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# The Saintly Priest

& His Departure From The World

On the Occasion of the Departure of Our  
Blessed Father

*Luka Sidarous*

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On the morning of August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020, I learned of the departure of our blessed father, Hegumen Luka Sidarous, to the bosom of our heavenly Father to share in the joyful eternal life of the saints and angels, and the words of St. Jacob of Serugh on the departure of a saintly priest in one of his homilies came back to me. In this homily (“memro”), St. Jacob bids farewell to a saintly priest, who is on his way to the grave, and whose soul has departed to Paradise to share in the heavenly life with all the saints, even as his flesh turns to dust.

In Homily 70, “On the Consolation of the Priests”, the tender feelings of St. Jacob of Serugh are revealed to us when he learns of the departure of one of the priests (or bishops). They are overflowing with profound spirituality and joyful Biblical thinking, expressed in his unique poetical style.

St. Jacob of Serugh sees the Lord waiting at the gates of heaven to welcome this saintly priest who was faithful with the talents the Lord had entrusted him with, and assures him that, although he has stopped serving the altar on earth, he will now serve at the righthand of the Lord Jesus. And the Lord will award him greatly, as St. Jacob says in his homily, **“Then the Lord will sit face to face with the priests who served Him, and He will crown them in the Kingdom.”**

This homily reveals St. Jacob’s view on the priesthood. Similar to many church Fathers, his aim is not to flaunt the authority of the priesthood, but to reveal the priest’s important role and the Lord’s gift to him, so that the priest can live in strength, hope, confidence, and humility, not attributing accomplishments to himself, and not becoming lazy or slothful either. As **St. John Chrysostom** says, “The priest has been entrusted with the whole world and has become a father to all.”

The priest - who enjoys numerous gifts and talents intended for the work of God’s kingdom - should always bear in mind the time when his soul will depart his body and his flesh will repose among the dead in the grave.

And if our Lord Christ Himself, the Lord of Glory whose flesh was incorruptible, shared in our death, was buried in the tomb and was counted among the dead in order to bestow on humans the glory of His resurrection, then certainly **we should not be troubled when a priest dies and is buried.**

The death of the priest **can never extinguish his love for his people**, the Lord’s flock, and he will never cease to pray for them as he stands in the presence of the Lord Himself.

And thus the death of the saintly priest only adds to the church’s heavenly treasure, for it attracts the hearts of the faithful to heaven, their eternal home.

My beloved, I present to you these excerpts from St. Jacob of Serugh’s homily, written as a heavenly dialogue between a saintly departed priest and his loving congregation, as they see Christ clearly in him, and him in Christ.





### **Farewell, My Father, The Priest!**

✠ Depart in peace, O our beloved and virtuous priest, for the heavenly banquet of life has been prepared for you. Depart, O saintly one, you have served the mysteries of the house of God, and the Lord awaits you at the gate of heaven. (Luke 11:9)

Depart in peace and joy to the bridal chamber of light, for there the holy altar which you served awaits you.

Depart, arise and accept that right hand of fellowship (Galatians 2:9) presented to you in the spiritual holies full of light.

Depart, stand and serve on the right hand of Jesus, your Lord, for He will remember you when He distributes His holy gifts.

Depart in peace and reassurance, O you full of wisdom, for the Son of God will award you according to your deeds.

**(St. Jacob of Serugh)**

### **Stretch Out Your Hands and Bless us all!**

As Christ joyfully awaits his faithful priest and gives him to serve Him in Paradise, this urges the priest to serve all humanity even more than before. Indeed, the priest's departure from the world to heaven never extinguishes his love for people, nor does it diminish his longing for the salvation of the world, but rather motivates him to pray even more earnestly for them.

- ✠ O blessed one, stretch out your hands and bless us all, for they are sorrowing over your departure.
- Stretch out your hands, O blessed priest! Bless your children, for they share in your prayers and service.
- Stand on the pulpit, and let us hear your beautiful words, for your sheep long to listen to your words and learn from you.
- Raise your voice as you always do, and bless them, for they look to you to receive all blessings.
- O good shepherd, call your sheep to your spring and let them drink, for it is dear to them.
- Give peace to your church, the mother of your sheep. Give peace to the holy altar which you served.
- Bless these children of Baptism, whom you sealed with the ineffaceable seal of the house of God.
- Bless the elderly, who have reached their old age in dignity. Sanctify the youth, whom you raised in wisdom.
- And the children, youth and infants to whom the church has given birth, may your prayers keep them from tribulation.
- With your prayers, bless the congregation that honours you, that the peace of the Lord may surround them from now and forever.
- Open your blessed lips and give peace to all righteous priests and beloved brethren, the children of your service.



Exhort them, warn them, and confirm them that they may remain steadfast in the Orthodox faith, as they walk in this world.

Plead with them to remember you in liturgies, that your memorial may remain alive in them as they serve the Holies to the Lord.

**(St. Jacob of Serugh)**

### **The Sainly Priest Bids Farewell To His Fellow Priests:**

St. Jacob of Serugh envisages the feelings of the saintly priest towards his fellow priests as he departs from this world. In humility, he asks them not to forget him in their prayers and exhorts them not to become idle in their service to God's people.

✠ Abide in peace, my fellow priests, and remember me in your prayers in the holy house of God.

When you offer incense to the Lord in the Holy of Holies, remember my poor soul that the Lord may comfort me on the day of His transfiguration.

My brethren, do not forget the fellowship of love, that our brotherhood may continue in the everlasting kingdom.

My brethren, remember that the Son of God became our brother, and when He departed, He left peace to all His servants.

**(St. Jacob of Serugh)**

### **A Joint Farewell between the Priest, his brothers the priests, and the Congregation:**

St. Jacob concludes his homily with a joint farewell. The congregation asks the priest to depart, that he may enjoy being in the fellowship of all the saints and apostles who departed to Paradise beforehand. And the priest, in turn, exhorts them to live in the Lord's peace and prays that non-believers may join them in the faith. Finally, he asks the Lord of glory to have pity on His church in His second coming and his glorious transfiguration on the clouds.

✠ O blessed priest, give us peace and depart in peace, and may the Lord count you as one of His apostles.

May the peace of the Lord be with you, O you who abided in Him all your life, And may He keep all the snares of the enemy away from you.

May the peace of the church and the peace of your congregation be abundant, and may her children rejoice in the faith.

O Son of God, You who are the Way full of Life, have pity on Your church on the day of Your transfiguration. Glory be to you!

**(St. Jacob of Serugh)**



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**St. George – Sporting**

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