

Sunday, April 14, 2013

The Priest

A priest has three main duties: Intercession, Fatherhood and shepherding, and teaching.

Through his duties, the priest represents the church and fulfills her role in the world. In the first place, the church is a mediator and intercessor between God and mankind, she conveys to them His grace and the blessings of His salvation and she raises the prayers and supplications of people to the heavens. Second, the church is a mother that overflows with love and vigilant care, and within her, we enjoy the bosom of the Father. Lastly, the church is the source of pure teachings guided by the Holy Spirit.

1- The Priest is an intercessor:

In the New Testament, the priest is called "Presveterous", means intercessor, a derivative of the word "Presvia" which means intercession. A priest is an intercessor for his congregation and the whole world. He is an intercessor before God to present the supplications of people and asks for the outpouring of God's grace, His forgiveness and gifts upon them. He is an intercessor connected to the altar, receives his power and peace from it and is nourished by it as well as gives nourishment to his children from it.

The main duty of a priest is prayer as Samuel the prophet once said: *"Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you."* (1 Samuel 12:23). Through prayers, the priest is filled with power and his inner peace is renewed. Through prayers, God gives the priest wisdom and help such that he becomes a blessing for many.

As Moses repeatedly interceded on behalf of his people, likewise it is the pleasure of the priest to mediate between man and God in the holy liturgy.

The priest lifts up his arms raising the contrition of his people to heaven, He intercedes fervently for the forgiveness of the people's sins and for the divine grace to pour down on every human as St Paul says: *"If I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you"* (Philippians 2:17).

The prayer of the priest is the most important part of his ministry as St. Paul always did: *"We also not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;"* (Colossians 1:9-10), *"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers."* (1 Thessalonians 1:2). Through prayer, the spirit of fatherhood is poured onto the heart of the priest so he becomes filled with wisdom in his ministry, and his eyes become open to the mysteries of the divine word. Thus, the word of God overflows abundantly out of his mouth.

2- The Priest is a Father and Shepherd:

He is a father who gives birth to souls for Christ and shepherds them with love and faithfulness. Giving birth to souls is not a small feat; rather it is like the labor of a pregnant woman when she gives birth. This is what St. Paul expressed when he spoke to the Galatians: *"My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you."* (Galatians 4:19). The priest has to put forth a tremendous effort- through prayer, love, and teaching- so that the image of Christ appears in those he serves.

As to what is expected of the priest in terms of shepherding, it is summed up by God in the book of Ezekiel: *"I will search for My sheep and seek them out... and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered... I will feed them in good pasture... I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment."* (Ezekiel 34)

3- The Priest is a teacher:

"The lips of a priest should keep knowledge, And people should seek the law from his mouth; For he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts." (Malachi 2:7). This is the picture of the priest painted by God. Therefore, the priest must understand the Bible, live the Bible, and teach the Bible.

The priest is not only a minister of the sacraments, but he is a preacher of the Bible as well, bringing out of his treasure things new and old. He tries diligently to deliver the message of salvation to everyone according to their spiritual level and become all things to all men that he might by all means save some (1 Corinthians 9:22).

The priest is a steward of God who strives to fulfill the words of Christ about the faithful and wise steward (Luke 12:42-44) whom his master makes him ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season, blessed is this steward that his master will find so doing when he comes. So He makes him ruler over all that he has.

Beautiful is the saying of one of the Fathers.

"The streams of the living water run down from the bosom of the Holy Trinity to quench the thirst of the world through the priest."

Fr. Yohanna Naseef

fryohanna@hotmail.com

St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church, Palatine, IL