

## People's Traditions

The absence of teaching and preaching in previous generations led to traditions among Christian people that are wrong from an ecclesiastic aspect. Ancient councils have noticed that some people ask to baptize their children in houses and prohibited it. However, this tradition continued in some places until the previous generation when we renewed the prohibition. People forgot that Baptism is the joining of a member to the Church and consequently this has to be done at the Church of the parish. In this sense, the Lord talked to the Pharisees and said: "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?" (Matthew 15: 3). Apostle Paul also named these violations "human traditions" (Colossians 2: 8).

Also, during the last generation, some people in some places did their weddings at houses although it is a Sacrament in the Church. Before this drift, it was always done at Church. And now, in this archdiocese, a tendency is appearing to have weddings in hotels or in hotel yards to be in open air. The reason people are giving is that they have arranged the reception to be after the wedding in the hotel. If the wedding was a stand in the presence of God and the saints, then it must be done at Church and after that the bride and groom may go wherever they want to. I wish that believers would stop asking for exceptional measures.

Weddings in open air started with a single wedding a few years ago and then it was spread. What I want to say is that some social habits become traditions; people would tell you: The Church has done it before. However, the truth is that such a thing doesn't come from the spirit of Christianity.

There was also a common habit in the Antiochian Church: People coming on the morning of the Holy Thursday to confess and have communion individually without a liturgy and going immediately back home. I hope that priests don't fall in this mistake because communion only happens as the last part of the Divine Liturgy. Holy Communion is a group act that occurs in the divine service. I don't mind having the Liturgy on Holy Thursday in a very early time so that believers get the chance to participate instead of having communion from what is reserved for the sick or from the grail left from the Holy Wednesday.

I have also asked all Churches to own an "Epitafion" (the icon of Christ in the grave which we carry in the procession on Holy Friday evening) after noticing that some Churches use a kind of bier that contains a cross and flowers. I don't know how this tradition entered our Churches. It has no ecclesiastic basis as all our books speak about an "Epitafion" that is surrounded by flowers; and at the end of the service, believers kiss the Epitafion and the priest throws flowers to believers as a sign for the joy of resurrection.

Priests must teach the believers the true traditions because those were built on a theological logic. We want to take believers back to the true ecclesiastic tradition so that new traditions don't mislead them. Those traditions might have leaked their way to us a hundred years ago or more, however, common mistakes do not become legal when time passes.

What helps the priest is to comply with the liturgical books he has and to read and ask his colleagues that have a better knowledge.

Do not insist on the priest to do what you want. He doesn't have to command you by what he is thinking about and tell you what the Holy Church wants and that you are saved by its teachings and heritage. Don't tell him that you have seen that tradition done in another Church or by another priest. The knowledge of priests differs and you must comply with who knows better.

I have written repeatedly to parish councils to comply with our instructions because we want the parish to be perfect and righteous in liturgical issues at least. The Book says: "obey your leaders". The spiritual authority isn't moody to impose whatever passes in its mind. It distinguishes between the right tradition and intruding traditions.

Don't stick to yourselves but to Christ and to what His Church says. Because of your love for Christ, get your information from those who have knowledge and don't be shocked if one of your leaders told you something you didn't know before because these leaders are concerned with the salvation of your souls. Your souls are saved through the Word of God and through what we received from the saints. "Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way" (Apostle Paul). This refers to the order that we received and that is preserved by the bishops. Continue your constant presence at Church and don't be seasonal because God wants you to be always at his holy house. This is the only way to become people "for Jesus".

Metropolitan George of Mount Lebanon