

Jubilee in the Syriac Church

- **The Meaning of a Jubilee**

In the Syriac Church, when we celebrate a life of service done in a spirit of devotion by a servant who identifies with those whom he serves, we call it a jubilee. This is an indication of the community's approval of the life-long labor of one of their own. It is an occasion for refreshing our memories of that labor. To offer a jubilee for zealous ministry is an ancient tradition from the first centuries. It aims to increase motivation and responsibility. This tradition calls those whom it honors to devote themselves to continue in their values and virtues. The roots of it extend back to the Old Testament.

It is a mark of wisdom to recognize sweat poured out and to acknowledge the value of service. However good it feels to be understood and approved; approval also loads one up with new responsibility. The approval we give to a man who has discovered his spiritual self, found himself, and grasped life's goal and purpose, imbues him with both responsibility and motivation. This approach is one reason that our accomplished ministers continue in their values with full vitality. This approach is important to the life of both the Church and society. Sincere approval is useful both to those who receive it and to those who give it. It, just as much as well-intentioned and constructive criticism, is necessary for personal growth and social maturity. As the ancient adage says, **“Not only does the thirsty seek for water, but also water looks for dry lips it can refresh.”**

- **Abuna Emanuel's Pastoral Work**

Together with a two-year period under spiritual guidance, Abuna Khorī Emanuel Aydin has offered a fifty-year-long ministry to the church in Vienna, Austria. The request for me to write in honor of his jubilee, for reasons beyond my control, plunged me into thought. I vacillated because I have always lived in the Motherland. What can I write about a distant land? For a long time now the prospect of writing about any human being and developing

thoughts about an individual, has made me think again. In fact, it scares me. It drives me to wavering hesitation. Especially if the one I am to write about has become a public figure with a capacity to represent a culture, who is a master of hearts, and bears a spiritual (ordained minister's) persona, then the task becomes much more difficult. But when I saw Abuna's mission-filled success story, the energy and labor he spent during his own history in church ministry—when I tried to understand it all—the resolution, discipline, industry, and productivity that I found in him banished hesitation from my mind. I felt truly motivated. And so, I decided to write down my feelings.

I must say, for me to write a portion of—to contribute to—a book to be published for the fiftieth anniversary jubilee of a spiritual minister of such distinction, is a cause of great honor. This jubilee is endowed with original and meaningful qualities that carry the years of labor, worthy of approval, and bear the reflections of their light as far as our times. I congratulate everyone from my heart who experiences this jubilee and the joy of it. I offer thanks to the value-acknowledging awareness that forms the backdrop to it. My desire and expectation are that this jubilee will give hope and life, and will be a cause for strong, healthy, and permanent developments.

The value and honor of an aware and sagacious person is in direct proportion, not to what he consumes, but to what he produces. To offer a contribution to the life of the Church and to add positive value is a spiritual person's (an ordained minister's) reason for being. In the Syriac tradition, service to a human being, or to society, is a method for reaching divine realities. So, those who possess this vision slip out of self-attenuating approaches, and endeavor to serve and form the future according to rational requirements. Abuna Khorī Emanuel's socio-cultural relationships which he developed with sister churches in Austria, and with the society there, and in this connection his multi-dimensional ministries, his 14 books, his various articles and sermons, rise above all manner of approval. As I show below, the awards and marks of approval he received from the Austrian State demonstrate the social echoes of this poignant ministry.

- June 1984, he received “**the great gold medal for service**” from the President of Austria.
- February 1998, the Governor of Vienna State and the Mayor of the City, presented him with “**the medal of service to Vienna state.**”
- March 2004, the President bestowed on him the title of “**professor of profession.**”
- January 2012, the President presented him with “**the medal of highest honor.**”

These awards of the highest level, and the rank he received as “**ambassador of peace**” together with other recognitions, without a doubt, are a great honor. In the present political conditions, it is not easy to be worthy of, nor to possess, such awards. It requires vision, wisdom, and labor. It requires disciplined and decisive work toward one principal goal: the Divine Will. We know very well that these awards are given to successful personalities who perform the duty of being a bridge between people, and who observe social harmony.

When our focal point is not how to meet our needs, but rather to fulfill the Divine Will and to do justice, every day when we repeat the Lord’s prayer and say, “**nehve sebyonoğ**” / **your will be done**”, we also know that our needs will be met. **The whole issue is the act of giving value to both one’s self and to the other. It is one’s ability to complete another - to fulfill - according to one’s opportunities, with the instincts of a servant.** In all areas of life, and especially in one-to-one relationships and the collaborations that demand togetherness, intentions are particularly important. The essential and permanent thing is sincere intention. Whoever intends something that intention will reflect back at him. The saying, “**An action without intention is without value; an insincere intention is without spirit,**” emphasizes the importance of intent rather than zealous actions. Let’s not forget, “**According to our highest light, more light will be given to us as we live.**”

Abuna Khor Emanuel is celebrating the fiftieth year of his pastoral work. In all of the ministries he has done, he has caused a distinct persona to appear. His deep devotion to the Word seems to have made his works easy. He is beyond the persona of an ordained minister. He is a rational thinker of interest to the Church and to society; a writer who grafts into his readers the will to overcome difficulties. He is an intellectual who discerned the fertility and

productivity of truth. He learned that truth finds life, is life, offers life to spiritual growth and development, and is bound to the ties that only justice develops; and he reflected this learning in the field of his ministry. For him, time flowed like a poem. By poem, I refer to the essence of life - filtered, fine, and beautiful. He was far from clutter and excess. I want to emphasize how his spirit gave exuberance to others. The person whose heart assimilates humane virtues, the person of culture, always looks at life and differences holistically, and approaches them rationally. Just as in the example of the vine and the branches, he is one part of a larger existence. He cultivates an understanding that he is in direct or indirect communication with all created things.

The Foundational Measure of Pastoral Work

According to the Church's understanding, pastoral work rests on the foundation of protecting, looking after people, and offering service to them. In essence, the pastor has the instincts of a servant. Love and self-giving are synonyms. Pastoral work is the way of guidance and supervision that carries a person from the carnality and false self that exists in human nature, to the essence of a human being - humanity or the true self - and to a spiritual life. This pastoral way that enriches life shelters all good things. The foundational measure of the pastorate derives from the teachings of Christ himself and his disciples. **It is just that easy and just that difficult.** The difficulty is not in the unknowns, but in the mis-construed.

“The pastorate/priesthood,” was ordained by Christ for the benefit of his people, whom he defines as brethren. Ordination to it is one of the seven sacraments of the church. This **“high sacrament,”** which conducts the holy power of Christ to his people, while it aims at the enlightenment and salvation of each of them, is tasked with the continual administration and structuring of the church. This **“privileged sacrament”** which Christ gave for his Church is the gift of the Holy Spirit. The person, who, by God's grace, can possess this sacrament, is furthering a divine mission entrusted to the Church through the apostles.

Saint Augustine (354-430) explains, **“The specific quality of the sacrament of ordination should resemble light. Those who seek enlightenment find light through it, and although it passes through unclean beings, it is not defiled.”** So, to desire any rank of spiritual ministry in the church is meaningful and beautiful. One should desire the labor and service that is the essence of the rank more than any personal advantage and respect that comes from it. According to the Church Fathers, the good shepherd does not tend the sheep for his own food. He eats so that he can lead the sheep to pasture. That is why those who serve for transient values are not true shepherds.

Saint Augustine also gave this imperative, **“Ordination should not be received in a spirit of authority or arrogance, but in a spirit of kindness and compassion.”** Saint Gregory of Nazianzus (329-390) gave this critical and important recommendation to pastors: **“Before purifying others, he must purify himself. To enlighten, he must be light. He must not forget whose shepherd he is, what level he is at, to whom he is addressing his attention, and that he the defender of the Truth.”**

So, we can see that the important spiritual personalities who have comprehended the priesthood, put existing contradictions aside and always used it to contribute meaning to the continuation of life. Their efforts and ministries transcended selfish ambitions and ego. They became a blessing for life. It should be known that the priests/pastors who offer ministry in their various ranks (priest, bishop, patriarch), who have internalized and grasped the true meaning of spiritual (ordained) ministry, are far beyond the age in which they live. Their ministries, like water, will surely find their way and flow for ages. They will always be remembered with respect and appreciation.

It is, however, difficult to preserve these things daily. It is hard to remain a true human being. This is a person who preserves his own inner discipline, derives pleasure from the success of others, and is communal. He is a person who endeavors to prevent visible and invisible defilement. A true human being has another special quality: he rejects all that is

contrary to the conscience and to human feeling. He is disgusted by the vulgarities that crush the honor of individuals. Unfortunately, without a strong personal spiritual reality and a self-managing spirit, in the ups and downs, in the daily comings and goings, we sometimes lose the meaning of all these qualities. Life, without its spiritual dimension, obviously does not possess its own reality nor its own truth.

Therefore, the essence of life is, contrary to general opinion, spiritual reality, which is relevant to everyone whether young or old. It is to maintain the quality of humanity and the true self by reining in carnality. It is for the spirit to be on the job with attitudes of a flexible will, in order to swim more easily in the currents and waves of life. It is to surrender to the spirit the reins of the body - the tiller of that boat. Principles in the Church, manners taught there, individual and congregational worship, masses, ceremonies and other disciplines are repetitions that remind us not to distance ourselves from the true self/the spirit and ensure that we do not. This spiritual cycle teaches us to scatter our inner darkness, and not to fold under our troubles, but rather to fold up our troubles and even to be saved from them. Therefore, the goal of all of the disciplines and acts of worship in the Church is to keep one's life in a positive cycle. It is to keep one close to the true self/the spirit. It is to balance the cultivation of the spirit.

The foundational issue of a life of spiritual reality that elevates communal life is to be directed away from the desire for material gain and toward the desire to impart that spiritual reality. It is to be in motion by serving in the flow of things. For to give and to fulfil is the essence of the spirit. Just as animal life needs oxygen, so our loving contributions to the functions of human life, our efforts to make life/the world better than it is, to enrich it, to serve the flow of it, are all critical for its continuation. At this point, to have a tranquil and happy life, we very much need these efforts. In this connection, the way to keep the voice of the conscience and of the heart strong passes through a healthy inner spiritual reality, not

rejecting the goodness within us, not resorting to evil despite the conditions and events that seem to force us to it.

- **The Sense of Life in Syriac Culture**

As I have studied to understand the feeling of the beloved Syriac masters/teachers, the masters of pen and word, the doctors of the heart, who have sought to explain the truth and the meaning of life with words of magical association, I want to emphasize that I encountered this truth: **“A human being only becomes human when he behaves with righteousness toward the truth, and with ethics toward creation.”**

According to the literary productivity of the Syriac masters who began to write in Antiquity and continued through the Middle Ages (5th to the 15th centuries AD), the material and spiritual growth and enrichment of a person is dependent on his generosity in his area of responsibility and on his work ethic. If he has assimilated the service-focused mentality, he is giving value to the honor of the inner person, who is holy. This is how he gets strength from the spirit. The energy of life flows from within the self and keeps the self in the light. If he does not take on the characteristic of a service-focused mentality, he does not receive strength from the spirit. The flow of the energy of life turns against him. Ego defeats him. The service-focused mentality forces him to give back to life the things he took merely to get more - to give them as they are, without dilution. If he keeps back everything he has taken and owns for himself, if he is stingy and lazy, his things become stagnant. With time they lose their value. They become a cause of impoverishment. If a water mill begins to dam up the water that turns it, it quickly drowns in a stagnant pool. Only if the water flows freely is it valuable to the mill because of the energy it creates. Everyone benefits from the flour that comes from the mill. The same thing is true for a person. It is necessary to transfer, as valuable assets to life - to give back to life - the things the Divine Will freely gave for our own benefit, for others to use, for individual and social tranquility. Otherwise, like the water mill that stopped the stream, a person will drown in his own water, and won't be saved.

The whole issue is to not lose human values but rather to preserve our ethical tools as we dive into the movement of life, as we produce service without putting on airs of superiority. We do this by focusing on self-love, self-respect, self-control, and kindness towards one's self without becoming a domineering person. In the service we do during the process of giving back, if the things we do are able to touch the spirit of people, to reach their spirits - whether the word that pours from the mouth, or is embroidered into our writing, or is any other offering that is offered to life - then all will be valuable and meaningful in the same way. For life is sometimes duty, sometimes obligation. Obligation and duty are life. The energy that creates them both is love. Love is what adds meaning and value to all good character. In true creative love there is no negative thought, meaning, intention, or action. If there were, then ethical evil would begin.

At the end of the day, everyone's conscience will be buried in the ground. Therefore, whether we give positive or negative things to life, we are investing in ourselves. The Divine bank is a bank that never goes bust. Whatever we do, we do it to ourselves. For a person lives and will live by the reflection of the light that shines out from him/her. It must be known that tranquility and stability among people, social harmony, and the sincere observance of rights of human dignity, that spring from that dignity, are dependent upon developing a consistent wholeness of meaning along these lines.

Finally, I say: **Is there a greater work and bigger responsibility than being a representative of divine love in the world?** A pleasant look, a smile, a word, can supply life to the soul. An evil look, a word, some heavy-handed behavior can darken a man's world and break his spirit. The most beautiful aspect of human beings is their heart, their spirit. That heart and spirit continually needs understanding.

As it is said, **"It is obvious what a tree is, from its own self; and what a man is, from his words."**

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