμήν, καί τραπέζῃ παραστάνατα καί χεῖρας εἰς ὑποδοχὴν τῆς ἁγίας τροφῆς προτείναντα...»).¹¹

According to the Apostolic Constitutions, a text of the Antiochian tradition (end of the 4th c. AD), during Holy Communion the rite called for “the bishop to administer the offering saying: the Body of Christ, and the one who receives it says: Amen. After, the deacon holding the cup while he offers it says: the Blood of Christ, cup of life. And the one who drinks (of it) says: Amen.” («Ὁ μὲν ἐπίσκοπος διδότη τὴν προσφορὰν λέγων· Σῶμα Χριστοῦ. Καί ὁ δεχόμενος λεγέτω· Ἀμήν. Ὁ δὲ διάκονος κατεχέτω το

⁷ Georg Schöllgen (ed.), *Didache zwölf-Apostel-Lehre*, Barcelona – Rome – New York, 1991, p. 122.

⁸ Justin Martyr, *Ἀπολογία*, 65, PG 6, 428B.

⁹ Jn. 19:34.

¹⁰ Wilhelm Geerlings (ed.), *Traditio Apostolica*, Barcelona - Rome- New York, 1991, pp. 292-296.

¹¹ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Church History*, Book 7, 9:4.

ποτήριον καί ἐπιδιδούς λεγέτω· Αἷμα Χριστοῦ, ποτήριον ζωῆς. Καί ὁ πίνων λεγέτω· Ἀμήν»¹² Basil the Great refers to the governing, at that time, rubrics according to which the communicant received the portion in the palm of their hand from the liturgizing priest, and they placed it “in the mouth with their own hand” («τῷ στόματι τῆ ἰδίᾳ χειρί»).¹³ Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, who is familiar with the rite of Jerusalem and clearly the Divine Liturgy of St. James, mentions the same act: “As you approach do not come with your hands outstretched, or with your fingers crossed. But make the left palm a throne for the right, as if you were going to receive a king, and cupping your palm accept the body of Christ. Draw near also to the cup of the blood, not with your hands raised, but bowed down and with reverence and respect say, Amen. Be sanctified from the blood also by receiving Christ” («Προσιών οὖν, μή τεταμένοις τοῖς τῶν χειρῶν καρποῖς προσέρχου, μηδέ διηρημένοις τοῖς δακτύλοις· ἀλλά τήν ἀριστεράν θρόνον ποιήσας τῆ δεξιᾷ, ὡς μελλούση βασιλέα ὑποδέχεσθαι, καί κοιλάνας τήν παλάμην δέχου τό σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, προσέρχου καί τῷ ποτηρίῳ τοῦ αἵματος, μή ἀνατείνων τάς χεῖρας, ἀλλά κύπτων, καί τρόπῳ προσκυνήσεως καί σεβάσματος λέγων τό Ἀμήν. Ἀγιάζου καί ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος μεταλαμβάνων Χριστοῦ»)¹⁴ In the Divine Liturgy of Saint James, the following is noted regarding the way the faithful receive Communion: "The Lord bless and make us worthy to take the fiery coal with the pure tongs of our fingers and place it in the mouths of the faithful, for the purification and renewal of their souls and bodies now and forever, and to the ages of ages." («Ὁ Κύριος εὐλογήσει καί ἀξιώσει ἡμᾶς ἀγναῖς ταῖς τῶν δακτύλων λαβαῖς λαβεῖν τόν πύρινον ἄνθρακα καί ἐπιθεῖναι τοῖς τῶν πιστῶν στόμασιν εἰς καθαρισμόν καί ἀνακαινισμόν τῶν ψυχῶν αὐτῶν καί τῶν σωμάτων νῦν καί αἰεὶ καί εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων»)¹⁵ In the text it appears that the distribution took place with the "tongs of the fingers" («ταῖς τῶν δακτύλων

¹² *Les Constitutions Apostoliques*, VIII, Sources Chrétiennes 336, 210 (=PG 1, 1109).

¹³ Basil the Great, *Ἐπιστολή* 93, PG 32, 485A.

¹⁴ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catéchèses Mystagogiques*, Sources Chrétiennes 126, 170-172.

¹⁵ F. E. Brightman, *Liturgies Eastern and Western*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1896, p. 63.

λαβαῖς»), in other words from the hand of the liturgizing priest directly into the mouths of the faithful. It is not clear, however, whether the bread was immersed in the blood or if the cup was offered separately, as we have seen, and that which is clearly noted in the interpretation of the Jerusalem Liturgy by Saint Cyril of Jerusalem. Of course for the Communion of the priests large portions were foreseen which the celebrant of the assembly immersed in the chalice «εἰς τόν κρατῆρα». One could deduce that the faithful received in similar manner only with smaller portions. There is of course evidence in the manuscript tradition, very little however, which states that the body was distributed by the priests first and then the blood separately.¹⁶ After the communion of the clergy, the rubric that follows, according to which the deacons “raise up the diskoi and the chalices to distribute to the faithful” («ἐπαίρουσι τούς δίσκους καί τούς κρατῆρας εἰς τό μεταδοῦναι τῷ λαῷ»)¹⁷ (the many diskoi and chalices served the needs of great numbers of faithful who came to receive Holy Communion) leaves room for two different interpretations, as far as the communion of the faithful is concerned. First, that the priest took a portion from the diskos held by the deacon and after dipping it in the cup he placed it in the mouth of the communicant. Second, that the portion (of the body) was administered first followed by the communion of the blood from the cup.¹⁸ The immersion of the bread into the wine was not unknown in the East. This tradition continues to this day by the Armenians. In the Armenian Liturgy “the deacon and the faithful commune both species, but not directly from the chalice nor with a communion spoon. The priest using both his hands holds the chalice and above it the holy body, which is immersed into the precious blood. With two fingers of his right hand he cuts a portion of it and places it in the mouth of the communicant.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Alkiviades K. Kazamia, *Ἡ θεία Λειτουργία τοῦ ἁγίου Ἰακώβου τοῦ Ἀδελφοθέου καί τὰ νέα Σιναῖτικά χειρόγραφα*, Thessaloniki, 2006, pp. 216-219.

¹⁷ F. E. Brightman, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

¹⁸ See Aristeides G. Panoti, *Ἡ θεία Λειτουργία τοῦ ἁγίου Ἰακώβου τοῦ Ἀδελφοθέου, ἥτοι ἡ τέλεσις τῆς θείας Εὐχαριστίας τῶν Ἐκκλησιῶν Ἀντιοχείας καί Ἱεροσολύμων κατὰ τήν παλαιοχριστιανικήν τάξιν*, Athens, 1986, p. 59.

¹⁹ Ioannis M. Fountoulis, *Κείμενα Λειτουργικῆς*, vol. 3. *Θεῖαι Λειτουργίαι*, Thessaloniki, 2007, pp. 376-377, 419. In the text of the Liturgy the following is noted: “He communes the faithful, receiving with two of his fingers a portion from the holy cup and places it their mouths saying: The body and blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for the propitiation and remission of your sins.”

Understandably, this method of Communion has its practical difficulties as well.

The Divine Liturgy of St. Mark also speaks of the distribution of the the holy gifts separately: “And when he communes the clergy and the people, he says: The holy Body of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ. And with the cup he says: The precious Blood of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ.” («Καί ὅταν μεταδιδοῖ τῷ κλήρῳ καί τῷ λαῷ, λέγει· Σῶμα ἅγιον τοῦ Κυρίου καί Θεοῦ καί Σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Καί εἰς τό ποτήριον λέγει· Αἷμα τίμιον τοῦ Κυρίου καί Θεοῦ καί Σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ»²⁰ This Liturgy also mentions in the epiclesis many loaves and many cups: “Look down upon us and send forth your Holy Spirit upon this bread (these breads) and these cups that (the Holy Spirit) may sanctify and consecrate them as God all-powerful.” («ἔπιδε ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς καί ἐξαπόστειλον ἐπί τούς ἄρτους τούτους καί ἐπί τά ποτήρια ταῦτα τό Πνεῦμά σου τό ἅγιον, ἵνα αὐτά ἀγιάσῃ καί τελειώσῃ ὡς παντοδύναμος Θεός»²¹).

According to the testimonies above the concept of the communion spoon refers to the communion of the bread with the “λαβίδα of the hands”. The priest placed the bread in the mouths of the faithful, in all probability it was immersed in the wine (Liturgy of St. James) first, or the priest placed the bread in the palms of the communicant which were in the shape of a cross. The communicant then put it in their mouth (Apostolic Constitutions, Cyril of Jerusalem). The deacon then offered the cup. Only in cases of sickness or for those dying or those who could not with their own hand receive Holy Communion, according to the 18th canon of the Council of Carthage (397), the bread was cast into their mouths.²² Most likely this occurred with the hand or with the assistance

²⁰ Ioannis M. Fountoulis, op.cit., p. 61.

²¹ Ioannis M. Fountoulis, op.cit., p. 54. Regarding the tradition of many loaves and many cups in our liturgical history see Panagiotis I. Skaltsis, «Οἱ πολλοί ἄρτοι καί τά πολλά ποτήρια στή θεία Λειτουργία», in «Ἱερουργοί καί Φιλοθεάμονες». *Κεφάλαια Ἱστορίας καί Θεολογίας τῆς Λατρείας [Λειτουργικά καί Ὑμνολογικά Παράλληλα -1]*, ed. Kyriakidis, Thessaloniki, 2014, pp. 563-616.

²² Mansi 3, 720.

of an instrument suitable for this urgent need.²³ This tool could have been forceps in the form of tongs or a spoon. This leads us to believe that along with the original manner of communion with the hand there would have been some object that assisted (λαβίδα) in these urgent needs, something which prevailed later on. How then for example was Holy Communion administered to those who were not present at the assembly? As Justin Martyr attests to: “and to those who are not present the deacons are sent.” («καί τοῖς οὐ παροῦσι διά τῶν διακόνων πέμπεται»)²⁴

Communion outside of the Liturgy

The modern historian Vassilios Stefanidis writes that “to those who were absent the Divine Eucharist was sent via the deacons in the form of a piece of the consecrated bread only, or a piece which was tinged with consecrated wine” («εἰς τοὺς ἀπόντας ἡ θεία Εὐχαριστία ἐστέλλετο διά τῶν διακόνων ὑπό τήν μορφήν μόνον τεμαχίου καθηγιασμένου ἄρτου, ἢ ὑπό τήν μορφήν τοιούτου τεμαχίου, ἀλλ’ ἐπί τοῦ ὁποίου εἶχεν ἐπισταχθεῖ καθηγιασμένος οἶνος»)²⁵ Answers to the questions regarding the method of Communion outside of the Liturgy are provided by some of the earliest ecclesiastical writers. Tertullian for example speaks of the transfer of bread (which has been immersed) to the home for the communion of the household, interestingly after some days of fasting.²⁶ Other sources also refer to the practice of Christians, of hermits and travelers who kept Holy Communion from the Sunday Liturgy, bread either immersed in the blood or not, for daily private reception, with or without a spoon. St. Symeon of Thessaloniki speaks of a λαβίδα: “In a clean place a holy cloth was laid out on which was placed the holy cover (κάλυμμα), and on top of the holy cover they placed with the λαβίδα the piece of the all-holy bread” («ἐν καθαρῷ τινι τόπῳ ἀπλοῦντας ἱερόν ὕφασμα, ἐπάνω τούτου τιθέναι

²³ Panagiotis N. Trembelas, *Αἱ τρεῖς Λειτουργίαι κατά τοὺς ἐν Ἀθήναις κώδικας*, Athens, 1982, p. 150.

²⁴ Justin Martyr, *Ἀπολογία*, 67, PG 6, 429C.

²⁵ Vasilios K. Stefanidis, *Ἐκκλησιαστική Ἱστορία ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς μέχρι σήμερον*, Athens ³1990, p.105.

²⁶ Tertulliani, *Ad Uxorem II*, V, PL 1, 1295-1297. See also Eustratios Argenti, *Σύνταγμα κατά Ἀζύμων*, Leipzig, Saxony, αψξ (1760), pp. 302-303.

ἅγιον κάλυμμα· ἐπὶ τοῦ καλύμματος δέ διὰ τῆς λαβίδος τοῦ παναγίου ἄρτου μερίδα»²⁷ We have a similar account in the Life of St. Mary of Egypt, which occurred in a liturgical context, during something similar to the Service of the Typika.²⁸ While in the land of Jordan, she received communion, the immaculate body and the precious blood of Christ, from the hands of Saint Zosimas from a “small cup” («μικρὸν ποτήριον»)²⁹ or a “sacred vessel” («σκεῦος ἱερόν») according to other verbiage.³⁰

Depictions that portray St. Mary receiving with a communion spoon are most likely later additions to the narrative by iconographers. This narrative is not devoid of historical evidence however. The text of her Life is not clear about the way the Saint received communion, whether the gifts were placed in her mouth via the hands or with a communion spoon. The “and the immaculate body and precious blood of Christ our God was received in a small cup” («καὶ λαβῶν εἰς μικρὸν ποτήριον τοῦ ἀχράντου σώματος καὶ τοῦ τιμίου αἵματος Χριστοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡμῶν»)³¹ shows that the Holy Eucharist was transferred from one place to another. Most probably the bread was tinged or mixed with the blood for easy transport. Another example is that of the Communion of Julian the Count, which allows for the possibility that the cup could have been filled with bread and wine: “Many times they kept the cup filled with the holy body and blood of the Master and they urged him to approach” («Πολλάκις δέ καὶ τό ποτήριον ἐβάσταζον ἁγίου σώματος Δεσποτικοῦ πεπληρωμένον καὶ αἵματος, καὶ προσελθεῖν αὐτῷ προετρέποντο»³²

In the tradition of the Synaxarion we also have the example of St.

²⁷ Symeon of Thessaloniki, *Αποκρίσεις πρὸς τινὰς ἐρωτήσεις Ἀρχιερέως*, MA', PG 155, 889B. Cf. Basil the Great, *Ἐπιστολή* 93, PG 32, 485 A.

²⁸ Sophronios, *Βίος ὁσίας Μαρίας*, 4, 34, PG 87³, 3721C.

²⁹ Sophronios, *op.cit.*, PG 87³, 3721A.

³⁰ Sophronios, *op.cit.*, PG 87³, 3721AB.

³¹ Sophronios, *op.cit.*, PG 87³, 3721A.

³² Sophronios, *Ἀφήγησις θαυμάτων τῶν ἁγίων Κύρου καὶ Ἰωάννου*, PG 87³, 3457BC. See also Robert F. Taft, *A History of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*, vol. VI, The Communion, Thanksgiving, and Concluding Rites, Rome 2008, p. 283.

Luke of Steiris (9th - 10th c.). Regarding how he should receive in the desert, the Hierarch answered him in this manner: “If there is no priest and you are in a Church, you should place an artoforion that has the presanctified gifts upon the Holy Altar. If you are in a cell, put it on a clean table, spread out a small cover (κάλυμμα) and place the portions of the immaculate Mysteries upon it. Cense, say the Psalms of the Typika, the Trisagion and the Creed, make three prostrations, cross your hands and receive the Holy Mysteries with your mouth, saying Amen. Instead of the consecrated wine drink a little plain wine, but the cup you use, you will not use for anything else. With the cover you will collect the portions and you will place them in the Artoforion, taking care that no small pieces fall down and are stepped on.”³³

Reference to the history of the λαβίδα as a spoon

Daniel Georgopoulos (19th c.), a later commentator on the Divine Liturgy, obviously relying on the iconographic depictions that show St. Mary of Egypt receiving with a communion spoon, claims that this liturgical article was introduced during the 7th c. AD, the era the Saint lived in.³⁴ It is probable that the Saint received bread immersed in the blood which was carried by Saint Zosimas in a small vessel (type of artoforion) with a λαβίδα (spoon) or with the hand. During the same period we have an account by St. Anastasios the Sinaite regarding a Stylite who received with a spoon.³⁵

St. Symeon of Thessaloniki likely relies on the accounts above, in order to point out that Holy Communion with a λαβίδα is a “very ancient tradition”.³⁶ It has been argued that the communion spoon was introduced into liturgical practice by Chrysostom. This view is supported

³³ *Μέγας Συναξαριστής τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας*, vol 2, month of February, 7, ed. Archim. Matthaios Laggi, Athens 1975, p. 206. See also Christofors Chronis (Protopresbyter), «*Τρόπος μετάδοσης τῆς θείας Κοινωνίας – Ὁδεύοντας πρὸς τὴν τέλεια ἀτέλεια*», online article.

³⁴ Δανιὴλ Γεωργόπουλου (Ἱεροδιδασκάλου), *Ἱερά Ἀνθολογία περὶ τῶν σεπτῶν καὶ θείων ἑπτὰ Μυστηρίων τῆς Ἐκκλησίας*, Βενετία 1833, σ. 36.

³⁵ F. Nau, “Le texte grec des récits utiles à l’âme d’Anastase (le Sinaïte)”, *Oriens Christianus* 3 (1903) 61- 62 : “And they sent him in this (vessel) a holy portion (of the body) with the Precious Blood. After pulling up the Holy Communion (on the pillar), holding the holy cup and the (communion) spoon he received.” («Καὶ ἔστειλαν αὐτῷ εἰς αὐτό ἁγίαν μερίδα μετὰ καὶ τοῦ τιμίου αἵματος. Ἐλκύσας οὖν ἄνω τὴν ἁγίαν μετάληψιν, κρατῶν τό ἅγιον ποτήριον καὶ τό κοχλιάριον, διεκρίνετο μεταλαβεῖν»). See also Robert F. Taft, *op.cit.*, pp. 283- 284.

³⁶ Symeon Archbishop of Thessaloniki (1416/17-1429), *Ἔργα Θεολογικά, κριτικὴ ἔκδοσις μετ’ εἰσαγωγῆς ὑπὸ D. Balfour* [Ἀνάλεκτα Βλατάδων, 34], Thessaloniki, 1981, p. 249.

by Petros Arkoudios³⁷ and Paisios Ligaridis.³⁸ Both rely on the information presented by the historian Sozomenus, according to which a woman was pressured by her husband to receive the sacrament of the Macedonists “(she) took the bread in the hand and skillfully rejected it” («λαβοῦσα ἐν χερσὶ τόν ἄρτον ἀπέρριψεν ἐπιδεξιῶς αὐτόν»)³⁹. According to another account, narrated by Georgios Kedrinos, a heretical woman during the time of Arcadius received the sacrament of the Macedonists, in front of the great luminary John Chrysostom in fact, the sacrament became a rock in her mouth, to control that which is heretical and prevent that which is unworthy.⁴⁰ “Because of the wickedness of this woman, as it is said, the Golden-mouth ordered that the Master’s body no longer be given in the hand, as was the custom in the Church, but with the same λαβίδα that held the sacred coal and purified soul and lips.” («Διὰ τό πονηρόν τῆς γυναικός ταύτης, ὡς λέγεται, ὁ χρυσόρρημων προσέταξε μή ἐν τῇ χειρὶ πλέον δίδοσθαι τό κυριακόν σῶμα, καθὼς ἔθος ἦν ἐν τῇ Ἐκκλησίᾳ, ἀλλά γε δι’αὐτῆς τῆς λαβίδος ἔσω αὐτῆς φερούσης τόν τίμιον ἄνθρακα ψυχὴν καθαγιζούσης καὶ χεῖλη»)⁴¹

Those who support the view that Chrysostom introduced the communion spoon are refuted by Chrysostom himself who supports the reception of the bread separately and communion of the faithful via the hand, identifying it with the fiery tongs that Isaiah witnessed.⁴² This tradition of communion via the λαβίδα of the hands was maintained until the time that the Penthekte Ecumenical Council (691-692)⁴³ was convened in Trullo, possibly even later into the 9th-10th c. “In the

³⁷ Petros Arkoudios, *De Concordia Ecclesiae Orientalis...*, Luterie Parisiorum, M. DC. LXXII, III, p. 53. See also Panagiotis N. Trembelas, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

³⁸ Paisios Ligarides, *Ἀνακεφαλαίωσις...*, in MS 571 Μετοχίου τοῦ Παναγίου Τάφου ff. 254v -255v. See also J. Goar, *Εὐχολόγιον sive Rituale Graecorum*, Graz, 1960, p. 130.

³⁹ Hermias Sozomenus, *Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Ἱστορία*, 3,5, PG 67, 1529 A.

⁴⁰ The account is by Nicholas Boulgareos, *Ἱερά Κατήχησις ἥτοι ἐξήγησις τῆς θείας καὶ ἱερᾶς Λειτουργίας*, Constantinople, 1861, p. 249.

⁴¹ Paisios Ligarides, *op.cit.*, ff. 254v-255v.

⁴² John Chrysostom, *Ἐπαινος τῶν ἀπαντησάντων ἐν τῇ Ἐκκλησίᾳ καὶ περὶ εὐταξίας ἐν ταῖς δοξολογίαις*, PG 56, 136: «Ἄλλ’ οὐκ ἐτόλμησεν ἄψασθαι τῇ χειρὶ τὰ Σεραφεῖμ, ἀλλὰ τῇ λαβίδι, σὺ δέ τῇ χειρὶ λαμβάνεις». See also *Ὁμιλία 20 πρὸς τόν λαόν τῆς Ἀντιοχείας*, chap. 7, PG 49, 208 and 345. See also Eustratios Argenti, *op.cit.*, p. 303.

⁴³ See Nikodemos the Hagiorite, *Πηδάλιον*, ed. B. Rigopoulos, Thessaloniki, 1987, p. 311.

ancient Church,” Eustratios Argenti notes “the holy bread of the Eucharist was given in the hands of the faithful, men and women, in the East and in the West, as the antidoron is given to us now. This tradition continued until the Seventh Ecumenical Council, as far as I know, perhaps even after.”⁴⁴

Germanos of Constantinople speaks of the λαβίδα of the hands referring also to the example of Isaiah.⁴⁵ The Council in Trullo, to which we referred, in its 101st Canon forbids the use of vessels for the display of wealth (supposedly out of reverence), therefore also communion spoons “for receiving the divine gifts” («πρός τήν τοῦ θεοῦ δώρου ὑποδοχήν») and remains steadfast in the ancient method of Communion. “If one wishes to receive the immaculate body and be united with it during the Liturgy (assembly), after forming the hands in the shape of a cross, let him approach and accept the communion of grace.” («Ὡστε, εἴ τις τοῦ ἀχράντου σώματος μετασχεῖν ἐν τῷ τῆς συνάξεως βουληθείη καιρῷ, καί ἐν πρός αὐτό τῇ μετουσίᾳ γενέσθαι, τάς χεῖρας σχηματίζων εἰς τύπον Σταυροῦ, οὕτω προσίτω καί δεχέσθω τήν κοινωνίαν τῆς χάριτος»)⁴⁶ The hands of man, writes St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite, are more honorable than any vessel.⁴⁷ This is also pointed out in the preamble of the 101st Canon: “Body of Christ, and temple, man created in the image of God” («Σῶμα Χριστοῦ, καί ναόν, τόν κατ’ εἰκόνα Θεοῦ κτισθέντα ἄνθρωπον»). This position is also established in the Apostolic exhortation: “Now you are the body of Christ and members thereof.”⁴⁸ St. John of Damascus speaks of receiving the bread and wine separately according to the ancient practice: “Let us approach with fervent desire and accept the body of the crucified one by

⁴⁴ Eustratios Argenti, op. cit., p. 301. See also Vlasios I. Feidas, *Ἐκκλησιαστική Ἱστορία Β΄. Από τήν Εἰκονομαχία μέχρι τή Μεταρρύθμιση*, Athens, 1994, pp. 647-648.

⁴⁵ N. Borgia, *Il Commentario Liturgico di s. Germano...*, Grottaferrata 1912, pp. 36-37 (= PG 98, 433A) «τόν κατέχοντα (ιερέα) τόν νοερόν ἄνθρακα τῇ λαβίδι τῆς χειρός αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ θυσιαστηρίῳ καί ἀγιάζοντα καί καθαίροντα τούς προσδεχομένους καί μεταλαμβάνοντας».

⁴⁶ G. Rallis - M. Potlis, *Σύνταγμα...*, vol. Β΄, pp. 546-547. Nikodemos the Hagiorite, *Πηδάλιον* op. cit., pp. 310-311. Regarding this Canon see Georgios X. Gavardinias, *Ἡ Πενθέκτη Οἰκουμενική Σύνοδος καί τό νομοθετικό της ἔργο* (Doctoral Dissertation) [Νομοκανονική Βιβλιοθήκη 4], ed. “Epectasis”, Katerini, 1998, pp. 241-242.

⁴⁷ Nikodemos the Hagiorite, *Πηδάλιον* op. cit., p. 311.

⁴⁸ I Cor. 12:27.

placing our palms in the shape of a cross" («Προσέλθωμεν αὐτῷ πόθῳ διακαεῖ καί σταυροειδῶς τάς παλάμας τυπώσαντες, τοῦ ἑσταυρωμένου τό σῶμα ὑποδεξώμεθα»).⁴⁹

It is clear from the sources above that the faithful, at least until the 9th century, in the East and the West, received both eucharistic forms separately. The bread was placed in the hand of the communicant. The wine was received from the cup.⁵⁰ In the West, Saint Ambrose of Milan also mentions this, when addressing the emperor Theodosius he says: “How will you stretch out hands that are dripping with blood from the unjust murder? How will you accept with such hands the most-holy body of the Master? How will you take in your mouth the precious blood, when out of anger you shed blood unlawfully?” («Πῶς δέ τάς χεῖρας ἐκτενεῖς ἀποσταζούσας ἐπί τοῦ ἀδίκου φόνου τό αἷμα; Πῶς δέ τοιαύταις ὑποδέξει χερσί τοῦ Δεσπότη τοῦ πανάγιον σῶμα; Πῶς δέ τῷ στόματι προσοίσεις τό αἷμα τό τίμιον, τοσοῦτον διά τόν τοῦ θυμοῦ λόγον ἐκχέας παρανόμως αἷμα;») ⁵¹

This ancient practice certainly allowed the parallel use of a λαβίδα (spoon) for emergencies, such as for the communion of the seriously ill or the need for daily communion of the faithful at home or for hermits in their place of solitude. It should also be noted that a communion spoon was used in the East by the Copts and the Nestorians after their secession from the Byzantines in the 4th century AD.⁵²

Konstantinos Kallinikos writes that the λαβίδα in the form of a communion spoon is witnessed from the 10th century on.⁵³ We do not know where this information is taken from. It is probably based on the account attributed to Gregory of Dekapolis (9th c.) regarding communion

⁴⁹ John of Damascus, *Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως*, 4, PG 94, 1149A.

⁵⁰ See Panagiotis N. Trembelas, *op. cit.*, pp. 149-150.

⁵¹ Theodoret Bishop of Cyrus, *Ἐκκλησιαστικῆς Ἱστορίας, Λόγος πέμπτος*, chap.17, PG 82, 1232D.

⁵² Eusebii Renaudotii, *Liturgiarum Orientalium Collectio*, vol. A', Paris, 1716, pp. 195-196 and 262.

⁵³ Konstantinos Kallinikos (Protopresbyter), *Ὁ Χριστιανικός Ναός καί τά τελούμενα ἐν αὐτῷ*, ed. Gregori, Athens, 1969, p. 190.

with a λαβίδα.⁵⁴ This text, however, is not older than the 14th c.⁵⁵ From the 9th c. onward new perceptions regarding the method of Communion of the faithful prevailed and new practical needs were created that made the use of the communion spoon vital, at a local level first and then a universal.

Reasons for the predominance of the λαβίδα

St. Symeon of Thessaloniki (15th c.) writes that the λαβίδα prevailed "due to several reasons (causes)" («διά τινὰ ἐπιγεγονότα»)⁵⁶. The issues that forced this change include the desecration of Holy Communion that was kept at home by some bad Christians. The lack of deacons also made it difficult to receive communion in both kinds.⁵⁷ The practical problems created during the communion of young children, the sick and the dying contributed to the new way of communion with the λαβίδα "towards the most proper" («πρὸς τό εὐσχημονέστερον») according to the expression of the Patriarch of Constantinople Michael Oxeites.⁵⁸ "The reason for why the Church devised the λαβίδα", writes Eustratios Argentis "was because some hypocrites of Christianity, or heretics, or superstitious men, receiving the holy bread, did not eat it, but instead either threw it away, or hid it, or used it in magic or wickedness. This is why the holy λαβίδα was devised, so that communion be given in the mouth of the communicant, and thus every reason for and pretext of contempt for this Holy Sacrament would cease."⁵⁹ The view that lay Christians should not commune with the hand prevailed from the 9th c. in the West, but also in

⁵⁴ Gregory of Dekapolis (pseudo), *Λόγος ιστορικός...*, PG 100, 1204B: «Καί πάλιν εἶδε ὁ Σαρακηνός ἐκ τρίτου τὸν ἱερέα μεταδιδόναι ἐκ τοῦ σώματός τε καὶ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ παιδίου μετὰ τῆς λαβίδος τοῖς μεταλαμβάνουσιν».

⁵⁵ H. G. Beck, *Kirche und theologische literatur in byzantinischen reich*, Munich, 1959, p. 579.

⁵⁶ St. Symeon Archbishop of Thessaloniki (1416/17-1429), *Ἔργα Θεολογικά...*, p. 249.

⁵⁷ Nikodemos the Hagiorite, *Πηδάλιον*, p. 311, 1.

⁵⁸ «Περὶ τῆς ὑπαλλαγῆς τῆς μεταλήψεως τῶν ἁγιασμάτων τοῦ Χριστοῦ», in *Les Registres du Patriarcat de Constantinople, I: Les actes des patriarches, 1-3*, ed. V. Grumel (Le Patriarcat byzantine, I), KadiköyInstabul 1932, and ed. J. Darrouzès, Paris 1977, 1979, 1991. See also Manouil I. Gedeon, *Ἀρχεῖον ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ἱστορίας*, Constantinople, 1911, p. 40. Robert F. Taft, op. cit., p. 293. See also Fr. Demetrios Tserpos, *Ἐφρόδιον ζωῆς. Ἡ μετάδοση τῆς θείας Κοινωνίας στοὺς ἀσθενεῖς πού ἀντιμετωπίζουν κίνδυνο θανάτου. Συμβολή στήν Ποιμαντική Λειτουργική*, ed. Tinos, Athens, 2001, pp. 37 ff. and 91 ff. Ioannis M. Fountoulis, *Λειτουργική Α'...*, p. 48.

⁵⁹ Eustratios Argenti, op. cit., p. 303.

the East.⁶⁰ The practice of offering the body of the Lord immersed in the consecrated wine, which also prevailed in the East, spread to Spain towards the end of the 7th century. This was prohibited in the West by a Synod in 675.⁶¹ The custom of mixing the gifts in vessels was forbidden, as we saw, by the Penthekte Ecumenical Council in Trullo. A milestone in the popularization of the λαβίδα is the development of the Proskomide and the prevalence of the portions. Its practical role and especially the mixing of wine and water are cited in the oldest text (12th c.) which describes the order of the Proskomide.⁶² Balsamon (12th c.) writes about the spread of the communion spoon “in certain Churches” («ἐν τισίν ἐκκλησίαις»)⁶³ During the same period the communion spoon is mentioned in the commentary on the Divine Liturgy attributed to Sophronios of Jerusalem.⁶⁴ St. Symeon of Thessaloniki considers the communion spoon necessary for the mixing together of the precious gifts, "For it is necessary for every believer to commune the body and the blood of Christ together" («Ἐπεὶ χρεῖα καὶ ἐκ τοῦ σώματος ὁμοῦ καὶ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ κοινωνῆσαι πάντα πιστόν»)⁶⁵ The predominance of the communion spoon as the most appropriate method of communion is also not irrelevant to the method of communion of the Latins who do not fracture the bread.⁶⁶

Conclusion

The study of the history of the method of Communion of the faithful leads us to the conclusion that from the earliest years until the 10th c. the Christians communed the holy gifts separately, receiving the bread in their

⁶⁰ Synod of Rouen, most probably held in 880. This position is later also shared by St. Symeon of Thessaloniki. See *Διάλογος...*, 99, PG 155, 301A. See also Panagiotis N. Trembelas, op. cit., p. 150.

⁶¹ Mansi 11, 155. See also Panagiotis N. Trembelas, op. cit., p. 150.

⁶² V. Laurent, “*Le vituel de la proskomidie et le métropolitain de Crète Élie*”, *Revue des Études Byzantines* 19 (1958) 131. See also Robert F. Taft, op. cit., pp. 294-297; ..., “Byzantine Communion Spoons: A review of the Evidence”, in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers (DOP)*, 50 (1996) 209-238.

⁶³ G. Rallis - M. Potlis, *Σύνταγμα...*, vol. B', pp. 548-549.

⁶⁴ Sophronios Patriarch of Jerusalem, op. cit., PG 87³, 3985B.

⁶⁵ Symeon of Thessaloniki. *Διάλογος...*, 94, PG 155, 284D.

⁶⁶ Panagiotis N. Trembelas, «*Ὁ ρωμαϊκός λειτουργικός τύπος*», in *Ἐπιστημονική Ἑπετηρίς Θεολογικῆς Σχολῆς Πανεπιστημίου Ἀθηνῶν* 15 (1960-1964), 198.

hands from the liturgizing priest (“λαβίδα of the hands”). The λαβίδα as a liturgical article (what form it took exactly is unknown), is used from the 4th c. as a utensil for an alternative solution for emergency situations and special requirements. Hagiographic texts of the 7th c. inform us that the λαβίδα is encountered in the form of a spoon. From the 12th c. it is associated with the Proskomide (portions) and is witnessed to on a local level. As a general practice it becomes widespread in the 14th c. The term “λαβίς”, was used for the spoon due to the strong symbolism and reference to the coal received from the altar. Isaiah saw the coal, in other words wood “united with fire: likewise the bread of communion is not simple bread, but united with divinity” («ἡνωμένον πυρί· οὕτω καὶ ὁ ἄρτος τῆς κοινωνίας οὐκ ἄρτος λιτός ἐστίν, ἀλλ’ ἡνωμένος θεότητι»)⁶⁷ In fact, it is no coincidence that the λαβίδα acquires a secret characteristic in the sense that it signifies a type of the Theotokos in so far as “there the fiery nature of the λαβίδα of the coal was received from the altar, this the fire of the divinity was accepted in her, not consumed, but glorified.” («ἐκεῖ ἡ φλογερά φύσις τῆ λαβίδι τὸν ἄνθρακα ἀπὸ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου ἔλαβεν, αὕτη δέ τὸ πῦρ τῆς θεότητος ἐν ἑαυτῇ δεξαμένη, οὐ κατεφλέχθη, ἀλλ’ ἐδοξάσθη»)⁶⁸ The tradition of our Church regarding the history, the practical need for and the symbolism of the communion spoon is distinct and substantial. The study of and immersion in this tradition can answer the problems that either by pretext or in truth are posed in our days. It can enlighten as much those who see things spiritually and understand the meaning of the words “for the bread of God is that which comes down from Heaven, and gives life to the world”,⁶⁹ as well as those who want to innovate, and even those who are unable to delve into the miracle of the mysteries burdened by the

⁶⁷ John of Damascus, *Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως*, 4, PG 94, 1149B. Cf. Gregory Palamas, Ὁμιλία 56, *Περὶ τῶν ἀγίων καὶ φρικτῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ μυστηρίων...*, ed. Σοφοκλέους Κ. τοῦ ἐξ Οἰκονόμων, Athens, 1861, pp. 200-212; Nikolaos Cabasilas, *Εἰς τὴν θείαν Λειτουργίαν*, Sources chrétiennes 4 bis, Paris, 1967 (= PG 150).

⁶⁸ Iakovos the Monk, *Λόγος Δ΄, Εἰς τὸν Εὐαγγελισμόν*, PG 127, 641D. Cf. Sophronios Patriarch of Jerusalem, op. cit., PG 87³, 3985C: «Ἡ λαβίς κατὰ τὸν προφήτην Ἡσαΐαν λέγοντα· “Ἀπεστάλη πρὸς με ἐν τῶν Σεραφεῖμ” σημαίνει δέ τὴν Παρθένον, βαστάζουσαν καὶ αὐτὸν τὸν οὐράνιον ἄρτον».

⁶⁹ Jn. 6:33.

notions of their doubts.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Nikodemos the Hagiorite, *Πηδάλιον*, op. cit., p. 243, fig. 1. See also Fr. Demetrios Tserpos, op. cit., pp. 91-93. See also Alkiviadis C. Calivas, «Σχόλια για τή χρήση τῆς λαβίδας», orthodoxia.info/news, 5/28/2020 (=“*A Note on the Common Communion Spoon*”, goarch.org, 5/25/2020); Fr. Christoforos Chronis (Protopresbyter), «Τρόπος μετάδοσης τῆς θείας Κοινωνίας - ὀδεύοντας πρὸς τὴν τέλεια ἀτέλεια», online; «ΕΚΤΑΚΤΟ: Τό Οἰκουμενικό Πατριαρχεῖο ζητᾷ ἐπικοινωνία μέ τίς Ὁρθόδοξες Ἐκκλησίες γιά τὴν θεία Κοινωνία», romfea.gr, 6/2/2020; Vasileios I. Kalliakmanis (Protopresbyter), *Μεθοδολογικά πρότερα τῆς ποιμαντικῆς, Λεντίω ζωννύμενοι*, ed. “Migdonia”, Thessaloniki, 2000, pp. 201-216.