

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros Homily for Ordination to the Diaconate of Steven Sarigiannis



Beloved Sub-Deacon Steven,

Today is a day of greatness – for you, for your family, and for this wonderful parish of Saint Barbara, your spiritual home.

I say that it is a day of greatness because of the profound emotions swirling about us. A day of greatness because you honor your family – especially your grandfather for whom you are named, by walking in his path on the first step of the holy priesthood, and receiving ordination to the Holy Diaconate. A day of greatness for you and your soon-to-be Diakonissa, Theophani, for you are true yoke-fellows in the Lord,[1] bound by a deep love of mission work, which has been your calling. A day of greatness for your entire extended family and for this Parish, which reared you in the ways of the Lord.

On such a day as this, I want you to look around and consider your spiritual inheritance – the ministry, the sacrifice, the prayers, the service to others, and the grace of the Holy Spirit that has carried you to this moment.

You are surrounded by a “great cloud of witnesses,” as the Scripture states.[2] Just look at the smiling faces of the clergy who have traveled to Saint Barbara today to join in this Liturgy of your Ordination to the Holy Diaconate. They have come to pray for, and to stand with you. They are standing with you to welcome you into the fellowship of the hoplites of the Lord, even as we chant on the Feast of the Holy Fathers:

Ὕ θεία παρεμβολή, θεηγόροι ὄπλιται....

O Divine array, God-proclaiming hoplites....[3]

And what is the character of this hoplite that you aspire to? He is a warrior for the Lord, but a peaceful warrior. We have just now heard of this evil absurdity of the Moscow Patriarchate, proclaiming a so-called “holy war” against their Ukrainian brothers and sisters. This is, in reality, a devilish inversion of the very essence of what it means to be a Christian and especially to serve within the Holy Priesthood! We are not called to be death-dealers, but death-healers. We are children of the Resurrection! As a member of the clergy, beloved Sub-Deacon Steven, your calling to be a soldier is defined by the Apostle Paul himself. As he bears witness, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, where he says:

Therefore, take up the hoplite’s armor of God, that you may be able to stand in battle, holding the line on the evil day, and when you have prevailed in all things – to stand!

Stand, therefore, with your loins girt about by truth. And put on the breastplate of righteousness. And clad your feet with the preparation of the Gospel of peace. Above all else, take up the shield of faith, by which you will be able to quell the fiery arrows of the Evil One. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. [4]

In truth, this is an exact description of the ancient Greek hoplite. And here is the message I have for, you dear Steven.

First, note that the hoplite's armor is only on the front of his body. There is no protection for a retreat of any kind. As ancient Spartan mothers used to say to their sons going off to war, referring to their shields:

"Ἡ τὰν ἡ ἐπὶ τὰς! With it, or on it!

For some people, this might sound harsh, but it was the hoplite's lot in life to never give up, and to never surrender. And so it is with us, who have entered the Order of Melchizedek, which is led by the Captain of our Faith, our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ!

We do not give up. We do not surrender. We enter into the fray of this world bearing the Holy, Precious and Life-giving Cross, which is our only "weapon of Peace," and our "invincible Trophy." [5] This is the armament of a true Christian - that most horrible instrument of death turned to life.

And with the Cross in holy procession, we go forth to conquer in the name of our Lord. We conquer hate through love; greed through generosity, animosity through forgiveness, and cruelty through mercy. Did you hear how the Apostle to the Nations describes your armor? Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and the word of God! When you are clad in your vestments today, they are but the outward signs of these inner realities, for the power of our armor comes by the grace of the All-Holy Spirit.

But the hoplite is not a solitary warrior. In fact, the whole purpose of the hoplite is to be part of the phalanx, the line of soldiers who were impenetrable to the enemy. And why? Because they stood shoulder to shoulder. As Saint Paul says:

Stand in battle, hold the line on the evil day, and when you have prevailed in all things – stand!

You stand because you do not stand alone.

You stand because you are in line, and aligned with your brothers.

You stand because when you feel weak, you can lean into the man on your left and on your right, who will support you until you are restored, and then you will support them.

You stand because you are part of something greater than your individual talents and strengths. Never forget this, dear Sub-deacon. Our fraternity of the Holy Priesthood has no place for competition among ourselves. We only advance when

we advance together, arm in arm and in lockstep, in the oneness of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, with these words of encouragement, you now stand before the Holy Altar and prepare to take your place in the Divine Phalanx.

ὝΩ θεία παρεμβολή, θεηγόροι ὄπλιται!

Receive now your commission into the army of the Lord. Angels and men will stand with you, from now until eternity.

And through the Captain of our Faith, the victory is guaranteed.

So be it! Γένοιτο! Ἄμην!

[1] Cf. Philippians 4:3.

[2] Hebrews 12:1.

[3] Doxastikon by George of Nicomedia for the Sunday of the Fathers of the 4th Ecumenical Council.

[4] Ephesians 6:13-17.

[5] Kontakion of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.

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