04/07/2024

Joint Meeting with Institutional and Military Chaplains at 47th Clergy Laity Congress



Most Honorable Delegation of the Mother Church of Constantinople:

Your Eminences Archbishop Nikitas and Metropolitan Cleopas,

Your Eminence Metropolitan Nicholas and Your Graces,

Beloved Brothers of our Military Chaplaincy and Institutional Chaplains,

Last night, on the deck of the Aircraft Carrier the USS Midway, I was deeply moved thinking of our Nation's proud military. And as I meet with you, the chaplains of our Sacred Archdiocese, and particularly the Military Chaplaincy that we honor today, I am reminded of the courage that you exhibit in times of the greatest stress, as you provide a most vital ministry to the members of the Armed Forces.

I also learned that the first naval chaplain to receive the highest award of our Nation for courage above and beyond the call of duty, was a Jesuit Priest on board another aircraft carrier during World War Two – the USS Franklin, by name of Father Joseph Timothy O'Callahan.

He literally incarnated the words of Rudyard Kipling who famously wrote:

If you can keep your head when all about you

Are losing theirs….

Most, if not all of you, know his story. When the Franklin was bombed, Chaplain O'Callahan was wounded, and yet persisted in ministering to the dying and assisting the wounded. In the midst of a raging inferno on the deck of the Carrier, he personally organized and led a damage control party that prevented further explosions and saved the lives of his fellow crewmen. For this, he was the first Navy Chaplain to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

* * *

This history does not reveal an exception to the rule. All of you who serve as Military Chaplains make the commitment to be in the line of fire, and in fact, you are always in the spiritual line of fire, helping, guiding, and ministering to our men and women in uniform. That is a conscious decision to go into harm's way, one for which you are to be profoundly thanked.

Everyone who serves in the Chaplaincy – whether in the military, or a hospital, or an institutional setting, puts themselves into unknown and unforeseen circumstances that will require a willing spirit of sacrifice. You all bring honor to the priesthood and to the ministry of the Holy Orthodox Church.

In closing, know that you have my complete support and my abiding gratitude – both as your Archbishop, and as your brother in Christ.

May the Good Lord always bless you and your families in your sacrificial service to our men and women and uniform, and to all who need your special ministry and loving care.

Amen.

goarch.org