

Sunday, May 27, 2012

Kissing the hands of the priests

I received the following question:

From a young age, we are accustomed to kiss the hands of our priests when we greet them. Is this intended to honor them? Is merely a custom for respect and reverence? Or is it to get the blessing? So, what is the purpose of this custom!?

+ first of all, I don't believe that the intention of kissing the hands of the priests is merely to give them honor, respect or reverence although they deserve all appreciation because they are Stewards of the Mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4), and the Bible commanded us to exceedingly honor them (1 Timothy 5:17).

Additionally, they act as mediators for the congregation. They represent the Church, which is the embassy of heaven on earth that connects people with God

+ In fact I believe that **this issue is more related to seeking blessing from the priests.**

+ **A diligent Christian is one who always searches for blessing**, seeks it everywhere and in every act. He asks for obtaining it through touching the person of Christ and all that is connected to Him.

+ **Christians [traditionally] sought the blessing by kissing holy things** such as icons, sanctuary drapes, crosses, Gospel, and even the doors and the floor of the church. Additionally, the priests and the deacons kiss the altar and the altar vessels (that Paten, the Chalice, the spoon, etc.)

+ Christians consider the hand of the priest, which comes in contact with the holy sacraments, as one carry a special blessing. Therefore, they are keen kissing it to take the blessings of Christ that lies within it, especially that his hand always carries the cross.

+ **Kissing the hand, generally, is an indication to getting the blessing from the person we are greeting, whether old or young.** For instance, some kiss the hands of the little children to take their blessings, and similarly, kissing the hands of the elderly to benefit from their blessings. I have observed priests and pious monks who are keen on kissing the hands of others especially the elderly. In doing so, they feel that they take blessings from them, even if it is a little blessings.

+ **Seeking blessings is a sign of a humble heart, and a continues feeling that we need God.** Additionally, it reveals a deep faith in the power of God. The woman who had a flow of blood strived to touch the hem of the garment that touched the body of Christ, and when she did, she obtained a purifying and healing power, and the Lord Jesus praised her great faith.

+ Similarly, every Christian is keen on obtaining the blessings of the priest's hand, which continuously touches the body, and blood of Jesus regardless of his personal traits and abilities. We seek the blessing of Christ through kissing the hands of our priests which is sanctified by the divine sacraments.

Fr. Yohanna Naseef

fr.yohanna@hotmail.com

St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church, Palatine, IL

