

THE MESSAGE
OF
HIS BEATITUDE
MAR BECHARA PETER RAI

To
The Priests of the Maronite Church
On the Occasion of the Feast of the Priesthood
In
The Thursday of the Mysteries

Beloved and Esteemed Priests,

1. It pleases me to write to you on the occasion of the **Thursday of the Mysteries**, on behalf of our brethren, their honorable Excellencies the Bishops, as you are for us helpers and counselors in the ministry and in the roles of teaching, sanctifying and nourishing the People of God (*Decree on the Ministry and Life of priests*, 7).

As we celebrate the Feast of the Institution of the Sacraments of the Eucharist and that of Holy Orders, and the consecration of the myron, as a sign of the acceptance of the Holy Spirit and His action, we remember our birth into the priesthood, and our communion of unity with Christ and the unity between us through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, felicitations from us to you with enormous wishes.

The Institution and the Call

2. On a day like today, **the Lord Jesus**, the Eternal Priest, **instituted the Sacrament of the Eucharist**, transubstantiating bread into His body, which is sacrificed, and wine into His Blood, which was shed for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 22:19-22), for the continuance of the Sacrifice of His Passion and Death on the cross for the redemption of humanity and the banquet of His Body and Blood for the life of the world.

Furthermore, He instituted the **Sacrament of Holy Orders** through the utterance, “do this in memory of me” (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24-26), for the sake of realizing this dual continuance, and the assurance of His presence in the life of the priest and in the Church, and in the life of every believer. These two mysteries came into being simultaneously and their fate of the dependence of the one on the other will remain so until the end of time. Our priesthood derives its origin, survives and bears fruit from the Eucharist. There is no priesthood without the Eucharist and there is no Eucharist without the priesthood.

3. **The Lord Jesus gave Himself up as an offering for the Church and the world**, renewable daily at the hands of the priest, **and the priest presented an offering on behalf of both**. It was His desire that the priest, as he dispenses the gift of the Body of Christ and His Blood, the sacrifice of forgiveness and redemption, offers himself with it devotedly for the teaching, sanctifying and administering, aimed at the salvation of every human person. Yes, you were, one by one, and ourselves too, in the thoughts of Christ, the Priest and the Redeemer, when He said, “do this in memory of me.” And today, each one feels that Christ has laid His hand on

him, and graced him with a personal share in His Priestly Eucharistic Mystery. With this awareness, we renew today our priestly pledges and faithfulness to Christ, the Priest who gave Himself up as expiation for the many, the Church and her salvific mission.

4. When the bishop laid his hand on you, O priest, **it was the Lord Jesus laying His hand on you**, saying to you, “Follow me,” as He had said to His Apostles, the priests of the New Covenant. His hand accompanies you throughout the stages of your life, raising you and fortifying you. Furthermore, when you experience limitations in your person, apprehension before the awesome task and weakness in capabilities, Christ takes you by the hand saying, “Do not be afraid,” “I am with you,” as He said to Peter after the miraculous catch (Luke 5:4-11). Also, when you are afraid because of the enormity of countering winds and the waves of the agitated sea of the world and you are seemingly on the verge of drowning in the concerns of the world and the trials of life and you retreat before the difficulties of the mission, our Lord will stretch out His arm as He did to Peter and He will pull you up saying, “Take courage...O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”(Matthew 14: 27; 31).

The Myron, the Gift of the Holy Spirit

5. On this day, **the Patriarch consecrates the myron**, the baptismal oils and the Anointing of the Sick as a sign of the descent of the Holy Spirit on those accepting the holy sacraments, and especially, the priests of the New Covenant. Through the consecration of the myron and the descent of the Holy Spirit, the priest has become a partner in Christ’s prophetic, priestly and kingly office, a teacher of the Word of God, a sanctifier of the people redeemed by the Divine Blood via the grace of the sacraments and a shepherd leading the community of believers to the springheads of the love of Christ. The Spirit shapes his inner self to conform to the image of Jesus Christ, the Eternal Priest and the great “chief Shepherd” (1 Peter 5:4), and incorporates him in the communion of unity with the One Triune God, and the communion of unity with the bishops and the priestly body and the people.

6. Consecrating the myron at the hands of the Patriarch and distributing it among all the churches is **a sign of the hierarchical communion** with the one who is head of the Church and her father. This spiritual communion in the Church is established by the Holy Spirit who is the all encompassing principle, as the spirit is to the flesh. It is nourished by the bread of the Flesh of Christ and His Blood intensifying its bonds, as the Apostle Paul says, “Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf” (1 Corinthians 10:17), and because “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?” (1 Corinthians 10:16).

This spiritual communion is also hierarchical, because the Church with her two components, the divine and the human is constituted and organized as a society, requiring of all her members, clergy and laity, in order to be complete, conformity with the three inseparables: the profession of faith, the seven sacraments and ecclesiastical governance (*Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, canons 7, and 8).

However, **the myron that is consecrated**, with which the priest was anointed, **is for the consecration of whoever was anointed with it** through the grace of the Spirit. If we add up all

the prayers voiced in the Rite of Consecration of the Myron taken from the Syriac Antiochene Liturgy, they are abbreviated into the **following prayer**:

“[Father . . . send your Holy Spirit] on us and on this oil which is before us and consecrate it, so that it may be for all who are anointed and marked with it holy myron, priestly myron, royal myron, anointing with gladness, clothing with light, a cloak of salvation, a spiritual gift, the sanctification of souls and bodies, imperishable happiness, the indelible seal, a buckler of faith, and a fearsome helmet against all the works of the adversary” (Refer to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1297).

8. In the framework of establishing the Sacraments of the Eucharist and that of Holy Orders, Christ, the Lord, undertook a **filial initiative** while they were at the Last Passover Supper. **He washed the feet of the Priests of the New Covenant** and gave us an **example** to follow (John 13:10), since the priest’s participation in the Sacraments of the Eucharist and that of Holy Orders are a call to humble service without measure. Because this participation in the Divine Love cleanses from pride, selfishness, the love of self and from exhibitionism. There is nothing more valuable in the life of a priest than Christ. Did not Judas Iscariot refuse the love of Christ when he left the table of love, favoring the thirty pieces of silver over Jesus, and handed Him over to the hateful and those like him who have refused the love of Christ? (Matthew 26:15-16; John 13:30).

9. O beloved and respectable priests, my supplication, along with congratulations on the Feast, is that you safeguard the existential organic bond between you and the Eucharist, and that you may be distinguished by the rich Eucharistic spirituality; meaning: complete affiliation with Christ and consecrating yourself to Him and to His mission; the love of Christ emanating from the Eucharist; holiness in worship and in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy; zealotry in the distribution of the bread of the Word through preaching and catechesis, and the bread of the Body of the Lord and His Blood in the Liturgy, for those near and those far off; securing the friendship of Christ through perpetual contemplation before His face, in the school of Mary most holy, who alone knows the beauty of Jesus, who made her, in the person of John at the foot of the cross, the mother of all priests (Refer to John 19:26-27).

With reaffirmation of my love and my apostolic blessing.

From our See at Bkerke, Thursday of the Mysteries April 5, 2012

+Bechara Peter Rai

Patriarch of Antioch and all the East