

RESPECT FOR THE CLERGY

The Orthodox Christian respects and loves the clergy. Knowing that the clergy are servants of God and man, devoting their life for the salvation of their flock, the Orthodox Christian expresses his gratitude and respect to them on every occasion.

First, the Priest is addressed as "Father" by all, for he is the spiritual father of his flock; he is their teacher, confessor, sanctifier, and healer. There are people that belong to Christian denominations that do not call their clergy, "Father". But let us consider the words of St. Paul, "For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel" (1 Corinthians 4:15). When we also read the gospel according to St. Luke, we find the rich man calling up to Abraham in heaven with Lazarus in his bosom and addressing him as "Father Abraham" (See Luke 16:20-31). Abraham's response was not, "Do you not realize that only God the Father is to be called Father?" Rather, he replied, "Son, remember".

Second, when people greet their Priest they kiss his hand as an expression of respect, as recognition of his Priesthood, and as a veneration to the holiness of his sacred office and duties.

The fact that the Priest handles the Holy of Holies, that is, the Body and Blood of Christ, when he offers the Divine Liturgy, is recognized by Orthodox people, at all time throughout the world, as a great and awesome privilege.

The hands that touch and offer the Bloodless Sacrifice on the Holy Altar; the hands that give to us the Body and Blood of Christ; the hands that baptize and anoint us with Holy Chrism; the hands that absolve us in the Sacrament of Penance; the hands that bless our wedlock in the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony and anoint our bodies with the healing oil of the Sacrament of Holy Unction; the hands that sprinkle upon us the Holy Water of Sanctification; the hands that bless us, alive and dead, these hands are the instruments of salvation. For this reason Orthodox Christians through the centuries have kissed the hand of our Priest when we greet him either in church when he distributes the "Antidoron" at the end of the Divine Liturgy or outside the church whenever we meet him.

We close these remarks with the words of St. Paul: "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life and imitate their faith; Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings. Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give an account. Let them do this joyfully, and not sadly, for that would be of no advantage to you" (Hebrews 13:7-9, 13, 17).