

IN THE NAME OF THE SELF-EXISTANT  
SEMPITERNAL OF NECESSARY EXISTENCE THE ALMIGHTY  
IGNATIUS PATRIARCH OF THE HOLY SEA OF ANTIOCH AND ALL THE EAST  
SUPREME HEAD OF THE UNIVERSAL SYRIAC ORTHODOX CHURCH

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## **“The Sacrament of Priesthood”**

The Apostle Paul wrote, saying:

**“One does not take this honor upon himself; but he is called by God, just as Aaron was.”** (Hebrews 5:4)

We offer apostolic benediction and benevolent prayers to our brethren, his Beatitude Mor Baselius Thomas 1, Catholicos of India, and their eminences the Metropolitans, our spiritual children the Patriarchal Vicars, monks, priests, nuns, deacons and virtuous deaconesses, and our blessed Syriac Orthodox people worldwide. May the divine providence embrace them through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and St. Peter the head of the Apostles, and the rest of the saints and martyrs. Amen.

### **Dearly beloved**

We ask for your well being and extend to you our apostolic blessing and benevolent prayers, and we say:

The sacred sacrament of priesthood is a divine gift that God bestows upon people whom He chose from among the faithful. He calls them and they answer His call and dedicate their lives for His service and receive the legitimate canonical ordination through the work and power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, they obtain authority that distinguishes them from the others regarding the service and the administration of the church. (Mathew 10:1-15, Luke 10:1-12) according to the level of authority given to them, and granting its holy sacraments to those who deserve them i.e. baptism, confirmation, absolution of sins to repentants, isolating offenders and unrepentant heretical criminals, performing prayer services, and guiding and shepherding the faithful. (John 20:21, Acts 20, 1Peter 5)

Yes indeed, when the Lord Jesus was fulfilling His divine mission in flesh, He chose twelve apostles and seventy disciples to be stewards to His mysteries (1Corinthians 4:1). He called upon them to perform religious services and ecclesiastic sacraments (Luke 6:13). In this regard, we read from the holy gospel of Luke, “When morning came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also designated apostles.” (Luke 6:13) “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in

heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Mathew 28:18&19), “So Jesus said to them again, ‘peace be with you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you’, and when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit, if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” (John 20:21-23). According to our father’s teachings, the Lord ordained His disciples as bishops when “He had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, He lifted His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He left them and was taken up into heaven.” (Luke 24:50-51) According to ordination, the bishop receives authority to: teach, absolve, consecrate, shepherd and Judge. The Lord established the sacrament of priesthood just after He declared the establishment of the church following Peter’s confession that He is the “Son of the Living God.” He said to Peter, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Mathew 16:17-19). The apostles observed this sacrament and ordained priests in every city (Acts 13:2-3), The book of Acts of the Apostles mentions that, “As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.” (Acts 13:2&3). We also read about them choosing priests to carry out church services as mentioned in the book of Acts about Paul and Barnabas, “And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘we must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God. So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” (Acts 14:21-23). The apostle Paul urges his disciple Timothy to ordain priests, by saying, “Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the council of elders laid their hands on you.” (1Timothy 4:14). The apostle Paul also wrote to Titus stating the qualities which priests should have, saying “you must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine, teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance.”(Titus 2:1-2) St. Paul also talks about the gift of priesthood in his epistle to the Hebrews, saying, “One does not take this honor upon himself; but he is called by God, just as Aaron was.” (Hebrews 5:4) and also says, “and in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.” (1Corinthians 12:28). Nowadays, bishops are the successors of the apostles. They obtained their authority by laying hands of their predecessors. (Acts 14:23). They chose priests in every church, and this continues uninterrupted until present day.

In this regard, the apostle Paul writes, “and the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, entrust the reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.” (2Timothy 2:2)

In our church, we have three levels of priesthood clearly shown in the holy gospel:

- 1 – Bishops, meaning the administrator, the general spiritual shepherd. It relates to the leaders, higher and lower in authority and administrative relations. It consists of three ranks: Patriarch, Metropolitan and Bishop.
- 2 – Priests, (Acts 14:23 & 1Titus 1:5) the monk-priest (Raban) and Archpriest (Khuroyo) formerly ordained as bishop's assistant in country sides. He is nowadays the head-priest of a certain church or a certain Archdiocese. Then the rank of priest who, in general, celebrates the holy sacraments and all spiritual services except those assigned to bishops, such as: ordination of priests and deacons, and appointments of church personnel in the Archdiocese.

It is worth noting that:

First: these three levels existed in the priesthood of the Old Testament, i.e. head-priests, priests, and Levites and was modified in the New Testament.

Second: These three levels resemble the three levels of angels as mentioned by St. Clemis of Alexandria who wrote: "the ranks of bishops, priests, and deacons resemble the glory of the angels."

Third: Below each level there are three ranks forming a total of nine heavenly ranks.

3 – Deaconry or God's service (Acts 6:6, 1Timothy 3:8-10): Its ranks are: the evangelical deacon, the sub-deacon, also called deacon of epistles, the reader, and the singer. The Archdeacon is the head of all the deacons in the Archdiocese.

The only servant of the sacrament of priesthood is the bishop who has the right to lay hands on the candidate to be ordained (Acts 6:6; 13:2-3). The visible part of the sacrament of priesthood is laying the hand of the bishop on the head of the candidate and the special prayer whereby the bishop asks for the divine grace to dwell upon him by the power of the Holy Spirit. The invisible part is the grace granted by God to the ordained, along with the authority to bind and lose, teach, discipline, absolve and consecrate.

The fruits of the sacrament of priesthood are: Preserving the ranks of priesthood in the church, committing to the order, working in accordance with duties and privileges of shepherds and flock, bestowing God's blessings on believers, performing the Seven sacraments of the church according to their clergy levels, teaching the truth of the noble Christian faith, and adorn themselves with the esteemed virtues and setting themselves as examples for the faithful, by speaking and working, so that the name of the Heavenly Father will be glorified, honoring priestly ranks, loving their flock and working for the salvation of their souls, "Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people." (Hebrews 5:1-3). Therefore, priests and bishops should care about the salvation of the souls of believers, "Therefore, keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He bought with His own blood." Christian faithful have to honor

their priests and their shepherds because they are Christ's servants and stewards to His mysteries. (1Corinthians 4:1). In this regard, St. Paul writes, saying, "We urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you" (1 Thessalonians 5:12 & Hebrews 13:7). The Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "He who receives you, receives Me" (Mathew 10:40), and "he who listens to you listens to Me; he who rejects you rejects Me." (Luke 10:16). Therefore, in honor of the Lord Jesus, we honor His servants.

On the occasion of the holy Great Lent, we ask the Lord to accept your fasting, your prayers and your charity works, and make you worthy to celebrate His resurrection with joy, happiness, and sound health, by the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, St. Peter the head of the apostles, and the rest of the martyrs and saints. HAPPY EASTER **ܩܘܪܒܘܢ ܠܥܘܠܐ**

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On the Seventh day of February, in the year Two Thousand and Nine of our Lord,  
Which is the 29<sup>th</sup> year of our Patriarchal Enthronement