



Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem ©  
\* Knights of Malta \*

June  
2009

## Chancellor's Update

### Holy Orders - *Cheirotonia*

In last month's Update, we discussed how Our Lord wanted the Apostles to spread the Gospel. This month we quote from Metropolitan Simeon, beloved arch-pastor of the Holy Bulgarian Orthodox Church, a Prelate of our Order, and friend of His Holiness Pope Paul John II ([photo archives of our Order and pictures in the book show the two working together on ecumenical issues](#)). In his book GOD'S GRACE in the Spiritual Life of the Church Shepherd, Metropolitan Simeon gives a profound insight into God's grace necessary for a bishop to succeed in his pastoral duties.

"We have received the gifts to shepherd *the Church of the Lord and God (Acts 20:28)* from the Holy Spirit through divine service, prayer and administration, according to the words of Chrysostom: *Entrusted to the shepherds is the authority to act with the blessed gifts*. It is through the action of the Holy Spirit that the ordinary believer in the sacrament of ordination is being singled out from the laity and becomes a mediator between the Lord and the other men. Thanks to the gifts he has been given by the Lord, he receives the power and authority to look after the salvation of the flock, to be the steward of God's mysteries.

"The manner of receiving God's grace is a secret for our understanding. But, according to the teaching of the Holy Fathers – St. Simeon the New Theologian, St. Gregory Palamas and St. Basil the Great - the soul of the shepherd endowed with God's grace seems to receive a kind of divine fire or light, which subsequently transforms his inner nature as well. This is a continuation of the tongues of fire that had come down on the day of Pentecost and the light of Mount Tabor, the incorporeal light of the apostles. In those times the chosen apostles had received, in the all-sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit, the ability to see the Lord in the glory of Tabor. Without it even the angels do not dare to touch and serve the eternal God.

"*If in front of God there are thousands and thousands of angels and an endless multitude of His servants*, says St. Basil the Great, *through the power of the Spirit they are performing the immaculate work of their service*. Similarly, the grace descending onto the shepherd seems to vest him with a blessed power, placing him in direct relation with God and is a condition for the administering of the sacrament.

"Through the Divine Grace, the priests come close to God's throne and represent the brightest of the angelic ranks. How would otherwise the priest appear boldly before God's throne, face to face with God Himself, and how would he offer as an intercessor prayers, supplications, petitions and thanks for each human being, and also the salutary sacraments? How would he dare do these things without the blessing and the help of the Holy Spirit?

"Even more strongly resound the words of St. John Chrysostom: *Or do you not know that human souls could never have borne the fire of this sacrifice and all would have perished were it not for the sublime help of God?*

"The holy grace, handed down to us two millennia ago by the apostles through the Holy Spirit, is being further transmitted by the same Spirit through a successive chain of archieratical hands to the contemporary shepherds.

Jerusalem 1048-1291, Cyprus 1291-1310, Rhodes 1311-1523, Malta 1530-1798, Russia 1798-1907, U.S.A. 1908-

<http://sovereignorderofsaintjohnofjerusalemknightsformalta.org/>

“He who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber (John 10:1).

“The *cheirotonia* is a necessary condition, because it is through it that the primary means of pastoral service - the grace of the Holy Spirit, i.e. the help of God - is handed on. *For without Me*, says the Lord, *you can do nothing* (John 15:5).

“How important and necessary the *cheirotonia* is becomes also apparent from what the Chief Shepherd Himself had said: *Thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness* (Matt 3: 15), and that he received his initiation into the shepherd's service at his baptism (Luke 3:21) and, according to the prophecy of Isaiah, had Himself testified to His *anointment by the Holy Spirit* (Luke 4: 18).” Metropolitan Simeon, *GOD'S GRACE in the Spiritual Life of the Church Shepherd*, Bulgarski Hudozhnik Publishers, Sophia, 2008, p. 38 - 39.

“...there arises the question: what does the phrase *the Divine grace prophesies* signify?

“According to Simeon of Thesalonika, *to prophesy* (προχέιζεται) means *to direct, install, create in a perfect manner* (προβαλλεται, Κανιστά, τελειοποιεί).

“As one can see, a hierarch in the Church openly admits that man in himself is too frail and powerless for the great deeds of God. It is with the help of God's grace, which sustains all, assists all and fills up everything that he receives what he is in need of. By the bishop's laying on of hands (ordination) the one to be initiated into the priestly office becomes capable of performing God's works and thus places himself at the service of the Church with all the rights and powers acquired by him. In order that the all-powerful grace of the Holy Spirit may descend upon the one to be ordained, the prelate summons all believers to step up their prayers at this moment, proclaiming: *Let us all pray that the grace of the All-Holy Spirit may come down upon him*. The presbyters and deacons attending the service at the altar respond to this invocation with a moving chant: *Kyrie eleison!* [Lord, have mercy!], and the clergy and laymen repeat after them: *Kyrie eleison!* The ardent prayers of the person ordained during the *cheirotonia*, notes archpriest Alexander Vetelev, *open his soul to God's grace, which by enveloping his whole being, heightens his forces and, just like a seed sown in fertile soil, will later yield abundant fruit*.

“What is the Divine grace that is being sent down at the sacrament of the *cheirotonia*? It is the particular grace of the apostolic-pastoral service, which had been promised to the apostles by Christ the Savior (John 15:26) and had in great abundance descended upon them on the day of the Holy Pentecost.

“God's grace is a necessary condition for the shepherd's service. *We believe*, writes Archpriest T. Tikhomirov, *that conferred on the priest at the sacrament of ordination is the blessed power to regenerate the human souls both in the sacraments and by his pastoral influence*.

“The grace of the apostolic-pastoral service bestowed at the *cheirotonia*, is also, for the shepherd himself, that cleansing, sanctifying and regenerating grace, which acts upon all spiritual forces, capabilities and virtues of the Shepherd cultivated by him within himself before the consecration. These spiritual powers and capabilities of the shepherd are the soil, sown into which is the seed of Divine grace. If there are no *germs* of spiritual life, no germs of virtues, no resolve to fight sin and no habit of waging such a fight in the shepherd's soul, then the grace of *cheirotonia* has nothing to act upon in this soul. *It cannot regenerate such a dead and waste soul*, writes Archpriest A. Vetelev.” *Ibid.*, p. 44 - 45. See and read Acts, 20: 17-38, also see Catechism of the Council of Trent on the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

