

The Mystery (Sacrament) of Ordination

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The Mysteries or Sacraments are a way in which God imparts the Grace of the Holy Spirit to His people. Orthodox Christians frequently speak of seven sacraments, but God's gift of grace is not limited only to these seven—the entire life of the Church is mystical and sacramental. The sacraments were instituted by Christ Himself (John 1:16,17), including ordination (Mark 3:14; Acts 1:15-26; 6:1-6; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; 4:14). The appointing of the twelve disciples sets forth Jesus' authority in calling people to ministry. Ordination is the sacramental act of setting an individual apart for the ministry of the Church by the laying on of hands of a bishop (*Tzernatrootyoon*).

The Sacrament of Holy Orders (Ordination) takes its name from the fact that bishops, priests, and deacons give order to the Church. They guarantee the continuity and unity of the Church from age to age and from place to place from the time of Christ and the apostles until the establishment of God's kingdom in eternity.

The Holy Orders are divided into two groups: Major and Minor orders. The three major orders are bishop, priest, and deacon. They are called members of the clergy because, by means of the Mystery of the Holy Orders, they receive the Grace of the Holy Spirit for sacred service in the Church. It is the doctrine of the Church that the clergy must strive to fulfill the grace of the Holy Spirit conferred upon them at ordination.

The **bishops** are the leading members of the clergy in that they have the responsibility and the service of maintaining the unity of the Church throughout the world by ensuring the truth and unity of faith and practice of their respective churches with all of the others. The word bishop (*yebiscobos*) means overseer. He is the one who is responsible and answerable before God and man for the life of his particular church and community.

Only a bishop, who can trace the source of his own authority to the apostles, has the authority to ordain. An ordination, while performed by the bishop, also requires the consent of the *whole* people of God; and so, at a particular point in the service, the assembled faithful acclaim the ordination by saying, "*Arjaneeh*" ("He is worthy"). For this reason, ordinations to the Major Orders always occur during the Divine Liturgy.

The **priests** of the Church are those who assist the bishop in his work. In the present day, the priests normally serve as the spiritual fathers (*hokevor hovivner*) of the local churches or parishes. They celebrate the Divine Liturgy, teach, preach, counsel, visit the sick, and exercise the ministries of forgiveness and healing.

The **deacons** of the Church originally assisted the bishops in good deeds and works of charity. The diaconate later became associated with assisting at the celebration of the Divine Liturgy and other Church services. However, a deacon is not only one who serves, but also one who will teach and prepare others. As a member of the Church hierarchy, he is authorized to bring the Gospel Book to the celebrant, read from it, and offer bread and wine so that they may be consecrated as the Body and Blood of our Savior Jesus Christ. The stole (*oorar*) signifies the Grace of God which the deacon received in the Mystery of Ordination.

The **subdeacon**, who is ordained and helps at the altar, is often a transitional rank between the four minor orders and full Deacon in which a young man is preparing himself

for fuller service to the church. He receives the right to wear the stole and is authorized to vest the Celebrant, ascend the bema, read the litanies, cense, and bring the empty chalice and paten to the celebrant.

In addition to the three orders of the sacramentally ordained clergy, there exists minor orders which are bestowed upon those for service in the Church. Typically, the four minor orders of doorkeeper, reader, exorcist, and candle-bearer are conferred at one time and the candidate becomes a **clerk** (*tbir*).

The first act is the administering of the Tonsure. Though not an order, it symbolizes the entering into a special role in the Church. Here, the bishop cuts the hair of the candidate in the form of a cross, signifying the cutting away of earthly desires and reminding the candidate to carry the cross of suffering in the likeness of Christ, who wore the crown of thorns upon His head while on the cross. Then, the candidate is given the Book of Psalms and a broom.

During the special prayers and blessings for the four orders, the bishop will present the candidate with a symbol of the new ministry to be served. The doorkeeper receives a key; the reader receives the apostolic and prophetic writings; the exorcist receives the *Mashdotz* ("Book of Rituals"); and the candle-bearer receives a candle and cruet. It is the duty of those who have the four orders to light the candles and lanterns of the Church and to prepare the wafer for the Holy Eucharist and fill the cruet with wine.

Some clerks are granted permission by the bishop to wear the stole (thus being called *ooraragir*), authorizing them to perform some of the duties of the subdeacon and deacon. It is both a great honor and responsibility to be granted the Holy Orders and to serve the Lord and His Church.