22/04/2024

Ordination Speech of His Grace Bishop Anthony of Synada



April 20, 2024

Archdiocesan Cathedal of the Holy Trinity, New York City

Σεβασμιώτατε Αρχιεπίσκοπε κ. Ελπιδοφόρο, Σεβασμιώτατε, Θεοφιλεστατοι, Αδελφοί κληρικοί, αγαπητοι συγγενεις, αγαπητοι φοιτητες,

Με την κατανόηση της σημασίας αυτής της ιερή στιγμή, επιτρέψτε μου να μιλήσω από τα βάθη της καρδιάς μου, στη γλώσσα της καρδιάς μου, στη γλωσσα τις προσευχες μου, και όχι μονο στη διάνοιά μου.

I cannot count the number of times I have either heard or proclaimed the invitation to Holy Communion, “With the fear of God, faith, and love, draw near.” As I prepared for this day over the past few weeks, these words have come to mind repeatedly. Today as I take this step, they take on even more meaning.

I am very conscious of the fear of God at this moment, in all meanings of the word φοβο – fearful and awesome. Moments ago, I accepted the responsibility of teaching the faith, of upholding all the dogmas and canons, and of keeping the

peace and unity of the Church. The enormity of the task, especially in this day and age, is both fearful and awesome.

I ask myself, “How can I receive the grace and gift of the holy episcopacy, especially when I consider how the greatest of our saints advised against it or even ran from it?” Consider the words of St. John Chrysostom: “The right course, I think, is to have so reverent an estimation of the office as to avoid its responsibility from the start.” (On the Priesthood, III.10) Or those of St. Gregory the Theologian, “I did not, nor do I now, think myself qualified to rule a flock or herd, or to have authority over the souls of men.” (Oration 2, On the Flight to Pontus, 9).

Hearing those words, every inadequacy of my life glares at me. And no doubt, every misstep going forward will be noted by others! I am comforted by the prayer that will be recited, which says, “The divine grace, which heals what is weak and completes what is lacking,…”

With faith

As a layman and presbyter, as a scholar, I have been a teacher of our faith and way of life at our Theological School, at the Graduate Theological Union, through my work at the Archdiocese, through my participation in Faith and Order, and in my parish. A phrase I learned many years ago in my doctoral studies has stayed with me as a guide in all these settings: “Loyal but open.”

I have labored to hand forward our Faith and Way of Life as it has been received, trying to be clear about the treasure we have inherited while differentiating what my personal thinking may be, and to be open to the ideas and experiences of others. The challenge of course is discerning how to express and live our Tradition in this day and age. Fortunately, generations before me have wondered the same.

Fr. Georges Florovsky wrote, “Orthodoxy cannot be maintained by inertia. No tradition can survive unless it is continued through creative effort. The message of Christ is eternal and always the same, but it must be reinterpreted again and again so as to become a challenge to every new generation, to be a message which may appeal to man in his concrete situation. We have not simply to keep the legacy of the past, but must first realize what we have inherited and do everything we can to present it to others as a living thing.” (“The Responsibility of the Orthodox in America,” in Vol 13 of the Collected Works, pp. 174-179. The quote is on p. 177.)

Daily, we are challenged with new circumstances, insights, and developments. Today there is war in Ukraine and the Middle East. We face unprecedented ecological and technological challenges. Moral and social questions abound. This

list seems endless. Our Faith is lived by people in the world. Thus their shepherds must rely on the words of the Lord, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.” (Matthew 13:52). In this process, the Church may help the faithful navigate through these choppy waters as St. Paul wrote, “until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:13). We are not so different from our ancestors in the Faith. We just possess more information.

Perhaps this is why, the apostle James wrote, “Let not many of you become teachers, …, for you know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness.” (James 3:1)

By God’s providence, I have been blessed with women and men who exemplified “loyal but open.” Some are Orthodox; some are not. I am grateful to stand on their shoulders.

Three I must name because they exemplify for me what Chrysostom wrote: “Example is one thing and instruction another, each requires the other.” (On the Priesthood, iv.8).

His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. From afar and through books, and the occasional meeting over the years, I have been inspired by his steadfast faith and his willingness to engage with diverse people and ideas. His statement, “Dialogue and reconciliation are not optional for us; they are directives and commandments,” is a clarion call.

Archbishop Iakovos of North and South America. I was able to sit at his table, to lose to him at Scrabble, and all the while to learn the stories and lessons of bringing our church into mainstream American life. His memory will be eternal, because the history of Orthodoxy in America cannot be written without him.

Archbishop Demetrios, Geron of America, my professor at Holy Cross. Simply put, if perhaps too familiar, I majored in Trakatellis as a student. As our professor you inspired us to do our best work possible through exemplifying in your person a model of patristic exegesis combined with contemporary scholarship, all through the lens of faith and life.

Fidelity to one’s tradition and openness to dialogue have been requisite in my academic and ecumenical experiences; we learn from one another’s tradition, finding commonality while retaining and respecting our distinctiveness. I have tried

to infuse this approach in my classrooms so that through my students' ministry, the Body of Christ can be built up and the Faith can be handed forward as a living entity, so that we may "have life and have it abundantly." (John 10:10)

For many years, I have relied on the image of the sower, from the parable of our Lord, as a source of inspiration for my work as a teacher. Like in the parable, the work of a teacher is to spread the seeds of our Faith and Way of Life, hopefully in the good soil, but always scattering widely. The impact of this work may not be felt for years, but I know that it can truly "touch the future" of the Church.

With love

At this moment, I am conscious of the love and friendship in my life, from family, friends, parishioners, classmates, many of whom are here today.

First though, I am grateful to you, Your Eminence, and to the Eparchial Synod of our Archdiocese. I have been privileged to work closely with many of you, in order to advance the work of our Church. That you saw in me the capacity to take this step in ministry humbles me.

Metropolitan Gerasimos. We met at Holy Cross almost four decades ago, and became co-workers at Hellenic College-Holy Cross. We have witnessed many events in the life of the Church. Through them all, you have always been a wise counsel, calming anxious moments, and reminding me that we are in the hands of Christ.

Love is the greatest motivation for service. I must acknowledge the Nativity-Assumption of the Virgin Mary parish of Cohasset, Massachusetts. I am grateful to His Eminence Metropolitan Methodios for allowing me to serve there for the past five years. This community embraced me from the first day and honored me with the care of their souls and lives, through the happy and sad times of life, through the liturgical year, through Covid. Their dedication and love for the church always motivated me to do my best for them.

Then there is love of and from my immediate and extended family – many of whom are here today, from Chicago and Sacramento.

I came across this idea not too long ago. It said, "the greatest gift we can give is just to speak the names of those we have lost. It gives them immortality." We do this in our prayers, but permit me to say these names: Petri and Nerenxhe, Aristea and Christos, Andoni and Katherine, Christos and Pauline. These are my great grandparents and grandparents, all of blessed memory. Only three of them I knew

in person. Their story, and thus my story, is embedded in the experiences of this country of the last one hundred years. And then of course my parents, George and Maria, who will always live in my heart. Through all the stories, I have learned how they loved their families and faith and how they labored to hand those values forward.

Surrounding me today is my brother and his family – Demetra, George and Alexa, Katie. The sixth generation of my family, Spiro, just a year old, is back in Sacramento. Often when I see him, I think about the Church that we are handing forward to him and to all our future generations.

Let me single out my brother. Chris – the last few years have been tough: Dad's decline and passing. Mom's illness and passing last year, and a few other things – especially these past few months. But through it all we've worked arm in arm, relying on the values that we were taught by our parents. Our lives have taken us to very different worlds, but what matters most is what Mom said to me in our last conversation before she died, that we "be good people."

I will rarely offer the exclamation "with the fear of God, faith, and love" after today. But I pray that the words remain ingrained in my heart, my mind, and my soul all the days of my life, as I draw near.

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Photo: GOARCH/Dimitrios Panagos

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