

Deacon Theodore Lyketsos Ordination Speech



Your Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros, Reverend Fathers, brothers and sisters in the Lord,

Standing before you and in the presence of our all-seeing Lord, I am struck by the enormity of the task before me. To stand before the Holy Altar Table of our Lord as his *διακονος*, as His servant seems to me to be at once a glorious privilege and a fearful burden. A glorious privilege, because the Lord Himself is glorious, and to stand near Him at the Holy Altar of Sacrifice is to partake in glory itself. And a fearful burden, because of my own feebleness, my own insufficiency, and my own sin. If Moses thought himself unworthy to intercede for the Israelites before Pharaoh, how can I dare to intercede for the Church before almighty God? If St. John the Baptist thought himself unworthy to untie the straps of Christ's sandals, how can I dare to hold in my hands His Flesh and Blood?

It is fitting that if I am to be ordained, it should be on the Sunday of the Prodigal Son. I have squandered the inheritance of Grace that was given to me at Baptism, and proven with my life that I don't deserve to be called our Father's Son. I have come today from the far country, from among the swine I have fed with my

careless behavior, to ask my Lord to accept me as one of His hired servants, in the hopes that my great spiritual hunger can be sated. I am dead and need to be made alive, I am lost and need to be found. That God should do anything good for me today will not be an expression of my worthiness, but an act of His indescribable Mercy.

And yet, I have only to turn towards my Creator to see that He has already been running to embrace me. While I was still far off from this moment, while I was still reckless and dissolute, I can see that He was still preparing to receive me in the hopes that I would turn and repent. That is to say in spite of me, and who I am, and who I've been, God has still been working mysteriously to bring me to this point. I must take a moment to thank Him for the people He has used throughout my life to bring about His ineffable Will.

First I must thank God for my parents, Manon and Constantine Lyketsos. They taught me to believe in God and the eternity. They modeled what it means to live with virtue and integrity. But I think the greatest gift my parents gave me was to provide me with a childhood so innocent and so beautiful, it seems to me that it was a foretaste of Paradise. I often think that my own desire for Heaven is a desire to know again the blessedness I experienced as a child in their care, where life was only love and peace, where people were only good and pure, and where God quietly permeated everything with His Beauty. Thank you so much for giving me a glimpse of Eden. May our Lord grant us to know that innocence together again.

I must also thank God for my sister, Daphne. My best friend growing up, someone who I have shared so much joy and pain with, someone I've grown and experienced so much with. Someone who knows me in certain ways that no one else can. She alone knows the beautiful joy we shared in our childhood that has been imprinted on my heart. I pray that when this short life is over we will be united again the way we were as kids.

I also believe that God has mysteriously used the person of my late grandfather, Harry James Cargas to guide me here. My grandfather died when I was six, and I only have a few fragmented memories of him. Yet his legacy as a Christian scholar, a man sincere and committed to his faith overshadows me so powerfully that in his absence he is present. The quiet example my grandmother Millie, his wife, also inspires and energizes me. I feel that in their own way they illumine the path I now walk.

I thank God for the first person who ever took me under his wing and guided me towards the priesthood was my first spiritual father, Fr. Constantine White. Looking

past my naiveté, my inexperience, and my sins, he saw my desire for the Lord and told me that with time and dedication, I could become a man capable of serving Him. He was exactly the mentor I needed at that point in my life, and I am incredibly grateful.

I thank God for the influence of Matushka Olga Meerson, one of my Russian professors in college. She opened my heart to the rich spiritual treasures of Orthodox theology, and inspired a love in me that has not subsided.

I thank God for my four best friends from college: Miha, Ian, Alec, and Matt. So intelligent, capable, and charismatic, the longer I know each of you the more I admire them. I am so inspired by them, they have shaped me more powerfully than I am often willing to admit. I am humbled that such impressive men consider me worthy of their friendship.

I thank God for my greatest mentor at Holy Cross, my spiritual father, Fr. George Dragas. To have a man of such towering intellect and profound faith call me his child and gently guide me is one of the greatest gifts God ever gave me. If one day I am half the theologian, the liturgist, or the pastor he is, then I will have exceeded my wildest expectations.

I thank God also also for other professors at seminary, particularly Fr. Maximos, Dr. Patitsas, Dr. Mamalakis, and His Grace, Bishop Joachim of Amissos. They taught live in this world with faith in the Holy Trinity and the the Church as the foundation of my life. In some ways I hesitate to say that I was even truly an Orthodox Christian before they showed me how to be one.

I thank God for my best friends from seminary, two of whom are here today. You know who you are, and you know what you mean to me. I trust each of you implicitly, and I am so, so grateful that I can face the enormous task before us with you at my side.

I thank God for my Proistamenos, Fr. George Bessinas and his wife Presvytera Chrysanthie. They live and run their household and parish with such sincerity and integrity that they have left a powerful impression on my wife and me. They have guided us, rejoiced with us, sorrowed with us, and protected us. They are so exactly the people we need in our lives right now, that I have no doubt it was God's Providence brought us together.

I thank God also for our Cathedral family at Annunciation in Norfolk, Virginia. The community has embraced us so readily, with such joy and love that it humbled us. We have only been there for two years, and yet we feel sincerely that Annunciation

is our home. We are profoundly grateful that you are part of our journey.

I would be remiss not to mention Fr. John Cox of Norfolk, Virginia as well. I am humbled by and grateful for his friendship and example.\

I also thank God for this parish, St. George, and Fr. Nicholas Dassouras. Thank you for welcoming me and my family, and for sharing this incredibly great moment with us. I do not know why God arranged things so that I should be ordained here, in your presence. I only know that in this world there are no accidents, and it is my honor and privilege to be here today.

But who can I thank God for at this moment more than my wife, Denisa? I am so, so grateful to be here with you at this moment. God gave me a woman so loving, so kind, so sincere, and so profoundly good to accompany me through this life not because I am worthy of you but because I need you. You know more than anyone how much I rely on you, and how so many good qualities I have I owe directly to your influence. You are beautiful, intelligent, and capable, you embody so many virtues and yet above all of them you are unhesitatingly, unflaggingly loyal. I have never for a single moment doubted that you are at my side, that you support me, that you will defend me. The trust and integrity that define our marriage can only be understood as a gift from God, a firm foundation that He has laid. I pray that by the Grace which God will send down upon us in my ordination He will build on that foundation, and accomplish His purposes within us. Denisa, I know you never expected this calling before you met me, and yet I have been so impressed by the way you have risen to the occasion and worked to become the woman God always intended you to be. I am so grateful that you will be my diakonissa, I never deserved you.

And I thank God for my daughter, Maria. Maria, you are two months old today, and already I love you more than I ever thought possible. I am so grateful that our Lord saw fit to give us such a beautiful, wonderful child to accompany us on this journey. I hope the life we can provide for you can be even a crude imitation of that blessed life which you were made for, which you deserve.

Your Eminence I am not worthy to fulfill the office of the diaconate. Anything good in my life comes from God and through the beautiful people He has blessed me to know. I simply present myself before you as a man with a sincere desire to serve our Lord and Savior. I now submit my whole life to the service of the Church, to be used by Her as Her instrument under your Archpastoral direction. I entrust myself to your wisdom and paternal care, knowing that our Lord has chosen you to shepherd His flock. I humbly request your blessing and guidance to labor in Lord's

vineyard, to preach the Gospel and to serve His people, to offer myself as a living sacrifice, and to make straight His paths for His glorious return. I can accomplish none of this through my own strength, and I have no boldness before the Lord. I ask that you intercede for me before the Holy Altar Table of our Lord, God, and Savior, that He grant me “The divine grace, which always heals that which is infirm and completes that which is lacking.”

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