



THE ALTAR SERVER MINISTRY

By MICHAEL HABIB

"For to serve Thee is a great and awesome thing even to the heavenly powers."

—Prayer of the Cherubic Hymn

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE Holy Ministry of altar servers is brilliantly illustrated with these important words from the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom. We must minister with honor and dignity because this little ministry is great in God's eyes. This blessed ministry can give you wisdom and strength, and may give you the blessing to be ordained in the future, as many of our clergy began their ministry as Altar Servers.

Despite the existence of the ordained ministry, which is deeply rooted in the New Testament, there is a ministry for all believers by virtue of our baptism: *"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ"* (Galatians 3:27).

This is why I must refer to this lay ministry as a "Holy Ministry." The Apostle Mark tells us, *"For even the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve"* (Mark 10:45). As such, we must serve with the fear of God in us. We must not allow the altar to turn into a social hall. We should be very reluctant to allow the altar to turn into a meeting room. We should be further reluctant to allow the altar to turn into a playground. The altar is a holy place. It is the place where the bread and wine become the precious body and blood of our Lord, God, and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The altar servers' service to the Church is a very important one. In the Holy Altar, the Altar Servers represent the Angels who are the heavenly servants of God. Here are but a few examples of the importance of Angels:

From the Apostle Matthew's account of the virgin birth of Christ:

"But while he thought about these things, behold an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins'" (Matthew 1:20-21).

In Matthew's account of the Resurrection of Christ, we read:

"And behold there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from Heaven ... Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as he said" (Matthew 28:2-6).

Just think, was it by accident that the Birth and the Resurrection of Christ, the two most important events in history, were both announced by *"an angel of the Lord?"*

In the Book of Revelation, St. John writes:

"And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets. Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne" (Revelation 8:2-3).

We can see from these accounts of the New Testament the importance of the Holy Angels and consequently, the significance of this Holy Ministry. By serving in the altar we are serving God at *"the golden altar which was*

before the throne." We are not serving for our own glory and self-interest, but for the glory of God and His Holy Church.

We must never forget how great it is to be able to serve the King of Glory through this Holy Ministry; for to serve Christ *"is a great and awesome thing even to the heavenly powers."* If you presently serve in the altar, it is my hope that you will continue to allow Christ to work within you for many years to come. May your service to the Church, especially through this Holy Ministry, always be for the Glory of God.

To assist the Altar Servers with this ministry, I have put together some books that contain the actual text of the service with instructions to the Altar Servers within the text. These books have been blessed by His Grace Bishop Joseph. For more information please write to: Michael Habib, PO Box 1952, Burbank, CA 91507, MikeHabib@aol.com.

