

# THE RANKS OF THE CLERGYMEN

By Amgad Salama

---

Clergymen are persons ordained to perform religious services. In the Old Testament, God chose individuals to minister to His people as priests, and consecrated them, and commanded that they dress in specially designed robes. We read in Exodus 29:9: "And thou shalt gird them with girdles, Aaron and his sons, and put the bonnets on them: and the priest's office shall be theirs for a perpetual statute: and thou shalt consecrate Aaron and his sons".

In the New Testament, our Lord Jesus Christ appointed His disciples and gave them authority to preach His works. In His appearance to the disciples after His resurrection, He instructed them saying: "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (Mat 28:18-20)

After the ascension of our Lord into the heavens, the Holy Church has decreed, through the holy apostles and fathers, that men who possess certain good qualities be ordained as clergy through the Sacrament of the Holy Orders. This sacrament in the Christian Church is the objective guarantee of the perpetual presence of Christ with His people. No clergyman acts on behalf of Christ as though He is absent, but rather as an icon of our Lord Jesus Christ, manifesting His presence amidst His Church, which He has purchased with His Precious Blood. No person is considered authorized if he was not a member of the chain of the apostolic succession which was established by our Lord Himself.

St. Mark the Evangelist was the disciple who converted Egypt to Christianity. In his first visit to Egypt, he stayed seven years preaching and teaching the people, who readily accepted the Faith with zeal. Guided by the Holy Spirit, he found worthy individuals whom he appointed as bishops, presbyters, and deacons through the 'laying of the hands', men who would carry out the Heavenly ministry according to God's holy will.

The Holy Order of the Coptic Orthodox Church may be grouped into three basic general ranks:

The episcopate, meaning the order of the bishop, or the shepherd.

The presbyterate, in reference to the order of the priest, or the teacher.

The diaconate, meaning the order of the deacon, or the server.

In his letter to the Magnesians, St. Ignatius instructed them to 'Be zealous to do all things in harmony with God, with the bishop presiding in the place of God, and the presbyters in the place of the council of the apostles, and the deacons, who are most dear to me, honored as a type of the Holy Spirit, entrusted with the service of Jesus Christ, Who was from eternity with the Father and was made manifest at the end of time... Be diligent therefore to be confirmed in the ordinances of the Lord and the apostles, in order that 'you may prosper in all things whatsoever ye do' (Ps. 1:3)'.

The clergyman, who is chosen for the ministry, is consecrated by the 'Breath of the Holy Spirit', Who gives him the grace, power, and authority to fulfill the duties of his rank. Though all Christians have received the seal of the Holy Spirit at Baptism through the water and the Holy Myron Oil, the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the candidate at the ordination is the special gift of authority to perform the duties required in the priesthood.

After the 'laying of the hands', the new clergyman is given a new name after one of the saints. A new name may be given to the clergyman as he moves from one rank, or sub-rank to another. This is similar to when our Lord Jesus Christ gave new names to His chosen apostles. The new name indicates a beginning of a new life as a servant of God, no more as a layman with worldly concerns, but rather a dedicated man focused on pleasing his Lord.

Prayers are always offered to God on behalf of the Church leaders who are entrusted with the great responsibility of saving and returning lost souls to God. All the three liturgies of St. Basil, St. Gregory, and St. Cyril include litanies praying for the Church clergymen.