

# ORTHODOX SYRIAN SUNDAY SCHOOL ASSOCIATION OF THE EAST



## THE RITUALS ARE MEANINGFUL (Supplementary Reader of Class XII)

*Published with Permission*

Sunday School Central Office  
Devalokom, Kottayam-686004  
ossae.org, ossaebodhanam.org

**AN OSSAE PUBLICATION**  
**Sunday School Padavali-XII**  
**(Non-detailed Book)**

First Edition September 2013

Third Edition December 2022

Copies 3,000

Price ₹ 40.00

## PREFACE

‘The Rituals are Meaningful’ is a non-detailed text for class XII. It gives short descriptions of the Orthodox Faith regarding prayer, major sacraments such as Holy Baptism, Holy Matrimony, Holy Ordination, Anointing the Sick, Funeral Service and the Blessings and Dedication of Houses. Besides that the book gives a short narration about the significant feasts; *Yeldho*, *Danaho* and Pentecost. Knowing the meaning is important in religious practices. Without knowing the meaning of a practice, worship becomes mere cult and ritualistic. Meaningless rituals lead to superstition.

Christianity is not a superstitious religion. It is based on the life and works of Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God who lives in the history. In the fullness of time, the Word became Incarnate and dwelt with us. The eternal Incarnate Son of God is the Sacrament. The glorious event of Incarnation is experienced in the life of believers in the present time through the Sacraments. The mysteries “spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways” (Hebrews 1:1) by God were revealed in the fullness of time through the “bodily” (Colossians 2:9) incarnation of Son of God. It is possible to understand the Sacraments experientially, that are mystical and imperceptible in peripheral vision. Rituals become meaningful only through knowing Jesus Christ. The mystery of Sacrament (*roso*) is revealed experientially to those who know Christ through personal experiences.

The meaning of rituals and their observances will be completed only when holistic transformation takes place in the life of the participants. The aim of this short text is to pave way to higher experiential levels of worship in the holy Church. Moreover the students who have completed the course successfully are going to be entrusted the responsibilities of a Sunday School teacher and thus the intention of this text is also to enable them to become worthy teachers. The author of the book, Rev. Fr. Shajan Varghese of Niranam diocese deserves much appreciation for having made all the contents in nutshell, in the easiest way possible. Prof. Jose K. Philip prepared the English translation and we express our gratitude to him too. May God help our children through the study of this book to experience the liturgical rituals of the Church in a meaningful way.

**December 1**  
**Kottayam**

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# 1

## THE DIVINITY OF PRAYER

### Public and Private Prayers

Public prayer refers to the gathering of the Holy Church for participating in pre-designed and officially recognized prayer. The Holy Church is the fold of the saved who are in Jesus Christ. Each believer is an organ of the Holy Church which is the body of Christ. There is no existence for a believer severed from this holy fold. Only those branches that are attached to the grape vine have life. Those which are severed from the stem will wither and become nonexistent. The relationship between the Holy Church, which is the body of Christ and each believer who is a member of it is equally inseparable. It implies that a lonely search for God separated from the fold of the Church is not Christian.

A believer prays through the church. The Church is the body of Christ. It is in this Holy Church, which is the body of Christ that worship takes place. That is why the saintly Fathers of the Church insist that prayers of the Canonical Hours should be recited as a community. Individual dew drops become a stream only when they join together. The prayers for Canonical Hours mention that when prayers from different mouths rise up together, the prayer becomes too strengthened for the Lord to reject. The prayers for seven Canonical Hours have to be said compulsorily. The whole family joining together in prayer in morning and evening is essential for rectifying its defects and rebuilding it.

Private prayers or prayers said when you are alone, are no substitute for public prayers. Private prayers are special supplications, intercessions and thanksgiving submitted individually to the Lord. Hermits, monks and nuns are people who are specially called to remain in private prayer. In the Gospels

we see Jesus Christ who kept vigil with the Lord in prayer throughout the night (Mark 6:46). We are descendants of saintly fathers who remained awake in prayer at night. If we want to be spiritually awake we should have the experience of an ejaculatory prayer, “Lord Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” A scheme of incessant prayer exists in the Oriental Orthodox tradition, especially in its monastic tradition.

### **Prayers of Canonical Hours**

Prayers of Canonical Hours are arranged into seven Canonical Hours. The seven Canonical Hours are None, Vespers, Compline, Nocturn, Matins (Prime), Terce and Sext. These hours are purified through the prayers recited in each.

### **Jesus Christ-The Model for Prayer**

It is essential for us to have a good and stable model for many things in life. We are living in an environment in which the meaning and method of prayer are grossly distorted. The Orthodox Church believe that there are no defects in the dogmas of the Orthodox Church. We should realize and retain the glory of the holy Orthodox faith, transmitted from the disciples of Christ to our fathers and inherited by us. We should grow steadfast in this true faith that has been imparted to the saints once and for all.

The disciples who realized the absolute faithfulness maintained by Jesus Christ in His relationship with the Lord, requested Him to teach them to pray. The prayer that Jesus taught them (Lord’s Prayer) is part of our *Kauma* prayer. The Church Father Cyprian of Carthage says, “ If He (Jesus) the sinless prayed, how much should the sinful pray?”. If He prayed incessantly throughout the night and made supplications, how much should we grow up through continuous prayers. This teaching was often quoted by saintly father Kuriakose Mar Gregorios Metropolitan of Pampady. Jesus prayed at the tomb of Lazarus, “I Know that you always hear

me” (John. 11:42). The prayer of those who keep good relationship with God is always acceptable before the Lord.

### **Inner Experience of Prayer**

In Matthew 6:5-18, we find that our prayers should have the characteristics of solemnity, purity and secrecy. Certain Charismatic groups mistakenly believe that the content of prayer consists in making loud noise. The ancient Christian theologian Tertullian of Carthage says, “The Lord pays no heed to the sound. What he pays attention to and listens, is the heart. What gain does praying in a loud voice make other than causing nuisance to the neighbours? This implies that Jonah’s prayer reached the Lord through the depth and noise of the ocean not on the basis of its loudness. What is more important is the attitude of the heart”.

Our Fathers teach us that ‘those who pray incessantly are those who integrate their own duties with prayer’. The duties entrusted to us by the Lord are also part of prayer. When the activities, thoughts and words of our life becomes divine, our entire life gets transformed into a lasting experience of prayer. We need to realise this experience of incessant prayer. It is essential for a person to be totally transformed in love of Jesus Christ at the height of virtue. Those who have mercy, kind heartedness, love, faith and devotion have truly seen the Lord.

Prayer involves freedom from disappointment, grief and hatred. Prayer becomes meaningless when we are malicious, hateful and proud. Our fathers have compared such kind of prayer to the fruitless endeavour of filling up a porous pot with water. Prayer is the lovely flower that blossoms in a life full of love. Prayer should not merely be a personal affair. It should also have a social dimension of intercession and thanksgiving for the sake of the entire creation. It is accompanied by fasting, genuflection, making the sign of the Cross and meditation. Spirituality in the Oriental Orthodox tradition doesn’t divorce body from the soul. That is why genuflection doesn’t stand apart from prayer. Both body and

soul partake in prayer. Even atonement should not keep the body at bay.

God is omnipresent. There is no place in the world without His presence. He will hear our prayers whatever be the place we are in which we stand and say our prayers. However east is a powerful symbol in all ancient Orthodox Churches. Matthew 24:27 says that the coming of Christ will be from the east. Ezekiel's vision mentions that the glory of the God of Israel appears from the east (Ezekiel 10:19). The signs at the time of Christ's birth were seen in the east (Matthew 2:1). Christ who looks forward to the bliss of paradise gives importance to the east. So we face the east when we pray.

There was undaunted faith in the supplication of the Cananite woman (Matthew 15:22-28) and Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52). The widow who obtained justice from the judge is yet another example (Luke 18:1-8). It was intense faith that healed the woman suffering from bleeding (Luke 8:43-48). Jesus who searched around for the woman who touched His clothes amidst the jostling crowd, teaches us that He is the God who cares for those who pray in faith. When Christ says "If you ask you will get and if you ask the mountain to jump into the sea it will obey" (Mark 11:23), he is emphasizing the value of deep faith in prayer.

What becomes evident through prayers is a pure life of witness and works of love. It was the acts of love that became more acceptable before God than calling on Jesus Christ and performing miracles in the name of Christ. Prayer is not a means for performing miracles. Signs will happen through those who believe. However that is not the sole sign of spirituality.

### **Prayer and Holiness**

The prayer comes from a penitent, blameless heart. Those who obey the Lord completely receive blessings from the Lord. However, this need not be the case always. Joshua's cries to the Lord are an example of prayer without a reply (Joshua 7). Here,



the reason for unanswered prayer was the sin on the part of the people. Jesus teaches us that “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”(Matthew 5:8). Purity of heart is a pre requisite for our prayers to be heard. We should prepare our mind to attain such a state of mind. Prayer, vigil and fasting are some of the means of preparing the mind. Our prayer becomes acceptable when our life is blameless and pure. Prayer devoid of purity of life is like the prayer of the Pharisee (Luke 18:14). Humility is the soul of prayer. The penitence and humility of the tax collector justified him (Luke 18:9-14).

### **Pointers to Pure Prayer**

Our prayer should have the spirit of surrender, sincerity and purity of heart which lead us to say, “Let it be not as I will but as you will”. The prayer should come from a pure conscience. It should never be tainted with selfishness. Intercessory prayers done with true faith is answered (Matthew 21:22, James 5:15). We should await patiently for God to act (*eg.* Martha and Mary, and Zachariah and Elizabeth waited patiently).

Prayer is a communication with God. Supplication is only a part of it. Silent prayer and recital of ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me’, repel the devil and protect us in righteousness. We should pray only after confessing our sins. Our heart must be sinless when we pray (2 Samuel 12:16, Joshua 7:9-13, Psalms 66:18-19). Gluttonous prayers are inconsequential (James 4:3). Works that are pleasing in His sight are as important as prayer (John 3:21). All members of the family should participate in family worship in the morning and in the evening. We should also find time for personal prayer and devotions.

## 2

### HOLY BAPTISM

Baptism is the first sacrament that joins one to Jesus Christ. A person is baptized in the name of Holy Trinity. We are reborn through baptism. Our rebirth takes place through the Holy Spirit. The Holy *Mooron* which is the sign of the Holy Spirit is used to anoint and seal the person being baptized. As a result those who are anointed with Mooron acquire the status of being children of God the Father. The baptized become the 'adopted' children of God.

The 'fall' of human which happened as a result of Adam's disobedience is absolved through baptism. By virtue of it the baptized become members of the Church, which is the body of Christ. We follow the practice of baptizing the children of the faithful in their infancy. However, the church permits baptism to others who accept the faith of the church irrespective of their age. "No one can see the Kingdom of God without being born from above" (John 3:3). Baptism enables us to be born again through water and Spirit. This is not the baptism administered by St. John the Baptist. What St. John gave was only baptism of repentance. St. John bear witness about Jesus who would baptize in Spirit (Matthew 3:11).

#### **Baptism of Infants has Biblical Sanction**

The following arguments are raised by those who say that baptism of infants doesn't have biblical sanction.

1. The Gospel passage says that 'he who believes and is baptized will be saved' (Mark 16:16). The biblical passage which contains this verse (Mark 16:9-20) is given in brackets. This is not part of the ancient manuscripts of this gospel.

2. Children are unable to think for themselves and confess their faith. Children have the ability to receive the grace of the

Lord. For example St. John learned about God's presence in the Holy Spirit and responded when he was in his mother's womb (Luke 1:44). Prophet Jeremiah was blessed and appointed as a prophet when he was in his mother's womb (Jeremiah 1:5)

3. Mediators cannot confess faith for and on behalf of the baptizand. The Holy Bible testifies to those who attained grace through the faith of others. The healing of the paralytic (Mark 2:5) and servant of the centurion (Matthew 8:5-13) are examples.

It is important to note that the Holy Bible also talks about 'families' which received their baptism together (Acts 10:24-28). Lydia, Cornelius and the jailor (Acts 16:15, 33) were baptized together with their families. It is only natural to believe that there were children who received baptism as part of the family.

### **Liturgy of Baptism**

Apart from the parents, a member of the Church, representing the Church, confesses faith on behalf of the child and undertakes to rear him/her up in the Orthodox faith. The baptizand receives two other sacraments (Holy Mooron and the Holy Communion) along with his baptism. The Holy Mooron and Holy Baptism are given for a life time. The administration of these sacraments cannot be repeated in the same person.

### **Structure of the Order of the Sacrament of Baptism and the Meaning of the Prayers Involved**

The liturgy of Bar Hebraeus who lived in the 13th century is followed in the sacrament of Baptism.

**1. Preparatory Service:** The preparatory service is till the recital of the Creed of the Church. It begins with a preliminary prayer. We pray that we too shall be made eligible for the spiritual priestly service of baptizing in fire and Spirit that the Lord had entrusted with His disciples. The *Promeon* and *Sedra* of the preparatory service explain the blessings received through baptism. Baptism admits us into the field of spirituality and invites us to observe God's

commandments. Here Epistle to the Romans 5:20-6:4 is included in the readings of apostolic exhortation. This biblical passage explains that through baptism we participate in the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Evangelion is the passage that deals with the new baptism in fire and Spirit. St. John the evangelist (Luke 3:15, 16, John 3:5,6) gives an interpretation for this. When the private, inaudible prayers are being said, the laity chants *Kuriyelaison*. Jesus Christ breathed the Holy Spirit into His disciples. Similarly the priest breaths on the face of the baptizand in the sign of a cross accompanied by the prayer, “O Lord, give him your divine breath which your only begotten Son has breathed on his holy apostles. Remove all remnants of idolatry from his mind by preparing him for reception of the Holy Spirit, so that he may be made worthy of the remission of sins through the only begotten Son, our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ; with him and with you Holy Spirit glory and honour and power are due to you, now and at all times.”

The baptizand is then sealed on the forehead in the name of the Holy Trinity without *Mooron* (Holy Chrism) and he turns westward and rejects Satan and his army forever. Then he turns to the east and accepts Christ and God’s commandments received through the apostles. The priest turns towards the candidate, administers the oath and recites the pledge of renouncing Satan. The preparatory service ends with the recital of the Nicene-Constantinople Creed.

**2. Liturgy at the Baptismal Font:** The candidate is sealed with ‘holy oil of Joy’ before baptism. This anointment shows that Jesus Christ enters the candidate’s life with Joy. Then, warm and cold water are mixed in the font, a cross is placed over the water and is covered with the Anaphoric Veil (*Sosafa*). A prayer for transforming it into a spiritual womb and a mould for ensuring eternal life through the advent of Holy Spirit is said. As a silent prayer is said the Anaphoric veil is removed, and the priest breaths thrice on the

water with the sign of the cross. As in the Holy Eucharist, the priest waves his palms over the water, invoking the Holy Spirit.

The sign of the cross is made thrice over the water to sanctify it. Then the Holy Mooron (Chrism) which is the presence and fullness of the Holy Spirit, is poured into the water. The candidate is seated in the font. The priest places his right palm on his head and pours water with his left hand from all four sides (first the front, then back, then the right and left together) of the baptizand, thus completing the sign of the cross. He then proclaims in the name of the Holy Trinity that the candidate is baptized with the hope of new life and absolution.

**3. Anointment with the Holy Mooron and Crowning :** Then the baptizand is anointed with Holy Mooron. Baptizand is set apart as the living abode, sealed in the name of the Holy Trinity and is anointed with the Holy Chrism. The Holy Mooron is the fragrance of Christ, symbol and mark of true faith and fulfillment of the grace of Holy Spirit. Anointment with Holy Mooron is the seal towards eternal life of the soldier of Christ, who acquires the capacity to walk in glory as the child of light and attain fullness in virtue.

In the early church the apostles disseminated the Holy Spirit by placing their hands on the believers. Later in various churches the practice of bishops placing their hands on the believers and praying (giving Confirmation to the sacrament of Baptism) developed. Some churches follow that practice even today. A small crown is placed on the head of the baptizand, saying a prayer; and then it is removed with another prayer, "O Lord, this your servant through your life-giving understanding of the evangelical life whom from the spiritual mother of the adoption of children you have made a perfect brother of your only begotten Son. Let him receive in your heavenly kingdom this crown which is preserved for those who behave well. Let him not lose the help of your right hand when this crown is removed from him, but let him be protected and strengthened and grow by it. And let him receive the crown of the heavenly call and glorify you and your

only begotten Son and your Holy Spirit who is consubstantial with you. Now and always for ever and ever”. From this prayer we understand that the crown that is worn is a symbol of the crown of glory.

**4. Holy Communion:** Baptism is completed with the Holy Communion. The Holy Communion is administered to the baptized by saying that “the fruit of life untouched by Adam in Paradise is given to the baptized.” Then the baptized is taken to the Holy of Holies where he kisses the sacred altar. The services end with the final benediction. Through the holy communion, the baptized becomes a member of the holy fold and is filled with spiritual gifts. Then the priest admonishes the God-father/mother and the parents about their responsibilities in the proper growth of the baptized as a good Christian.

# 3

## HOLY MATRIMONY

The Sacrament of Matrimony was founded in the garden of Eden (Genesis 2:18). The Holy Bible teaches that marriage is respectable; and the family is holy. This awareness is essential for the sustenance and development of the world. The constituents of union in marriage are love and faithfulness. In the Orthodox Church, the clergy may marry before they are admitted to the stage of ‘full deacon.’

### **Sacramental Nature of Marriage**

Jesus Christ was present at the marriage feast in Cana in Galilee (John 2:1,2). This illustrates fully that Jesus Christ didn't consider marriage as impure and bad. In the Orthodox Church, marriage is not a treaty or an agreement between a man and a woman. A treaty could be violated. Such violation can lead to divorce. In the Orthodox Church, marriage is a sacrament. It is God's command that human shall not separate what God has joined together. The sacramental nature of marriage is evident from this. Divorce came into practice as a result of human's hardness of heart. Jesus affirms that “from the beginning it was not so” (Matthew 19:3-8).

### **Conditions for the Sacrament of Marriage**

Both the partners should be members of the Church. They should be eligible for receiving the Holy Communion and should be virtuous. They should have the generational distance insisted in the canons (marriage between close relatives is forbidden, Leviticus 18:16). This sacrament should be accepted only out of freewill and one should be prepared for it. This sacrament should

be administered only in days specified by the church (Sundays and Mondays only).

### **Announcing the Bans**

This is an important event linked with marriage. After a marriage is decided on, it is announced publicly in the parish. The priest asks the parishioners to point out any canonical prohibitions regarding a match. The sacrament of marriage has cultural, social and sacramental aspects.

### **Liturgy of Matrimony**

There are two parts in the sacrament of marriage.

1. Liturgy of blessing the rings.
2. Liturgy of blessing with the crowns.

The bride and the groom who have had their confession and Holy Communion, stand in front of the Holy of Holies along with their attendants. The bridal *saree*, rings, chains and the wedding locket (*minnu*) are placed on the table in the Alb. The service of matrimony follows.

### **Liturgy of Blessing the Rings**

St. Paul compares the relationship between a husband and a wife to that between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:22-43). This is evident in the hymns and prayers in the order of service of the sacrament of marriage. The opening prayers are for sincere love, compatibility, peace and passion-free unity between the bride and the groom. Then prayers for God's grace to grant purity in soul and body are made. Human beings are weak and infirm. It is an uphill task for them to attain the great goals of matrimony. Hence the entire church prays for God's grace on the couple. Then the rings are blessed and put on the finger of the groom and the bride respectively. Thus decisions on wedlock arrived at in the families are sacramentally recognized and affirmed by the Church.



## Liturgy of Blessing with the Crown

Prayers for invoking the same right Hand (hand of God) that blessed the virtuous early fathers and mothers are made. Now, Readings from the epistles are made (Ephesians 5:20-6:3). The matrimonial relationship is compared to relationship between Christ and Church. Apostle Paul uses the term *mysterion* (mystery) to refer to the Kingdom of God and to describe the mystery of marriage. One feature of the Kingdom of God is God's love. Similarly Christian family too is brightened by the fire of love. The passage which contains Christ's teaching that Christian families are joined together by God and eligibility for married life is 'given' by God is read as the Evangelion (Matthew 19:1-12). Then the crowns are blessed and are worn ceremoniously on the couple, first on the groom and then on the bride.

The wedding locket is a Christian version of the *thali* used in the Hindu tradition. Here the *thali* has a small cross embedded on it. Tying the wedding locket around the bride's neck is a ritual adopted from Indian culture. Then the wedding *saree* is draped over the bride's head. Then the right hands of the couple are joined together and the priest gives them admonitions and blessings. The couple put their signature in the marriage register after the *Kukiliyon*.

## Remarriage

In the Orthodox Church normally only one marriage is permitted. However if a partner dies, remarriage is permitted. Since sacramental benefits are not repeated, the sacrament of marriage is not administered to those who come for remarriage. Prayers of atonement are said, the hands of the couple are joined together, the bride is veiled in the *saree* around her head, and tying of the wedding locket is done. The hymns used in the *Shubkhono* service of the Lent is used in remarriage too. These prayers are those of repentance. This service is also administered in two parts.

## **Married Life**

The couple has to have a spiritual and mental maturity beyond the level of passion. Marriage is not an agreement between two individuals. It is an experience of love in which two persons and families become one. The couple should consciously try not to let differences in their social and economic backgrounds affect their married life adversely. Marriage is a sacrament. A sacrament requires preparation and spiritual environment. All forms of luxury and ostentation shall be avoided in the details of the sacrament of marriage. The couple is joined together in love. True love contains sacrifice and care.

## 4

### HOLY ORDINATION

The Israelites were the chosen people. Yet a separate priestly class among them was selected and blessed. Priests are ordained to serve the Church through word of God and sacraments and rituals. Priesthood is a call to saved life, to represent the goodness of God. They are called to ‘bless and guide’ the people of God. It is the sacrament through which one is called to be the representative of Jesus Christ to serve Christ and to administer His mysteries. Priesthood is not repetitive. It is an eternal blessing which denotes the permanency of a sacrament. When a bishop prayerfully places his hand on the head of a candidate to be ordained, the Holy spirit enters and resides in him.

#### **Priesthood: A Sacrament Received from Jesus Christ**

When Christ began his public ministry, He selected twelve disciples from the multitudes that followed him and gave them special powers (Matthew 10:1). When it was day, He called his disciples to Himself and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles (Luke 6:13). After Resurrection Christ breathed on His disciples and said to them “Receive the Holy Spirit.” He also gave them powers to absolve sins (John 20:22, 23)

Seven deacons were selected and were set before the apostles. The apostles laid their hands on them, prayed and appointed them to minister unto the church (Acts 6:6). Saul and Barnabas were selected and having fasted and prayed, the apostles laid their hands on them (Acts 13:3). After his Ascension, Jesus Christ gives His disciples authority in heaven and on earth as well (Matthew 28:16-20). Priesthood is divine gift received by the Episcopos from the saintly Church Fathers who in turn received it

from Christ's disciples and Christ. This divine gift is transferred through generations in Churches having apostolic succession.

St. Paul laid his hands on Timothy and ordained him (2 Timothy 1:6). "Therefore I remind you to rekindle the gift of God within you through the laying on of my hands". The apostles and the elders appointed servants of the Church by laying hands on them. St. Paul states "Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands by the council of elders" (1 Timothy 4:14).

## **Hierarchies of Priesthood**

"The gifts He gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists and some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ... (Ephesians 4:11). The qualifications of the pastor are listed in the pastoral letters of St. Paul. There are three main hierarchical positions of priesthood on the basis of their ministry.

### **1. Episcopa (Bishop)**

Episcopa has the authority to conduct all sacraments. His powers include consecration of the Church and altar as well as ordination. Each priest is a representative of the Episcopa. The Episcopa has the responsibility to lead his diocese in the right path. The crozier is a symbol of pastoral authority and sustenance. The succession of apostolic delegation and faith passes through the Episcopa. On the basis of hierarchy, the Episcopal heads are further classified into Metropolitan, Arch bishop, Patriarch or Catholicos, based on varying levels of administrative responsibilities.

### **2. Kasheesha (Priest)**

This Syriac word means 'elder'. Its Greek form is *Presbyter*. *Kasheesha* is the head of a local parish. He leads the worship in the church and execute the administrative responsibilities of the local

parish. The position of Cor Episcopos developed in times when the Episcopos found it difficult to reach the individual parishes. This word means ‘Episcopa of a village’. Cor Episcopa is a kind of chief among the priests. Today they don’t perform any administrative responsibility. Yet this position is given as a mark of respect. Their vestments include white robe, waist-gird, chain with cross and a short hood worn over the liturgical vestments, while celebrating the Holy Eucharist.

*Ramban* (a life professed monk) is a position existing in monasteries. *Ramban* (Rabo) stands for the highest religious position in a monastery. It is not a position of ordination. The Oriental Orthodox Church has the tradition of giving the title of ‘Ramban’ to even those who are not priests. H.H. Baselios Augen Catholicos was given the title of ‘Ramban’ even when he was a deacon. Such ‘Rambans’ are called *Shervoyo Ramban*. They wear a black headdress with 13 crosses stitched on it and a wooden cross as a symbol of total submission to and following Christ and the commandments of His disciples. Since all bishops are monks, a priest before getting consecrated as bishop is professed as Ramban.

### 3. Deacon

The word *deacon* originates from the Greek word *diakonos* which means servant. Deacons were in the Church from the Apostolic times. Deacon St. Stephen was the chief among deacons (Acts 6). The deacons stand as mediators between the priest and the people during worship. They had the responsibility of social service too (eg. serving the widows, Acts 6).

In the Orthodox Syriac tradition, deacon means ‘full deacons’ (*Mshamshono*). They are entitled to submit incense in the absence of priests, give Holy Communion in certain special cases, read Evangelion, give baptism in emergency and anoint with Holy Mooron, all with the consent of priests. They wear *Oorara* (stole) on both sides of their left shoulder. *Yauppadyachno* (Sub deacons),

*Koruyo* (Readers) and *Samrone* (Singers) are other hierarchies among deacons.

## **Liturgy of Ordination**

Those who are found qualified for various positions according to the Constitution of the Church, apostolic tradition and Canonical laws, are elected to various positions. It is the Church that chooses such persons. Ordination is done in the middle of the Holy Eucharist, with the Church to witness. Even though liturgies vary according to various positions, the following are the important parts of all.

- Prayers and Hymns
- Reading from the Holy Bible (Old Testament, Epistles and Gospels)
- Witnessing the faith of the Church and submitting to it (*Amalogiya*)
- Laying of hands and ‘call /invitation’ of the Holy Spirit.
- Declaration of being ordained and seal in the name of Holy Trinity.
- Wearing the vestments
- Delegation of the authority due to the position.
- Kiss of Peace.

## **Liturgy of Ordination: Details and Explanations**

### *Amalogiya*

This is the creed of Faith written by Mar Jacob, Metropolitan of Meeppark, the city of martyrs of Besnaharin. The bishop reads out the creed of Faith of the three Great Ecumenical Councils before the person to be ordained. Those who are raised to the position of bishops read it themselves and signs. As a symbol of reciting and complying with the Creed, perforations in the sign of a cross are made in the liturgical book of Ordination which then are joined together. It is the signature of the ordained.

## **Cropping of Hair**

The removal of hair which is inanimate is the symbol of removing beastly passions. The hair is cropped in the sign of a cross and the designate is ordained for eternal life. The hair is cropped only after the designate puts his signature.

## **Entry into the Holy of Holies**

After *Amalogiya* readings and cropping of hair, the candidate is held by his right hand to the Holy of Holies. The declaration “Holy Spirit calls you” is made. At that time, the believers sing a hymn praising the watchful servant of the Lord. After the above mentioned preliminary services the candidate kneels before the altar. The congregation in one accord sings hymns describing priesthood founded by Jesus Christ and its functions and qualifications and thereafter prays for making the priest qualified for heavenly gifts. The main theme of these prayers is a plea for purifying the candidate with Holy Spirit and imparting the gifts of God.

## **Reading from Gospels**

The gospels are placed on the candidate’s shoulder when it is read during the ordination. It is symbolic of the call to bear the gospels of Jesus Christ and bowing the head as a response to it. After the reading of the Gospels, the congregation in one accord recites the Creed of the Church. This is followed by invocation of the Holy Spirit.

## **Laying of Hands**

Laying of hands and invocation of the Holy Spirit are done for positions of full deacon and above. The main rituals included in it are waving of arms over the Holy Mysteries and then over the head of the candidate by covering him in the cassock of the officiating prelate and prayer done with laying of hands on the head. This service is of a secret nature. As a reply to the

Church's supplication, the Holy Spirit descends and sanctifies the candidate.

### **Declaration and Sealing**

The declaration of the metropolitan that God's grace has raised the candidate to (a particular) position is completed by the *Archdeacon*. Then the candidate is sealed in the name of the Holy Trinity. Thereafter it is again declared that the candidate is "ordained in the Church of God." The first declaration is done before invoking Holy Spirit and the second declaration is done after that. Making the seal on the forehead in the name of Holy Trinity indicates that the candidate is earmarked for the ministry of God. Since the seal made is permanent and inviolable the sacrament of ordination is not repeated.

### **Adorning the Vestments**

The vestments are waved over the Holy Mysteries as well as on the candidate. Then the candidate is made to wear the vestments appropriate for his positions.

### **Delegations of Authority Appropriate for the Position**

This is the ceremony of vesting the authority appropriate for each position. The bishops are given croziers also during this ceremony. The new priest puts frankincense in the censor by himself and offers incense. For the full deacons, the incense is put by the bishop. The Sub deacons are given lighted candles whereas the Readers are given the Holy Bible. This ceremony indicates the specific ministry of each designate.

### **Kiss of Peace**

The official recognition of the church is given through the kiss of peace. What we have mentioned here are only the important elements of the lengthy sacrament of ordination. The priest is the



guardian of apostolic traditions and a model for the people of God. Ordination is a sacrament in which the candidate is sanctified completely by the Holy Spirit. His obedience and submission to God is very important. He is the intercessor for the people of God, a vigilant supervisor of the Church, and one who administrate the Divine Mysteries. This sacrament is very important because it entrusts the candidate with a very serious ministry. The prayerful participation of the believers is, as in other sacraments, very important in ordination too.

## 5

### ANOINTING THE SICK

Anointment with Holy oil is a sacrament administered for the healing of body, mind and spirit. The priest anoints oil on the body of the sick and prays for regaining health and absolution. The prayers for absolution of sins committed knowingly or unknowingly, deliberately or inadvertently, are said.

#### **Biblical Basis of Anointment with Holy Oil**

The Holy Bible mentions the use of oil for healing the sick. The twelve disciples sent by Jesus Christ anointed many sick with oil and healed them (Mark 6:13). It was a common practice to use oil for healing. The apostolic tradition suggests that anointment with oil should be done with prayer. The authority for anointment with oil on the sick rests with the priests (James 5:13-15). “Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins, he will be forgiven” ( James 14-15).

#### **Sacrament of *Kantheela* (Smearing Holy Oil)**

*Kantheela* is an elaborate form of anointment with Holy Oil. Normally it is administered only to bishops and priests. However all believers are entitled to receive this service. This service involves lengthy songs and prayers. It has five parts. Kneaded dough is pasted in the inner side of a vessel and olive oil is poured into it. Five cotton wicks are planted into the dough and they stand out above the surface of olive oil. The wicks are arranged in the shape of a cross. At the beginning of each service one wick each is lighted. First the one at the east end, then the one in centre,

thirdly the one to the west, fourthly the one to the north and finally the wick at the south are lighted. The vessel of wicks, Cross, Holy Bible and candles are placed on a decorated table. The sick person is seated or laid at the side of the table.

At the end of each service, the patient is sealed with the Holy oil. At the end of the fifth service, each of the five sense organs is blessed with the sign of a Cross with holy oil in the name of the Holy Trinity. The celebrant marks three crosses on the sick and says; “May you be purified and sanctified and may the debts and sins that you have committed voluntarily or involuntarily with knowledge or without knowledge be forgiven, and be blotted out from you all evil thoughts, and satanic deeds, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit, for the life forever and ever”.

Then one sign of the cross is made over the entire body, the next over the face and the third over the trunk. Thus three signs of cross are made altogether. The first sign of the cross is made from head to foot and from the right hand to the left. The second one is made from the eye to mouth and from ear to ear. The third one is made above the internal organs.

After the anointment the priests stand on both sides of the patient and place their hands on his head. The officiating priest lays the Holy Bible, Cross and right hand together on the patient’s head and recites the concluding prayer. “.... O Lord, heal and make this servant wholesome by your holy cross and by your adorable Gospel....Heal this servant and grant him/her remission of debts and forgiveness of sins. Strengthen him/her to keep your commandments and enable him to observe your law....Make him/her worthy to rejoice with them in the blessings promised to your saints in your heavenly kingdom...Remember this servant and deliver him/her from all temptations and dangers. Gladden him/her by your salvation and bless him/her and all his/her possessions...”

This is the supplication for healing and absolution. All the believers who participated in the sacrament of *Kantheela* are marked with the holy oil on their forehead.

### **Way of Anointment with Holy Oil**

After the Hymns of Penitence, other Hymns, *Promeyon*, *Sedra*, *Ethro*, readings from Apostles and reading of Gospels are done, the prayer for absolution is said by laying the hands on the patient. Then the holy oil is applied prayerfully on the forehead, chest and knees of the patient. This is followed by applying oil on five sense organs with a prayer. Finally Hymns of Penitence and Creed of the Church are recited.

### **Meaning of the Prayers**

The patient is presented before God with intercessory prayer made in true faith. Then remission of sins are pleaded for. Disease and sin are signs of incompleteness. During his Incarnation Jesus Christ transformed the incomplete human into complete one. The prayers connect disease with sin. Along with the prayer for relief and quietness of the body and the mind, we pray for absolution of omissions and sins. The central thought contained in these hymns and prayers is penitence.

### **Sacrament of Anointing with Holy Oil is not the Last Sacrament**

Some people believe that this sacrament is administered only to the fatally sick and the dying. This is not correct. In the Roman Catholic Church, this sacrament is called extreme unction, meaning the end of life not far away. In the Orthodox Churches, this sacrament can be administered any number of times at any stage of the disease. What gives healing is the prayer made in faith. The community of believers has participatory roles in this sacrament. Anointment of holy oil on the sick, gives special importance to penitence. Penitence is a transformation of the

mind. The sick and the community of believers should repent and turn to God. Turning to God means treading the path of God. It is the mercy and love of God that liberates one from the sickness of sin. While oil that is consecrated earlier is used in anointment with oil, and unconsecrated ordinary oil is used for the sacrament of *Kantheela*. Anointment with holy oil is a sacrament of penitence. It is not something that is administered to the dying.

## 6

### FUNERAL SERVICE

Funeral service is conducted revering the departed person and witnessing faith in the resurrection of the body. Since the belief is that Christ's second coming will be from the East, the deceased are buried facing the East. According to the Jewish culture, throwing away a corpse instead of burying it was a mark of disrespect. The Jewish tradition was burial of the corpse in a tomb. The body of Jesus Christ too was buried in a tomb according to the Jewish tradition. This custom was taken over by the Christian Church.

For a Christian, death is a sleep. Hence the dead are often described as the departed or those who are in slumber. The dead people are those who have become inanimate only in their physique. At the end of life, the soul gets separated from the body. Since the soul is not composed of matter, it doesn't perish. The promise that "those who believe in me shall live it even after their death" is hope for the dying.

St. Paul compares the period from death to resurrection to the state of a seed (I Corinthians 15:35-38). Just as the plant grows out of the seed under suitable conditions, the departed too will assume a physique of the spirit. They will rise up immortally when the trumpets signaling the end of the world is sounded. Those who are described as dead in Psalms 115:17 are those who lived their lives like the prodigal son (Luke 15:32). It was spiritual death that happened to Adam and the Prodigal son. This means that the soul remains animate even after bodily death happens.

#### **Liturgy of Funeral**

The liturgy of funeral for those belonging to the priestly class from full deacons upwards is quite elaborate. It contains preliminary and concluding services along with eight other liturgical sections.

The liturgy of funeral for the laity and children contain variants of four liturgical sections. The concluding liturgical section of the funeral of priests contains the ceremony of bidding farewell to the Church and the laity (*Pushbaslomo*). The believers say as a reply “Go in peace” (*Sel beshlomo*). The structure of this service is same for all. It contains introductory prayer, *Kolos*, *Promeyon*, *Sedra* and *Ethro*. In the concluding service readings from the Holy Bible, Litanies (Repetitive prayer) and other rituals are added in addition.

### **Meaning of the Funeral Rites**

Death is not an end. The prayer which says “The soul that has embarked on its journey departing from this temporary world” is a symbol of hope after death. The supplication is that “Let this soul be led by God’s angels and let it enjoy happiness till the day of Resurrection.”

Prayers remind us of the ephemeral nature of life in this world. Human life in this world is short and the Christian has the duty to wait vigilantly for the coming of the Master. The dirge that when the Angel of Death came and urged for a hasty journey, the dead was even denied permission to bid farewell to his friends and acquaintances and even his bribes and supplications were rejected, points out the futility of arrogance in human life and the ephemeral nature of worldly comforts. In short, the glory of Christian life is contained in moments of vigil. We should execute the duties assigned to us faithfully and without indolence.

Another theme is hope in resurrection. The degeneration that began in Adam was defeated with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The hope of resurrection and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ are described through hymns. Prayers to make the departed who were created in God’s image and likeness shine with the God’s chosen are repeatedly chanted. This is followed by prayers to prepare those who are left behind in divine virtues. Death is not a terrorizing reality for a Christian because this worldly life blossoms in the hope given by Jesus Christ.

The biblical passages 1 Corinthians 15:34-53, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:12-19 are read during the funeral of men, women and children respectively. These biblical passages say that the period till resurrection is like the “seed in which life lies asleep.” When the final trumpets are blown the dead will rise up immortally and the living will be transformed. What happened to Jesus Christ after his crucifixion will also happen to those who died in Christ.

Then in the case of human beings, John 5:19-29 in which Jesus Christ speaks about the End of Ages is read out as the gospel passage. This involves Christ’s teaching that the dead who hears the voice of the Son of God will resurrect and that salvation and judgment are at the disposal of the Father and the Son.

### **Pouring Olive Oil and Soil with Incense on the Corpse**

The practice of pouring oil on the corpse exists in the Church since the fifth century. Pouring olive oil is the service of strengthening the dead who are spiritually alive, with prayers of the living. After covering the face of the corpse the olive oil is poured thrice on it in the sign of a cross (on the face, chest and the knees). A pinch of earth mixed with incense is placed on the corpse saying “the commandment that the body which is taken from the earth shall return to it, is fulfilled.”

After these rituals, the praise of the Cherubim, the Creed of the Church and incense burning prayers are recited. Then the corpse is placed in the tomb and the service is ended with the recital of *Hoothomo*. The tomb is then closed with the blessings of peace that the ‘lid of this sepulcher shall be opened at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ’. As the concluding prayer it is said “Let the same place where the First man raised his tent before he committed sin, become the abode and happiness of those who died in Christ.”



## **Post Funeral Observances**

Since the corpse is a body made in God's image and likeness and has received the Body and Blood of Christ, it is buried with respect and hope. Since the believers are alive in Spirit even after their physical death, prayers are said for them. A Holy Eucharist or commemoration followed by offering incense at the tomb, is done on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> day of demise as well as on death anniversaries and other days of remembering the dead. Charity and vows in the name of the dead are also observed. "Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:26). The departed are alive according to this commandment.

# 7

## BLESSING AND DEDICATION OF HOUSES

A home is a system for members of a family to live together. The home which has four walls and a roof that joins them is a symbol of unity. Selfless love is the basis of the family. Individuals (priests, kings, and prophets) and places (church) are selected and submitted for special mission and ministries. Submission leads to purification. The home which is made with human effort and material objects are submitted to God and purified through the blessing of homes.

Even while standing amidst other houses, a Christian church stands out apart. It is marked out by the sign of the cross made in the name of Holy Trinity; it is like a lighted lamp placed on a stand. All members of the family, who engage in different domains of activity, come together, in the evening and morning and worship God. Blessing of homes reminds us that even when we are in this world, Christian life is not meant to be led in a worldly manner. This is executed by priests with the participation of the believers.

### Service

This includes *Kauma*, prayer and hymns along with *Promeyon*, *Sedra*, Gospel Readings and Intercessory prayers. They uphold the importance of family. The water for sprinkling, for purification of the house and making the sign of the cross, is blessed in the name of Holy Trinity. A sign of cross using it is made on all lintels of the doorposts. Then Creed of the Church, incense burning hymns and final benediction are recited.

### Prayers of Blessing the Houses

The introductory prayer pleads for divine peace and tranquility to reside in the house. The prayer “Let the faces of the residents of

the house be illuminated” is quite notable. When Moses came near to the Lord his face was illumined. He could thereafter stay away from sin and correct the people of God. A shining face indicates a shining heart. It is a sign of how much one is near to the Lord. It reminds us the Christian virtue of engaging in divine deeds and gaining indestructible profit. The prayers end in an eternal hope that extends beyond this world. The prayer “enable these people to become delivered from sins and attain salvation” is an example.

Luke 19:1-10 is read as the Evangelion. Here, the atonement, confession and redemption of Zacchaeus give salvation to his entire family. The individual purity and prayers of all members of the family are essential for its sustenance. Here we can see the importance of intercession. The intercessory prayer following the Evangelion is the plea of the church for the family. We pray that let this home be protected just as Noah was protected from the Great Flood, Abraham from the sword and Lot from fire. Even if crores of rupees are invested into the construction of a building, it cannot become a home unless love reigns in it. This ceremony reminds us that just as the house which is marked with the sign of a cross and purified, each member of that family should be purified and renewed.

### **Seal in the Name of Holy Trinity**

The people of Israel were saved from the Angel of Wrath because they smeared the blood of lamb on the lintels of their doorpost. Similarly a home which is marked with the sign of the cross is rescued from the devil. It becomes a home of children of the Lord through this seal and purification.

### **Preparation for Blessing of Homes**

Ours is a society in which many are homeless. When a minority lives in luxury, the majority is in abject poverty. Today many houses are symbols of luxury. Luxury and spirituality never

go together. Huge homes constructed by destroying nature are quite unnecessary and cannot be justified before the Lord. A house is a place for man to escape from heat and cold . When the money spent unnecessarily on a house, is given to the homeless poor, a true Christian home rises up.

All sacraments require preparation. The members of a family should prepare themselves for the blessing of homes too. Prayer, charity and fasting are part of this preparation. The sacraments should not become occasions of luxury. In some places there is the custom of blessing homes at the time of feast of the Pentecost. This upholds the importance of the entire house being renewed. The members of a family take up a serious mission through the blessing of homes. The meaning of this becomes revealed through actions only when we faithfully walk in God's commandments.

## 8

### FEAST OF *YELDHO* (CHRISTMAS)

The word for festival in Malayalam is *Perunal* which means 'great day'. The *Moronaya* (means 'Our Lord's') feasts observe the commemoration of the important events associated with Jesus Christ or with the history of the Church. They are the major feasts of Christ Our Lord. They include feasts like *Yeldho*, *Denha*, Resurrection, Ascension and Pentecost. *Yeldho* is the Syriac word for Christmas (feast of Nativity). This word is used in the West Syriac tradition instead of Christmas which means 'holy mass in the name of Jesus Christ'.

#### **Special Services of the Feast of *Yeldho***

The special prayers of *Yeldho* begin with Vespers. The most important services are the solemn procession and service of bonfire observed after the incense burning prayers of Nocturn. Before the praise of the Cherubim, the congregation leaves the church through the doorways facing north and encircling the church reaches the west end where the fires are kept. The readings from St. Paul's epistles and Evangelion (Luke 2:1-20) are done there.

Evangelion is stopped in between and the priest lights the fire, encircles the bonfire Thrice. The Hymn of the Cherubim "Glory be to God in the skies..." is sung during this ceremony, followed by reading of the rest of the Gospel passage beginning with Praise of the Angels. Thereafter the congregation completes the procession around the church. They reenter the church and the celebration of the Cross in all four directions follows. The services of the feast of *Yeldho* ends with the Holy Eucharist.

#### **Mystery of Incarnation in Prayers**

The central theme of the prayers and hymns of the feast of

*Yeldho* is a description of the mystery of Incarnation. God who commands history became a gift to history. The hymns and prayers describe the inscrutable mystery of how the infinite became finite and suckled the virgin's breast milk.

The *Sedra* of Vespers joins the prophecies and prototypes regarding the birth of Virgin Mary. The prophecies of Abraham, Jacob, Job, Amos, Isaiah and the burning bush seen by Moses; the chariot seen by Ezekiel, Daniel's proclamation of the dew on bales of wool, and the stone carved out untouched by human hands are read here. Such prophecies and typologies display the biblical scholarship of Church Fathers. How God became human without eschewing his Godliness is a mystery. We pray to give us true faith in this inscrutable mystery of Incarnation which is incomprehensible to human intellect.

### **Significance of the Service of Bonfire**

The objects for making the bonfire are the blessed palms of previous years' feast of Hosannah. They are placed in a pit made in the shape of a cross at the Western side of the church. The flames that rise up in darkness are a symbol. What was seen in Bethlehem was the Son of God who was the Light from Light. Prophet Isaiah prophesied about Incarnation that Light rose over people who were in darkness. This prophecy of Isaiah is quoted in Matthew 4:16; "The people who sat in darkness saw a great light and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned."

During the celebration of the Holy Cross the prayer states that "Let Your Light be dawned in us." In the *Sedra* of the Matins we pray "On the day of your Incarnation, Light was dawned on Your Creation and darkness was dispelled from all directions." The Great Dawn of Our Lord Jesus Christ illuminated all creation completely. The lighting up of bonfire at the feast of *Yeldho* is a symbol of the birth of our Saviour who is the Light of the World.

## **Message of *Yeldho***

The Son of God took the human form, which had caused fallibility in Adam, for his Incarnation and bridged the creation with the Creator. The limitation of human doesn't permit us to see God. Even the sun is too bright for the human eye. It is impossible for human to approach God who is the source of Light and the Creator of all things. The feast of *Yeldho* is the interaction of God the Infinite with human who is finite. God the Infinite revealed himself to the world through Jesus Christ. He imparted joy to the celestial and the mundane through His Incarnation and filled them with peace.

The feast of *Yeldho* is glorification of the condescension described in the Epistle to the Philippians 2:6-8. The message of the feast of *Yeldho* is the condescension of Christ "who being in the form of God did not think that by force he should try to be equal with God" and took the form of a bond servant. This is a message that should be reckoned much today. There is lack of peace and tranquility even in homes which are unselfish. Discriminations and exploitations exist in the society around. Even though lack of peace exists all around, a Christian should enjoy the fruits of peace. The feast of *Yeldho* exhorts us for love animated through sacrifice.

## 9

### FEAST OF *DANAHO*

The Syriac word *Danaho* means ‘arising’. The Greek word equivalent to it is Epiphany. The feast of *Danaho* is the commemoration of the Revelation of the Holy Trinity.’ It is celebrated as the major festival of the Church since the third century A.D. From the very ancient times, January 6 was given special importance. Today most Churches ceremoniously observe January 6 as the feast of *Danaho*.

#### Feast of Light

The feast of *Danaho* is known as the feast of light because light dawned in the river of Jordan “Remove the darkness of ignorance from our souls and abide in us and in our midst.” We pray, “lead us without faltering to the complete and unapproachable Great light of the Holy Trinity and fill us up with light beyond this world. Illuminate our inner eyes with your rays and transform us into children of Light.’ Prayers like these point out to the illumination at the feast of *Denaho*. Throughout the prayers we see a desire for becoming pure and illumined.

#### Special Services of *Danaho*

The unique feature of the feast of *Danaho* is the liturgy of blessing water. The practice of blessing water has been in existence since the fourth century A.D. The practice of blessing the waters of Jordan River, the Nile and the nearly water bodies exists in Palestine, Egypt and certain other Churches respectively. We pray that let the blessings got by Jordan river be given to all springs of water.

After the Matins, there is a procession around the church. Water is taken in a glass jar. A cross is placed over it and is covered



with a veil. A deacon carries it during the procession. The procession re-enters the church through the door to the South. The bowl of water is then placed on a table on which a cloth is spread and the service begins. The theme of the song of procession is Jordan River and the baptism given by St. John.

As part of the service of *Danaho* we have the service of blessing the censor in the name of Holy Trinity. It is reminiscent of the revelation of Holy Trinity at the time of Christ's baptism. The veil used to cover the jar of water is removed with ceremony as in the Holy Eucharist. After the prayers are done with raised hands, the water is blessed in the name of Holy Trinity. The jar of water is ceremoniously raised along with the cross in all four directions. The cross on top of the jar is taken and three drops of sanctified water are poured to the baptismal font in the sign of the cross. After the Holy Eucharist, the believers depart after communing with the sanctified water.

### **Feast of *Danaho* and Local Special Rituals Associated with It**

The Christians of Kerala, especially the Orthodox Christians of Kunnankulam observe certain rituals connected with the feast of *Danaho*. One important ritual is lighting lamps on the sap of plantain stem and carrying them during the procession. Because of this *Danaho* is also known as 'Festival of the sap of plantain stem' (*pindi perunnal*). The procession and lighted lamps indicate that it is the festival of illumination. In certain places *Danaho* is also known as 'the festival of Nocturnal Bath' (*rakkuli perunnal*). It is customary bath taken by the believers on the eve of the *Danaho* in ponds or water bodies associated with the Church.

# 10

## FEAST OF PENTECOST

The feast of the Pentecost is a *Moranaya* feast. The Pentecost is the commemoration of the descend of the Holy Spirit on the apostles when they were assembled in the house of St. Mark. The event connected with the feast of the Pentecost is given in chapter 2 of the Acts of Apostles. The Holy Spirit descended like a rushing of the mighty wind, appeared to them as a flame of fire, and all were filled with it. The word 'Pentecost' means the 'fiftieth'. The Pentecostal experience of the early church happened on the feast of the Pentecost of the Jews.

### Pentecost in Old Testament

The feast of First fruits is described in Leviticus 23:9 onwards. The Pentecost is also known as the feast of Weeks. The feast of the Pentecost is observed on the fiftieth day after the Passover. Even though the Pentecost was observed as the festival of the first fruits, later it became the feast for commemorating the commandments received through Moses on Mount Sinai.

### Second Babel

Jews used to assemble at the temple for the feast of Weeks (Deuteronomy 16:16). The apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit when Jews of the diaspora assembled to fulfil God's commandment of the festival of weeks. (Acts 2:9-11). The mansion in which the apostles sat became the second Babel. Genesis 11:1-9 speaks about Babel. Because of human's pride and lack of fear of God, communication even in the same tongue became impossible and God scattered them all over the earth. In the New Testament people speaking different tongues understood everything spoken in a single tongue. This is described as Second Babel in the prayers.

## **Pentecost as the Feast of Renewal of Holy Spirit**

Each believer receives the Holy Spirit through baptism. Since we have received the Holy Spirit once and forever through baptism, what happens through the Pentecost is the renewal of it. The prayers of the Pentecost contain prayers and services for the renewal of Holy Spirit that dwells in us.

### **Special Services**

The special service of the Pentecost involves the service and sprinkling of sanctified water done in the middle of Hymns of Eucharistic Devotion of the Holy Eucharist. This special service is divided into three parts after the three persons of the Holy Trinity. After Easter, the Church genuflects for the first time during the Pentecost. Since we genuflect, pray and rise up with God's power it is known as 'liturgy of genuflection.' This enables renewal of the Spirit which is the source of divine gifts. The *Promeyon* and *Sedras* present dense theological thoughts. These *Sedras* are Orthodox homilies regarding the Holy Trinity.

### **Meaning of the Prayers**

We pray just as of the descent of the Holy Spirit that swept on the apostles in the mansions, let our inner eye brighten up and make up pure. The Three persons of Holy Trinity, One Essence, the birth of Son, the origination of Holy Spirit from Father and their unification in the Holy Trinity are stated here. Supplication for granting God's presence over words, actions, which are ideal and perfect are placed before the Holy Spirit.

The signs of the grace of the Holy Spirit are knowledge, purity and sanctity. This service involves a lot of epithets for describing the Holy Spirit. The activities of the Holy Spirit include functions like providing relief, creation, completion, purification and illumination.

The service of the Pentecost involves lengthy prayers. Fasting and genuflection during the Canonical prayers begin once again

with the feast of the Pentecost. The fifty days from Resurrection are exempted from genuflection and fasting. During the ten days after the Ascension, the Church awaits in special prayer for its renewal in Holy Spirit. Hence these days are known as 'days of waiting'. The believers should have the conviction that those were waiting by preparing themselves received the gift of Holy Spirit; and hence they should be well prepared to receive the gift of Holy Spirit.