

26/02/2024

## **Archbishop Elpidophoros Archpastoral Exhortation for the Ordination of Alexander P. Maillis II Nassau, Bahamas**



Beloved Sub-Deacon Alexander,

You present yourself today for ordination to the Holy Diaconate, at the Beginning of Triodion, on the day of the reading of the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee. For one seeking to serve in the role of deacon, it is hard to think of a more appropriate commemoration.

For this Parable, which speaks of how all Christians should embark upon the upcoming Fast, teaches the virtues that should adorn every member of the clergy: that we should minister with gratitude, with honesty, and without judgment of others.

The Pharisee, who was clearly an observer of the Law, did so in such a way that he lost all the benefits of his good works. He was egoistic before God, not grateful. He was prideful, and not honest about himself. And above all else, he was judgmental.

By comparing himself to the Publican, he lost the sense of solidarity with another human being. He thought he could have a “one-on-one” relationship with God, forgetting that as we have done it to the least of our brothers or sisters, we have done it unto God Himself. \*

On the other hand, the Publican knows who he is. He knows that he engages in the sin-stained work of collecting taxes from his fellow citizens for the foreign Roman Empire. He stands in the back of the Temple, his eyes cast down. He beats his breast as he prays: “God be merciful to me a sinner.”†

The prayer of the Publican – “God be merciful to me a sinner,” ὁ Θεός, ἰλάσθητί μοι τῷ ἁμαρτωλῷ – has become the special prayer of the clergy. We say it at every service, before we commence our sacred duties, and many times during the Liturgy.

It is no mere formula that we repeat without thinking. It is the profound mystery of awe, of understanding that we are not only in the presence of God – something that is constantly true – but that we are about to serve the Faithful on His behalf by the grace of our ordinations.

Beloved Sub-Deacon: You come before the Holy Altar today as an integral member of this precious congregation in the Bahamas – our only parish in this wonderful Island Nation.

Together with your spouse, Patricia, your children and your wider family, you represent the core of the Greek Orthodox experience in the Bahamas. You have served the Annunciation Parish in many and diverse capacities – even as Parish Council President. But now that you are crossing the threshold into liturgical ministry, a new frontier for you and your fellow parishioners.

The Office of Deacon, which you studied for over ten years ago through the Permanent Diaconate Program offered by our Holy Cross Seminary, is a noble and honorable ministry. As I am sure you are aware, Deacons may be assigned to parishes, but they belong to Bishops. The following story of how Saint Basil the Great found his deacon demonstrates the very values that we commemorate today, at the beginning of Triodion.

Saint Basil would go to the communities under his care, and find a well-deserving man, one with an unimpeachable reputation. He then instructed the man: “Wash my feet.” And all the candidates would. But then the Great Saint, an icon of humility himself, would instruct each candidate: “Now, I will wash yours.” And like Saint Peter at the Mystical Supper, they would all protest, for they held the Saint in such high and holy regard. Finally, Saint Basil found a man who obeyed the second

injunction without hesitation, taking off his shoes so that the Saint could wash them.

And this was the man that Basil chose as his deacon. True humility is the key to obedience, not slavishness, which is not substantive, and collapses under pressure, just like Saint Peter at the Footwashing. Rather, as the Greek for obedience show, ὑπακοή means to listen deeply, and to understand.

Therefore, beloved Alexander, I exhort you to embrace your ordination today like that Deacon of Saint Basil. Be attuned to whispers of the Spirit, and to the deeper meanings of our liturgical life. Serving as a deacon is so much more than a privilege or honor. It is the ministry of unselfish and loving service to the Body of Christ.

It is the ministry of humility, that stands afar off in the Temple of the Lord - by which I mean far from egocentric desires.

It is the ministry to speaks with authenticity and honesty the words of the Publican:

ὁ Θεός, ἰλάσθητί μοι τῷ ἁμαρτωλῷ.

God be merciful to me a sinner.

And the Lord, Who has called you to the ministry of the Deacon, will show you mercy, and magnify your service in the Church for the glory of His Holy Name. Therefore, embrace the change that now awaits you. As the Psalmist sings:

“Αὕτη ἡ ἀλλοίωσις τῆς δεξιᾶς τοῦ Ὑψίστου”

“This change has been wrought by the right hand of the Most High.”†

So now, enter into the Holy of Holies and present yourself to the Living God as an oblation of service and love.

And may the Lord, Who was Crucified and Arose from the dead, always keep you and your ministry in generosity of heart, in purity of spirit, and in love for all that you are called to serve.

Amen!

\* Cf. Matthew 25:40.

† Luke 18:13.

‡ Psalm 76:10, LXX.

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