

03/02/2021

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America Address on Ordination to the Diaconate of Panayiotis Steele



The Feast of the Meeting of the Lord Saint Sophia Greek Orthodox Cathedral

My beloved Sub-deacon Panayiotis,

Today the Heavens are ablaze with the glory of the present Feast – the Meeting, the Encounter, the Ὑπαπαντή. The Lord of the Universe humbled Himself to be presented in the Temple of the Law. The Word of God, seated upon the Throne of Heaven, together with the Father and the Spirit, and surrounded by an emerald rainbow,[*] is carried as an infant into a temple made by human hands. And into human hands, He wills to be received by the ancient Symeon, and fulfills the Elder's deepest desire to behold the salvation prepared for all people – the light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of the People of Israel.[†]

My dear Panayiotis, what a blessing you have gained, finding yourself standing before the Holy Altar, the day of your Ordination to the Holy Diaconate, on this magnificent Feast of the Presentation!

Because you are presenting yourself – your body – as a “living sacrifice,” as the Apostle Paul writes, which is your “reason-endowed adoration” of the Holy and Life-Giving Trinity. [‡] You stand here now, without pretension, without arrogance and without entitlement. You stand in humility, patience and obedience.

In the Great Vespers of this Feast, in the Second of the Prophecies, we read of the Vision of Isaiah. He was standing in the Temple, as you are now. And the glory of the Lord filled the Temple, as the glory of this Cathedral now surrounds you. And the Prophet heard the Trisagion Hymn that you have just heard:

Ἅγιος, Ἅγιος, Ἅγιος Κύριος Σαβαώθ, πλήρης πᾶσα ἡ γῆ τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ...[§]

In this ecstatic moment of Divine θεωρία, the Prophet Isaiah experienced the cleansing of his sins, when ‘one of the seraphim took a burning coal in his hand with the tongs from the altar, laid it upon his mouth, and said, “Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged”.’[**] This moment is double-edged for you, my dear Sub-deacon. For in your life up to this moment, you have received the Eucharist, just as the Prophet received the coal of Divine Fire and Love. But now, as a Deacon, it will be your ministry to represent the Seraph and, with the sacred λαβίδα as new tongs, transmit the Eucharist to the Faithful.

Thus, you must answer the question that the Lord called out to Isaiah:

“Whom shall I send? And who shall go to this People?”[††]

And so, my Sub-Deacon Panayiotis:

Are you willing to go?

Are you willing to serve?

Are you willing to love the People of God, with all their humanity?

If so, then let your answer be:

Ἴδοὺ ἐγὼ εἰμι, ἀπόστειλόν με.

“Here am I! Send me!”[‡‡]

* * *

Therefore, my beloved Sub-deacon, if your heart is ready to say “Yes” to the

summons of the Lord, ascend into this Holy of Holies, as the Lord once did on this Day, in the Jerusalem of old. Welcome the embrace of the Ancient of Days, who will sustain your ministry for all the years to come. Your ministry is unlike Symeon the Prophet, who was waiting to be released, to be dismissed from his office. Today, you begin. Today, you can say:

“Now, O Master, send forth Your servant in peace. Let my eyes behold the salvation that You, O Lord, have prepared in the presence of all peoples, that they may behold the Light of revelation for the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people, the New Israel.” [§§]Amen.

[*] Revelation 4:3.

[†] Cf. Luke 2:31,32.

[‡] Cf. Romans 12:1.

[§] Isaiah 6:3 and the Second Trisagion Hymn of the Divine Liturgy.

[**] Cf. Isaiah 6:6,7.

[††] Isaiah 6:8.

[‡‡] Cf. Isaiah 6:6,7.

[§§] Isaiah 6:8.

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