

ORDINATION OF BISHOP RAPHAEL OF ILION



With great joy and liturgical grandeur the ordination of Bishop Raphael of Ilion took place at the Church of St Panteleimon and St Paraskevi in Harrow, North-West London, on the feast of the Forty-Martyrs of Sebaste.

The Divine Liturgy was presided by His Eminence Archbishop Nikitas of Thyateira and Great Britain and concelebrated by their Eminences Metropolitans Athanasios of Cologne and Silouan of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch.

The High Commissioner of Cyprus, HE Andreas Kakouris, HE Theodoros Gkotsis, Consul General of the Republic of Cyprus in London, His Grace Bishop Mar Awraham of the Assyrian Church and His Grace Bishop Kenneth Nowakowski of the Ukrainian Catholic Church were present at the Liturgy and Ordination. The Ambassador of the Hellenic Republic to the United Kingdom was represented by the honourable Ms. Penelope Micha. Several other clergymen from the Archdiocese were also present, amongst many faithful, all adhering to the relevant governmental Covid-19 measures.

Below is the Homily of His Grace Bishop Raphael of Ilion
Your Eminence Archbishop Nikitas of Thyateira and Great Britain,
Your Eminence Metropolitan Athanasios of Cologne,
Your Eminence Metropolitan Silouan

Reverend fathers,

Honourable representatives of the civil authorities and the Armed Forces,

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,

It is with great awe and trepidation that I stand before you, having been called upon to receive by the hands of our Most Reverend Archbishop, Nikitas, and the concelebrating Most Reverend Hierarchs, the loftiest of the sacred ministries, that of the High Priesthood.

I did not seek it, I am not prepared for it, and certainly do not deserve it. This sense of inadequacy exacerbates my awe before the Mystery and increases the weight of the responsibility on my shoulders.

However, I am encouraged and strengthened by the fact that my acceptance of this high call was made—I hope—out of obedience, first and foremost, to the Holy Triune God, Whose inscrutable Providence brought me to this point and Whose holy will is the only thing I want to do in my life, despite my many weaknesses and mistakes. To Him only is due all glory, honour, worship and thanksgiving.

God's holy will for me at this moment was expressed primarily by His All-Holiness, our Ecumenical Patriarch, whose ever-alert paternal gaze watches lovingly over the holy Orthodox Catholic Church around the world.

I do not know why His All-Holiness and the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate elected me bishop, but I am deeply honoured, and moved by their trust.

I am also touched by the choice of His All-Holiness to give me the honorary title of the Bishop of Ilion, the ancient Troy of Homer, one of the cities of the Troas of the Holy Apostle Paul, which is located just across the water from my birthplace, the village of Petra on Lesbos.

The acceptance of this call was also made in obedience to His Eminence our Archbishop Nikitas whose election and enthronement in the Church of Thyateira filled us with good hopes, which increasingly come true as time goes by.

From the early days of his tenure in this Archdiocese, His Eminence has earned our love and trust with his affection, kindness and care for us all, but also with his education, evangelical view of events, and his vision for a local Church that will manifest Christ, and embrace and transform all without discrimination. I thank him for his love, his ecclesial ethos, his paternal care for all, and his humanity. If I were allowed to describe our Most Reverend Archbishop, I would call him "Nikitas, the deeply human Archbishop".

The person who interprets the divine will in my life in the most direct and charismatic way is of course my spiritual father, Archim. Zacharias. I thank him for his struggle, his care, and the spiritual blood he sheds for his spiritual children. In return for his complete surrender to the Divine Will, the Lord gives him the “word” which comforts and informs us. At this sacred moment I gratefully recall to my mind honoured and sacred persons who have benefited me in many ways. The late Archbishop Gregory, who ordained me to the first and second degree of the holy orders and always showed me love and support. My parents, Nikolaos and Themis of blessed memory, as well as my sister Efstratia and my brother Apostolos. My spiritual father during my student years in Greece, the Elder Archim. Timotheos Sakkas of blessed memory. The humble Elder Archim. Onoufrios Kostopoulos, who supported me, inspired me and beneficially influenced my life in a profound way. I will always be grateful to him. My reverend fellow priests in the Holy Archdiocese for their love and encouragement and especially my colleagues, initially Fr Konstantinos Papageorgiou, and later my brothers in Christ Archimandrite Avraamy, and the Presbyters John Raffan, Luke Jeffery and Antonios Kakalis. I am also grateful to my tutor at the Theological School of Athens the ever memorable Professor Constantine Scouteris thanks to whom I was able to come to Scotland for further studies.

I cannot describe how grateful I am to the Lord for my parishioners at St Andrew’s in Edinburgh, my spiritual brothers and sisters as well as the spiritual children which God has given me. I have only received joy and love from them all. May God reward them richly.

Since my arrival in Scotland, one person has been for me a safe spiritual refuge, a treasure of love, a measure and example of a life pleasing to God: the Archimandrite John Maitland Moir. Scotland may boast in the Lord that in these last days she has given birth to a saint. I certainly wouldn’t be here right now if I had not met Father John.

I consider myself blessed to be a clergyman of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The theological excellence, ecclesiastical experience and knowledge, spiritual nobility, venerable Liturgical Tradition, sacrificial responsibility for the stability and growth of the Holy Churches of God all over the world, which are embodied by the Holy and Great Church of Christ, were the guarantees and conditions for my colleagues and me to be able to minister in a multi-ethnic community in which we all experience the Eucharistic unity of the Church.

Rising above petty localism, religious fanaticism and one-dimensional theological interpretations, the Ecumenical Patriarchate and especially His All-Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew I show us a path of Orthodox theological enrichment which aspires to embrace and save the world in Christ Jesus.

This attitude of love and spiritual comfort, of catholicity and ecumenicity founded upon the right faith and right praxis, I saw embodied by the Orthodox Church in Edinburgh as nurtured by Archimandrite John Maitland Moir of blessed memory. This has been a Church open to all, a Church which teaches more by its love, humility, and truth, and less by its regulations. That ethos won my heart and I decided to stay there.

I was very pleased to see the Most Reverend Archbishop Nikitas bring the same ethos and vision, which is why I am happy to accompany him on his journey.

Most Reverend Hierarchs,

I thank you for being here today representing the fullness of the Church and humbly ask for your blessing and prayers so that I may carry out the sacred ministry which the Church entrusts to me through your honourable hands today, with the fear of God, obedient to His holy will until death, and faithful to the doctrines and sacred customs of our spotless Orthodox faith and the sacrificial ethos of the martyric Great Church of Christ in Constantinople, our Mother Church.

My desire is to do my best to assist our Most Reverend Archbishop in his sacred mission of the evangelism and re-evangelization of as many souls as possible on the British Isles, a land out of which so many saints have sprung.

I humbly ask you, Most Reverend Hierarchs, reverend fathers, beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, to pray for me that I do not grieve God, do not disappoint the Church and do not betray your trust and the hope of the people of God.

Address of His Eminence Archbishop Nikitas of Thyateira and Great Britain

Dear and beloved Brother in the Lord, Bishop-elect Raphael,

Just a few days ago, the joyous news that His All Holiness and the Holy and Great Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate elected you as Bishop of the ancient see of Ilion, so you may serve this holy Archdiocese in her pastoral mission to the people of God.

You left your native land, the island of Lesvos, and came to the United Kingdom to study and, over time, you have become one with the people of Scotland and the faithful of the Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain. You have demonstrated the true qualities of a priest that preaches the word of God with and in every aspect of his life because your soul is decorated with the virtues of humility, love, prayer and inner peace. These qualities seem to be those which are disappearing and often missing in today's world. Christ has called you and says to you, as He did to Peter, "feed my sheep" and "tend my flock". While you have done this for years, you must now take on more responsibilities, as you will also shepherd the clergy and faithful in Scotland.

Today is a historic day, as it marks the first episcopal ordination of my tenure. It is also the first hierarchical ordination in this sacred Archdiocese in some twenty five



years. It is not that things could have been different, but it is God Who sets the time and dates, as we are reminded in the Scriptures – “To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under heaven”. Today is the appointed time and we will ask the Holy Spirit to descend and pour out grace upon you and the universal Church. The heavens rejoice and the angels celebrate, as does your own patron Saint, Saint Raphael of the Island of Lesbos. Our Church commemorates and remembers him as a Martyr – someone who confessed Christ. You must continue to confess and witness Christ, especially in these difficult days and challenging times when the world seems to suffer the consequences of a spiritual drought.

As you know, we live in challenging times not only with the problems caused by the coronavirus but also when the people of our world are desperately searching for truth. If we know and believe that Orthodoxy is the sought-after truth, then it is our responsibility to offer this to all who hunger and thirst, so they may be satisfied. The Truth of Christ is not to be hoarded by us, but it is to be shared and given freely to all. The harvest is ready and workers are needed – this is why the Lord has summoned you to this high office, as He did the simple fishermen and others. In the earliest days, Paul writes to Timothy and expresses his thoughts about the office of the bishop. Ponder and reflect on his words, as you look to minister and serve the new Israel.












Saint Joseph the Hesychast

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