



For Your Sake My Body is Given Up and My Blood is Shed

The Fourth Priestly Message

**Addressed by
His Eminence and Beatitude**

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Patriarch of Antioch and all the East

To the Priests of the Maronite Church, Eparchial and Monastic

On the Occasion of the Feast of the Priesthood

Bkerke, Thursday of the Mysteries, 2014

Peace in the Lord Jesus, with the Apostolic Blessing

1. I write to you, my beloved priests, in the name of my brothers, their excellencies, the bishops. You are our assistants in the threefold apostolic service of: teaching, sanctifying and administering. I write to you on the occasion of Thursday of the Mysteries, the Feast Day of the Institution of the Mysteries of the Eucharist and the Priesthood. I share with you the joy of the Feast and I am present by your side in spirit while you perform your service, as the Spirit willed for each one of you, in Lebanon, the Patriarchal Domain, and the countries of expansion; in the eparchies and the monasteries. I embrace your worries and your toil; I listen to your anxieties and challenges, and I bless the fruits of your hands and the dedication of your struggle for the sake of those the Lord has entrusted to your care.

It is the birthday of our priesthood. We were born from the love of Christ. He is the One, who, **for us and for the sake of many gave up His Body** on the Cross of Redemption in expiation for the sins of the entire human race, **and shed His Blood** to wash them with forgiveness and gave them to us as food and drink for a new life.¹

Handed over to us by the Lord,² through our priestly ordination, is the consignment of His Body and Blood that we may celebrate them on the altars of the Church as a sacrifice of the new worship, for which we thank the Father for His love for humankind, His great and inexpressible love.³ Through it, we accept Christ, risen from the dead and we unite with Him and with one another in His Mystical Body, which is the Church.

Today, along with you and with Saint Augustine and the Church, we raise our voices, saying to the Blessed Sacrament, as we kneel before Him: “**O sacrament of devotion! O sign of unity! O bond of charity!**”⁴

2. I write to you, you who are the gift of the love of Christ to the Church and to all humanity, **to congratulate** you on this Feast Day, and for us to renew, along with your bishops and gathered around them, **our priestly vows with Christ**, the eternal Priest, and the great Shepherd of shepherds.⁵ For, in His name, we exercise our priesthood, and He is the Head of His Body and the Shepherd of His flock, the Priest of His Sacrifice and the Teacher of His Truth. Together, we promise Him to make Him visible in the midst of the community of believers through our priestly teaching, sanctifying and administering and through the model of our lives. Through the Holy Spirit, He has formed us, in our inner being, in the image of His priesthood.⁶

¹ Refer to *John* 6:54-55

² *1 Corinthians* 11:23

³ **Anaphora of Saint James, Brother of the Lord**, Thanksgiving Prayer

⁴ Refer to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1391, 1398

⁵ *1 Peter* 5:4

⁶ Refer to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1548, 1549

3. I write to you so we may **also renew our promise to the Church** in which and from which we received our priesthood; and in her name, we raise our prayers to God, especially, when we celebrate the Eucharistic sacrifice. For, her prayer and offering are inseparable from Christ's prayer and offering. All His Body, Head and members, prays and offers. Through the priesthood, we are the servants of Christ and His Church. **For His sake and for hers**, we were consecrated, and through His grace we are sanctified.⁷ This is our **common priestly motto**. Is He not Christ, the Lord, who **for our sake, and that of the many**, gave up His Body and shed His Blood? (*Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24-25*) Did He not promise His Father in His priestly prayer that for our sake and for theirs He consecrates Himself?⁸

4. I write to you to assure you that along with our bishops **we are praying for you** that you may remain steadfast in your priestly faith, and, in turn, firmly establish in their Christian faith your brothers and sisters in your parishes, monasteries and institutes. Did not Christ, our eternal Priest, pray for us that we may not slip, and our faith fail, in our trial with the evil one? Did He not, once we triumph, invite us to strengthen our brethren and each other?⁹ We think of you and of them and we salute your bold trustworthiness to your calling, despite what you are sometimes being subject to, in economic, existential and health difficulties, aside from the challenges of your service and your being misunderstood when in troubled situations and areas infested with violence, war, threats and persecution, as the Lord had foretold us: "In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world" (*John 16:33*). I recall with you many of our brethren whose dignity has been violated because of their faith and their faithfulness, and those who were persecuted all the way to martyrdom because of the name of Jesus. Their sacrifice fulfilled His Word: "The hour is coming when everyone who kills you will think he is offering worship to God. They will do this because they have not known either the Father or me." (*John 16:2-3*).

Our present age is in need of the proclamation: "God is love" (*1 John 4:8*). I call you to be trustworthy toward the witness of those who, for their faith, are being persecuted and killed, from priests, monks, nuns and the laity. Do not be ashamed to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Await, with great hope, the new spring that the Holy Spirit is preparing for our countries through the Church. Our societies will not know peace without being enculturated with the Gospel of Jesus.

⁷ Refer to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1552, 1553

⁸ Refer to *John 17:19*

⁹ Refer to *Luke 22:32*

Our Ecclesial Communion

5. On this holy day, filled with mysteries, we consecrate **Baptismal Oil, the Myron and the Oil of the Anointing of the Sick**. It is **the sign and the instrument** of the anointing of the Holy Spirit for new birth through baptism and to recreate us, in our inner being, in the image of Christ, priests and pontiffs, through Holy Orders, to cure us from sin, sanctify our suffering and consecrate our bodies as spiritual temples for the Lord through the blessed anointing. It is the sign of our ecclesial unity in our Patriarchal Maronite Church, and through her, with the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. For, there is no Christian life and no priestly life outside the Church.

For the sake of expressing this communion in our Church, the Antiochene Liturgy reserves to the Patriarch the consecration of the Myron, and with it the baptismal oil and the oil of the Anointing of the Sick. Since the commitment of bishops and priests are many on this holy day, and their participation in the celebration is not possible, we ask you to participate with us through thought and prayer. Furthermore, we are working with the Holy Synod to find an appropriate expressive formula for this communion.

In the consecration prayer, common among our Eastern Antiochene Churches, the Patriarch, along with the participating Bishops and Priests raise prayers invoking the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Myron to “consecrate it, so that it may be for all who are anointed and marked with it Holy Myron, priestly Myron, royal Myron, anointing of gladness, cloak of 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.”¹⁰

¹⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1297

Our Priestly Motto

6. Our priestly motto is, “**For Your Sake,**” because it is the method of our Lord and God, Jesus Christ who, “For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven,” as we declare in the Creed. This “**being for the sake**” describes the entity of the Lord Jesus in His wholeness that He is the “**entity for the sake.**” If we make Him our entity and emulate Him, we would be walking in His footsteps, in the embrace of His love for all people, believers and nonbelievers, striving to foster their friendship for Him, activating ‘their union with Him through their thoughts, feelings and the pattern of their lives.’¹¹

This expression “**for the sake of**” means to the Apostle Paul that Jesus is the sole “mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself as ransom for all” (*1 Timothy 2:5-6*). And, we have become the servants of this “Sole Mediator,” working with Him “to gather into one the dispersed children of God” (*John 11:52*). The Church is born out of the Mystery of the Eucharist, and from it acquired her identity and mission. When the Lord gave up His Body and shed His Blood for our sake, and for many, for the forgiveness of sins, then left it for us under the species of bread and wine to sacramentally be transubstantiated into His glorified Body and Blood, He left us also His commandment: “Do this in remembrance of me” (*1 Corinthians 11:25*).

7. With this commandment, He **made His disciples priests** of the New Testament and gave them authority to “Break Bread,” and enjoined them to celebrate the memorial of His sacrifice and death, and to partake of His Body and Blood. It is the new worship in “Spirit and truth” (*John 4:23*), known as the Eucharistic Prayer, that is, the prayer of blessing and thanksgiving. Through this prayer, the moment that we now live in becomes connected to Jesus’ moment. So, we say, “here and now;” wherever and whenever the Eucharistic Prayer is recited, the redemptive sacrifice becomes connected to the Banquet of the Body of the Lord and His Blood by the action of the Holy Spirit. In the Eucharistic Prayer, our present moment is the moment of the Lord’s Last Supper.

“**Do this in remembrance of me**” is a commandment that does not only entail remembering Jesus and what He did, but, to also do what He did. We hold the liturgical celebration as a memorial of His death and resurrection, a perpetual sacrifice, a holy banquet, a pledge for His love and His perpetual presence amongst us in the Church. Thus, we become in our very lives and in our activities, witnesses to His presence and love, giving ourselves as He did, and like the grain of wheat that dies to self, yields its fruit. Thus, the words of our Lord Jesus are consummated in the Eucharistic Liturgy and in us: “I have power to lay it down, and power to take it up again” (*John 10:18*).

This commandment of the Lord has given the Church and humanity, shepherds and lay faithful, hearts burning with love for the Lord and zeal for the salvation of souls, and has given

¹¹ Letter of Pope Benedict XVI *Proclaiming a Year for Priests*, June 16, 2009

our children spiritual directors and wise people who lead many of them to attain “to the extent of the full stature of Christ” (*Ephesians* 4:13).

This commandment was relayed by the apostles to the fledgling Christian community, as we know from Saint Paul’s Letter to the Corinthians, which he wrote around the year 56, and it is older than the Gospels. In it, he handed on what he received, thus, “For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me...” (*1 Corinthians* 11:23-24).

The Prayer of Thanksgiving and Benediction

8. We wonder, **for what was our Lord Jesus giving thanks at the Last Supper?** And the answer comes: from the inspiration of *Psalms* 16, verse 10. He is thanking the Father in advance for not letting His Body see corruption. In turn, the Church thanks God for the incarnation of His Only Begotten Son, His death, resurrection and ascension into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father. On that basis the Lord Jesus was able, from that moment, to give us, with the bread and the wine, His Body and Blood, resurrection and eternal life.¹²

If we go back to *Psalms* 22, which applies to the Passion of Christ and starts with the expression: “**My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?**” we find that it concludes with a promise prior to the ascent: “I will offer praise in the great assembly; my vows I will fulfill before those who fear him. The poor will eat their fill; those who seek the LORD will offer praise...” (*Psalms* 22:26-27). In all the *Psalms* pertaining to the promise, the oppressed, once they are delivered, declare their thanksgiving to the Lord for His work of salvation. Yes. The words of *Psalms* 22 are fulfilled in that the poor shall eat, not earthly food, but real manna, which is communion with God in Christ, risen from the dead.¹³ And we are all poor!

The Eucharistic thanksgiving prayer that we raise, is **an encounter with Jesus Christ risen from the dead**. Through it we connect with the two encounters that took place on Resurrection Sunday, in the morning and the evening, as well as eight days after Jesus’ resurrection, also on a Sunday. This inaugurated, the Christian custom launched that the community celebrate “the Breaking of the Bread,” which is “the Eucharistic Thanksgiving Prayer,” the morning of every Sunday, to commemorate this encounter with the One who rose from the dead.¹⁴

This means that the Cross and the Resurrection are part of the Eucharist and without it, their meaning is lost. Since the death of Jesus is rooted in the Resurrection, then **the Eucharist becomes a thanksgiving prayer** to the Holy Trinity: **The Father**, who loved the world so much that He gave up His Son, **the Son** who presented the sacrifice of Himself on the Cross for our redemption, **and the Holy Spirit** who raised Him from the dead for our acquittal by bringing the fruits of redemption to us every time the encounter with Jesus raised from the dead takes place in the Eucharistic Thanksgiving Prayer.

9. We wonder, **what does it mean that Jesus blessed?**¹⁵ And, what is the difference between the blessing and thanksgiving? They are two complimentary expressions, both used in

¹² Refer to *John* 6:53-58

¹³ Refer to Pope Benedict XVI’s *Jesus of Nazareth*; Arabic translation by Dr. Nabil Khoury, p. 152

¹⁴ Refer to *Acts* 20:7; *Revelation* 1:10

¹⁵ The first principles of the act of thanksgiving goes back to the Jewish tradition of “the Rite of the blessing of the table,” which is a thanksgiving prayer to God for the gift of creation, the earth and its fruits, where the head of the

Old Testament Liturgy. **We thank God** for His gift and we praise Him by **the blessing** of the gift. **We thank Him for our salvation**, which Christ the Lord consummated on the Cross, and **we bless him** thanking God for creation. In the Sacrifice of the Mass, humankind in its entirety, beloved of God, is offered to the Father through the death and resurrection of Christ. Through Christ, the whole Church offers the sacrifice of **blessing and thanksgiving** for all that God has done with creation and mankind, from goodness, justice and beauty. Through blessing, the Church expresses her gratitude to God for all His benevolence in creation, redemption and sanctification. **Through thanksgiving and blessing**, she chants glory to God on behalf of all creation. All, through Christ and with Him, chant perpetual thanksgiving and blessing.¹⁶

family moves on to mention the history of salvation, mentioning the Covenant with the fathers, the exodus from Egypt, the land of slavery, and the entrance of the people of God to the promised land.

¹⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1359-1361

Our Serving Pastoral Love

10. Through the Mysteries of the Holy Orders and of the Eucharist, we acquired the priesthood identity, **“for the sake of.”** In the hour of its institution, the Lord Jesus gave another existential dimension to this “identity,” which is **“humble service”** without measure, when “he rose from supper...and began to wash the disciples’ feet” (*John* 13:4-5). Thus, He imparted the spirit of humble service of our priestly love and called us to emulate Him: “If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do” (*John* 13:14-15).

The washing of feet, according to the ancient custom, is the duty of the servants in their master’s homes. For us, it is a call to serve, however small or humble; “I am among you as the one who serves” (*Luke* 22:19-27). For, service is not measured by its dimensions, but rather, by the love that it impels. **It is a call for a method of simplicity and humility:** “Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart” (*Matthew* 11:29). There can be no accord between our priesthood and pride, haughtiness over people and the life of lavishness and luxury, even in the simplest of ways. How beautiful it is for each one of us to be in a state of readiness for service, whatever it is, and whatever the age and the state in life are. None of us lives for himself and for his comfort, or according to his own whim. On the contrary, we were stamped by the Holy Spirit with the Myron of priestly and episcopal ordination, and our identity is portrayed as the image of Christ, the Priest who came: “to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (*Matthew* 20:28), and the Good Shepherd who has compassion on the sheep, leads them to the pastures of life and defends them in the face of wolves.¹⁷

The Washing of Feet is a call to **cleansing the heart, thoughts and intentions** so that we may carry out our priestly service. Judas Iscariot was not pure, as Jesus prophesied of him: “you are clean, but not all” (*John* 13:10). That is why he betrayed the Lord and handed Him over. Cleansing the heart and intentions is accomplished by accepting the love that is poured out into hearts by the Holy Spirit. What makes a person impure, unclean and of bad intent is his refusal to love and his strive for selfish personal interests, and closing in on his own selfishness. Did not Judas prefer the thirty silver coins over Jesus, thus, handing Him over to the hateful, and those like him who have refused the love of God? He transformed the kiss of love into that of treason and fell into misery that led him to suicide, hanging from a tree.¹⁸ As for the God of love, He crucified treachery to love with Him on the Cross, and washed it with His Blood and made love overflow anew onto the world through the Holy Spirit.

11. “For your sake.” This is our priestly vocation and mission, wherever you are, O beloved priests. Many people, seek likeminded people who are cut off from the world of God.

¹⁷ Refer to *John* 10:1-15

¹⁸ Refer to *Matthew* 27:5

This is why malice and hatred, oppression and violence, enmity and wars reign. However, we, who every morning derive our identity in the Sacrifice of the Mass from the identity of Christ, must continue the work of redemption on earth. Christ has entrusted us with the keys of the treasures of salvation. Let us not tire of inviting people to these treasures through the Eucharistic enculturation of believers and through the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. Thus, we will not let them rely, far away from Him, solely on “the good works that do not compare to the Sacrifice of the Mass, because they are human works, whereas, the Mass is the work of God,” as Saint Jean Marie Vianney – Cure d’Ars, would reiterate. Rather, let us teach sinners that God awaits them and would always meet them with inexhaustible mercy.

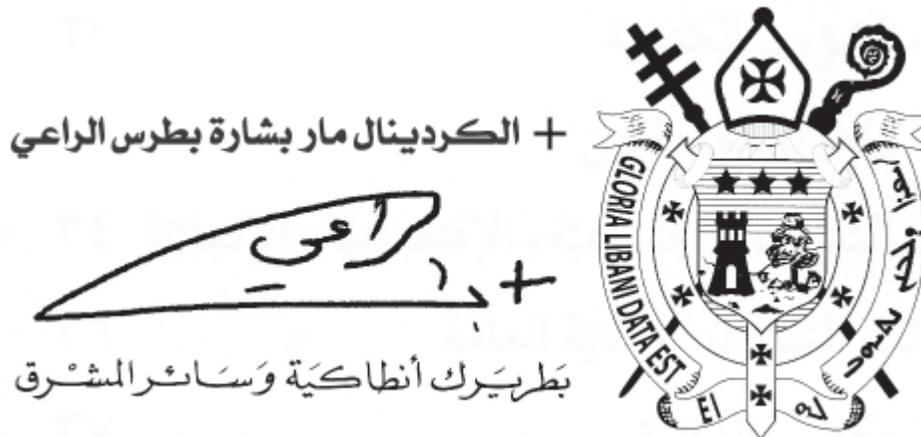
I assure you, beloved priests, eparchial and religious, that Christ is depending on your life witness to enhance the spirit of repentance and Eucharistic enculturation for the salvation of souls of the many. The word of God’s servant, Pope Paul VI in Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, maintains its seriousness and efficacy: “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.”

In this year, we renew our commitment to our motto: “**For your Sake and for the Sake of the Many**” (*Mark 14:24; 1 Corinthians 11:24*), in imitation of Christ, the Lord, and the guidance of our Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the humble servant of God’s plan of salvation with the word: “Yes” (*Luke 1:38*).

I express to my brothers, their Excellencies, your bishops, and to you and all the brothers and sisters, children of the eparchies, monastic orders and parishes, my most sincere hearty congratulations on our Feast of the Priesthood and the Feast of the Glorious Resurrection, with my lasting love, prayers and the Apostolic Blessing.

Christ is Risen. He is Truly Risen.

From our See in Bkerke, on 17 April, 2014.



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