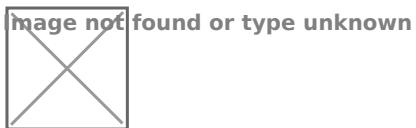


His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America Address at the Ordination to the Diaconate of Gregory Gounardes



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Address at the Ordination to the Diaconate of Gregory Gounardes
November 2, 2024
Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Cathedral
New York, New York
Beloved Sub-deacon Gregory,

I am very moved today, because this ordination is of one very dear to the hearts of everyone at the Megaron of the Archdiocese. You are a family member to us all, as well as a noble and worthy son of your family by blood, and certainly of the Church, flowing with the Precious Blood of our Savior.

Sub-Deacon: your whole life seems to have been centered around all things ecclesiastical. Your family's commitment to Saint Basil Academy is legendary. The family's contributions to your home parish, and your decision to engage in a theological education. Your work at the Archdiocese through the years – serving the Chancellery with distinction. I also know with what devotion you assisted in the welcome and transition to my Archiepiscopacy, after my election. And in all your duties, responsibilities, and service to the Church, you always bring a smile, a good word for everyone else, and a truly Christian attitude of empathy.

Your evolution to become a clergyman has been natural, and clearly blessed by God. Your recent marriage to the soon-to-be Diakonissa Andrea was the one thing lacking, and we are thrilled at your happiness.

The Apostle Paul tells us that to aspire to the office of bishop is a noble task.¹ But I would augment that saying by including every rank of the Clergy, for we are all in the Order of Melchizedek, and our One and True High Priest is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today, dear Gregory, we welcome you into the first step of the Τάξις τοῦ Μελχισεδέκ – into the Holy Diaconate. This Apostolic Institution – the Order of

Deacons, was established in the first place because certain widows were being neglected in the daily provisions, a prejudice against their Gentile origin. Therefore, the Apostles selected seven men:

... ἄνδρας ἔξ ὑμῶν μαρτυρουμένους ἐπτά, πλήρεις Πνεύματος Ἁγίου καὶ σοφίας....

... seven men of you well testified of, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom....²

These three qualifications have never changed. First of all, what is required is a life of good repute, of good testimony, of witness. And it was Stephanos the first of these seven Deacons, whose name means “crown,” who became the Proto-Martyr, the First Witness to the Lord Jesus of the Church.

Sub-Deacon Gregory: you have manifested a most excellent testimony of your faint in the Lord Christ, and you repute in the Church of God is unassailable.

Second, every clergyman needs to be aware of the Holy Spirit, here described as “fulness” – the fruit of a spiritual life and lifestyle. As Saint Symeon the New Theologian suggests, if one is unconscious of the Spirit on earth, one might be unconscious of the Spirit in the age to come. ³

You have cultivated your spiritual heart and mind, but I exhort you never to leave off spiritual enhancement and education. Remember, a vessel that is already full cannot be filled. Even as the Lord emptied Himself (as Saint Paul says⁴), we are called to be empty of pride and the self-serving attitude, and to be receptive to the movements of the Holy Spirit in our lives and ministries.

And finally, that last quality of wisdom reflects our deep need to be filled by the Wisdom and Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. Our judgment about anything can never exceed that of the Supreme Judge of the Universe! Thus, we hear constantly in the prayers of the Church:

Εὐλογητὸς εἶ, Κύριε, δίδαξόν με τὰ δικαιώματά σου.

Blessed are You, O Lord, teach me Your judgments. ⁵

For the judgments of God are wise and prudent, and will always lead you in the way of His commandments.

So now, Beloved Gregory, you stand before the Holy Altar of God to receive from my hand ordination into the τάξις of the Holy Diaconate. By God’s mercies, You are presenting yourself, as the Apostle says:

... a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, a reason-endowed expression of your True Adoration. 6

Your transformation is not automatic; nor is it inevitable. Rather, as the Psalmist says:

“Αὕτη ἡ ἀλλοίωσις τῆς δεξιᾶς τοῦ ‘Υψίστου’

“This change is by the right hand of the Most High” 7

Take hold of that “Right Hand” of the Most High and never let go.

It will sustain you through the valleys of life,

Enrich you with the consciousness of the Spirit,

And enfold you in loving service to Himself, to the Church He has redeemed, and to the world that He created.

May it always be so for you, your precious spouse Andrea, and all your family.

Amen.

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