

**IN THE NAME OF THE SELF-EXISTANT
SEMPITERNAL OF NECESSARY EXISTENCE THE ALMIGHTY
IGNATIUS PATRIARCH OF THE HOLY SEE OF ANTIOCH AND ALL THE EAST
SUPREME HEAD OF THE UNIVERSAL SYRIAC ORTHODOX CHURCH
ZAKKA I, IWAS**



We offer apostolic benediction and benevolent prayers, to our brethren, His Beatitude Mor Baselius Thomas I, Catholicos of India, and their Eminences the Metropolitans, our spiritual children the venerable priests, monks, nuns, deacons and deaconess, and our blessed Syriac Orthodox people worldwide. May the divine providence embrace them through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and St. Peter, the head of the apostles, and the rest of the Martyrs and Saints. Amen.

Meekness and Humbleness

The Lord Jesus said, **“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”**

(Mathew 11:28 – 30)

Dear faithful

Humbleness and meekness are two heavenly and esteemed virtues. Each one completes the other. In our humbleness we glorify God and we confess His abundant blessings upon us for He is our creator and care taker. We should always continue to give thanks to Him, acknowledging our weakness and asking for His mercy. All heavenly and earthly gifts that we enjoy in life are free handouts from Him. And accordingly, we have no right to boast but rather admit His grace and avoid arrogance that takes us away from Him and blocks our senses from hearing His words, and leads us to self adoration and atheism. We must let humility fill our minds and hearts with the light of Christ who will

enlighten them with faith and dependency upon God and confessing the fact of faith inspired by God Almighty in His Holy Bible. This is how we glorify His holy name by reciting with the author of Psalms, saying, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us. But to Your name give glory." (Psalm 115: 1)

Therefore, the virtue of humility is the base of all Christian values and its ultimate stage. And meekness is its ripe fruit and companion in the spiritual struggle. When humility is fixed firmly in the heart and mind of a person, it becomes a belonging to his soul. People around him would feel it in his behavior because he owns meekness and he is able through this spiritual courage to fight the accursed devil and overcome hard temptations through God giving him the necessary power to control himself from aggression and to be far away from hatred and malice. He would abide by the Lord's saying, "But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also." (Mathew 5:39&40) And also, "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you." (Mathew 5:44). In this way only, meekness becomes a second nature where we treat people with love and kindness, and we would be likened to Christ who commanded us to learn from Him for He is meek and lowly in heart. These two virtues - meekness and humbleness - were clearly shown in His behavior during His holy mission in the flesh. He loved children and they loved Him back. He sympathized with women and felt pity on sinners and wanted to put them on the path of repentance. He also forgave His enemies and haters. He taught us these two virtues in words and deeds. And if we abide by Him and follow His trace, we will be in peace with the Lord and we shall surrender to His godly will in good times and in bad times. And we will find solace with ourselves and obtain peace of mind and conscience, by loving God who loved us, by keeping His commandments and refraining from His prohibitions and by keeping His church's obligations, and by being in peace with our neighbor, forgiving his shortcomings, loving him and praying for him according to the commandment of St. Paul to his disciple Timothy, "In humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth." (2 Tim. 2:25)

Through His meekness and humbleness, the Lord Jesus corrected the world's understanding of the heavenly values and refined morals.

Meekness which was considered weakness before the birth of Jesus, became a strong spiritual power in Christianity. And humility which was considered lowliness in the past, became highly esteemed and a sign of a clear victory over the accursed devil and his followers. It became a condemnation to their pride which led them to the abyss and became the enemies of God and humankind. Pride also was committed by human who rebelled against God, the Creator, and was penalized by death. So in order to save man from sin and return him to life, He treated him with humbleness and commanded him to be meek by saying to His disciples, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves." (Mathew 10:16)

Yes indeed, the disciples realized the greatness of their heavenly Teacher. And they recognized their own feeble selves and their constant need to their Lord. Jesus did explain to them this fact by saying, "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me and I in him, bears much fruit; for without me you can do nothing," (John 15: 4&5)

My beloved

In this difficult time, our church is facing a hard period which is a decisive and dangerous turn in its recent history. The chaotic immigration scatters our people in the dimmer paths of the world taking them away from their historical roots and spiritual values that they inherited from their forefathers. Besides, being targeted by the enemies of truth, trying to catch them in their wicked webs in their old and new homeland. There are the old heretics and the new organizations that claim Christianity while Christianity disowns them. Their followers came like wolves clothed like sheep desiring to prey on the flock of Christ. There is pride, the origin of all sins, that caused some seculars to come up with futile ideas, trying to control the church and violate its organizational structure which was divinely, not humanly, set. The church is a spiritual institution and it is the Sacramental body of the Lord who is the head. He delegated His disciples to serve the faithful. He gave them authority to administer and manage its affairs and to take care of its members. They are its legitimate representatives and the protectors of its religious doctrine, name, culture, language, traditions, civilization, features, and its heavenly characteristics that were confirmed throughout generations. Christ is in her midst and it will never

shake because He promised, saying, “And the gates of Hade shall not prevail against it.” (Mathew 16:18) Anyone who opposes her shall be defeated because her authority is from heaven. So, in the spirit of meekness and humbleness we advise and urge those who have gone astray to come into the church’s obedience so that heaven will have joy in one sinner who repents and we shall welcome them into the church. But if they insist on fighting the church and spread chaos among the faithful and turn deaf ears to the real shepherds, then we shall use our spiritual authority to defend our belief and our honorable traditions by disciplining those who rebelled against our church’s laws, according to St. Paul saying, “put away from yourselves the evil person.” (1Cor. 5:13)

Dearly beloved

The holy occasion of the Great Lent is a golden opportunity for spiritual effort to follow the Lord in His humbleness and meekness. And to practice highly esteemed virtues and let our faith be shown through our works specially by acts of mercy like charities, helping the poor and needy, caring for the orphans and widows, beside our love for our Syriac Orthodox church and its laws, rules and regulations, language, rituals, and the teachings of its holy fathers.

May God accept your fasting and your prayers, and make you worthy to celebrate His resurrection from among the dead, with joy, happiness, and blessings. May His grace be always with you. ...ܐܡܝܢ

Our Father Who art in heaven....

Issued at our Patriarchal house in Damascus, Syria
On the 20th day of January, in the year Two Thousand and Seven of our Lord
Which is the 27th year of our Patriarchal reign