

29/12/2020

Archbishop Elpidophoros of America: Address on the Sunday After the Nativity and the Ordination to the Diaconate of Hans Vomend



Annunciation Greek Orthodox Cathedral

Baltimore, Maryland

December 27, 2020

My beloved Sub-Deacon Hans,

Dear Faithful of the Annunciation Cathedral,

Christ is Born! Let us glorify Him!

Our celebration of Christmas continues on this Sunday after the Nativity, when we

honor Joseph the Betrothed, Iakovos the Brother of God, and the Prophet David, His royal Ancestor. We gather in this magnificent Cathedral to elevate into the first rank of the Holy Priesthood of Christ our beloved spiritual son, Hans Vomend, as he enters into the Holy Diaconate.

We call you “beloved,” because you are both in name and reality truly “beloved of God.” Like the beloved Evangelist John at the Mystical Supper – whose name you share in German – you are close to the beating heart of the Lord. You have embraced the Angelic Life, a life that has its challenges and difficulties, as well as its spiritual rewards and joys. As Saint John of the Ladder says: “Monasticism is an angelic order in an earthly body.”[\[*\]](#)

But what the Angels do with such great ease is not so easy for us, who are bound by laws, physics and the habits of this world. That is why our calling is in accord with the Humanity of our Lord, Who was made “a little lower than the angels,” but then crowned with glory and honor.[\[†\]](#)

Earlier, you received the Monastic Tonsure – the Koupά of dedication and sanctification, the calling to “be ready always to give an answer with meekness and awe to every man that asks you the reason of the hope that is in you,” as the Apostle Peter enjoins us.[\[‡\]](#)

And now, you are stepping into the liturgical service that is the glory of all clergy. Your ministry becomes truly Angelic, for the Deacons of the Holy Church serve as Angels in the flesh around the Holy Altar.

Therefore, Hans, my beloved spiritual son, as you ascend the spiritual ladder of the clerical ranks of the clergy, the father and Patriarch of us all, His All-Holiness Bartholomew, has chosen a name for you after an earthly Angel of the Holy Mountain.

Henceforth, you shall be called “Sophronios,” after the newly-glorified Saint Sophrony the Hagiorite, the founder of the Stavropegial Monastery of Saint John the Baptist in Essex, England. His All-Holiness selected this name for you to inspire you by the example of this great Elder of our modern days. The Holy Elder was born and raised in Russia, and studied in Paris. But it was on Mount Athos – in discipleship to Saint Silouan the Athonite – that he shone forth with the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, my beloved Sub-deacon Hans, you are the heir and son of a great legacy of the Holy Mountain and our Ecumenical Patriarchate. I pray that your journey will

be a long one, filled with prayer, grace and the inner assurance of the Holy Spirit that enlightened these Saints of God.

Like ever monastic and, indeed, like the martyric witness of the Holy Mother Church of Constantinople, your path will be the Way of the Cross. For truly, there is no other path, as Saint Isaac the Syrian says:

For His path has been trodden from the ages and from all generations by the cross and death. ... The path of God is a daily cross. No one has ascended into Heaven by means of ease..."[§]

May you always embrace the Way of the Cross in your monastic calling, in your service as a deacon and in your calling to the priesthood of our Great High Priest Jesus Christ, Who – through the prayers of the Holy Theotokos – will grant you His grace, His strength and the will to fulfill your destiny in Him. Amen.

[*]Ladder of Divine Ascent, Step 1:4.

[†] Cf. Psalm 8:5.

[‡] I Peter 3:15.

[§] Homily 59.

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